
POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 24 September 2019 from 7.00pm - 8.24pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Dendor, Alastair Gould (Chairman), Ann Hampshire, Alan Horton (Substitute for Councillor Lloyd Bowen), Benjamin Martin, Ken Pugh, Ken Rowles, Sarah Stephen, Ghlin Whelan (Vice-Chairman), Tony Winckless (Substitute for Councillor Julian Saunders) and Corrie Woodford.

OFFICERS PRESENT: David Clifford, Philippa Davies, Sarah Porter and Bob Pullen.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Mike Baldock (Deputy Leader), Cameron Beart, Ken Ingleton and Roger Truelove (Leader).

APOLOGIES: Councillors Lloyd Bowen and Julian Saunders.

236 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

237 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 July 2019 (Minute Nos. 133 – 138) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to including Councillor Corrie Woodford as being in attendance at the meeting.

238 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

Part B Minutes for Information

239 CORPORATE PLAN 2020-2023

The Chairman welcomed the Leader to the meeting and invited him to introduce the report.

The Leader explained that following the election in May 2019, there had been a radical change in direction, with different priorities. A new corporate plan was needed to reflect these priorities and acknowledge and develop the changes over the next four years. The Leader outlined the background to the corporate plan and explained that it was an overarching statement, not a manifesto, and was a plan for the administration up-to 2023. He stressed the need to avoid silo working within the organisation, and that everyone within the Council understood the overall direction of travel, with Cabinet Members and officers working together.

The Leader outlined the four priorities within the corporate plan, as set out in Appendix I of the report. He highlighted the following themes within the priorities:

Priority 1: Building the right homes in the right places and supporting quality jobs for all

Housing needed to be amenable to the local area, with more affordable and social housing. An economic improvement strategy was needed to expand opportunities and improve salaries throughout the borough.

Priority 2: Investing in our environment and responding positively to global challenges

There needed to be stronger emphasis on the environment, especially climate change. There was the opportunity to improve parks and public spaces with a special projects fund, and air pollution needed to be tackled and the borough kept clean.

Priority 3: Tackling deprivation and creating equal opportunities for everyone

The Leader stated there was too much inequality in Swale. He wanted the Council to work more with the local community, e.g. with foodbanks, and to work with the voluntary sector.

Priority 4: Renewing local democracy and making the council fit for the future

The Leader said there would be a 4-year programme of making the council more responsive and to enhance the role of individual members. He added that the introduction of area committees and the return to the committee system in the future would enable decision-making to be broader, and not limited to just a few members.

Members were invited to ask questions and make comments.

A Member referred to paragraph 1.6 of the report and asked whether other areas within the borough, not solely Sittingbourne, could be included when considering an appropriate range of tenure options on brownfield sites for development. The Leader was happy to make that amendment and to include the whole borough.

In response to a Member's questions, the Leader explained that the new CCTV system was in the process of being commissioned, and CCTVs would be located where there was a history of anti-social behaviour and/or criminal activity.

A Member asked whether the Council would initiate any affordable housing itself. The Leader said that this had not been ruled out, but there were more immediate steps that could be taken, by being more robust with developers at Planning Committee. There was also the option to work in partnership with housing associations.

A Member asked whether the Government housing targets were reflected in the corporate plan? The Leader acknowledged that the borough was not meeting Government targets, and this reflected the true market. He added that if there was more housing in Swale, it needed to meet local needs.

A Member asked how the Leader was going to set about reducing health inequality? The Leader explained that a new health officer had been appointed, and there was a Cabinet Member and Deputy Cabinet Member for Health. He added that there would be cross-cutting work with other aspects of inequality, such as lack of education, and life expectancy differences. He hoped to report on further progress in six months time.

In response to comments about reliance on funds for infrastructure coming from housing growth, the Deputy Leader acknowledged the issue and emphasised the need to ensure that as much infrastructure as possible was realised at the planning application stage.

A Member suggested that mention of young people in paragraph 3.4 be moved to a separate paragraph on its own. The Leader was happy with this. There was some discussion on the word 'more' in paragraph 3.3, and the Leader was happy to remove 'more', so that the paragraph read 'develop a communitarian approach.....'.

The Head of Policy, Communications and Customer Services outlined the next steps and explained that there would be a public consultation in late December 2019, with further consultation in the new year with cabinet members, group leaders and officers. The new corporate plan would be adopted in May 2020.

Resolved:

(1) That the comments and amendments included in the above minute be noted.

240 CONSTITUTION REVIEW - AREA COMMITTEES

The Working Group Coordinator gave an update following the Working Group's first meeting on 3 September 2019. He drew Members' attention to the tabled paper which set-out the preliminary public consultation responses. He summarised the responses and reported that over half of the responses had indicated that residents were in favour of area committees.

In the discussion that followed, Members raised points which included:

- Only a tiny percentage had responded to the consultation, the results were not representative of the whole Borough;
- thanks to the Working Group for the work they had done so far;
- the wording on the consultation needed to be clearer to explain more on what the role of area committees was;
- area committees could work well in an area that was unparished;
- did not understand how area committees and parish councils fitted together;

- residents' expectations might be raised with issues such as housing, planning and infrastructure, but area committees would have no influence;
- it looked as though some urban and rural areas might be cut in two with regard to the geographical areas that the committees might cover;
- area committees gave residents the opportunity to talk strategically about an area which crossed parish boundaries;
- this was not about numbers, but about receiving useful comments;
- this was an initial consultation, not a definitive document;
- needed to balance the cost of the area committees against whether they were worth having; and
- the consultation needed to have information on what area committees were, their intentions, and links with the current processes.

The Head of Policy, Communications and Customer Services explained that the consultation was not intended to be statistically robust, but was more about soliciting ideas.

In response to questions, the Interim Policy and Performance Manager explained that there had been a good spread of responses to the consultation from across the Borough. She advised that there had been some information on the key areas of work that the area committees would cover, without adding too much at this stage and leaving it open to encourage residents to add what they thought was relevant.

The Working Group Coordinator explained that the public consultation closed on 2 November 2019, and the working group would meet again on 8 October 2019.

There was some discussion as to whether there would be another consultation following the final report going to Cabinet, so that the final version could be put out to residents. It was suggested that this be considered by the working group.

Resolved:

(1) That the consideration on the possible introduction of area committees be noted.

241 WORK PROGRAMME

The Policy and Performance Officer briefly explained the background and history of the Policy Development and Review Committee (PDRC) which was a 'sounding board' for Cabinet for both new and revised policies. He explained that as there was a new administration, with a change in direction, it was unclear as to what policies needed to be examined at this stage.

The Leader said that it was important that the PDRC was involved in the process of looking at policies. He suggested the Swale Heritage Strategy and the Economic Improvement Strategy could be looked at by the PDRC as the strategies developed. The Deputy Leader welcomed the Committee's input right from the beginning of a new strategy or policy.

The Leader explained that he would speak to the Chairman and the Policy and Performance Officer on putting together a forward plan of items for the PDRC to consider in the future.

Resolved:

(1) That the verbal report be noted.

Chairman

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