
CABINET

MINUTES of the Virtual Meeting Via Skype on Wednesday, 3 June 2020 from 7.00pm - 8.48 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock (Vice-Chairman), Monique Bonney, Angela Harrison, Ben J Martin, Richard Palmer, Roger Truelove (Chairman) and Tim Valentine.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Jayne Bolas, Zoe Callaway, Martyn Cassell, Philippa Davies, Robin Harris, Charlotte Hudson, Jay Jenkins, Kellie MacKenzie, Jo Millard, Jill Peet, Roxanne Sheppard, Claudette Valmond, Nick Vickers, Rebecca Walker and Emma Wiggins.

DEPUTY CABINET MEMBERS: Councillors Derek Carnell, Alastair Gould, Hannah Perkin, Julian Saunders, Sarah Stephen, Eddie Thomas and Ghlin Whelan.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Cameron Beart, Lloyd Bowen, Roger Clark, Simon Clark, Richard Darby, Steve Davey, Simon Fowle, Nicholas Hampshire, Alan Horton, James Hunt, Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Denise Knights, Lee McCall, Benjamin A Martin, Ken Rowles, David Simmons, Paul Stephen, Bill Tatton, Ghlin Whelan, Mike Whiting, Tony Winckless and Corrie Woodford.

679 INTRODUCTION

The Leader explained that the Cabinet meeting would be conducted in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panel (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 No 392.

In welcoming all Members and members of the public, the Leader explained which Swale Borough Council officers were in attendance.

680 MARK RADFORD

The Leader paid tribute to the Chief Executive of Swale Borough Council (SBC), Mark Radford who sadly passed away recently. He spoke of Mark's courage and determination to return to work and his competency, kindness and dedication and said that Mark was a genuine person who was a team player. The Leader advised that he had received many tributes for Mark and said that a proper tribute would be made at the next Full Council meeting.

Councillors Alan Horton and Mike Whiting also paid tribute and sent their thoughts to Mark's family.

681 ANNOUNCEMENTSLand collapse, Eastchurch

The Leader spoke of the land collapse at Eastchurch over the previous weekend and of the Council's commitment to the welfare of those affected. He thanked SBC Officers, the Isle of Sheppey community, Minster and Eastchurch Parish Councils and others for their hard work and support in dealing with the emergency.

Recovery plan from Coronavirus pandemic

The Leader explained that the Council would need a robust recovery plan in immediate, medium and longer term stages, as the country came out of lockdown and said it would need to be adaptable to changes. He referred to the pressures faced in delivering core services whilst meeting social and economic changes, and said that a draft report on the Council's approach would be considered at the next Cabinet meeting on 8 July 2020 followed by a consultation with all Members at an open forum to be held on 22 July 2020. The Leader set out the initial areas that would be considered including the effect on and support of the businesses and communities in Swale, working with partners, communication and engagement with the community, scenario planning, looking at opportunities as a result of change and returning to Swale House. The Leader stressed the importance of SBC's role.

682 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on Wednesday 18 March 2020 (Minute Nos. 634 – 655) and the Extraordinary Meeting held on Wednesday 22 April 2020 (Minute Nos. 645 – 650) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

683 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

684 CHANGE IN ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Leader advised of a change in order of business, bringing forward Part B reports for discussion first.

Part B Reports for Decision by Cabinet**685 FINANCE CORONAVIRUS UPDATE**

The Leader introduced the report which gave an update on the Coronavirus financial issues. He explained that Central Government had said that local government should act as an agent for the delivery of emergency services during the pandemic and Councils were called upon to set up community support hubs, facilitate rough sleepers and assist businesses in the grant support scheme. The Leader said that the affect on Council budgets was acknowledged by Central Government and whilst substantial financial support had been given, it was not enough to meet the losses already incurred. He drew attention to paragraph 2.6 on

page 7 of the report which highlighted the allocation received so far by SBC, and he said that additional funding from Central Government in the future could not be relied upon, but would be a bonus.

