
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 16 November 2016 from 7.00pm - 9.29pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Andy Booth (Chairman), Lloyd Bowen (Vice-Chairman), Mark Ellen, Mick Galvin, Mike Henderson, Ken Ingleton, Nigel Kay, Samuel Koffie-Williams, Peter Marchington and Ben Stokes.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Jo Millard, Bob Pullen and Nick Vickers.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Duncan Dewar-Whalley (Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance) and Alan Horton (Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities).

APOLOGIES: Councillors Mike Baldock, Derek Conway and Mike Dendor.

1006 FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman outlined the fire evacuation procedure.

1007 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 October 2016 (Minutes Nos. 929 – 937) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

In response to a member of the Scrutiny Committee, the Senior Democratic Services Officer confirmed that the Cabinet had considered the Scrutiny Committee recommendations at their meeting on 5 October 2016 to include the wording at Minute No. 843, Recommendation (i) '.....and ensure that the **Scrutiny Discipline** is recognised' as confirmed in the written transcript from the meeting but that **Project Management** was the preferred wording.

1008 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Ken Ingleton declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was Chairman of licenced premises.

1009 CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman reversed the running order of the meeting, starting with Item 10 Urgent Business Requests.

1010 URGENT BUSINESS REQUESTS

There were no urgent business requests.

1011 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Chairman advised Members of three updates to the Forward Plan.

The Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Project – variations to the development agreement and the Adoption of Biodiversity Action Plan and Swale Green Grid Strategy Swale Green Grid Partnership would now be presented to the Cabinet meeting on 1 February 2017. The Local Development Framework Panel on 1 December 2016 was cancelled.

A Member reminded the meeting that the Scrutiny Committee report on the Leisure and Tourism Review would be considered at the Cabinet Meeting on 7 December 2016 and encouraged Members to attend, particularly those Members of the Task and Finish Group.

1012 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the report and drew attention to the Budget Scrutiny Meeting scheduled for 26 January 2017. The Chairman reminded the meeting that all members of the Scrutiny Committee should attend this meeting, and for all Members to attend the Scrutiny Committee Meeting on 29 November 2016 which would be hearing the call-in of the Cabinet's decision on Capital Financing and Investment.

1013 OTHER REVIEW PROGRESS REPORTS**Development Management**

The Chairman, as Review Co-Ordinator, advised the meeting that work on the Development Management Review would be commencing before the end of the year.

Housing Services

The Chairman invited the Housing Services Task and Finish Group to update the meeting and referred to the Tabled report.

A Member advised that two visits to other Councils were currently being arranged, that expected changes in legislation could cause further pressure on the service and there were 139 homeless families currently living in temporary accommodation.

A Member suggested the wording in the second bullet point be changed to read "To explore the causes of pressures on housing services **including but not limited to...**".

1014 REVIEWS AT FOLLOW-UP STAGE AND LOG OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the report and highlighted that the two recommendations on the MKS (formerly MKIP) Governance and Communications review were yet to be implemented, two recommendations on the Sittingbourne Town Centre Review were rejected and one accepted, and the

recommendations on the Leisure and Tourism Review were to be decided at the next Cabinet meeting on 7 December 2016.

A Member raised the issue of the lack of an update on all significant regeneration projects and the Chairman agreed it was disappointing and suggested that the Cabinet Member for Regeneration could attend a future meeting to give an update. A discussion ensued and the following points were made:

- Only two face-to-face updates for Group Leaders had taken place over the previous six months;
- suggestion that an item on Regeneration be included on the Committee's Agenda more frequently;
- specific questions to be asked and full responses required;
- concern that the Media were aware of updates before Members and the sporadic release of information given; and
- updates required on Sittingbourne, Faversham and the Isle of Sheppey.

The Chairman agreed that the updates received were inappropriate and proposed that Regeneration be a regular item on the Agenda until an appropriate response was received.

1015 REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance and the Head of Finance to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report which set out the proposed fees and charges for 2017/18 for submission to Council. In doing so, he advised that £4million was raised in fees and charges yearly, and that the focus was on specific areas suggested by Members.

The Chairman advised Members that the charges in Appendix II were set nationally.

The Chairman referred to Appendix I. A Member sought clarification on the benchmarking process with other Councils, whilst another Member considered benchmarking valid, but required more information within the report on the true cost of providing a service.

Car Parks and Season Tickets - Long Stay Covering

A Member asked why different charges applied to car parks in Sheerness to those in Leysdown, since both were considered areas to attract tourism? The Head of Finance advised he would investigate and report back.

Residents' Parking Permits (on street)

A Member did not consider it appropriate to increase the cost of Residential Parking Permits to control the number of permits issued, as this could impact on poorer families. The subject was debated and the Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities explained that Residents' Parking Permits cost more to administer

than its fee, but legally a profit could not be made. The primary reason to increase was to cover costs and most schemes were 50% over subscribed. In response, a Member suggested that the scheme would be fairer if the number of permits issued were limited per household rather than an increase in price. A proposal to recommend that the fee not be increased was put to the vote but was not supported.

Taxi Licensing

A Member highlighted the significant increase in Vehicle Licensing (1 year) from £160 to £290 and Private Hire Operator Licensing (one payment for 5 years) from £100 to £430, and feared that the increase would be reflected on the cost to the customer.

The Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities explained that the maximum cost was set and an operator could charge up to, but not beyond, the maximum limit. He continued that the pricing regime in Hackney Carriage and Licensing Service was out of date and had not been increased for over five years. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance added that the Transformation Project Team had identified areas in Licensing fees that had been undercharging for some years and the current proposed increases were addressing that issue.

A discussion ensued concerning the costs of the service and whether more detailed information could be supplied. A Member was supportive of the proposed increase and the Chairman agreed that an increase was appropriate to meet costs.

Bootcamp Licence Fees (per annum)

A Member raised the issue of whether 1-15 people was an appropriate figure and after a short discussion, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance agreed to change the figure in the Appendix to “**up to 5 – 15 people.**”

Sports Facilities – with changing facilities and showers

A Member supported the proposed increase in the cost of Senior facility users from £55.83 to £70 but proposed that for Under 18s and Under 16s & mini soccer users the charge should not be increased to help promote health and well-being amongst the young population. The proposal was seconded and on being put to the vote was agreed.

Sports Facilities – with no facilities

The Chairman highlighted the error in the report for the total charge of Under 16s & mini soccer in 2016/17 which should have read **£10.00** and not £9.50.

Cemeteries Burial Fees

The Head of Finance advised the meeting that the cost in income received was only half the total cost of the Cemeteries Burial Fees service and benchmarking had been carried out against all other Kent District Councils. He added that the

proposed increase would achieve £30k in increased revenue. A Member raised concern that the service would continue to be subsidised in the future.

Seafront Memorial Bench

The Chairman raised concern that the cost of £525 for a bench and installation was lower than the actual cost of the beach, and proposed that £750 would be more accurate. The proposal was seconded and on being put to the vote was agreed.

Travelling Fairs and Fetes

A Member proposed that the on site fee of £56 be increased to £100, but another Member disagreed citing the effect the fee increase could have to an event. The proposal was seconded but on being put to the vote was not supported.

Beach Hut Charges

The Chairman highlighted that there was no change in ground rental fees.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance advised the meeting that the Beach Hut venture was new, it was still difficult to determine what costs would be acceptable to customers and whilst the waiting list exceeded 350 people, there was no guarantee that potential customers would be willing to pay an increased price. He added that the fees should be looked at in further detail in the future with more detailed financial reports.

A lengthy discussion took place which included the following issues:

- Was there any cost comparison with other Authorities?;
- if the waiting list was so long, the current charge could be too low;
- clarification on ground rental and licence fee;
- inconsistency in considering charges as ownership and ground rental of beach huts were a luxury;
- examples of the costs of other beach huts in other areas given;
- confirmation of costs to install beach huts and were they leasehold?;
- highlighted the benefits of receiving income from the Licence fee;
- comparison with the level of facilities in beach huts in other areas;
- suggestion of freezing sales of beach huts until market price established; and
- vigorous review of beach huts required so that a more informed decision could be made for fees and charges 2018/19.

The Head of Finance agreed that comparison with other Authorities and basic information could be sought, but raised concern that inadequate information was available in time to make a decision. He added that proposals could be made to Full Council. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance was concerned with the effect that any increase may have on Tourism but agreed the issue should be reviewed.

The Chairman proposed that the charge for ground rental be increased from £300 to £500. The proposal was seconded but on being put to the vote was not supported.

A Member proposed an increase in ground rental from £300 to £400 which was seconded and put to the vote but was not supported.

The Chairman proposed that the ground rental be increased from £300 to £375. The proposal was seconded and on being put to the vote was agreed.

The Chairman proposed that the Licence fee be increased from £950 to £1200. The proposal was seconded and on being put to the vote was agreed.

The Chairman proposed the suspension of the sale of beach huts for one calendar year. The proposal was seconded and on being put to the vote was agreed.

Street Trading Licensing

A Member sought clarification on the minor difference in cost of a one-off consent and a 6 months event. The Cabinet Member for Finance advised that the cost was to cover the administration charge.

Environmental – Fixed Penalty Notices

The Head of Finance informed the meeting that the Environmental Response Manager had confirmed that the Council were already charging the maximum charge allowed including the obligatory discount. The Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities added that the discount was only offered when the Council were obliged and this had little impact on the payment rate. In response to questions from Members, the Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities advised that the Court make the decision on whether refuse has been left out inappropriately and the Council encouraged appropriate behaviour.

Town Centre Licences

A Member asked how the Town Centre Licence for large events over 10,000 people or more was enforced and another Member did not consider it necessary to charge for visitors to the Borough. A proposal to remove the Town Centre Fee was proposed and seconded. On being put to the vote the proposal was agreed.

Legal Charges for Third Parties

A Member suggested that there should be a different hourly rate fee dependent on experience and that a single charge rate was not appropriate. He added that the proposed rate was too high and suggested an alternative proposal should be sought. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance agreed to investigate alternatives.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance and the Head of Finance for their attendance and thanked the Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities for his input.

Resolved:**That the Scrutiny Committee recommends:**

- (1) That the charge for Under 18's and Under 16's and mini soccer users of Sports Facilities with changing facilities and showers not be increased.**
- (2) That the charge for Seafront Memorial bench and installation be increased to £750.**
- (3) That the ground rental charge for Beach Huts be increased from £300 to £375.**
- (4) That the Annual Licence Fee for Beach Huts be increased from £950 to £1200.**
- (5) The suspension of the sale of beach huts for one calendar year in order to carry out a review of beach hut cost comparison.**
- (6) The removal of the proposed new Town Centre Licence fee for large events of 10,000 people or more.**

Chairman

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