

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 2 October 2014 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. London (Chairman)

Cllr. Brown (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Brookbank, Davison, Grint, Orridge and Underwood

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Pett and Walshe

Cllrs. Dickins, Eyre, Fleming and Ramsay were also present.

11. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 15 July 2014, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

12. Declarations of Interest

No additional declarations of interest were made.

13. Responses of the Cabinet to reports of the Scrutiny Committee

The Committee noted the Cabinet's response to its referral.

14. Actions from the last meeting of the Committee

The completed actions from the previous meeting were noted.

15. In-depth Scrutiny - Report of the Leisure Working Group

The Chairman advised that the Chairman of Leisure In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group had given his apologies for not being able to attend the meeting. The Working Group had not been able to meet since the last Scrutiny Committee meeting but had made progress in meeting some key people. The Group would report to the meeting of the Committee on 20 November 2014.

16. Sencio Community Leisure

Jane Parish, the Chief Executive and Sarah McDonnell, the Marketing Manager of Sencio Community Leisure gave a [presentation](#) on the performance of the organisation. This included the income and expenditure of the trust, its strategic direction and the challenges it faced. The Chief Executive added that the intended aim of the trust when established had been to achieve savings of £1.3million over 10 years, whereas savings of £3.7million had been achieved. Its mission and values were decided by their own staff through the staff forum. Reductions in staff expenditure came from natural wastage

Scrutiny Committee - 2 October 2014

rather than redundancies. The Marketing Manager emphasised that Sencio had changed its logo to achieve a strong brand in the competitive marketplace. The website was being redeveloped, designed specifically for mobile and tablet users, and would also have an interactive content feed which would be tailored to individual users and to prioritise the content which was most popular. The representatives of Sencio then responded to Members' questions.

The representatives were asked which facilities were profitable. The Chief Executive stated that no centre was losing money. The accounts were set up so that central overheads were deducted from overall income and not apportioned between centres.

The Vice Chairman noted that some private sector providers offered membership at £16 per month, compared to the £38.50 for Sencio. He noted that Sencio was also in its buildings rent free, asset maintenance was paid by the Council and Sencio received a management fee of £80,000 per year. The Chief Executive advised that the cheaper private providers did not provide swimming pools, which were expensive both in the plant and staffing costs as local authorities required lifeguards at pools where private providers did not. Although Sencio could continue without the management fee it would be extremely difficult and there would be implications from any cuts made.

The Chief Executive was asked about the targets set for Sencio's budget. The business plan was set at the beginning of the year then targets were set for each area. Each line of the budget was looked at. The principal target aimed for was to achieve reserves of 10%, which had not been possible in previous years.

A Member enquired as to what staff incentives were in place. There was an impact award scheme for those staff who received positive customer comments or made savings for Sencio. Small vouchers were recently given out to incentivise use of the customer standards, which had been very popular among staff.

In response to other questions the Chief Executive confirmed that the White Oak Leisure Centre was Sencio's event centre due to its size and a temporary bar had proven useful for temporary events. Triathalons were very popular at both White Oak and Sevenoaks. Sencio was looking for the right time to submit an application for an outdoor gymnasium at Edenbridge. Sencio had a number of ageing buildings and, if modelled today there would be insufficient demand for a leisure centre at Edenbridge due to its size, however there was a significant community feeling at that centre. It would be possible for Sevenoaks Leisure Centre to improve its income with sufficient investment.

The Chairman thanked the representatives for attending.

17. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Strategy & Performance

The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Strategy & Performance presented a report on the recent successes and challenges ahead within his portfolio. On the decking of the Buckhurst 2 car park, the process was ongoing, a planning application had been submitted and a number of nearby residents had been spoken to. The increased need for long term parking in Sevenoaks was understood and had been raised as long as 25 years ago. The Council would respond to the likely accelerated cuts in local government grants with continued savings, increased income and keeping Council Tax at affordable levels. The Council was working with an experienced external company on setting up a

Scrutiny Committee - 2 October 2014

trading company to support its income. Sevenoaks Switch and Save had been launched. It had been established as a simple price comparison site, six customers had already together saved £2,000 and the Portfolio Holder was speaking to West Kent Housing Association on how to make its residents more aware of the scheme. The number of complaints about the Council to the Ombudsman had fallen and he felt this was due to an increased focus on dealing with concerns at the front end of the process. The Council was also continuing to look at improving the customer experience, for example by providing services outside the traditional working day, while continuing to deliver savings.

The Portfolio Holder responded to Members' questions. He was asked, aside from decreased income, what was causing greatest concern. His biggest concern was that none of the political parties had a vision for local government. It continued to be a soft target for financial savings and reorganisation, in light of devolution, was not a solution.

