
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 7 November 2018 from 7.00pm - 8.29pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Bobbin, Lloyd Bowen (Chairman), Roger Clark, Derek Conway, Mike Dendor (Vice-Chairman), Mick Galvin, Mike Henderson, Ken Ingleton, George Samuel, Ben Stokes, Lynd Taylor and Roger Truelove.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Katherine Bescoby, Martyn Cassell, Bob Pullen and Nick Vickers.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Duncan Dewar-Whalley, Alan Horton, Nigel Kay, David Simmons and Ted Wilcox.

APOLOGY: Councillor Mike Baldock.

312 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

313 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2018 (Minute Nos. 255 – 263) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

314 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

315 SCRUTINY OF FEES AND CHARGES PROPOSALS

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance, the Deputy Cabinet Members for Finance and Performance, the Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities, the Chief Financial Officer and the Head of Commissioning, Environment and Leisure to the meeting.

The Chairman advised that the report had been considered by Cabinet the previous week, and would be considered by Council the following week. He suggested that the Scrutiny Committee should focus its attention on Appendix I in the report which were areas where the Council had some discretion on charges. Appendix II listed the fees and charges set by Government which Swale Borough Council had no discretion over.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance introduced the report which invited the Scrutiny Committee to consider the proposals for the level of fees and charges to be levied for the next financial year 2019/20. He referred to the

commentary provided in Appendix I which should assist the Committee in its consideration of the proposed fees and charges.

The Chairman invited Members to ask questions on the fees and charges set out in Appendix I, which was considered page-by-page.

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The Chairman invited the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities to explain the rationale behind the charging regime for Bourne Place Multi-Storey Car Park. In doing so, the Cabinet Member referred to the new technology that would be in place, and reminded the Committee that all Council car parks were free between 6pm and 8am.

In response to questions:

- The Cabinet Member clarified why it would not be possible to have the free concession for disabled drivers at Bourne Place, as with an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) and barrier system there was no way of validating blue badges. However, more disabled spaces would be made available in the Forum car park to compensate for this.
- Members were advised that there would be a 'help' system should the automatic barrier fail.
- The Head of Commissioning, Environment and Leisure clarified that the charging structure proposed was to keep it in-line with other short-stay Council car parks although it was possible that real-time tariffs rather than hourly slots could be looked at in the future.
- In respect of the number of long-term parking spaces in Sittingbourne, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities advised that in the short term there would be a surplus of spaces, referring to the current provision at Cockleshell Walk and Spring Street Car Parks. In the long-term, Albany Road car park would be changed to a long-stay car park and there was an increase in car parking spaces at the train station.

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In response to a question regarding long-stay car park charges, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities explained that the car park charges were cheaper in Cockleshell Walk (than in Faversham) to encourage its use.

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In response to a question regarding the charge to close parking bays for events or other activities, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities explained that different charges applied depending on whether the use was for a community group or commercial organisation, and whether the event had income generating activities. The charge was calculated to reflect the average use and occupancy of the car park.

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In response to a question as to whether the £10 charge to replace a residents' parking permit (on-street) could be waived in circumstances such as the vehicle being stolen, **the Head of Commissioning, Environment and Leisure agreed to report back on this.**

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In response to a question regarding the travelling fairs and fetes pitch premium for days open to the public, compared with the charge for use of Council land by travelling fairs, the Head of Commissioning, Environment and Leisure explained why the percentage increase proposed was different, to reflect they would be earning income on days open to the public.

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In response to a question as to whether the Council would ever consider removing the charge for the garden waste subscription, the Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs referred to the waste partnership with Ashford and Maidstone Councils needing consistency and that the fee did not discourage use. It was also noted that this service generated £367k per annum.

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In response to a question regarding why the cost of additional dog bins was still there now litter bins could be used for the same purpose, the Head of Commissioning, Environment and Leisure explained that it cost less to empty a dog bin, so where litter was not an issue it was still cost effective to have dog bins.

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In response to a question regarding 'householders duty of care – lack of care in disposal of waste', the Head of Commissioning, Environment and Leisure explained the circumstances when this charge would be levied. The intention was to educate the public to use bona fide waste removal companies. He drew attention to the registered waste carriers website which customers could use to check whether a company was legitimate.

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The Head of Commissioning, Environment and Leisure referred to the 'shake- up' in legislation regarding Animal Welfare Licensing, and that the charges proposed were based on their interpretation of the guidance issued by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

In response to a question regarding how they identified where dogs were being bred to sell as pets in residential properties, the Head of Commissioning, Environment and Leisure referred to intelligence received from the public **and agreed to report back further on this.** The Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs emphasised the good relationship that the Council had with the

RSPCA (referring to the Council's success in obtaining the gold footprint award) and the public.

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In response to a question regarding the pricing structure for pest control charges for clients on benefits, the Committee asked officers to look at whether this was necessary given it was the same fee for those clients not on benefits.

In respect of the £25 charge for returning a stray dog to an owner, there was some discussion as to whether this charge covered the actual cost of this service.

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In respect of the fee charged to food handlers for training in food hygiene, a Member asked that consideration be given to reducing this charge for community organisations and for small community groups. This was agreed by the Committee. It was noted that this service generated £500 per year, and that the training was also available from other providers.

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In respect of charges under Gambling Licensing, **the Chief Financial Officer agreed to report back on why the maximum statutory charges were not being proposed for betting premises, and to provide the definition of a 'family entertainment centre'.**

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In response to a suggestion, **the Chief Financial Officer agreed to report back as to why there was a charge for alleygate keys, when the income generated was £50 per year.**

The Chairman thanked Officers and Members for attending the meeting.

Recommended:

Scrutiny makes the following recommendations to Council:

(1) That in respect of the fee charged to food handlers for training in food hygiene, consideration be given to reducing the charge for community organisations and small commercial organisations.

(2) That consideration be given to remove the separate charges under pest control for 'clients on benefits'.

316 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Chairman explained that the Business Improvement Officer (Policy) was unable to attend the meeting due to illness, and welcomed the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance and the Deputy Cabinet Members to the meeting.

The Deputy Cabinet Member for Performance reminded the Committee that the report was for the first quarter, and that the second quarter would be considered at the next Scrutiny Committee meeting.

Members considered the reports page-by-page and the Deputy Cabinet Member for Performance introduced each balanced scorecard, and answered Members' questions. The Deputy Cabinet Member agreed to provide **further information on how the risk scores for homelessness and cyber security had been calculated (Corporate Overview Scorecard)**.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Performance and Finance and his Deputy Cabinet Members for attending the meeting.

317 SITTINGBOURNE TOWN CENTRE UPDATE REPORT

The Committee considered the written update. The Chairman asked Members to send questions for the next meeting to Democratic Services.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

318 OTHER REVIEW PROGRESS REPORTS

The Chairman drew attention to the update provided in respect of the review of Regeneration Schemes (other than Sittingbourne Town Centre). The Lead Review Member suggested that the review should be deferred until after the elections in May 2019, and Members concurred with this view.

In respect of the review of Development Management, the Lead Review Member advised that a meeting would be taking place with officers in the Planning Department. He would give an update at the next Scrutiny Committee meeting, and hoped that the review would conclude by the end of the civic year.

319 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Chairman drew attention to the updated Forward Plan which had been tabled.

320 URGENT BUSINESS REQUESTS

There were no urgent business requests.

321 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman drew attention to the Committee's work programme, and advised that a revised date was being looked at for the March 2019 meeting. He also suggested that utility companies should be invited to that meeting.

Chairman

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