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## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

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**MINUTES** of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 5 June 2019 from 7.00pm - 9.08 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Lloyd Bowen (Chairman), Richard Darby, Mike Dendor (Vice-Chairman), Mark Ellen (substitute for Councillor Carole Jackson), Tim Gibson, Denise Knights, Lee McCall, Pete Neal, Ken Pugh, Paul Stephen (substitute for Councillor James Hall) and Bill Tatton (substitute for Councillor Elliott Jayes).

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Charlotte Hudson, Jo Millard, Bob Pullen and Dean Radmore.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Councillors Mike Baldock (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning), Cameron Beart, Monique Bonney (Cabinet Member for Economy and Property), Roger Clark, Simon Fowle, Alan Horton, James Hunt, Peter Marchington, Ben A Martin, Ken Rowles, David Simmons, Sarah Stephen and Ghlin Whelan (Deputy Cabinet Member for Housing).

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Steve Davey, Alastair Gould, James Hall, Carole Jackson and Elliott Jayes.

### 24 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

### 25 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 February 2019 (Minute Nos. 519 – 524) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### 26 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

### 27 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

The Chairman welcomed new and re-elected Members to the meeting and Members of the Committee introduced themselves. The Deputy Leader said that Cabinet would be supportive of reviews and would take recommendations arising out of the Scrutiny Committee seriously.

### 28 ADJOURNMENT

The Chairman called an adjournment from 19:13 to 19.15 so that those present could consider the progress update and plans of the Sittingbourne Town Centre regeneration.

**29 SITTINGBOURNE TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION UPDATE**

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property, the Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services and the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property introduced the update and clarified Swale Borough Council's (SBC) role as a partner in the scheme. She explained that SBC were commercially and contractually bound by a legal agreement.

The Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services gave a short history of the partners in the scheme. She referred to the plan circulated, highlighted the development areas and explained that SBC were a development partner and funder, not the developer. The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property added that work to the Spring Street car park and one-way system was due to commence the following week.

A Member questioned the safety aspect of buses dropping passengers off on an unlaid kerbline area and asked when the work would be completed? In response, the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration scheme manager confirmed that Spirit of Sittingbourne (SoS) were aware of one particular bus operator doing this and they had been warned against it.

In the discussion that followed, the Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services explained that the responsibility for the management of the buses was with Kent County Council (KCC) and the bus companies and the issue could be discussed at the next Quality Bus Partnership meeting. The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property added that any photographic evidence would be forwarded on for action.

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property said that there was dis-satisfaction with the works generally and this would be addressed. The Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager explained that KCC had not yet signed off the work and the Stage 3 Safety Audit process was still ongoing. In response to a question from a Member on the number of elements of the scheme not yet signed off by KCC, the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager explained that Erith (Contractors) had found difficulty in laying hot rolled asphalt to acceptable KCC standards.

There was a discussion around the traffic lights at the train station and how recent and proposed changes might affect the flow of traffic. The Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager agreed to look into this.

In response to a Member's question on any progress made on a previous suggestion of moving the taxi rank outside the train station to avoid the blockages caused by the loading bay, the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager agreed to look at this.

The Chairman questioned the communication sent out to Members and highlighted a press release that Members received after it was published in the media. Another Member criticised the SoS website and suggested that communication should be

clearer. The Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services agreed that communication levels needed attention and there would be more regular updates.

The Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services gave an update on the Multi-Storey Car Park (MSCP). She advised that whilst the car park was complete, operational and could function, it needed to work for SBC. There had been some delays due to additional work and some snagging issues were still being worked on. She added that the health and safety inspection had raised issues. The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property added that SBC were not comfortable with the safety measures in place and drew attention that the height of the railings needed to be expanded and this should have been picked up in the design stage. It was confirmed that there were two lifts in the building and contrary to reports elsewhere, there had never been an issue with the lifts.

The Chairman said that completion, operational and practical dates should have been explained to avoid confusion with residents over the opening of the car park.

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property expressed her concerns over the traffic flows in the town centre, particularly near the two pedestrian crossings. She advised that whilst there were current contractual agreements, long-term traffic implications would be looked at and she suggested that in future a wider group including KCC Officers should be included in the discussion.

