
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 3 July 2019 from 7.00pm - 9.05 pm.

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

OFFICERS PRESENT: Jo Millard, Bob Pullen and Nick Vickers.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Cameron Beart, Monique Bonney, Simon Fowle, Alastair Gould (Cabinet Member for Planning), Angela Harrison, Alan Horton, Ken Rowles and Ghlin Whelan.

APOLOGIES: Councillor Richard Darby and Carole Jackson.

108 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

109 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held 5 June 2019 (Minute Nos. 24 – 33) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

110 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

111 INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIRMAN

The Chairman of Scrutiny welcomed everyone to the meeting, and said that the Scrutiny Committee wanted to be a critical friend to the administration and work where possible with Members to the benefit of the residents of Swale. He said that Cabinet and Officers of the Council should be reminded of the powers of the Scrutiny Committee and that requests from the Committee to Cabinet Members and Officers should be actioned and met where at all possible. He added that where there were difficulties, the Cabinet Member or Officer should discuss this with the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Officers.

A visiting Member supported the Chairman and the role of Scrutiny.

The Vice-Chairman sought clarity on whether a Deputy Cabinet Member was able to sit on Scrutiny Committee. In the discussion that followed, the Senior Democratic Services Officer advised Members on the situation and the Chairman requested that the circumstances be resolved by the time of the next Scrutiny Committee meeting in September 2019.

112 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Alastair Gould (Deputy Cabinet Member for Planning) attending the meeting as representative for the Cabinet Member for Finance, and the Chief Financial Officer.

The Deputy Cabinet Member for Planning introduced the report and referred to service underspends which would be rolled over, with some funds used for Special Projects in the future. He highlighted the additional income from the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration and explained that £4m would be received over the next 4 years from the growth of Business Rates, and £1.7m from the North Kent Business Rate Plan. For the benefit of new Councillors, the Chief Financial Officer gave a brief history and explanation of the budget savings.

Members asked questions and raised points which included:

- Where was the funding of the car parking concessions and the Real Living Wage coming from in the future?;
- clarification on the future costs for topping up the Special Projects fund;
- did the reinstatement of the car park concession include Sheerness Leisure Centre?;
- was the car park concession at the leisure centres for users of the centre only?;
- what were the implications on other pay grades in implementing the Real Living Wage to Swale Borough Council (SBC) staff?;
- if the Real Living Wage level continued to increase, were SBC tied into the agreement and was it reviewed annually?;
- why did the car parking concession exclude Faversham Swimming Pool?;
- did the £68k funding for the Real Living Wage include national insurance and pension contributions?;
- where were the running costs of the Special Projects coming from?; and
- had an Impact Equality Assessment been carried out when considering the Real Living Wage and were any other alternatives considered to remunerating staff?

In response, the Deputy Cabinet Member for Planning spoke positively on the benefits of the Real Living Wage and said that SBC should take the lead and incur the costs, which would not have a huge impact on the Council budget. The Chief Financial Officer said that it was SBC's decision to implement the Real Living Wage, it was only a small part of the wage bill and the cost did include National Insurance and Pension contributions. He added that more information would be tabled before the Cabinet meeting on 10 July 2019.

The Deputy Cabinet Member for Planning confirmed that the concession for parking was for users of the leisure centre only. The Chief Financial Officer said that Faversham Pool was not run by SBC but there were ongoing discussions around concessions for that car park.

The Chairman went through Appendix I, page by page.

In response to a Member's question on the reduction in income from Land Charges (page 23), the Chief Financial Officer explained that customers could now carry out land charges more cheaply by not using a Local Authority and figures were expected to continue to fall in the future although other ideas of bringing in customers were being looked at by the team.

A Member asked which building the Sheerness District Office (page 28) was. The Chief Financial Officer agreed to find out and report back.

In response to the Chairman's question on the vacant post of Building Surveyor (page 29), the Chief Financial Officer advised that it was difficult to recruit staff to the role. He went on to clarify the Building Maintenance Reserve and agreed to provide a more full explanation on the £35k underspend from the HR Shared Service.

The Chief Financial Officer agreed to provide more information to all Members on the work being carried out, funded by the grant received from KCC, for the Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan for Faversham and the Isle of Sheppey (page 31).

In response to a question on the £29,600 rollover from the Homelessness Temporary Accommodation fund (page 31), the Deputy Cabinet Member for Planning advised that SBC wanted to recruit more Housing officers. The Chief Financial Officer agreed to find out what the new software upgrade costs would be.

The Chief Financial Officer gave the definition of 'channel shift agenda' (page 31).

Members drew attention to the rollover requests in the Communications team (page 32), and the Chief Financial Officer explained that additional, external assistance might need to be funded in the future. He agreed to find out if the Inside Swale booklet was printed externally. In the discussion that followed, a Member stressed the importance of Inside Swale to residents.

A Member sought clarification on the additional income received from renewing Hackney Carriage Licences (page 32). The Chief Financial Officer agreed to check and report back. A Member welcomed the proposed funding of a new taxi badge printer.

A Member said that there should not be savings from street cleansing (page 35). Another Member agreed and suggested street cleansing as a future Scrutiny review.

A Member asked that the vacant post of Senior Manager in Contracts and Procurement be filled quickly.

In response to a Member's question on Food and Health and Safety (page 36), the Chief Financial Officer explained that it was difficult to recruit Environmental Health Officers. He suggested a briefing to assist Members' awareness of the service.

A Member questioned why the work on the public realm improvements in Sheerness (page 37) had not commenced?