In drawing attention to paragraph 2.3 on page 6 of the report, the Leader said that the total estimated impact on SBC's base budget was £4.1m and that if that level remained, the agreed revenue budget could be delivered with the use of Government grants and some allocated reserves. However, he warned that SBC needed to be disciplined in the management of the revenue budget as there was uncertainty over future income from an economic downturn. He referred to the principles set out in paragraph 2.4 on page 6 of the report and said that the Council also needed to manage and consider the budget of future years. The Leader said that reserves could not be used to continually sustain the base budget and the Council should not deviate from the medium term financial plan agreed in 2019.

The Leader said that monthly budget monitoring would continue to be carried out as outlined in paragraph 2.9 on page 7 of the report, and concluded by acknowledging the work carried out by staff on Business Rate Grants, the Local Council Tax Support scheme and in making the Council financially viable.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

686 APPROVAL OF CONSULTATION DRAFT OF THE HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY 2020

The Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the report and clarified that recommendation to approve the draft document to go out to consultation to public and housing associations was sought, and it would come back to Cabinet with any changes after the consultation. He explained that the previous Housing Allocations Policy no longer complied with the regulations and the document had been considered by the Policy Development Review Committee.

In highlighting the key changes to the policy, the Cabinet Member for Housing indicated Band changes on the housing register which would improve the position of those residents in the highest need, introducing a tapering system to reflect affordability and need, and a reduction in residency period from 4 to 2 years to assist the most needy. He explained that a new Band E would be introduced for rural exception sites. Other changes brought the policy in line with legislation.

To increase public participation in the consultation during the current pandemic, Councillor Nicholas Hampshire suggested inviting residents to offer their opinions and ideas at virtual workshops or similar. In response, the Cabinet Member for Housing advised that the majority of the policy was in legislation and that little change could be implemented. He added that some staff in partner agencies were currently furloughed and unavailable to attend workshops. The Head of Housing Economy and Communities said public virtual workshops could work in other areas.

Councillor Mike Whiting questioned whether reducing the residency period would just lengthen the list with no funding available for additional housing, and he queried

the financial implications since developers built social housing for housing providers. The Cabinet Member for Housing agreed that there was a risk the housing list would lengthen but gave examples of how it would benefit residents in the greatest need. He advised that there were on-going conversations with housing associations to ensure that the Homes England grant funding was being utilised for affordable housing in the area, and he said that SBC were in the process of setting up a housing company to invest in the housing market. Finally, the Cabinet Member for Housing advised that officer time might be saved in the reduction of appeals in reducing the residency period from 4 to 2 years.

Resolved:

(1) That the draft Housing Allocations Policy document be agreed and an 8-week consultation on the draft document be carried out.

687 COMMUNITY HOUSING FUND: OPTIONS FOR FUTURE DELIVERY MODELS IN SWALE

The Cabinet Member for Housing introduced the report which provided the options available to the Council to spend the remaining Community Housing Fund of £281,232 left from the total grant awarded of £341,232, provided to local authorities for training and workshops. He explained that Kent County Council were replicating the work and he drew attention to the 3 options to spend the funding at Appendix I on pages 45 to 47. The Cabinet Member for Housing thanked the Affordable Housing Enablement Manager.

The Cabinet Member for Housing proposed option 3 in the report. The Cabinet Member for Planning praised the report and seconded the proposal.

Resolved:

(1) That the remaining Community Housing fund of £281,232 be used to progress option 3 "Swale Borough Council Grant Management" as set out on pages 46/47 of the report.

688 EXTRA-ORDINARY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - CALL-IN OF MINSTER LEAS MODULAR TOILET CONTRACT AWARD

The Leader advised that he had received many emails from members of the public objecting to the siting of the modular toilet block at Minster Leas at location A as agreed at Cabinet on 22 April 2020, and he had received suggestions of alternative sites that were not included for consideration in the Cabinet report. He explained that alternative options were not part of this report and Cabinet would be considering whether to continue with location A or to reconsider it as a result of the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations.

The Cabinet Member for Environment introduced the report and advised that he had visited the site again that day. He went through the recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee and his response to each, as set out in the tabled report. He concluded by saying that a meticulous process had been followed and he could see no reason to change the original decision.

