
COMMUNITY, ECONOMIC GROWTH AND PROPERTY CABINET ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Virtual Meeting held via Skype on Tuesday, 11 January 2022 from 7.00 pm - 8.25 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Cameron Beart, Derek Carnell (Substitute for Councillor Corrie Woodford), Mike Dendor, Simon Fowle, Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, James Hall, James Hunt, Denise Knights, Peter Macdonald, Peter Marchington, Eddie Thomas, Ghlin Whelan and Tony Winckless (Vice-Chairman, in-the-Chair, to be referred to as the 'Chairman' for the rest of these minutes).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Steph Curtis, Charlotte Hudson, Joanne Johnson, Kellie MacKenzie, Kieren Mansfield, Jo Millard and Emma Wiggins.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Monique Bonney, Steve Davey, Angela Harrison, Elliott Jayes, Richard Palmer, Ken Rowles, David Simmons and Sarah Stephen.

APOLOGY: Councillor Corrie Woodford.

508 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 October 2021 (Minute Nos. 324 – 331) were taken as read, agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

509 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Denise Knights declared a Disclosable Non-Pecuniary Interest as she worked for the East Kent College Group.

510 UPDATES FROM CABINET

The Cabinet Member for Community introduced the community portfolio update which was attached to the agenda and welcomed questions from Members. He also advised that: two members of the Community team had left the Council; the Milton Creek CCTV cameras would be going “live” on 12 January 2022; and he had attended a White Ribbon Campaign Awareness event at Sittingbourne Rugby Club.

The Cabinet Member for Community also referred to the Swale Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Strategic Assessment report, due to be considered under Item 8 of the Agenda and explained that the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) were very keen to get feedback on that document.

Members considered the update and raised points which included:

- Concerned that the Covid-19 vaccine bus at Kemsley Community Centre had not been publicised by the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG);
- how could problems with Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in Kemsley be enforced?;
- was the Prevent scheme still in operation?

- concerned about the turn-over of staff currently at the Council and Members needed to be informed of new officers and their specific roles within the Council;
- what were the benefits of the Community Renewal Fund bid for East Kent College?;
- what type of support were the Council providing to trusts in respect of assets transferred to them and was it financial?; and
- could more information be provided on the Xantura pilot?.

In response the Cabinet Member for Community agreed that information to residents about where they could receive vaccinations locally was not being communicated properly by health providers. The Director of Regeneration & Neighbourhoods advised that the Council had pressed the CCG via the Kent County Council led Strategic Command Group and the Kent Resilience Forum to co-ordinate better. The Council had also pushed for more vaccination centres in Swale and hoped that the Covid-19 vaccine bus would be able to visit Sittingbourne again. She added that the bus had been publicised via the social media channels with the agreement of the CCG.

The Cabinet Member for Community asked any Member concerned that ASB issues in their areas not being dealt with the contact the CSU direct. A Member advised that Police had recently launched “My Community Police” which helped Kent Police update users with news, alerts, appeals etc. and encouraged Members to join-up to the scheme. The Economy and Community Manager advised that the Prevent Team were still delivering regular schools inputs.

The Cabinet Member for Community said that there may be a limited amount of funding from the Council required in respect of asset transfers and they would also be seeking grant support to ensure work was completed particularly at Thistle Hill, Minster.

The Cabinet Member for Community gave a brief outline of the Xantura pilot scheme. He explained that it would ensure early intervention for families that required support and hopefully as the scheme progressed more information would become available. The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing reported that it was an extremely valuable tool that would assist Members in identifying those in their wards with issues such as homelessness, experiencing food poverty, rent arrears, council tax arrears etc. and hoped that a briefing for Members on the scheme could be provided in the future.

The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property gave a verbal update on the Economy and Property portfolio which included.

- Clean Growth Grant – There had been an event at The Light Cinema, Sittingbourne presented by a consultant on how businesses could implement energy saving and environmental measures within their businesses. This had been well attended by local businesses. So far 79 enquiries and 49 applications and the scheme was now closed. Additional support from Government was available for the hospitality and leisure sector and further clarification on the criteria was awaited;

- reviewing the Council's Business Support Contract which would be re-rendered in April 2022;
- the Government had announced on 3 November 2021 the bids for the UK Community Renewal Fund and of the ten successful bids in Kent, five had committed to working in Swale: the Swale and Ashford Skills Renewal; Bridge the Gap; Diversity House; Growing Green; and Kent and Medway Partnership for Enterprise Food and Health;
- there had been discussions around rail freight in Swale which fed into the North and East Kent Rail Strategy and requested the rail freight potential along the Sittingbourne and Sheerness line was acknowledged;
- the HIF grant at Queenborough and Rushenden. The works had been extended to completion September 2022 due to delays;
- employment statistics for Swale - the current claimant count in November 2021 was 4.9% a small reduction on October 2021. The Claimant count for the Isle of Sheppey was 6.5%; Sittingbourne 4.2%; Western area 2.9%; and Eastern area 4.2%. So of the 4,450 unemployment claimants in Swale 2,495 were male and 1,900 were female. At the end of September 2021 there were 1,900 furloughed jobs in Swale and youth unemployment in the borough was 7.8%.
- the Council were working with the Town Centre Task Force consultant and there would be a Workshop in April 2022 to access those support streams through that programme;
- Visitor Economy progress was on-going and pushing Visit Swale including digital media and in particular the blogs which were popular;
- temporary coach park in Faversham;
- Sittingbourne regeneration nearing completion; and
- spoke about refurbishments undertaken and proposed in Sittingbourne and Sheerness high streets.

