
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber - Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 15 January 2019 from 7.00pm - 8.15pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Bobbin, Lloyd Bowen (Chairman), Roger Clark, Mike Dendor (Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair), Mike Henderson, Ken Ingleton, Peter Marchington (substitute for Councillor George Samuel), Lynd Taylor and Roger Truelove.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Richard Blackwell, Huw Evans, Steven Lee Sang, Jo Millard, Lyn Newton, Tony Potter, Bob Pullen, Dean Radmore and Emma Wiggins.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Mike Cosgrove (Cabinet Member for Regeneration), Duncan Dewar-Whalley (Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance), Alan Horton (Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Families) and Ted Wilcox (Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance).

APOLOGIES: Councillors Derek Conway, Mick Galvin and George Samuel.

434 FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

435 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2018 (Minute Nos. 312 – 321) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Vice Chairman-in-the-chair as a correct record.

436 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

437 SITTINGBOURNE TOWN CENTRE UPDATE

The Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair welcomed the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, the Director of Regeneration, the Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager and Huw Evans, Richard Blackwell and Steven Lee Sang from Spirit of Sittingbourne (SoS) to the meeting. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration introduced the report and invited questions from Members.

Members asked questions which included:

- Were the schedule of the works in Station Street, the station forecourt and the new bus hub area on target?; (bullet point 3 in the report);
- at what stage was the piling at?; (bullet point 6 in the report);

- what progress had been made with implementing Central Avenue one-way, and had the concerns of businesses been addressed?;
- who decided that SoS could give free parking at Christmas and who funded the promotion?; and
- were any further changes to the roundabout planned to assist HGV's and buses?

In response, Richard Blackwell said that the works at Station Street were on target and that surfacing would be laid once the surface temperature had increased. Steven Lee Sang said that piling to the hotel was complete and was due to be finished at the cinema next week. The Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager said that the Central Avenue design was complete and Kent County Council (KCC) would be issuing a formal notice with a start date. He added that businesses would be notified in advance once a start date was agreed. The Director of Regeneration advised that the free Christmas parking was funded by SoS.

Richard Blackwell advised that any improvements on the roundabout were still being agreed with KCC, although the modelling appeared to work. He added that maintenance of the roundabout would be picked up as part of the 12 months maintenance period.

A Member asked why Wildwood withdrew from the development? In response, the Director of Regeneration said that this was down to the national trend of Wildwood and nothing to do with the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration project. She advised that of the seven units, three were currently let and one was currently in negotiation to be let. She added that she was confident that once the physical build of the units was under way by April 2019, there would be more interest in the final three units.

In the debate that followed, a Member questioned the timing of the press release and how accurate it was. In response, the Director of Regeneration said that Wildwood had withdrawn from the project some time ago but in order not to affect the market, the information was not released until Nando's had agreed to come on board. The Cabinet Member for Regeneration explained how the pattern of recruiting businesses to the scheme operated and advised that there were originally only six units.

In response to a Member's question, Huw Evans agreed to find out the actual cost of the free parking promotion at Christmas and confirmed that it was paid for by SoS.

A Member asked a question about advertising of partners involved in the scheme. In response, the Director of Regeneration said that all the restaurant chains, partners and the SBC logo would be displayed on the hoardings on the leisure site.

The Chairman asked for the phasing of the traffic lights at the train station to be looked at, said that the frontage to the station was not being used correctly, asked whether a non-food outlet would be considered for the units on the leisure site and asked who Cushman & Wakefield were? Richard Blackwell advised that the traffic lights were self-phasing with overhead sensors that predicted traffic flows and the

frontage drop off to the station was being looked at with South East Rail and KCC, and would be monitored during the maintenance period. The Director of Regeneration said that consideration would be given to an alternative use of a unit if it suited the location. She said that Cushman & Wakefield were an experienced commercial property company that managed assets for organisations and had been working with SBC on preparations for the car park and leisure facilities.

The Director of Regeneration referred to the communications meeting that took place between SBC, SoS and the Lowick Group and advised that more effective communication was being addressed.

Finally the Director of Regeneration highlighted the recent video about the scheme, available to view on Kent On-line.

The Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair thanked the visitors for attending the meeting.

