
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 15 January 2020 from 7.00pm - 9.06pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Lloyd Bowen (Chairman), Richard Darby, Steve Davey, Mike Dendor (Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair), Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, James Hall, Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Denise Knights, Lee McCall, Pete Neal and Ken Pugh.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Kieren Mansfield, Jo Millard, Tony Potter and Bob Pullen.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Monique Bonney (Cabinet Member for Economy and Property), Roger Clark, Alan Horton, Ken Ingleton, Richard Palmer (Cabinet Member for Community), Ken Rowles, Sarah Stephen, Bill Tatton and Roger Truelove (Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance).

Ms Rhiannon Mort (South East Local Enterprise Partnership).

448 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

449 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 6 November 2019 (Minute Nos. 338 – 348) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

450 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

451 INVITATION TO SOUTH EAST LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP (SELEP)

The Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair introduced Rhiannon Mort, Capital Programme Manager for South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP). Ms Mort gave a presentation which included information on SELEP's investment in projects in Swale, funding streams and future projects.

Members asked questions and made points which included:

- Were there fewer projects in Kent, particularly in Swale, that had been allocated funding, compared to other areas of the South East?;
- praise for the A2500 Lower Road, Minster scheme;
- were there plans in place to retain those trained at the proposed Kent and Medway Medical school in the area, to benefit the local community?;

- suggested investment in primary care facilities as GP Hubs lacked the space to retain trainees;
- who decided on the allocation of funds for projects when a bid was submitted?;
- how could Swale improve its chances of receiving funding?;
- what was the future for funding after March 2021?;
- there should be a focus on local growth so that there was less travel to work and less damage to the environment;
- the infrastructure gap needed filling; and
- support for the Digital Skills partnership as there was a shortage of IT skills.

In response, Ms Mort said that funding was fairly proportioned across areas, according to the population. She said that SELEP could not influence the NHS to retain trained staff but there was evidence that the facility would benefit the local area and it was important to create places where people wanted to work, stay and continue to live. In addressing the question of how to improve chances of receiving funding, Ms Mort explained that robust business cases, sometimes in conjunction with neighbouring authorities or related organisations could improve chances of receiving funding along with evidencing value for money, identifying clear priorities and deliverability of a scheme.

On the subject of the Lower Thames Crossing, Ms Mort said that the project would serve many purposes and provide connectivity to the north and south. A Member highlighted the environmental impact and suggested that other forms of transport such as rail freight should be considered.

The Economy and Community Services Manager explained that future funding was unknown as Central Government's post-Brexit plans had been delayed with no announcements. Ms Mort said that some projects had not delivered as expected and other projects would receive funding instead. She highlighted the 'Growing Places' fund which was a cycle of funding by re-investing using rental income.

The Economy and Community Services Manager detailed the process for submitting bids. He explained that businesses cases for projects were put together in accordance with the administration's priorities, in response to a call for bids. There was a scoring system and projects were then prioritised. He said there was a risk going forward that projects developed in advance of any announcements on future funding may not fit the Government's funding requirements.

The Economy and Community Services Manager drew attention to the challenges and said that revenue was an issue, particularly in relation to the Further Education funding model.

The Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair thanked Ms Mort for her presentation and attendance at the meeting which was met with a round of applause from the Committee.

452 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair welcomed the Leader and the Business Improvement Officer to the meeting. He drew attention that whilst the performance figures were now out of date, due to the delayed meeting because of the General Election, it was useful to see trends.

The Leader highlighted the waste collection targets and said that whilst there had been improvements, it remained in the red. He drew attention to chart 1 on page 7 of the report and said that although there was further improvement in the second quarter, there were still too many red flags because of the failure of the waste contract. He added that the failure had affected other targets such as phone calls in the CSC. The Leader was encouraged by the figures achieved in planning application targets in table 4, drew attention to the tabled update on the Sittingbourne Town Centre scheme and advised that trading was due to start in March 2020.

The Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair sought clarity on how to interpret the tables on Appendix II on page 15 of the report and went through the report page by page.