Councillor Lloyd Bowen, in his role as Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, referred to the response to recommendation two in the report and said it was unclear why the original 5 options were reduced to 2 options. He considered that it was insulting to assume some public would not understand the technicalities of the scheme. Councillor Bowen drew attention to the response in recommendation three and said that as there was a 16 week lead in time for projects, the 2020 summer season would be missed. He added that there was confusion whether Members were consulted or not, in their role as a Parish Councillor or a Ward Member, information was left out of the original report and that it was not for officers to apologise as Cabinet Members should be responsible.

The Leader reminded Members that the role of Scrutiny was to examine decisions based on the reasons for a call-in.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing was critical of the chairing of the Scrutiny Committee meeting and repeated that Cabinet Members could not be involved in the tender process.

The Cabinet Member for Planning said that lessons had been learned in consulting the public. He said that the Scrutiny Committee wanted to consult on impossible options, and option A was the only viable option. He gave his support to Minster Parish Council.

The Cabinet Member for Housing said that a delay risked financial viability.

In summing up, the Leader said that The Leas was vital in SBC's Visitor Economy and the facilities were long-overdue. He acknowledged the opposition to the location but said the site was challenging and Cabinet had been presented with 2 location options, A and B. Location B was fraught with issues which he summarised. The Leader said that the Scrutiny Committee should have addressed the technical and financial issues of site B.

Resolved:

(1) That the decision made at the Cabinet meeting on 22 April 2020 at Minute No. 649 be agreed.

689 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EXTRAORDINARY LOCAL PLAN PANEL MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 7 MAY 2020 - TO-FOLLOW

Cabinet considered the recommendations from the Extraordinary Local Plan Panel meeting on 7 May 2020 which were tabled. Minute no. 666 was the subject of a report elsewhere on the Agenda which was considered before this item was noted.

Resolved:

(1) That the recommendations in Minute Nos. 663, 664, 665 and 666 be noted.

Part A report for recommendation to Council**690 INTERIM PLANNING POLICY FOR PARK HOME RESIDENCES**

The Cabinet Member for Planning introduced the report and explained that the policy sought to give guidelines and standards on planning applications that came forward on park homes. He explained that the policy would support housing options for the elderly, which was currently lacking in SBC's Local Plan, but would be addressed as part of the new Local Plan.

The Cabinet Member for Environment supported a policy on park homes but suggested there should be more detail in the policy. He raised concern about how the policy might contrast with a breach of 12 month occupancy of caravans in Planning regulations. The Cabinet Member for Environment also raised energy efficiency issues and said that many residents of park homes were in fuel poverty and he hoped to see the same British Standards on energy efficiency for houses placed on park homes.

Councillor Cameron Beart had concerns over the implications from the policy which he said went further than those listed in the report and said that the policy might just add housing numbers onto the Council's lack of a 5 year supply. He highlighted contradictions in the policy and reports circulated, and asked how much weight the policy would be given in future? Councillor Beart said there would be a detrimental impact to tourism on the Isle of Sheppey in implementing the policy and raised concerns over the sustainability of residential parks in areas of poor transport links and facilities. He also said that park owners might need to reduce the number of units on their site in order to comply with standards which might cause homeless issues.

The Leader explained that it was an evolving policy, which would be discussed at Full Council, and reminded Members that the policy would be Borough-wide, not just the Isle of Sheppey.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing said that her initial concerns had been addressed and she praised the good design of other park homes throughout the Borough. She said that the Council needed to consider different cohorts of residents and their housing needs.

The Cabinet Member for Housing highlighted the proposals at paragraph 3.2 of the report and said that the policy was not an alternative to affordable housing but was another product to assist those in the Borough with specific needs.

In supporting the policy, Councillor Benjamin A Martin warned against creating brownfield sites or inadequate park homes for the future.

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property spoke in support of the proposal to provide a wide choice of housing for residents in the Borough.

The Cabinet Member for Planning reminded Members that without the policy, applications could still be made, but there would be no guidance to judge against. He explained that the policy was always intended to be Borough-wide.

Recommended:

(1) That the Interim Planning Policy as set out in paragraph 3.2 is adopted as a material planning consideration.

Chairman

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