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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 Thursday, 27 February 2020 from 7.02pm - 9.15 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Lloyd Bowen (Chairman), Richard Darby, Steve Davey, Mike Dendor (Vice-Chairman), Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, Carole Jackson, Denise Knights, Lee McCall, Ken Pugh, David Simmons (Substitute for Councillor Pete Neal) and Corrie Woodford (Substitute for Councillor Elliott Jayes).

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Alister Andrews, Philippa Davies, Charlotte Hudson, Tony Potter, Bob Pullen and Dean Radmore.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Councillors Monique Bonney, Alan Horton, Ben J Martin, Hannah Perkin, Sarah Stephen, Roger Truelove and Ghlin Whelan.

Richard Blackwell (Spirit of Sittingbourne).

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors James Hall, Elliott Jayes and Pete Neal.

### 570 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

### 571 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 January 2020 (Minute Nos. 471 – 477) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to adding the following additional wording to Minute No. 475, Budget 2020/21 and Medium Term Financial Plan, under the paragraph with the heading Page 34 paragraph 2.13:

“A Member asked the Leader whether the £1.7 million he, as Leader and Finance portfolio holder, was intending to use to cover the finance costs on the £10 million loan for housing, was the same £1.7million set aside for job creation and commercial growth in Faversham. The Leader confirmed that it was.”

### 572 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

### 573 SITTINGBOURNE TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property, the Deputy Cabinet Member for Economy and Property, the Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services (the Director of Regeneration had sent her apologies), the Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager, and a representative from the Spirit of Sittingbourne to the meeting. The Chairman referred to the tabled

update for this item and expressed disappointment that although a representative from Kent County Council (KCC) had been invited to attend, no one from KCC was present at the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property gave an update and explained that the Travelodge was now open and consequently the multi-storey car park (MSCP) would now be open 24 hours a day, and the new opening times would be publicised. She added that the restaurant below the Travelodge was being fitted-out, and work had commenced on the new footpath between the High Street and the MSCP and this would be completed in 5 weeks. The Cabinet Member said that she had met with KCC officers regarding issues with the road layout outside the station where lorries were getting stuck trying to navigate the mini-roundabout, and also the need for improved signage for the one-way system. The Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager explained that one sign near the traffic lights was partially obscured by construction hoarding at the moment and from the other direction, the location of the sign was incorrect and it would be relocated within a week.

Members were invited to comment and ask questions on the tabled update. A summary of the topics raised and answers given are set-out below:

### **Highway Works**

Some Members raised concern with the unfinished road surfaces, with dips in the road, poor quality finish, road surfaces not lining-up, and pot holes. These issues were located from Dover Street to Fountain Street and Spring Street, from the railway bridge. The Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager referred to the update and advised that the final surface would be laid in May 2020.

A Member sought clarification on whether cars were permitted to go through the bus stop hub to access the Forum car park. The Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager explained that this was not the intention. However, from the MSCP end there needed to be access to the service yard, but this was a no through road for other vehicles. The Member suggested a sign stating 'Buses and Service Area Only' be installed.

A Member stated that buses were reversing and turning around in the bus hub area, rather than using the Forum road, and were unsatisfactorily trying to get around the mini-roundabout near the station. The Cabinet Member said there was an issue with lorries as well and she had spoken to KCC about this.

The Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager explained that a road safety audit would be carried out in April 2020 and this would look at the actions of motorists, identify any other issues and recommendations from the audit would be taken forward. He acknowledged the mini-roundabout issues and said that buses did not need to turn left out of the Forum road; they were permitted to turn right and this approach was agreed with KCC. He advised that handover of the bus hub was due to take place in March 2020.

Members asked for more detail on the audit, whether it would be over a period of 24 hours and whether other reported issues could be fed into the audit findings. The

Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager explained that the audit would include all conditions, during the day, at night, and during rush hour. He said that the auditors would look at documents from inception to completion of the scheme, and audits throughout the design stage, but would not normally take additional 'external observational' facts. The Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager explained that KCC would be represented in the audit as well. The Cabinet Member explained that some independent advice would also be sought.

A Member referred to the Erith plant on St. Michael's Road and stated that drivers of the vehicles using the site were ignoring the rules of the road, and he raised safety issues with vehicles travelling on the wrong side of the road. The Member asked whether there was any recourse, once the audit had been signed-off. The Spirit of Sittingbourne (SoS) representative explained that there was a 12 month maintenance certificate, so if KCC thought anything was unsafe, changes would have to be made.