A Member raised a point of order and drew attention to paragraph 3.2.1 of the Council's Constitution under the Committee's Terms of Reference in Paragraph 5 which stated "The Committee would receive concise written updates from Cabinet Members on current issues". He said that it would have been courteous for the Member to have circulated the update with the agenda so that Members could raise comments and ask questions.

The Senior Democratic Services Officer suggested a short adjournment of the meeting whilst the Cabinet Members update was circulated to Members to read. The Director of Regeneration & Neighbourhoods drew attention to the substantive items on the agenda and considered adjourning items for noting would prolong the meeting. The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property agreed to circulate her update to all Members after the meeting.

A Member was delighted with the improvements being made to Sheerness High Street. He asked if the railings around Rose Street toilets could be repainted. The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property agreed to look into this.

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods introduced the report which set-out the draft 2022/23 revenue and capital budgets and the draft Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). Members were asked to comment on areas relating to the Community portfolio and Economic Growth and Property portfolio.

A Member drew attention to page 21 of the report and applauded the efforts to provide decent housing but asked where £11.5million was coming from? He also noted that there had been large increases in the cost of building materials. The Head of Housing & Community Services referred the Member to a report considered by Cabinet in October 2020 which set-out the business plan and further details of the £11.5million and agreed to forward that report to the Member after the meeting.

512 GENERAL UPDATE ON THE LEVELLING-UP FUND PAPER

The Cabinet Member for Economic Growth and Property introduced the report which outlined the developing Levelling-up Fund project. She advised that the criteria was still unclear and the timelines had not been confirmed.

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development provided background on the fund as set-out in the report and drew attention to the table under paragraph 3.1 of the report which provided a summary of ideas proposed for consideration of the funding and comments from officers and Members on each suggestion. She said that the Sheerness regeneration scheme would be progressed as it was the best “fit” under the Levelling-up Fund priorities, she drew attention to paragraph 3.5 of the report which set-out the four elements to be developed: Beachfields; East Kent College Expansion; Master’s House Completion; and Wider Placemaking.

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development sought comments and views from Members on the development project proposals and referred to the questions set-out in paragraph 6.1 of the report.

Members raised points which included:

- Disappointed to see some of the ideas for consideration discontinued due to lack of capacity by other agencies;
- employment on Isle of Sheppey was appalling and starter units needed to be provided for businesses;
- concerned that the competition for the second round of funding would be a lot harder and not so much funding available;
- was there a risk that projects put in round one had been refined based on feedback?;
- could other projects be put forward again at a later stage?;
- supported the proposed college expansion;
- agreed the swimming pool needed to be improved but did not see how that would improve the visitor economy as it was mainly used by local residents;
- there would always be connectivity issues between the sea and the High Street due to the sea wall and a lot more work was required to resolve this;

- there should have been more consultation on the Beachfields element and concerned that was being told what we wanted rather than being asked;
- what element of the proposed projects would be contributing to the Net Zero Strategy?; and
- the beach at Sheerness was unavailable to most people as the beach had been washed away. The Council needed to put pressure on the Environment Agency to put back the groynes and 'recharge' the beach. The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property agreed to look into the matter for the Member.

In response the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property considered that the regeneration of Sheerness High Street was key to encouraging local people to spend money locally and improve the visitor economy. She also spoke about the importance of improved connectivity between the High Street and seafront area of Sheerness and welcomed local Member input on how that could be achieved. The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property said that she had discussed with cabinet colleagues other potential projects for consideration. She spoke about the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Council resources, but agreed that this project was a priority. The Cabinet Member for Economy and Property advised that any refurbishments proposed would be to the Net Zero standard including thermal insulation and energy saving measures.

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development explained that it was not currently clear whether the Council could put in future bids if not successful on this occasion. She reported that of the £4.8bn budget, approximately £1.7bn had been allocated in round one, and whilst not successful the Council and its consultancy support could learn from feedback and experience of the first round of applications and she noted that having the Priority 1 status had made a real difference as to whether applications were successful or not.

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development explained that with regard to the attractiveness of the project at Beachfields to tourists, officers would be consulting on what people thought would bring people to the area. She reported that a hybrid Extraordinary Sheppey Area Committee meeting was scheduled to be held at Sheerness Working Men's Club on Tuesday 8 February 2022 to seek views on the proposals.

513 EMPLOYMENT SHEPPEY

The Economy and Community Services Manager introduced the report which provided a brief overview of current employment on the Isle of Sheppey using limited area data. He drew attention to an error in paragraph 3.3 of the report which should read "...historically there has been a significantly **higher** propensity for residents on the Isle of Sheppey....." rather than lower.

There were no questions from Members.

514 COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

The Economy and Community Services Manager introduced the report which summarised the findings from the Swale Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Strategic Assessment and sought feedback and comments, on behalf of Swale Borough Council, ahead of their agreement of the priorities of the CSP for 2022/23 within the Community Safety Plan (CSP). She drew attention to the questions for the Committee set-out on the last page of the report.

A Member considered that the recommended priorities and focus areas reflected areas of concern within Swale and welcomed the refinements made to the CSP.

Chairman

Copies of this document are available on the Council website <http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

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