A Member raised concerns from the Sevenoaks Society about the materials proposed for the Buckhurst 2 car park and asked what impact redevelopment of Fort Halstead would have on the rates received by the Council. The Portfolio Holder felt the Council was in agreement with the Sevenoaks Society on many planning appeals and that a majority of the Society were pragmatic over the design of the decking. He would be disappointed if some felt that progress had not been made on its design. Concerning Fort Halstead, the current occupant was the largest rates provider in the District and its loss would be detrimental to the Council as it would then fall below the baseline to be set for the Business Rates Retention Scheme. However, it was difficult to evaluate its effect until a planning application for the site had been received.

The Portfolio Holder was asked about the relationships the Council had with its partner local authorities, whether he was happy with them and whether he sought improvements. The largest partnership was with Dartford Borough Council on Revenues and Benefits where the change in workload between the two partners was being reflected in an amended split of costs. He was excited by the new partnership with Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council on Building Control and hoped they would join the Licensing Partnership. The relationship with Kent County Council was mixed but difficult. KCC needed to support the east of the County but there would be economic consequences if the west was neglected. More was expected at the County level, particularly given that the cost of commuter travel per mile was higher in Sevenoaks than anywhere else. The Local Enterprise Partnership was working well and KCC officers had been excellent in supporting the Escalate interest-free loan scheme.

A Member asked whether Sevenoaks Switch and Save was something that could be carried out by the private sector instead. The Portfolio Holder said that, unlike the private sector, the Council's comparison site was not limited to specific firms and did not prioritise sponsored companies. The Council would use the £38 from each switch to spend on services which had been cut.

The Portfolio Holder was directed to a scheme run by Gravesham Borough Council for dementia sufferers to carry bracelets with electronic information about the carrier which could be accessed by supporting services. The Portfolio Holder advised that the relevant Portfolio Holders had been working on dementia matters and the scheme sounded very good for professional services.

Scrutiny Committee - 2 October 2014

18. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Finance & Resources

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources presented a report updating the Committee on the recent work within his Portfolio and the significant projects which lay ahead.

The Portfolio Holder responded to Members' questions. Asked about the budget-setting process he advised that it began with the Financial Prospects and Budget Strategy which had been considered by the Finance and Resources Advisory Committee on 3 September 2014. The Advisory Committees would soon be making recommendations on savings and growth items to Cabinet in December 2014 when the budget position would be updated pending any late Government announcements on local government spending.

A Member of the Committee asked for his perspective on the financial prospects for the Council arising from the redevelopment of Fort Halstead. He advised that it depended on what partnerships could be brought in, possibly by promoting technology on the site with K College. The more employment that could be generated the better, there would be community as well as financial impact. Council Tax from houses would not make up for losses to Business Rates.

The Portfolio Holder was asked who would be bearing the costs for decking Buckhurst 2 and when a profit would be returned. He confirmed that the Council would bear the full costs. The Council would generate a profit after the amount borrowed had been repaid.

Action: The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources to provide Members of the Committee with pay back details for the Buckhurst 2 car park decking.

19. Scrutiny Committee's Terms of Reference, Role and Powers

The report set out the roles and powers of the Scrutiny Committee, taking into account its powers under the Local Government Act 2000 and the Council's Constitution. It explained that the Committee could play a wide role, particularly in holding the Cabinet to account, questioning the impact of decisions, assessing the Council's relationship with partner organisations and in taking on in-depth projects.

The Vice Chairman noted that the Committee was not to become involved at reviewing quasi-judicial decisions, except where there had been a systemic failure. He wished to clarify that this should also include the failure in a process by which a decision was made.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

20. Performance Monitoring

Members considered a report which summarised performance across the Council to the end of July 2014. Members were asked to consider nine performance indicators which were performing 10% or more below their target with a commentary from Officers explaining the reasons and detailing any plans to improve performance. If actions taken were not deemed sufficient, the report recommended referring those indicators to Cabinet for further assessment.

Scrutiny Committee - 2 October 2014

Resolved: That the report be noted.

21. Work Plan

The Committee considered its workplan for the remainder of the municipal year 2014/15.

The Committee intended at its next meeting to ask the Clinical Commissioning Group about the provision of patient transport to hospitals and transport between. They agreed Kent County Cllr. Gough would be invited to its meeting on 3 February 2015. The Committee wanted to consider school places, provision for schools from large infrastructure projects (such as Fort Halstead), transport, grammar schools and the performance of non-grammar schools. County Cllr. Mrs. Crabtree would be invited to the meeting on 28 April 2015.

The Committee noted that the work of the In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group on Investment in Property had been delayed as the Audit Committee had been considering the risk assessments involved, but this work was since completed. Some concern was raised whether the Working Group would have enough to scrutinise as the project was still in its early stages. It was agreed that the schedule for the Working Group would be delayed, with terms of reference and scope of inquiry to be brought to the meeting on 20 November 2014, interim conclusions on 3 February 2015 and the final report on 28 April 2015. This was to remain flexible and the value of the Working Group kept under review.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9.05 PM

CHAIRMAN