438 UPDATES ON RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tourism Scrutiny Review

The Economy and Community Services Manager introduced the report and drew attention that of the 16 recommendations by Scrutiny Committee, ten were accepted and three remained pending. She advised Members that there would be a Member Briefing on the Visitor Economy Framework, including a presentation from Visit Kent, on Tuesday 12 March 2019 at which all Members were welcome to attend. The Economy and Community Services Manager drew attention that the workshop event scheduled in February was on Wednesday 27 February 2019, not 28 February as printed in the report.

A Member said that it was too early to tell whether residents were more informed and looked forward to future updates.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration thanked the Scrutiny Committee and highlighted and thanked the contribution made by the Policy Development Review Committee (PDR).

Members agreed that monitoring of implementation of the review recommendations was complete.

The Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and officers for their attendance.

Housing Review

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Families introduced the report. He highlighted the progress that had been made since he and officers attended the Scrutiny Committee meeting in July 2018 and reminded Members that the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy would be discussed at the PDR meeting the following evening. He thanked the Scrutiny Committee for their direction and work on the review. In response to a question from a Member, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Families clarified that the need to build

affordable housing was in areas of the Isle of Sheppey and Sittingbourne, where viability was at its lowest.

Members agreed that monitoring of implementation of the review recommendations was complete.

The Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair thanked the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Families for his attendance at the meeting.

Development Management

Members agreed to postpone the review and reconsider it in the new municipal year as part of the Committee's work programme for 2019/20.

439 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair welcomed the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance, the Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance and the Business Improvement Officer (Policy) to the meeting, and went through the Balanced scorecard report for 2018/19 Quarter 2.

Corporate Overview

A Member drew attention to the improving sickness absence levels. The Business Improvement Officer (Policy) confirmed the levels remained good going into Quarter 3.

Environment and Rural Affairs

There were no comments.

Finance and Performance

A Member sought clarification on why some large projects were amber and not green. The Business Improvement Officer (Policy) advised that once a project had been delayed, it could remain amber if the information was based on the original target dates of the scheme. The Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair suggested that a new schedule should be produced. The Business Improvement Officer (Policy) agreed to look at this in the future.

In response to a question from a Member on why the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was green, the Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance agreed to find out.

There was a discussion on the Transformation Team working on other projects. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance explained that the staff had been diverted to work on the Council's new website which was a key corporate priority.

Housing and Safer Communities

A Member highlighted the increase in crime levels and asked what could SBC do? The Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance drew attention that figures for crime were now reported differently and this could have added to the increase. A Member said that the figures still indicated that crime in Swale was worsening.

In response to a request from a Member, the Business Improvement Officer (Policy) agreed to provide figures for the breakdown of crime.

Planning Services

In response to a request from a Member, the Business Improvement Officer (Policy) agreed to provide performance data relating to Freedom of Information requests.

A Member asked what the additional, unpredicted, revenue from planning fee income was spent on? The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance explained that the money was retained and went into the General Budget or Planning Services budget. He warned that, in some years, there had been an over-estimate of the expected revenue. The Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance said that recruitment of Planning Officers was difficult. A discussion ensued focusing on the statutory timescales for completing planning applications, and the Business Improvement Officer (Policy) clarified that there were statutory requirements to meet before a planning application became valid, but there might still be insufficient information to progress the application, which caused delays.

A Member asked about funding from developers as part of a Planning Performance Agreement to provide Planning Officers for major planning applications. The Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance agreed to find out more information on this.

Regeneration

There was no discussion.

Health and Well-being

The Chairman sought clarification on the figures for staff receiving safeguarding training. The Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance explained that the safeguarding training module had only just been updated to include the domestic abuse training module when the figures were submitted and by the end of Quarter 3, most staff had undertaken the training.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance, the Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance and the Business Improvement Officer (Policy) for attending the meeting.

440 OTHER REVIEW PROGRESS REPORTS

The Development Management Review was discussed under Item 6.

441 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

A Member highlighted the Disposal of 17/17A Station Street, Sittingbourne on Page 3 of the Forward Plan and asked for an update to be provided on plans for the building.

A Member disagreed that the impact of the closure of public conveniences on page 5 of the Forward Plan was not a key decision as he considered that if the facilities were brought back to use, they could be used by drivers travelling through the Borough.

442 URGENT BUSINESS REQUESTS

There were none.

443 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman suggested inviting the Utility companies to attend the Scrutiny Committee meeting scheduled for 27 February 2019. In the discussion that followed, a Member suggested the topic should be discussed early in the next municipal year for completeness.

The Policy and Performance Officer agreed to contact the Utility companies and update Members.

Chairman

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