
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Virtual Meeting Via Skype on Thursday, 23 September 2021 from 7.00 pm - 7.55 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Lloyd Bowen (Chairman), Steve Davey, Mike Dendor (Vice-Chairman), Oliver Eakin, Tim Gibson, James Hall, Ken Ingleton, Carole Jackson, Denise Knights, Hannah Perkin, Ken Pugh and Corrie Woodford.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Billy Attaway, Janet Dart, Steve McGinnes, Jo Millard, Tony Potter, Larissa Reed and Phil Wilson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Cameron Beart, Mike Baldock (Cabinet Member for Planning), Alan Horton, Elliott Jayes, David Simmons, Roger Truelove (Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance) and Mike Whiting.

APOLOGY: Councillor Pete Neal.

317 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 July 2021 (Minute Nos. 166 – 171) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

318 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

319 PLANNING SUPPORT - ERRONEOUS PLANNING DECISIONS

The Chairman explained that, in order not to prejudice the outcome of the current investigation, there would be no discussion on the report, and it was for information and noting only.

The Chief Executive introduced the report and gave an update on action being taken to ensure lessons were learnt and processes improved to safeguard against any future incidents.

The Chairman advised that the matter would be discussed in full at a future Scrutiny Committee meeting, once the investigation was complete.

Members noted the report.

320 FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report which set out the revenue and capital projected outturn position for 2021/22, based on service activity up to the end of June 2021, and collated from monitoring returns from budget managers. The report had been considered by Cabinet the previous evening.

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance drew attention to the projected overspend of £392,000 in Table 1 on page 33 of the report and highlighted the loss of income and increase in provision for homelessness during the Covid-19 Pandemic. He referred to the £1.043million put aside from the Covid Recovery Fund, £170k grant from Government awarded for the reduction in income from fees and charges, and considered that Swale Borough Council (SBC) remained in a comfortable position. Referring to paragraph 3.10 on page 35, the Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance advised that the balance on the General Fund was £2.86million, above the £1.5million agreed minimum. He said that a review of the Council's reserves would be carried out to ensure its robustness.

The Chairman went through Appendix I, with Members.

Table 5

In response to a Member's question of how the loss of income from the Leisure Centre would be offset, the Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance advised that the budget would be adapted and would be financed from ordinary reserves.

A Member sought clarification on the accuracy of the round figures for consultancy advice in Planning at £50k. The Head of Finance and Procurement said the figures were estimates, not actuals and were the expected costs.

There was a discussion on salary underspends on page 44 of the report. The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance explained the difficulties faced by local authorities and other organisations in recruiting and acknowledged the considerable impact and stress unfilled vacancies had on existing staff. Several other members joined in the praise of staff.

A Member drew attention that the figures in Table 6 should be in £'s, not £'0000. The Head of Finance and Procurement agreed to rectify this.

Members noted the report.

The Chairman thanked the Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and the Head of Finance and Procurement.

321 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report which presented the year-to-date quarterly performance management report for the first quarter of 2021/2022 (April – June 2021) as previously reported to the Strategic Management Team and Informal Cabinet. He drew attention to the corporate indicators charts on page 55 and 56 of the report, and highlighted the improvements made in meeting targets on the previous year. He spoke of the staff resource issues in Planning Enforcement.

A Member asked questions on whether the introduction of stickers on waste bins had helped to meet the residual waste target and how the app was developing. The Policy and Performance Support Officer agreed to find out and update all Members.

In response to a Member's question on whether the Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance was happy with the 21 day response target figures in Planning Enforcement, the Leader stated that the figures were not satisfactory and a new enforcement strategy had been agreed

A Member sought comparisons on the numbers and types of calls received during the Covid-19 Pandemic. The Policy and Performance Support Officer agreed to provide this.

Members noted the report.

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

322 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The Senior Democratic Services Officer updated Members with additions to the Forward Plan since the Agenda had been published, and said these had been emailed to all Members for information.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer agreed to coordinate a response to questions a Member had on the Planning Enforcement Strategy and the Community Asset Transfer – The Walled Garden, Faversham.

The Chairman asked why Master's House, Sheerness had been removed from the Forward Plan. The Senior Democratic Services Officer agreed to find out and report back.

Members noted the Forward Plan.

323 UPDATE ON INVITATIONS TO SCRUTINY COMMITTEE BY THE UTILITY COMPANIES AND COMMISSIONING GROUP (CCG)

The Chairman advised that communications with external organisations to attend a future Scrutiny Committee meeting was ongoing. He asked that any Member with contacts with the external organisations discussed should contact the Senior Democratic Services Officer.

Chairman

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