Table 1, page 8

The Chairman said that he hoped the next quarter figures would show further improvement and he was disappointed that the Scrutiny Committee were only being informed of the issues with the waste contract now. He asked how food waste had got into the residual waste stream? The Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair raised communication issues. In response, the Leader explained that there was a variety of issues with the contract that was approaching its end. He highlighted vehicle and staff issues and said that the Contractors had to be more accountable. The Leader said that there had been some improvements but the quality of service had reduced again and the Council were in a difficult position. He said there were 2 years left to run on the contract and that he would be meeting with the Contractors again very soon.

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The Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair referred to the percentage of CSC abandoned calls and commented that digital use had not been as high as expected. The Business Improvement officer agreed and said this was being looked at and would be reported to a future meeting.

Table 5, page 11

The Chairman sought further information on the Beach Huts and Mill Skate park. A visiting Member said that the Beach Huts should not be amber as the project had not yet started.

Tables 8 and 9, page 13

The Business Improvement Officer confirmed that the Mid Kent Audit should be 2019-20, not 2018-19.

The Chairman asked whether staff were available to undertake audit projects? In response, the Business Improvement Officer said that the projects were on a rolling schedule that followed a cycle and projects would be worked on when resource was available. A visiting Member added that the process of when to carry out audits was checked by the Audit Committee.

Table 10, page 14

The Business Improvement Officer agreed to find out why the project in table 10 had been removed from the Audit Plan.

A visiting Member drew attention to point 6 on page 14 of the report, and the Leader agreed that contrary to what was written, there were cost cutting implications.

The Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair said that a lot of useful information could be found on the Council's website and details of where to access this were at 1.3 on page 6 of the report.

Appendix II, page 15

A visiting Member praised the good work carried out by staff in meeting the target of bringing the number of long-term empty homes back into use.

In response to the Chairman's clarification on long-term and short-term sickness, the Business Improvement Officer highlighted the information at BV12b on the chart.

Appendix II, page 16

The Leader confirmed that some information relating to Sittingbourne Town Centre Phase 1 was out of date, from the previous administration, and there were no plans to consider free parking on a Sunday at the multi-storey car park.

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property confirmed that the Mill Skate park could not open in its current state, and there was no landscaping around ramps, no bins and security for the Barge Museum was not yet in place. She advised that the site was still in the contractor's possession. The Cabinet Member for Community advised that the landscaping was due to be carried out in September 2020.

The Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair thanked the Leader and the Business Improvement Officer for their attendance.

POST MEETING NOTE:

The Business Improvement Officer provided responses to questions from Scrutiny Committee members, which were circulated after the meeting.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

453 OTHER REVIEW PROGRESS REPORTSSittingbourne Town Centre

The Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair referred Members to the tabled update. The Chairman reminded Members that Officers would be in attendance at the Scrutiny Committee scheduled for 27 February 2020 and questions could be submitted in advance.

Members discussed the tabled update and made points including:

- Why had the extra earth levels at the Bourne Place development not been predicted earlier?;
- poor signage at Dover Street meant that lorries were continuing to drive towards the low railway bridge – could a temporary height barrier be installed and the signage be made pictorial?; and
- sporadic work with no notice was taking up spaces in the car parks.

Councillor Elliot Jayes proposed and Councillor Lloyd Bowen seconded that the progress letter sent to local residents and businesses on 10 January 2020 be circulated to all Members.

Infrastructure in Swale

The Policy and Performance Officer explained that representatives from SGN, UK Power Networks and South East Water had all confirmed they would attend a future Scrutiny Committee meeting. A response from Southern Water was still awaited.

Regeneration (other than Sittingbourne Town Centre)

It was agreed at the previous meeting to pause any further work until after the 2019 General Election and holiday period. Work on the review would resume shortly.

Resolved:

(1) That the tabled update report be noted.

(2) That the progress letter sent to residents and business on 10 January 2020 be circulated to all Members.

454 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Senior Democratic Services Officer updated Members of changes to the Forward Plan since publication of the Scrutiny Agenda and advised that the Environmental Health Enforcement Policy 2020 and the Constitutional Review: Area Committees would be considered at the Cabinet meeting on 12 February 2020, and the Corporate Plan would be considered by Cabinet in May 2020.

455 URGENT BUSINESS REQUESTS

There were no urgent business requests.

456 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Vice-Chairman-in-the-chair went through the work programme.

The Chairman reminded Members of the Budget Scrutiny Committee meeting on 22 January 2020.

Chairman

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