
COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 13 December 2017 from 7.00 - 8.55 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Sarah Aldridge, Mike Baldock, Cameron Beart, Bobbin, Monique Bonney, Andy Booth, Tina Booth, Lloyd Bowen, Bowles, Roger Clark, Derek Conway, Mike Cosgrove, Adrian Crowther, Richard Darby, Mike Dendor, Duncan Dewar-Whalley, Mark Ellen, Paul Fleming, Mick Galvin, June Garrad, Nicholas Hampshire, Harrison, Mike Henderson, Alan Horton, James Hunt, Lesley Ingham, Ken Ingleton, Nigel Kay, Samuel Koffie-Williams (Deputy Mayor), Gerry Lewin, Peter Marchington, Bryan Mulhern, Prescott (Mayor), Ken Pugh, George Samuel, David Simmons, Ben Stokes, Roger Truelove, Anita Walker, Ghlin Whelan, Mike Whiting, Ted Wilcox, Tony Winckless and John Wright.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Katherine Bescoby, Chris Lovelock, Donna Price, Mark Radford and Nick Vickers.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Sue Gent, James Hall and Padmini Nissanga.

390 PRAYERS

The Mayor's Chaplain said Prayers.

391 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Mayor drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

392 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 November 2017 (Minute Nos. 339 – 353), were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

393 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

394 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor drew Members attention to the tabled paper which advised of the number of engagements he had attended, referring in particular to award ceremonies at local cadet forces and voluntary organisation celebrations, and his plans for visits to the emergency services and hospitals on Christmas Day and St Stephen's Day.

395 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW - SHEERNESS

Mr Brian Spoor, Chairman of the Sheerness Town Team, handed in a petition to the Mayor, signed by 635 electors in Sheerness, asking for a Sheerness Town Council

to be set-up. In submitting the petition, he referred to the need for Sheerness to have a voice and the benefits that a town council could bring to the area.

The Leader thanked Mr Spoor and the Town Team for their work, and introduced the report which asked the Council to agree the terms of reference and note the communications plan. He proposed the recommendations in the report, which were seconded by Councillor Mike Baldock.

The Leader of the UKIP Group welcomed the petition and the opportunity for Sheerness to have a town council.

The Leader of the Independent Group spoke in support of the work of the Sheerness Town Team in pursuing the creation of a town council, and gave details of his experience of Faversham Town Council.

The Deputy Leader of the Labour Group clarified that she had expressed reservations a year or so ago, however, she was happy to support the terms of reference and the communications plan, which would give local residents the opportunity to make an informed choice, and welcomed the proposed drop-in sessions that would be held at the Gateway.

Discussion ensued during which it was clarified that if a town council was established, it would not replace the borough council but would be an additional layer of local government; the importance of informing residents about what responsibilities a town council could have; the recognition that there would be an additional precept for residents to pay and the amount would depend on what services the town council wished to provide; the benefits that a town council could bring to the area; and experiences of setting-up a parish council.

The Leader welcomed Members' comments and clarified that adjacent parish councils would also be consulted. He referred to discussions that had been held with the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) to work together on the information sessions, and welcomed input from the Swale Area Committee of KALC and all interested parties. He referred to the cost of running any new town council, which would be paid for via a precept, and would depend on the ambition of the town council. He also responded to comments that had been made regarding political parties standing in parish or town council elections.

Resolved:

(1) That the terms of reference be approved and the communications plan be noted for the Community Governance Review.

396 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

The Mayor advised that one question had been submitted, the response to which had been provided, can be viewed on the Council's website, and is attached as Appendix I to these minutes.

The Mayor invited Mr Rayfield to ask a supplementary question.

Mr Rayfield asked the Cabinet Member if he would consider building a disabled parking area, giving examples of those in Canterbury and Medway, and asked whether the communication with residents regarding the validation process would be once the multi-storey car park was built?

The Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities thanked Mr Rayfield for his question, and assured him that blue badge holders would be properly catered for. A number of options were being considered and with particular reference to the validation process, he invited Mr Rayfield to meet with him and officers to discuss this further to ensure that the validation process was fit for purpose.

397 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS

The Mayor advised that five questions had been submitted by Members, the responses to which had been provided, can be viewed on the Council's website, and are attached as Appendix II to these minutes. The Mayor reminded Members that there was a three minute time limit for each supplementary question and answer.

Question One

Councillor Roger Truelove asked if the Leader agreed that Members should be kept informed of action and progress; did he agree that an answer had not been given to the question regarding progress since the July Council meeting; and did he agree that the response given was lame?

The Leader advised that he could not accept such criticism, and referred to responses of both MPs that had featured in the local press. Officers had contacted Highways England to see if there were any further updates with regarding to the M2 J5 scheme, but there were no further updates at this time.

Question Two

Councillor Roger Truelove thanked the Cabinet Member for his response, and asked if this was part of the Tourism Strategy, and when would the Tourism Strategy be available?

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs confirmed that it would be part of the Tourism Strategy, which would be available in the New Year.

Question Three

Councillor Harrison advised that she was not talking about licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation, but private landlords, and asked if the Cabinet Member was aware that selective licensing did not just cover decent homes but also covered areas such as the anti-social behaviour of tenants?

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing referred to the criteria and advised that officers considered that they already had sufficient powers and were not considering making the area a Selective Licensing Area as it would not be of any benefit to residents.

Question Four

Councillor Cameron Beart expressed disappointment about the slippage in bringing forward proposals for the Sheerness Military Hospital and accommodation at the Sheppey Prison Cluster, and asked why there had been a delay?

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing shared the Cabinet Member's frustration and referred to the delay caused by the Justice Ministry in granting leases.

Question Five

Councillor John Wright thanked the Cabinet Member for his answer and asked if the Cabinet Member agreed that there was still reliance on developers coming forward with Section 106 agreements and starting sites, and if he agreed that further pressure should be put on developers to speed up the process?

The Cabinet Member for Planning agreed in principle but advised that this would depend on what powers were given to local authorities to get developers moving, and referred to the detail given in the answer provided.

398 LEADER'S STATEMENT

The Leader introduced his statement by updating Members about information he had obtained from a District Councils Network meeting held earlier that day. He advised that the Local Government Finance Settlement was due to be announced on Tuesday 19 December 2017. In respect of applications for business rate pilots, there had been 27 applications and the Secretary of State was keen to increase this. The Secretary of State had also granted three mergers of district councils, and was minded to approve changes in Buckinghamshire. He encouraged Members to work together to maintain independence for Swale. A written update would be provided to Members at the next Council meeting.

The Leader then drew attention to his written Statement, which gave an update on the Health Service and Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration, and invited Members to ask questions.

Health Service Update

The Leader of the UKIP Group gave his views in agreement with the update, referring to the difficulties recruiting doctors in Swale (and Kent) and the importance of services being provided locally so that they can be accessed properly.

The Leader of the Labour Group referred to the difficulties in maintaining acute hospital services where there was not a university, and did not support the idea of a 'super hospital'. He considered that the best solution would be for acute services to be provided in Margate, Canterbury and Ashford.

The Leader of the Independent Group thanked the Leader for his Statement, and advised that they were some years away from a final decision being reached.

A Member asked if it was possible for an update to be given on services in West Kent, referring to work being undertaken by Kent County Council. Another Member advised that a bid for a medical school had been submitted by Kent University, which would help to retain medical staff in the area. Members spoke in support of a medical school in Canterbury, and that experience elsewhere had shown that this resulted in a highly qualified workforce being trained and retained in the local area, and asked if the Leader agreed to support this?

The Leader responded by saying he supported the stance taken by the local MP, and had also co-signed a letter in support with other district leaders in Kent. He agreed that a medical school might make it easier to recruit to East Kent acute services. He supported the suggestion made to have three acute hospitals in Margate, Canterbury and Ashford. He also spoke about the need for local primary facilities and for money to be moved to front-line services.

Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Update

The Leader of the UKIP Group asked how many name suggestions had been received for the new retail site, and another Member thanked the Leader for giving the public an opportunity to give their view on this.

The Leader referred to the names proposed, and advised that a shortlist of four had been drawn-up, for residents to vote on. The name 'Princes Street Retail Park' had received over 50% of the votes cast. He also referred to the Council going unconditional on the leisure site, which removed financial risk from the Council.

399 APPOINTMENT TO OUTSIDE BODIES - QUEENBOROUGH FISHERY TRUST/SWALE RECREATION TRUST (QFT/SRT)

The Leader introduced the report which advised that the term of appointment for Councillor Ted Wilcox was due to expire on 31 January 2018. He proposed that Councillor Ted Wilcox be nominated for a further term. This was seconded by Councillor Gerry Lewin.

In response to questions regarding the term of office being for four years, when local elections would take place in 2019, the Leader acknowledged this and anticipated that the representative would offer his resignation from the QFT/SRT should he no longer be a serving Member at that time. There was some discussion regarding the appointment process, and it was clarified that the Council made a nomination but the Trust made the appointment.

Resolved:

(1) That the Council nominates Councillor Ted Wilcox to the Queenborough Fishery Trust/Swale Recreation Trust, for the period 1 February 2018 to 31 January 2022.

400 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NOTING

Resolved:

(1) That the following Minutes be noted: Minute No. 363 of the Appointments Sub-Committee meeting held on 29 November 2017; Minute No. 367 of the Audit Committee meeting held on 29 November 2017; and Minute No. 379 of the Cabinet meeting held on 6 December 2017.

401 SENIOR MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

The interim Chief Executive left the meeting whilst this item was discussed.

The Leader introduced the report, referring to the recommendations made by the Appointments Sub-Committee meeting on 29 November 2017. He referred to the exemplary performance of the interim Chief Executive and the interim Director of Regeneration, who had been carrying out their respective roles for nine months. He proposed the recommendations in the report, explaining that a Director of Corporate Services was no longer required and referring to the savings that would be made as a result of deleting the post. He thanked Members of the Appointments Sub-Committee for the thorough debate at the Sub-Committee meeting, and encouraged Members to support the recommendations they had made. The recommendations were seconded by Councillor Gerry Lewin.

Debate ensued during which Members spoke in support of the recommendations to make the interim appointments permanent, referring to the positive performance of the individuals over the last nine months; the need for stability; the cost of recruiting externally; the uncertainty that recruiting externally could bring when such progress was being made; and that external applicants would be 'unknown' whilst the interim appointees had effectively been in the role for nine months.

A Member asked whether the process had been fair, open and transparent, and Members of the Appointments Sub-Committee reassured the Member that there had been thorough debate and they were satisfied with the process that had been undertaken and with the recommendations to make the interim appointments permanent.

The recommendations were put to the vote and agreed, and the Chief Executive returned to the meeting to be advised of the outcome and congratulated on his appointment. The Chief Executive thanked Members and said it was a great honour to be Chief Executive.

Resolved:

(1) That the post of Director of Corporate Services be deleted from the establishment.

(2) That the current Interim Chief Executive be assimilated into this role on a permanent basis following the deletion of his permanent post. The Chief Executive be confirmed as the Head of Paid Service, Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer.

(3) That the current Interim Director of Regeneration be offered the post on a permanent basis.

(4) That it be noted that the Interim Chief Executive has made an Interim Monitoring Officer appointment; given the conflicting delegations in the

Constitution, the process for appointment of Statutory Officers be looked at in the Constitution review.

(5) That the General Purposes Committee considers the appropriate revisions to amend and update the Constitution; this is to include the appointment process for Statutory Officers, the appointment process for senior positions in the event of the need for interim positions or in a situation when there are only internal candidates; and updating the scheme of delegation.

Mayor

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