There was a discussion around the temporary post of Economic Development Support Officer (page 37). The Chairman, Councillor Lloyd Bowen, proposed that “the Scrutiny Committee recommends that future consideration be given that the Economic Development Support Officer post be made a permanent role at Swale Borough Council”. The Vice-Chairman, Councillor Mike Dendor, seconded the proposal. On being put to the vote, Members agreed.

The Chief Financial Officer explained the reason that the reserves for pension and redundancy (page 39) was so low, was because the numbers of Revenues and Benefits staff were cut by one third last year. He said that Cabinet could move money into the fund in future if necessary, and additional income was expected from the Sittingbourne Town Centre.

A Member drew attention to table 14 on page 44 – Capital Programme 2018/19 Outturn - and advised that the Queenborough Lines Bridge deck replacement needed additional work and funding. He highlighted the typing error to Queenborough Causeway Hard on page 45.

Members congratulated staff in Finance for their continued hard work and gave particular praise that 99% of invoices were paid within 30 days of receipt.

The Chairman sought confirmation that Cabinet were confident that projects had been properly costed. The Deputy Cabinet Member for Planning said that not all projects were yet firm and the proposals were a statement of intent.

The Chairman thanked the Deputy Cabinet Member for Planning and the Chief Financial Officer for their attendance.

Recommended:

- (1) That the gross revenue underspend of £930,800 be noted.**
- (2) That the revenue service rollovers of £722,500 and the setting up of new reserves as set out in in Appendix I Table 11 of the report for approval be noted**
- (3) That the setting up of a new fund called ‘Special Projects’ to replace the Regeneration Fund, and to agree to topping up this Fund by £1m per annum from reserves be noted.**
- (4) That the consideration of reinstating the car park concession at the Swallows and Sheerness Leisure Centres from July 2019, at an estimated cost of £90,000 in 2019/20 funded from the underspend in 2018/19 be noted.**
- (5) That the implementation of the Real Living Wage for SBC staff at a cost of £68,000 per annum funded from the underspend in 2018/19 be noted.**
- (6) That the delegation to the Chief Financial Officer for the allocation of uncommitted underspends to reserve funds be noted.**

(7) That the capital expenditure of £18,870,571 as detailed in paragraph 8 and Appendix I Table 14 be noted.

(8) That the consideration of the capital rollovers of £2,862,822 as detailed in Appendix I Table 15 of the report for approval be noted.

(9) That the Scrutiny Committee recommends that future consideration be given that the Economic Development Support Officer post be made a permanent role at Swale Borough Council.

113 REVIEWS PAUSED DURING 2018/19

Development Management

The Policy and Performance Officer gave an outline of the work that had already been carried out and explained that the recommendations made in an interim report were not accepted by the previous Cabinet. He added that there were further aspects of the review to work on if Members wished to continue.

In the discussion that followed, the Vice-Chairman gave more details on aspects of the review that could be considered in the future.

Members agreed to abandon the review.

Regeneration

The Policy and Performance Officer explained that the Regeneration review had gone in a different direction to its original purpose. The Chairman agreed and said that the review could look at a few specific projects as the previous review had got too big.

Members agreed to re-commence the review with the following Members sitting on the Task and Finish Group:

Councillor Cameron Beart (co-opted Member)
Councillor Steve Davey
Councillor Tim Gibson
Councillor Lee McCall
Councillor Pete Neal
Councillor Ken Pugh

In the interests of geographical balance, it was agreed that a Faversham Ward Member be co-opted onto the group, and an email would be sent out to Members for a volunteer.¹

It was agreed that Councillor Beart be the interim co-ordinator.

¹POST MEETING NOTE: Councillor Benjamin A Martin agreed to be co-opted onto the Regeneration Task and Finish Group.

Scrutiny Committee in Council Structures

The Chairman proposed that a future review should focus on what benefits the Scrutiny Committee might have in different Council structures such as Cabinet/Executive or hybrid Council structures. Councillor Ken Pugh seconded the proposal.

Members agreed that the Scrutiny function in different Council structures should be a future review.

114 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Senior Democratic Services Officer advised that the Forward Plan had been republished since the Scrutiny Agenda had been published and Members had received the updated Forward Plan electronically.

Members asked that Cabinet Member names be added to the Lead Member column on the Forward Plan.

Resolved:

(1) That the Forward Plan was noted.

115 URGENT BUSINESS REQUESTS

There were no urgent business requests.

116 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMESittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration

The Chairman invited questions on the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration tabled update.

Members raised the following:

- Not enough space at the bus station area with buses loading and unloading; not wide enough for wheelchairs and buggies;
- buses taking too long to get up St. Michael's Road when leaving The Forum;
- one particular bus operator blocking other buses at the stand;
- the loading area should be a bus waiting area;
- what part of the leisure development scheme at Bourne Place had not been built in accordance with the approved scheme and why?;
- would PDR newsletters be circulated to Councillors?;
- have the electric charging points been replaced by mother and child bays in the multi-storey car park?;
- have the Cabinet Member and Deputy Cabinet Member taken up their place on the Board?;
- some parts of the road were dangerous to cross, what provisions were in place for the elderly?;

- the carriageway and footway works surrounding the multi-storey car park were not substantially complete, further update required;
- little activity outside the multi-storey car park, further update for provisional opening for use required; and
- when would the block paving at the train station be finished?

The Senior Democratic Services Officer agreed to forward questions and seek answers to outstanding questions from the previous Scrutiny Committee held in June 2019.

Chairman

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