
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 12 October 2016 from 7.00 - 9.14 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Andy Booth (Chairman), Tina Booth (Substitute in place of Mike Dendor), Lloyd Bowen (Vice-Chairman), Derek Conway, Mick Galvin, Mike Henderson, Ken Ingleton, Nigel Kay, Samuel Koffie-Williams, Peter Marchington and Ben Stokes.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Kellie MacKenzie, Bob Pullen and Nick Vickers.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Cameron Beart, Mike Cosgrove and James Hunt.

APOLOGY: Councillor Mike Dendor.

929 FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman outlined the fire evacuation procedure.

930 MINUTES

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 31 August 2016 (Minute Nos. 838 – 849) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the following amendment to Minute No. 843, Recommendation (i) ‘.....and ensure that the **Project Management** discipline is recognised’.

Post meeting note

Cabinet considered the Scrutiny Committee recommendations at their meeting on 5 October 2016 including the recommendation as originally minuted.

931 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

932 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Chairman welcomed the Head of Finance to the meeting. Apologies had been received from Councillor Duncan Dewar-Whalley.

The Head of Finance introduced the report which set-out the capital projected outturn for 2016/17 as at end of June 2016. He reported that the total revenue projected underspend on services was forecast to be £199,000.

The Chairman invited Members to consider the report page-by-page.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows: suggested the format of the tables be amended to three columns showing the Actuals, Balance and Variance, this would make it more reader-friendly; noted the £119,000 overspend for homelessness in relation to net bed and breakfast budget, and requested that the Task and Finish Group reviewing housing services take account of this in their review as the figures for homelessness will make it look like the homelessness situation had not got worse when it had; seemed impossible not to have any variance on MKIP; an explanation for the £5k overspend for enforcement salaries; query the £100k fee for net pressure for planning fees; an explanation for the private sector housing £11k underspend due to maternity leave; an explanation for the £52k estimated contract cost savings; request feedback that the £20,000 consultancy support for renegotiation of Grounds Maintenance contract did save the Council money; and request information on why there were already so many staffing overspends.

There was some discussion about Table 4 on page 8 of the report which provided details of the outturn position on improvement and regeneration funds. The Head of Finance explained what each fund covered and drew attention to Appendix I of the report which detailed the allocations from each fund during 2016/17. He stated that the transformation project was a two-year project and the full cost for it was likely to increase.

Some Members considered that the £49,000 website re-design was excessive. The Head of Finance stated that there had been a lot of discussion about the provision of this which would also allow for smarter digital services. He agreed to forward the justification information he had received to the Committee.

In response to queries about the Transformation project, the Head of Finance advised that this was separate from the Transformation Challenge Award which was receiving funding from Central Government. The Transformation project was looking at the Council's services and looking at how they could be handled more efficiently and where possible digitally. The project was being managed by internal officers.

The Head of Finance undertook to provide written answers to the questions raised by Members at the meeting.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Finance for attending the meeting.

933 REVIEWS AT FOLLOW-UP STAGE AND LOG OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the report and highlighted that all six of the recommendations were from a single review completed early in 2015.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

934 OTHER REVIEW PROGRESS REPORTS

Leisure and Tourism review – Draft report by the Task and Finish Group

The Chairman drew attention to the Leisure and Tourism draft report and invited the Review Coordinator to introduce the item.

The Review Coordinator introduced the report which outlined the findings of the Task and Finish Group to establish whether the Council was making the most of Swale's leisure and tourism offer in order to encourage people to visit the Borough. He drew attention to paragraph 5.1 of the report which focused on how important tourism was to the Borough and its economy and that it supported 7% of the total employment in Swale. The Review Coordinator spoke about the importance of branding Swale and whether this should be as a single designation or whether to separate Faversham, Sheppey, Sittingbourne, plus the villages and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The Review Coordinator noted that over 65% of visitors to Swale were from people visiting family, so it was important also to promote tourism in Swale to local people. He noted the strong response from those working within the tourism industry about the importance of Councillors working together and with local groups to improve local tourism.

The Review Coordinator explained that the Policy and Performance Officer and himself had visited Tendring District Council and Maldon District Council. He considered that as authorities they were both doing more than Swale to promote tourism. In response to queries, the Review Coordinator explained that Tendring were heavily marketing and promotion the two-day Clacton Air Show, and also Harwich which had an attractive historic town centre.

Members raised the following points: full and useful report; report did not give enough 'weight' to things already being done in Faversham, particularly by Visit Faversham. It also did not acknowledge the work undertaken by volunteers.

The Review Coordinator considered that the report did acknowledge tourism work already being undertaken, particularly in Faversham. He added that the purpose of the report was to expand on the good work that was already happening.

