
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 3 October 2018 from 7.00pm - 9.28pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Lloyd Bowen (Chairman), Derek Conway, Mike Dendor (Vice-Chairman), Ken Ingleton, George Samuel, Ben Stokes and Lynd Taylor.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Jo Millard, Bob Pullen, Dean Radmore, Nick Vickers and Emma Wiggins.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Duncan Dewar-Whalley, Mike Cosgrove and Nigel Kay.

Richard Blackwell (Spirit of Sittingbourne) (SoS)
Philip Chater (Huber Car Park Systems)
Huw Evans (Spirit of Sittingbourne) (SoS)
Jamie Hare (Kent County Council) (KCC)
Simon Jones (Kent County Council) (KCC)
Dominik Webster (Huber Car Park Systems)
County Councillor Mike Whiting (Kent County Council) (KCC)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Mike Baldock, Mick Galvin, Mike Henderson and Roger Truelove.

255 FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the Fire Evacuation Procedure.

256 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 July 2018 (Minute Nos. 89 –101) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

257 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

258 SITTINGBOURNE TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, the Director of Regeneration, the Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager, Huw Evans and Richard Blackwell from Spirit of Sittingbourne (SoS) and Philip Chater and Dominik Webster from Huber, the multi-storey car park contractors, to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration introduced the report and highlighted the progress that had been made since his last attendance at the Scrutiny Committee

meeting in June 2018. He praised Huber for their work and progress on the multi-storey car park, and thanked Kent County Council (KCC) for their assistance.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration advised that since the Agenda had been published, there had been further progress.

Multi-storey Car Park

Philip Chater (Huber) said that the multi-storey car park was progressing well and further progress was expected to meet the deadlines. He explained that progress would not be so visible in the coming months as work would be more localised within the inside of the car park. He advised that there were no health and safety issues and thanked KCC for their help and support.

Members asked the following questions:

- When would the multi-storey car park be complete?;
- what were the fire evacuation plans during the build and on completion?;
- how was the snag list addressed? and
- how many lifts were planned?

In response, Philip Chater (Huber) advised that the forecast was that the major structure would be complete by the end of the year, and the car park should be complete by the end of February 2019, weather dependent. He advised there were three emergency exits, explained the process of dealing with the snag list which was factored into the deadline date, and confirmed there would be 2 lifts in the completed car park. The Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager said that some stages of the multi-storey car park scheme had been moved to allow for contingency for later in the project. He added that the wall adjacent to The Forum was a fire boundary wall, emergency routes were via a ramp and there was always free access from The Forum.

The Chairman gave praise and thanked Huber for their attendance.

Kent Council Council

The Chairman welcomed the KCC Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste, the Director of Highways, Transport and Waste and the Development Agreements Manager to the meeting.

The KCC Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste thanked the Scrutiny Committee for their invitation to attend and praised the successful relationship between KCC and Swale Borough Council (SBC).

The Chairman referred to the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 7 June 2018, when Members had raised issues around the role of KCC in the scheme and its delayed start.

Huw Evans (SoS) explained that KCC had considered the Traffic Management Plan and raised issues which needed to be addressed. He said that the work on the amended Traffic Management Plan had caused an initial delay but was of benefit

as traffic delays in the area once the scheme commenced were significantly less than originally expected because of KCC's suggestions. He thanked KCC.

The Director of Highways, Transport and Waste added that KCC were regularly on site checking that the environment was safe and to minimise congestion.

A discussion ensued and a Member asked why some of the issues weren't anticipated and why KCC were not involved in the project earlier in the process? In response, Huw Evans (SoS) explained the lengthy stages of re-modelling the Traffic Management Plan. The Director of Highways, Transport and Waste added that KCC were involved early on but additional requests took time to address, and the project was complex. He stressed the importance of safety.

Huw Evans (SoS) said that whilst lessons had been learned, the delays could have been a lot worse without KCC's assistance and generally, the project was going well.

A Member drew attention to the issues of signage and gave an example of Heavy Goods Vehicle's (HGV) directed round a narrow road as part of the diversion. Richard Blackwell (SoS) advised that contractors were regularly monitoring signs but they had sometimes been moved or knocked down in between inspections.

In the discussion that followed, several Members agreed that signage had improved since the scheme had started and the number of HGV's driving on unsuitable routes had fallen. The KCC Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste asked Members to report incorrect signage. He said that individual driving behaviours and the use of Sat Nav's routing HGV's down country lanes could not be mitigated against. He advised Members that there had been liaison with the major transport depots to inform of diversions for HGV's.

The Chairman thanked the KCC Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste, the Director of Highways, Transport and Waste and the Development Agreements Manager for their attendance.

Swale Borough Council and Spirit of Sittingbourne

The Chairman referred to the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 7 June 2018 and the actions arising. He said that the Risk Register and Project Plan had been received by Members. The Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager confirmed that information on contamination had been circulated and he agreed to confirm the costs.

In response to the Chairman's question on whether the step-free access for the disabled toilets in The Forum Car Park had been looked at, the Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager advised that the design team were still looking at this.

In response to the request for a Facebook Page for the scheme, the Director of Regeneration advised that Kevin McKeever (Lowick Communications) had advised that the constant monitoring of a Facebook page could not be resourced. She added that the website was updated and contained correct information and that SBC's Facebook page was used to update the public.