A Member considered the points raised at this meeting should be included in the audit process. The Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager again stated that the auditors would have all the information they required, and they would not include issues raised at this meeting. The Cabinet Member said that issues raised by Members this evening would be relayed to KCC. The SoS representative confirmed that there had been no reported accidents involving members of the public during the roadworks.

A Member asked for timescales of when Spring Street would be fully operational and when the damage to the Cockleshell and Spring Street car parks would be corrected. The SoS representative explained that warmer weather was required for re-surfacing, and there would need to be full road closure. Work on the car parks could be completed in the next month. He said that 3-4 days work was needed on Dover Street, but this was not necessarily continuous days. The SoS representative confirmed that he would forward the dates when the work would be carried out to the Cabinet Member, the Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager and the Scrutiny Committee.

A Member said that he was happy to raise any highway issues at the Swale Joint Transportation Board meeting on 2 March 2020. The Cabinet Member advised that parking restrictions at the lay-by near Cockleshell Walk were being considered at that meeting, and this would allow buses to then use the lay-by.

A Member asked if the Erith site on St. Michael's Road would revert back to being a car park and was advised that it would and pictures taken of the site, prior to it being used for storage, would ensure that it was reverted back to the same condition that it had been.

### **Leisure Development (Bourne Place)**

A Member queried whether the Travelodge was actually open for business. He noted that there was an opening event on 4 March 2020. The Member requested an update on the UKPN work and the SoS representative outlined the work that needed to be completed and said that this would be done by the end of March 2020.

A Member asked about the buildings' insulation and the SoS representative advised that the product being used had caused some small issues which were being resolved, and he confirmed this would not delay opening times. The Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services added that extra insulation was being looked into, to benefit both the restaurant and the cinema. The Travelodge and the unit underneath had passed the test, but the cinema standards were not currently being met. The Cabinet Member emphasised the need to get the insulation sorted out at this stage, rather than do remedial works in the future.

A Member asked for more information on the installation of the fibre cabling and the SoS representative explained that the situation had been known for a while and he outlined the work that needed to be completed, which involved outage for a while which would be difficult to co-ordinate, but this was being pursued with Vodafone at the moment.

Members agreed to go into closed session whilst the Cabinet Member gave an update on the take-up of the units.

**Resolved:**

***That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act:***

***3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).***

The meeting resumed as an open meeting.

**Princes Street Retail Park/ The Forum Car Park**

A Member asked for more details on the concrete floor slab. The Sittingbourne Town Centre Scheme Manager explained that the concrete floor slab in The Food Warehouse was structurally sound, but its appearance at the front, was different to that at the back, with a lot more aggregate at the front. Independent advice was being sought, prior to resolving the issue. The SoS representative confirmed that the Concrete Society had looked at the problem.

**Risks**

The SoS representative said that an updated risk register would be circulated to Members.

**Communications**

The SoS representative explained that members of the public had asked questions and these were responded to, and any negative issues were raised at regular meetings. The Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services said that enquiries about job vacancies were also made. There was also engagement with local businesses who had been impacted by the development.

The Cabinet Member advised Members to look at the roadworks.org website, and if there was a particular issue with a contractor to contact them direct, and to copy KCC in.

### **Multi- Storey Car Park**

The Cabinet Member said there was a 12 month defect inspection with Huber in March 2020. She referred to the different colours on each floor of the MSCP, which did not show up very well, and asked Members if they wanted this issue to be pursued with Huber. Some Members were unaware that the floors should be different colours and Members agreed that this issued should be raised with Huber.

### **SBC Team and Governance**

The Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services agreed to forward the Arcadis report to Members.

A Member asked if there had been any issues with the artisan market as a result of the development. The Cabinet Member explained that unfortunately the artisan market was finding it difficult, and were not making enough money. She said that markets generally, especially in Sittingbourne and Sheerness needed to be looked at.

There was some discussion on how this item could be scrutinised in the future as completion of the development was scheduled for March/April 2020. The Chairman explained that this was the last scheduled meeting with invited attendees, with the next one being a written update. He suggested there might be an additional meeting before the end of the municipal year. The Chairman acknowledged the time that the Scrutiny Committee had been looking at STC regeneration, and he considered the project was all the better for going through this process.

The Chairman thanked all those present for attending the meeting. He also thanked officers for their work and Members who had commented and critiqued and for the depth of conversation and questions during the review.

## **574 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT**

The Chairman welcomed the Leader, the Policy and Performance Support Officer and the Environmental Services Manager to the meeting. The report set-out the quarterly performance management report for the third quarter of 2019/20 (October – December 2019) as previously reported to the Strategic Management Team and informal Cabinet.

