
POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 27 November 2018 from 7.00pm - 8.30pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, Andy Booth (Chairman), Lloyd Bowen, James Hunt (Vice-Chairman), Nigel Kay, Peter Marchington (Substitute for Councillor Cameron Beart) and Ted Wilcox.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Katherine Bescoby, David Clifford, Mike Marsh, Bob Pullen and Graeme Tuff.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Bowles (Leader) and David Simmons (Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs).

APOLOGIES: Councillors Cameron Beart, Tina Booth and Nicholas Hampshire.

353 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

354 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 November 2018 (Minute Nos. 305 – 311) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

355 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

356 UPDATED TREE POLICY

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs, the Leisure and Technical Manager and the Greenspaces Manager to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs invited Members to give feedback on the Tree Policy, which had last been reviewed in 2015.

Members made a number of comments on the policy, and the Cabinet Member and officers answered Members' questions. A summary of the feedback and comments is set out below:

- Correct typographical error to show the Draft Policy was for 2019 – 2023.
- The intention was for more comprehensive information to be provided on the website for the general public.
- Officers were asked to re-draft the document to be more user-friendly for residents, rather than a corporate document, and to cover additional areas

such as the future management of woodlands and involvement of community groups; new developments and expectations, to make it clearer what would be acceptable; and to include a definition of 'property' as it was not clear if this included fences.

- Officers were asked to clarify how the public should inform the Council of any problems.
- Members queried the frequency of inspections, and the meaning of the wording 'where appropriate' in terms of notifying Ward Members and Parish Councils, as some Members considered that they should be notified in any event.
- Officers were asked to review the wording on page 13 under 'Tree Touching Building' which read 'it is advised to contact the Council to arrange for removal of the nuisance'.
- Officers were asked to review the wording on page 14 under 'Trees dropping fruit/seeds' regarding the term 'unsupervised children' and to consider whether this should include reference to animals such as dogs and horses.
- Officers were asked to review the wording on page 15 under 'Trees and TV Signal' to consider if a tree not being managed had caused a problem with the TV signal.
- Officers were asked to review the wording on page 15 under 'Tree roots – in garden/causing damage' to consider potential problems where gardens had artificial grass.
- Officers were asked to consider the section regarding replanting, to reflect that two trees should be planted for every tree that was removed, and that this might not be in the same area as the tree that had been removed.

There was some discussion regarding the frequency of inspections of trees, and the circumstances when Ward Members and Parish Councils would be notified of any issues. Members were also advised of the resources available to look after the 4,700 trees managed by the Council.

Further discussion ensued, and Officers were asked to consider the following feedback when reviewing the policy:

- To clarify the circumstances when Ward Members and Parish Councils would be notified of any issues relating to Council-managed trees in their area.
- To include the names of all seven sites in section two of the policy.
- To review the wording of section 10 on replanting, to reflect that trees removed could be replaced with 'more appropriate species' of trees; whether

more mature trees could be planted in vulnerable areas (for example, if likely to be subjected to vandalism).

Officers clarified that in cases where a tree was removed due to subsidence, or where roots were caught up in service runs, it was unlikely that a tree would be replanted in the same position.

Further comments were made as follows:

- To review the wording in section 6, which referred to a 'weather event' to make it clearer what this referred to; and given the impact of the weather on trees, whether the frequency of inspections needed to be reviewed.
- To clarify the meaning of the word 'enhance' in Objective 2 of the policy and what area would be covered in the 'letter drops' referred to in Objective 3.
- To consider including reference to ancient hedgerows as well as trees.
- To review the wording under 'Tree related subsidence damage' to invite residents to contact the Council in the first instance, before contacting their insurers.

Further discussion ensued, where Members were advised that there was a balance to strike in terms of risk, and that priority would be given to higher risk areas and managed within the existing budget. Some Members questioned whether there were enough resources allocated to manage the Council's 4,700 trees. The Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs undertook that officers would provide information to Members regarding the resources available to manage the trees.

In response to a question, the Greenspaces Manager advised that there was a record of trees and it would be possible to advise each year how many trees had been removed and re-planted. Another Member asked whether Tree Preservation Orders were up-to-date?

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs thanked Members for their useful feedback, which officers would use to update the policy where appropriate and to make it more community focused.

The Chairman asked for the updated policy to be brought back to the Policy Development and Review Committee meeting in January 2019, and thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for attending the meeting.

357 CORPORATE PLAN REVIEW

The Chairman welcomed the Leader and the Head of Policy, Communication and Customer Services to the meeting.

The Leader advised that this was the second time that the draft Corporate Plan had been considered by the Committee, referring to the way it had been drafted to reflect feedback and the opportunity given to Group Leaders and Parish/Town

Councils to discuss the draft. The document was currently out for consultation, and he welcomed views from the Committee which would be considered together with other responses received.

A discussion ensued regarding the document, where some Members questioned whether now was the right time for a Corporate Plan to be approved, given the local elections in May 2019, and whether some of the content was presumptuous, referring in particular to Objective 2.2.

The Leader advised that the Corporate Plan was a living document and could be revisited after the elections in May 2019 if the new Council wished to do so.

General comments were made as follows:

- Priority 1 – 1.6 – whether the words ‘embrace opportunities’ were the right words.
- Priority 2 – 2.2 – whether there should be mention of traffic problems.
- Priority 2 – 2.4 – whether the word ‘pragmatic’ was the right word to use, and whether ‘innovative’ would be more suitable.
- Priority 3 – 3.1 – whether this wording should be reviewed.
- Priority 3 – 3.2 – whether the word ‘experiment’ was the right word to use; suggestions such as ‘pilot’ or ‘trial’ were made.
- Priority 3 – 3.5 – whether the term ‘second to none’ was the right term to use and how it could be measured.
- Whether reference should be made to the heritage strategy, as well as the tourism strategy.

The Leader welcomed the suggestions for revised wording, and clarified the position regarding reducing the dependency on government-controlled funding sources.

In response to questions, the Head of Policy, Communications and Customer Services clarified that the document was a strategic steer over the life of the plan. He referred to the annual reports which were based on the Corporate Plan and he was looking at ways to coordinate progress on the objectives.

Councillor Mike Baldock proposed and Councillor Monique Bonney seconded that the Cabinet be asked to defer approval of the Corporate Plan until June 2019. This was put to the vote but not supported.

The Chairman thanked the Leader and the Head of Policy, Communications and Customer Service for attending the meeting.

358 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the work programme which set out the items due to be considered by the Committee. It was noted that the Tree Policy would also be considered at the January 2019 meeting.

Chairman

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