
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Virtual Meeting Via Skype on Thursday, 25 February 2021 from 7.00 pm - 8.40 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Lloyd Bowen (Chairman), Richard Darby, Steve Davey, Mike Dendor (Vice-Chairman), Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, James Hall, Carole Jackson, Denise Knights, Pete Neal, Hannah Perkin and Ken Pugh.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Anne Adams, Janet Dart, Philippa Davies, Kellie MacKenzie, Tony Potter and Nick Vickers.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Cameron Beart, Monique Bonney, Roger Clark, Angela Harrison, Alan Horton, James Hunt, Ken Ingleton, Elliott Jayes, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen and Roger Truelove (Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance).

476 INTRODUCTION

The Chairman explained that the 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.

The Chairman welcomed all Members, officers and members of the public to the meeting.

477 CHANGE TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Chairman advised that Councillor Bill Tatton had replaced Councillor Elliott Jayes on the Committee. This was because Councillor Jayes had been appointed as Deputy Cabinet Member for Community.

478 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 January 2021 (Minute Nos. 404 – 411) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

479 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

480 SITTINGBOURNE TOWN CENTRE REGENERATION UPDATE

The Chairman referred Members to the update on the regeneration of Sittingbourne Town Centre which was attached to the agenda. He invited the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property, who had been invited to attend for agenda item no. 5, to introduce the item.

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property reported that the cinema and bowling alley were complete and ready for opening, and Nandos were currently fitting-out their unit.

In response to queries from Members, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property confirmed that Pizza Express would not be coming to the development. The high level meetings referred to in the update with The Spirit of Sittingbourne were to ensure that things progressed.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property for the update.

Resolved:

(1) That the update be noted.

481 SWALE HOUSE REFURBISHMENT

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property, the Chief Financial Officer and the Head of Property Services to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property gave a presentation on the refurbishment of Swale House which focused on the following themes: this is our challenge; what have we been doing; funding position; proposed works; and the next steps. The key objections for the project were: to contribute towards the delivery of the Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan by creating a low carbon building; to create a modern and efficient working environment for the organisation, and; to support the Council's Economic Improvement Plan and Recovery Plan by providing opportunities for businesses to locate at Swale House.

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property said that a report would be considered by Cabinet on 17 March 2021 to agree funding for the first phase of work which it was hoped would be carried out summer 2021.

In the debate that followed, Members asked questions and raised points including:

- Air-conditioning should be considered a priority;
- surprised that air-conditioning was not included given the issues in the council chamber during periods of extreme weather;
- did the £200,000 for internal alterations include security doors?;
- was the intention to let a whole floor of Swale House out?;
- how was the figure of £23m calculated for a new building?;
- the market for office space had changed greatly since the Covid-19 pandemic and it would be better to wait until the full effects of it were known before commencing work;
- Scrutiny Committee would require regular updates and details of costs involved for each phase;
- would like a breakdown of the £23m new build figure;
- needed to consider the 'bigger picture' and what was the Council's vision regarding Swale House and considered it was not in the town centre;

- needed to consider the requirements of the Council;
- should look at providing a smaller building unit outside of the town centre; and
- the Council should explore whether planning mechanisms such as Community Infrastructure Levy payments could help to fund a new building unit;

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property confirmed that air-conditioning would not be installed and the proposals included replacement double-glazed windows with solar control film added to south facing windows. Officers were also currently looking at insulation and boilers and that would be part of phase II of the refurbishment. The improvements to the wi-fi in the building would enable flexible working for employees of Swale Borough Council and tenants. She confirmed that security doors were included in the internal alterations costing and it was intended to let a whole floor of Swale House.

In response to comments from a Member, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property explained that officers had considered the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on office based working and the internal changes would be considered as part of Phase II.

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property said that the proposals helped to make the Council 38% carbon neutral and confirmed that they were hoping to strengthen the roof of Swale House so that solar panels could be provided. The Head of Property Services stated that they had explored installing air source heat pumps but they would be problematic to install into an old building and would not be value for money and more cost effective ways were being explored.

There was some discussion about the costings for a new building and how the figure of £23m been calculated? Some Members considered that the possibility of a new building should be explored further. The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property stated that a breakdown of all figures would be included in the report to Cabinet and she spoke about the positive aspects of Swale House, including its location near to public transport. The Chief Financial Officer said that there simply was not the funding available for the Council to consider a new building.

A Member asked what the average number of desks were in Swale House and whether any interest had been received in renting? The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property stated that there was currently 300 desk space available and they had received enquiries to rent. She explained that officers had sought advice on the type of office space most required and small office space was the most popular on a small term lease. However the Council would be flexible and accommodate larger office areas if required. The Chief Financial Officer stated that they were liaising with the Council's Economic Development Unit about costs for renting.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property, the Chief Financial Officer and Head of Property for attending the meeting.

The Chairman suggested that the Committee receive a quarterly update report. Members agreed that in future the Chairman and Cabinet Member for Economy

and Property would liaise about anything urgent that may need to be considered by the Committee.

Resolved:

- (1) That the presentation be noted.**
- (2) That the Committee receive quarterly updates on the Swale House Refurbishment, and the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property to liaise with the Chairman about anything major that may need to be considered by the Committee.**

482 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Chairman welcomed the Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Policy and Performance Support Officer to the meeting.

The Leader introduced the report which presented the quarterly performance management report for the third quarter of 2020/2021. The report had been reported to Strategic Management Team and at informal Cabinet on 15 February 2021, set-out at Appendix I to the report.

The Leader said that the Covid-19 pandemic had a major impact on both performance and monitoring. He referred to Table 1 on page 12 of the report, which set-out eight year-to-date red indicators and noted the good performance in relation to bin collections but warned that the indicator would not recover by year end due to the nature of monitoring.

The Leader drew attention to Table 3 on page 15 of the report, which set-out the eight monthly and eight quarterly indicators against previous levels. The Leader noted the number of households living in temporary accommodation had risen from 280 to 283. He was encouraged to note that the number of affordable homes delivered had risen from 99 to 204. The Leader said that the huge fall in visitors to council owned leisure facilities was no surprise given the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, and he welcomed the good performance of planning services.

The Chairman invited Members to ask questions and make comments.

Comments raised included:

- Impressed and astonished to note that there were no 'peaks and troughs' given the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and recent snow;
- recognised the difficult period for the Council; and
- thanked the hard work of the officer in preparing the report.

In response to a comment from a Member, the Leader stated that bin collection was a priority and the Council's contract officers were working hard with Biffa to reduce the amount of missed bins.

The Chairman thanked the Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Policy and Performance Support Officer for attending the meeting.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

483 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Democratic Services Officer read-out the updates to the Forward Plan which had also been emailed to Members and published on the website.

A Member requested that the Master's House, Sheerness – low carbon refurbishment item be considered at their next meeting on 24 March 2021. This was supported by Members.

Resolved:

(1) That the Forward Plan be noted.

484 ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

There was an adjournment from 8.15pm to 8.20pm.

Chairman

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