The Leader explained that there were signs that a few of the indicators were improving, but had remained red because of their performance in the second quarter. He said that he had met with Biffa, and with a better fleet, things should now improve. The Leader welcomed the increase in affordable homes being delivered, as noted on page 11 of the report.

Members were invited to make comments and ask questions page-by-page.

**Table 1**

A Member asked why the number of refused planning applications had risen. The Policy and Performance Support Officer explained that this could be because of the lower take-up of pre-application advice.

*Members discussed the number of missed bins per annum and the following points were raised:*

Some streets had their bins emptied and others off the main road did not. The Leader explained that there was a chronic shortage of drivers, and the agency drivers did not know their way round. The Environmental Services Manager said that he would look into this further. He did say that Biffa were looking at solutions to retain their drivers. He added that operatives had a hand held Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) device which showed which streets had been visited.

A debate took place regarding whether brown garden waste bins were included in the missed bin figures and it was determined that they were.

A visiting Member considered 70 missed bins a week out of 60,000 was not too bad, and he suggested there were more complaints of missed bins than was noted in the report. The Policy and Performance Support Officer said that the figures may be 'flipped' to show the amount of bins collected, rather than not collected.

A Member asked how the figures were collected and the Environmental Services Manager advised that they came from calls to the Customer Services Centre (CSC) or were logged online. The Member suggested that the figure in reality was greater as it would be the whole street that had not been collected.

Some Members said that parked cars hampered access for the freight vehicles.

The Environmental Services Manager confirmed that he would look into whether once a call had been made, and the bin later collected, whether the call stayed as a missed bin.

There was some discussion on the performance measures used for bin collection.

Councillor David Simmons proposed that the Cabinet Member considered a performance measure more suitable for the refuse indicator. This was seconded by Councillor Tim Gibson and agreed by Members.

In response to a question, the Environmental Services Manager confirmed that all freighters were fitted with CCTV and this helped to investigate missed bins and encourage operatives to improve performance.

*Percentage of calls to Customer Service Centre answered in 20 seconds*

A Member considered 61% for this was an extremely good figure, and complimented the CSC for this. He said the figure could be improved, but acknowledged the pressure the staff were under.

**Table 3**

A Member felt there was too much detail on the reasons for long-term sickness, and that an individual could be identified by the description. Another Member considered this could be the case if the figures were lower.

A Member praised the fly-tipping figures and commended the team.

A Member suggested that the lack of delivery of affordable housing was because developers were not building-out once they had got planning permission.

A Member drew attention to the business indicators on the top of page 11, and thought they needed to be looked at further. The Policy and Performance Support Officer explained that these were new indicators and as such there was not enough data yet to see a trend.

A Member suggested the Swale CVS figures needed to be broken down to identify the type of enquiry received.

The Policy and Performance Support Officer confirmed that he would include the previous quarter values for comparison.

**Table 4**

A Member commended the Planning Department and said that this was a great achievement.

**Table 5**

A Member raised concern that the discovery of asbestos during works at Faversham Recreation Ground improvements had not been found sooner. The Policy and Performance Support Officer said that it was the quantity of asbestos that had been the issue. A Member said the improvements were going well, and he welcomed the legacy, enabled by the Big Lottery Fund, being put in place.

A Member asked if there was an allowance from the Heritage Fund for dealing with the asbestos. The Environmental Services Manager agreed to email a response to Members.

A Member asked about progress with the beach huts at Minster, and the Environmental Services Manager agreed to email a response to Members. Another Member noted the popularity of the beach huts and the opportunity to raise revenue and encourage tourism and considered this matter should be progressed more urgently than later in 2020.

In response to questions about the Mill skate park, a Member advised that there was some tidying-up to do to make it safe.

The Leader thanked Members for their comments.

The Chairman thanked the Leader and officers for attending for this item.

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the report be noted.**

**575 OTHER REVIEW PROGRESS REPORTS**

The Policy and Performance Officer explained that the Regeneration (other than Sittingbourne Town Centre) review had not progressed since it was paused for the snap General Election in December 2019. He said that he was meeting with the review co-ordinator soon.

A visiting Member asked whether the Scrutiny Committee would continue into the next municipal year. The Chairman advised that the dates for meetings had been agreed at Council on 26 February 2020, including dates for Scrutiny Committee.

**576 CABINET FORWARD PLAN**

There was a tabled paper for this item with an additional item added to the Forward Plan.

The Joint Transportation Board on 2 March 2020 was included twice on the Forward Plan which the Democratic Services Officer noted for correction.

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the Forward Plan and tabled paper be noted.**

**577 URGENT BUSINESS REQUESTS**

There were no urgent business requests.

**578 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

Members noted the work programme.

Chairman

Copies of this document are available on the Council website <http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

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