A Member said that he had received many complaints about late buses, different drop-off points and bus passes being unable to be used on earlier buses in order to arrive at destinations on time. In response, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration advised that the initial issues around re-routed buses had been resolved and he would check on the use of bus passes. He added that there was communication with the bus companies through the Quality Bus Partnership meetings. He agreed to consider how improvements could be made via SBC's 'Delivering for You' service.

Other issues raised by Members included:

- A249 still being used as a diversion when the M2 was shut;
- were there ongoing discussions with businesses affected by diversions or road closures and what was SBC doing to help? and
- communication with public and Members was still an issue.

Richard Blackwell (SoS) said drivers would use their own preferred route when being diverted but Highways England had advised that the A249 was not the suggested route.

The Director of Regeneration said that there was regular visiting and updating of High Street traders and SBC would assist in promotion when roads were re-opened. The Chief Financial Officer added that a reduction in Business Rates was a rating valuation issue, and there was no discretion by SBC. The Director of Regeneration agreed to discuss with SoS improvements in communication.

A Member asked what had caused the delay in the opening of St. Michael's Road/Dover Street, Sittingbourne which had been set in time for local schools opening at the beginning of September 2018? Richard Blackwell (SoS) advised that several issues including the removal of a hidden concrete slab in Milton Road and removal of a wall in Dover Street, works to the underpass leading from The Forum and the extension of a diverted water main to avoid maintenance in the future, had caused delays.

In the discussion that followed, Members suggested that exact completion dates should not be given to allow for any unexpected delays, and delays to the project should be better communicated to Members so that they could advise residents.

A Member suggested that signage, informing of expected completion dates, should be displayed and updated regularly if delays occurred.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration agreed that Members should have been updated about the delay earlier and agreed to look at the issues raised around communication, signage and buses.

Finally, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration advised that The Light Cinema had not withdrawn from the project.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, the Director of Regeneration, the Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager, Huw Evans and Richard Blackwell (SoS) for their attendance.

259 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance, the Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance and the Chief Financial Officer to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance introduced the report which set out the revenue and capital outturn position for 2018/2019 as at the end of June 2018. He said that it was early in the financial year to forecast but that the £54k underspend was a small amount compared to previous years. He thanked the Finance Team for their hard work in continuing to look for savings and was determined that the quality of services provided would not be lost.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance said that work would continue through to the Borough elections in May 2019 to ensure sound finances for the new administration, and to support the Council in the next two to three years. He referred to the Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance's assistance and expertise in risk.

The Chairman commended the clarity of the report.

A Member asked that, as the report was three months behind, were there any current issues causing concern? Another Member asked whether the software used could produce a Red Amber Green (RAG) report whilst the Chairman suggested any issues coming up might be included? In response, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance said that Central Government often made changes that lacked detail and would affect the Budget, at late notice. He also referred to the previous issue of unexpected payment to the Lower Medway Internal Drainage Board which he had highlighted to the Scrutiny Committee at the time. He advised that there were no exceptional risks at the current time. The Chief Financial Officer added that the timing of the meetings cycle dictated when reports were considered by the Scrutiny Committee. He said that homelessness costs had increased and planning fees income and parking revenue income had reduced. He agreed to consider including a RAG rating for the next cycle of reports.

The Policy and Performance Officer and a Member both considered that the quality of the report compared favourably with other Local Authority reports.

In response to a question, the Chief Financial Officer clarified the Non-Service Budget on page 19 of the report.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance praised the clarity of the report and said that it had evolved from feedback from the Scrutiny Committee.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance, the Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance and the Chief Financial Officer for their attendance.

260 OTHER REVIEW PROGRESS REPORTS**Regeneration**

The Chairman referred to the suggestion made by the current lead on the Regeneration Task and Finish Group, that the review be postponed until after the Borough elections in May 2019.

Members discussed whether the review should be continued with the current group, an invitation sent out to all Councillors (not just Scrutiny Committee Members) to join and continue the review, or whether it should be postponed until after the Borough elections in May 2019.

In the discussion that followed, the Policy and Performance Officer advised that the focus so far had been about themes such as skills/education not individual Regeneration projects.

Several Members said that the review should not be rushed, and asked what work had been carried out so far? The Policy and Performance Officer advised that some information gathering had taken place and several meetings had been held. He said that visits to businesses and other Local Authorities were due to be arranged.

Members asked that the Policy and Performance Officer bring back the Review Plan and a summary of progress to the next Scrutiny Committee meeting on 7 November 2018, to decide whether to proceed with the review or put it on hold until after the May 2019 elections.

Development Management

The Lead Member on the Development Management Task and Finish Group advised Members that the review team had met, formulated an action plan and were waiting to meet with Planning Officers and the Cabinet Member for Planning during the day, before the next Scrutiny Committee meeting on 7 November 2018.

261 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Chairman updated Members with the changes to the Forward Plan since the Scrutiny Committee Agenda was published, which had been circulated via despatch.

The Chairman requested clarification on the 'List of the documents submitted to the decision maker' column on the document. The Senior Democratic Services Officer agreed to report back.

In response to a question, the Senior Democratic Services Officer explained that a report on CCTV cameras would be considered at the next Policy Development and Review Committee on 6 November 2018 and the Policy and Performance Officer explained the process.

262 URGENT BUSINESS REQUESTS

There were none.

263 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman advised that invitations to the Budget Scrutiny Committee meeting on 23 January 2019, would be sent out to all Cabinet and Deputy Cabinet Members.

Chairman

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