
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Virtual Meeting held via Skype on Thursday, 17 June 2021 from 7.00 pm - 8.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Steve Davey, Mike Dendor (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), Oliver Eakin, Tim Gibson, James Hall, Carole Jackson, Denise Knights, Peter Marchington (In place of Ken Pugh), Pete Neal, Eddie Thomas (In place of Hannah Perkin) and Mike Whiting (In place of Lloyd Bowen).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Billy Attaway, Kellie MacKenzie, Tony Potter and Nick Vickers.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Cameron Beart, Roger Clark, Alan Horton, James Hunt, Ken Rowles and Roger Truelove (Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance).

APOLOGIES: Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Hannah Perkin, Ken Pugh and Bill Tatton.

76 INTRODUCTION

In welcoming all Members, the Chairman explained which officers were in attendance.

The Chairman advised that due to an administrative error the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property had been invited to attend for Item 4, Sittingbourne Town Centre. He explained that as previously agreed by the Committee if a written Sittingbourne Regeneration update was provided the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property would not be invited to attend.

77 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 March 2021 (Minute Nos. 582 – 589) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

The Chairman referred to the responses to questions raised at the March 2021 meeting in respect of Minute No. 586 (Financial Management Report) which had been emailed to Members.

The Chairman referred to paragraph five on page 564 of the minutes “...a Member sought clarification on the percentage of reduction in income from Council Tax collection which was offset by Government grants.” The Chief Financial Officer explained that this information would be included in the Financial Outturn report which would be considered at the next Scrutiny Committee meeting on 21 July 2021.

In response to a query from the Chairman about the cost of the new CCTV system, the Chief Financial Officer agreed to find out.

The Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting held on 8 April 2021 (Minute Nos. 618 – 622) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

78 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

Part B Minutes for Information

79 SITTINGBOURNE TOWN CENTRE UPDATE

The Chairman referred Members to the Sittingbourne Town Centre update which was attached to the agenda. The Chief Financial Officer was invited to respond to questions.

In response to a question from a Member about the Action Plan to improve cleanliness and whether it referred to external or internal areas, the Chief Financial Officer explained that it was the Council's management agent's responsibility as landlord to ensure that littering did not occur, and he was aware that the Council's property section and Cushmans were exploring further funding. In response to a concern about littering at the rear of the retail park under the railway bridge, the Chief Financial Officer stated that he would report this to the Council's Property section for action.

A Member was disappointed that the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property was not in attendance and stated that she had a responsibility to respond to any questions. The Chief Financial Officer reminded the Member that following agreement with the Chairman and Committee the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property was not required to attend as a written update had been provided.

A Member asked what the list of highways works identified were? The Chief Financial Officer agreed to find out.

In response to a query from a Member about figures identifying footfall back into Swale following the opening of the Light Cinema and Bowling Alley the Chief Financial Officer agreed to ask if these figures were available.

A Member stated that he hoped that the pavement where the fibre optic cable work had been carried out would be restored to its original condition.

Resolved:

(1) That the Sittingbourne Town Centre update be noted.

80 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report which presented the year-end annual performance management report for 2020/2021 (to 31 March 2021) as previously reported to the Strategic Management Team on 4 March 2021 and informal Cabinet on 17 May 2021 and was attached at Appendix I (Annual Performance Management Report (2020/21)).

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance referred to Table 1 on page 11 of the report which highlighted 12 performance indicators not meeting their target in 2020/21 which he acknowledged was not good enough and he hoped that the recent changes to management would improve performance. He stated that some of these might be due to the Covid-19 pandemic and should improve for the next quarter. The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance referred to Table 2 on page 13 of the report which showed monitored performance indicators as at 31 March 2021. He was pleased to note that the number of affordable homes delivered had increased from 0 to 283; crime had fallen and there was an increase in calls to the Council's business support service.

The Policy and Performance Support Officer referred to the Direction of Travel analysis outlined on Appendix I which identified more positives than negatives.

The Chairman invited Members to ask questions and make comments.

A Member referred to the number of long-term empty homes brought back into use not meeting target as outlined on Table 2 and asked if this included social housing providers. The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance stated that whilst they had no control over private providers they would pursue the issue.

Members made comments which included:

- Congratulated officers on how they had performed with the added work and stress caused by the Covid-19 pandemic in particular the Economic Development Unit who had provided enormous support to business owners in Swale;
- not all the performance indicators had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and considered it was an appalling record;
- was aware from Kent County Council (KCC) that only 36 long-term empty homes had been brought into use not 74 as stated in the report and would like to see how Swale compared with other areas in Kent;
- the cost of appeals in Table 3 should be scrutinised;
- hoped that planning enforcement would improve as were aware of issues; and
- good that more affordable homes were being provided.

In response to queries from Members the Policy and Performance Support Officer advised that BV109a (processing of planning applications) on Table 1 did include the agreed extension of time. He agreed to check whether fly-tipping attendance was monitored within 3 working days or 10.

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance thanked officers who had worked in the Covid-19 community hub, helping rough sleepers and monitoring social regulations during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Annual Performance Management Report (2020/21) be noted.**

81 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

A Member suggested that the Committee should scrutinise delivery of the Swale Rainbow Homes Housing Company.

The Chairman agreed and acknowledged that whilst a lot of the information was sensitive it would be appropriate to scrutinise the item at this time. A Member stated that it was important to understand how the company were spending public money.

The Chief Financial Officer explained that the Council would need to be careful about how this was dealt with and in particular whether the Board or Company should be scrutinised or whether the remit should be broader than that.

In response to queries, the Chief Financial Officer agreed to forward the Housing Board's Business Case to Members.

Resolved:

(1) That the Forward Plan be noted.

Chairman

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