In response to a Member's question, the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager gave more detail on the proposed bus stand at the northern end of Cockleshell Walk, and advised that sufficient room for it was found within the design and it would not impact significantly on the traffic flow.

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property advised that there were monthly project monitoring reports and the current 7-9 week delay would have a financial impact to the developer the Council needed to ensure that quality was not impacted. She suggested that, as part of the contract cinema users were offered free parking after 6pm and there were parking subsidies for guests of the hotel, a future topic for the Scrutiny Committee may be SBC car parking as SBC looked to be subsidising certain elements of the scheme.

In response to a Member's question, the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager explained that Loungers café bars were independently branded.

A Member asked what the justification was behind the single-lane traffic running alongside Cockleshell Walk, Sittingbourne. In response, the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme Manager explained that the main reason for the design was due to the planned residential area and increase in pedestrians.

The Chairman asked about the marketing of the three remaining restaurant units. The Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services said that SoS had employed Savills to market the remaining units, but there were no current negotiations with any restaurants. The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property expressed her concern over two of the leases.

During the discussion on the frequency of alternate in-person and written updates to the Scrutiny Committee, Committee Members all agreed to continue with the current format. The Chairman asked that representatives from KCC and SoS be invited to the next appropriate Scrutiny Committee.

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property concluded by saying that the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme was a long and complex development that SBC were contractually bound to, but she was conscious of the need to plan for the wider area of Sittingbourne, including the High Street. Lastly, she warned Members to be mindful of the current unstable restaurant market.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property, the Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services and the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration scheme manager for their attendance.

### **30 INTRODUCTION TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

The Policy and Performance Officer gave an introduction to Overview and Scrutiny which included an explanation of what it was, how it worked at SBC, highlights of its positive achievements and how it might change in the future.

In response to a Member's question on what could be scrutinised, the Chairman explained Scrutiny's powers. He drew attention that only Cabinet or Cabinet-led decisions could be considered and explained the procedure for a call-in. The Chairman explained that the Policy Development and Review Committee (PDRC) could consider policies of the Council. Lastly, the Chairman highlighted the importance of the Annual Budget Scrutiny Committee meeting, in January 2020, and advised that he would ask each Cabinet Member to attend and give an overview of the main proposed budget changes in their portfolio.

### **31 DRAFT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT**

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the report which would be submitted to Full Council. He explained that much of the previous municipal year concentrated on the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration Scheme and some of the reviews were not completed due to the Borough election.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report for 2018/19 be presented to Council.***

### **32 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2019/20 MUNICIPAL YEAR**

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2019/20 and referred to the table at Appendix I. He explained that items 1 to 4 were ongoing review work and the Scrutiny Committee should consider whether to continue with Development Management, Regeneration review and Infrastructure provision in Swale. He added that the new administration might have different ideas going forward.

The Chairman said that any reviews should be completed this municipal year and explained how a Task and Finish Group was set up.

In the discussion that followed, Members suggested that Utilities provision across the Borough (water, electricity, broadband) and future public transport provision (including the train line between Sittingbourne and Sheerness) should be considered.

A Member said that several projects including the Queenborough and Rushenden Regeneration Scheme and the Faversham Swing Bridge were ongoing projects so should continue to be reviewed. The same Member advised that Southern Gas Networks were investing heavily on the Isle of Sheppey. In response, the Policy and Performance Officer advised that the scope of the Regeneration (non-STC) review had changed in the previous municipal year and he would circulate the scoping reviews for all the paused reviews to Members for discussion at the next Scrutiny Committee meeting. Members agreed to progress Utilities and Public Transport reviews for Swale.

A Member suggested the Scrutiny Committee could consider how it operated at other authorities under the Committee system and whether it added any value.

The Chairman encouraged Members to take part in future reviews.

### 33 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Policy and Performance Officer gave an explanation of the purpose of the Forward Plan and highlighted the criteria of a key decision.

A Member asked for more information on the disposal of 17/17a Station Street, Sittingbourne. The Senior Democratic Services Officer agreed to obtain this information.

#### Chairman

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