The Review Coordinator drew attention to the recommendations outlined in the report. Members considered each recommendation separately, raising comments and suggesting amendments as necessary.

There was some discussion about branding and the following points were raised: Faversham already had its own branding 'Market Town of Kings'; the branding should be aimed at what Swale had to offer as a whole and not by separating the areas; suggested focusing on history, tranquil and active – Swale rather than places; and did not matter which area an attraction comes from, it was more about how it was 'packaged'.

The Policy and Performance Officer advised that branding was likely to be included within the Visitor Economy Strategy was currently listed on the Forward Plan for consideration by Cabinet in 2017.

The Chairman and Members applauded the Review Coordinator and members of the Task and Finish Group for the “exceptional” report. The Chairman stated that he looked forward to the Cabinet response.

Development Management

The Chairman, also the Review Co-ordinator, reported that the Task and Finish Group were going to visit neighbouring authorities and would be inviting witnesses to a future Scrutiny Committee meeting. It was hoped that a report would be finalised by the end of the municipal year.

Housing Services

The Chairman invited the Review Co-ordinator to introduce the update report which had been tabled for Members.

The Review Coordinator thanked the Policy and Performance Officer for his support and stated that he hoped to have a draft report for Members by December 2016. He reported that they were arranging visits to other local authorities.

Recommendations on Leisure and Tourism to Cabinet:

a) Promotion and marketing:

- i) To commit a minimum of £25,000 to the tourism base budget to allow for substantial marketing and promotion of Swale as a tourist destination;**
- ii) To agree an objective of growing Swale tourism by 5 – 10% over the next 4 years;**
- iii) to consider as part of the future tourism plans the best forms of branding of Swale.**

b) Visitors to Swale and local infrastructure:

- i) Swale Borough Council (SBC) should identify and provide sufficient coach parking in convenient locations to meet the demands of all visitors to Swale;**
- ii) SBC Should work closely with tourist attractions to ensure the Borough has a comprehensive coverage of up to date “brown tourist signs” including on strategic routes;**
- iii) provision of more local signs;**
- iv) consideration given to whether the funding of these signs could be supported by SBC, either through a new fund, Member grants, Section 106 or a combination of these;**
- v) SBC should make sustained efforts to influence Kent County Council Highways and Highways England to fulfil their responsibilities to keep roads clean, and do the same with Network Rail in relation to the approaches to local stations.**

c) Working with local tourism sector:

- i) that SBC facilitates the establishment of collaborative groups, preferably led by the private and/or voluntary sector;**
- ii) that SBC establishes a challenge fund of £3,000 to support new activities or events.**

d) Research and intelligence:

i) to conduct a full economic assessment of tourism in Swale. It is understood that this has been arranged to cover 2015 using "Destination Research". This should be repeated strictly every three years which has not recently been met;

ii) additionally extra information should be sought from useful reports available on the tourism market;

iii) to make contact with several other similar Boroughs to develop a benchmarking programme to seek the best ways of increasing the economic and cultural effects of tourism. A minimum of £2,000 pa should be set-aside for research.

e) Financial and other support to the sector:

i) SBC to proactively assist local tourist organisations to find and bid for grants to increase tourism;

ii) consider the creation and promotion of a challenge fund worth £5,000, subject to future review, which local tourism businesses could bid for;

iii) That SBC increases the availability of officer time to ensure the best possible potential achievement of all the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee.

935 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the report which set-out the suggestions made at the meeting on 9 June 2016 to help the Committee to select and prioritise what reviews might be taken forward.

The Policy and Performance Officer drew attention to Appendix I of the report, which set out possible review activity for 2016/17, as well as existing reviews. He stated that the Committee would be reviewing the Fees and Charges for Council Services at their next meeting on 16 November 2016.

A Member suggested the Committee should prepare to review Street Cleansing as soon as possible in the new Municipal Year. He stated that this would allow time to agree the scope of the review in principle. This was agreed by Members.

The Policy and Performance Officer drew attention to the tabled report from officers in Resident Services, which provided a response to a request the Committee made at a previous meeting on Empty Homes which the Committee previously reviewed in 2013.

A Member requested that the item be considered at a future meeting and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing and the Revenues and Benefits Manager – Technical & Financial be invited to attend.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

(2) That a review of Street Cleansing be commenced February/March 2017.

(3) That Empty Homes be considered at a future meeting and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing and the Revenues and Benefits Manager – Technical & Financial be invited to attend.

936 URGENT BUSINESS REQUESTS

There were no urgent business requests.

937 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Chairman drew attention to the updated version of the Forward Plan which was tabled for Members.

Resolved:

(1) That the Forward Plan be noted.

Chairman

Copies of this document are available on the Council website <http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

All Minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel