

## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2014 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. London (Chairman)

Cllr. Brown (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Brookbank, Davison, Grint, Orridge, Pett, Underwood and Walshe

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Brown

Cllrs. Eyre, Hogarth, Mrs. Hunter, Mrs. Morris and Piper were also present.

### **22. Minutes**

Cllr. Underwood asked that it be clarified under minute 17 that the “Shop safe, stay safe” scheme was run by Gravesham and Dartford Borough Councils for vulnerable people and dementia sufferers to carry key fobs with electronic information about the carrier.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 2 October 2014, subject to the amendments, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### **23. Declarations of Interest**

No additional declarations of interest were made.

### **24. Responses of the Cabinet to reports of the Scrutiny Committee**

There were none.

### **25. Actions from the last meeting of the Committee**

The completed action from the previous meeting was noted. Cllr. Walshe added that he had sent a follow up email requesting further information on the cost of the Buckhurst 2 car park and Officers confirmed the Chief Finance Officer would respond outside of the meeting.

## **CHANGE IN ORDER OF AGENDA ITEMS**

With the agreement of the Committee, agenda item 6 was brought before agenda item 5.

### **26. In-depth Scrutiny - Report of the Leisure Working Group**

The interim report of the Leisure Working Group was tabled for Members' consideration and it summarised the research of the working group. The Chairman explained that the Group was still examining the scope of the Council's leisure assets and the Council's

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expenditure, in order to assess the value for money. He highlighted that the headline figure for the subsidy to Sencio Community Leisure of 8 pence per user related to the sums paid to Sencio. If the Council's own asset maintenance costs on the facilities were included, this figure was 18 pence in 2012/13 and 25 pence for 2013/14. It was not easy to benchmark with other local authorities as they each managed their financial arrangements differently but these were being looked at to enable the Group to undertake clearer benchmarking against other leisure providers. The Group intended to provide a final report to the Committee at its meeting on 3 February 2015,

A Member raised concern that Sencio was not making best use of the assets when they should be making profit. Some Members considered whether, although it was not a statutory service, it was appropriate for the Council to provide leisure services. A concern was also raised that detailed knowledge of the leases with Sencio had fallen since the retirement of the previous Professional Services Manager, however the Chief Officer Communities & Business advised that the Council's Asset Surveyor had been undertaking a complete review of the Council's responsibilities under each of its leases.

### **27. Kent County Council - Education**

The Chairman welcomed Roger Gough, the Kent County Council (KCC) Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform to the meeting, who gave a [presentation](#) on school places, school performance, the provision of a grammar school annexe and school transport.

Mr. Gough highlighted that the rise in the birthrate across the County had meant a need to plan ahead in primary school places, with major construction, and this would in turn filter to secondary school places. The pressures in the Sevenoaks District were less severe than in other areas where there was more intensive house building. The County Council was generally within 1% in its predictions of need but it could be difficult to predict population movements. The County Council had been in discussions with Sevenoaks District Council to investigate the role of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) in supporting the provision of places as although the Government expected the Basic Need capital grant allocation to cover 80% of need, in practice it covered only 50%. Kent County Council was also lobbying firmly to receive monies through the recent £300 million pot announced by the Government.

The KCC Cabinet Member added that many pupils travelled out of the District, particularly for selective education as there were no selective schools in the District but there was approximately a 40 to 50% pass rate. The traffic corridor between Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells was particularly busy. Although the provision of new grammar schools was prohibited, there were fewer restrictions on the extension of existing schools. The extension of the Weald of Kent Grammar school was still going ahead and was expected to be completed by autumn 2016. Mr. Gough then responded to questions from Members of the Committee.

The Chairman asked whether there was a reason the Young Person's Travel Pass was limited to between 6am to 7pm when this could end before some after school clubs. The KCC Cabinet Member advised that the scheme cost approximately £13 million per year and it was hoped those hours would cover most after school activities.

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Mr. Gough confirmed to the Committee that the pass only related to bus travel, not trains. He had tried to include train companies but found they were resistant and cost was also a factor. Some arrangements could be made to pay towards the travel if the school they went to was their closest. In follow-up the Chairman asked whether in the past there had been arrangements with train companies. The KCC Cabinet Member agreed that train travel would be appropriate for many of the pupils travelling from the District and would investigate what past measures there may have been.

A Member asked what prospects there were for a boys' grammar school annexe in Sevenoaks and whether the County Council could end the super selection of grammar school pupils from outside the county. Mr Gough advised that there was not a partner for a boys' grammar school in the same way as for girls although the County Council and Michael Fallon MP were both seeking a change in law to allow new grammar schools. The County Council had tried unsuccessfully to limit super-selection through the Schools Adjudicator four years ago.

Another Member asked whether the CIL would assist in meeting the possible shortfall of school places in Halstead. The KCC Cabinet Member confirmed that he was still having discussions with the Council as the collecting authority. It could form one part of the armoury but in other parts of the County CIL could not be relied on because development would not always be viable.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Gough for attending.

### **28. Performance Monitoring**

Members considered a report which summarised performance across the Council to the end of September 2014. Members were asked to consider eight 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.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

### **29. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Local Planning & Environment**

The Portfolio Holder for Local Planning & Environment presented a report on the recent successes and challenges ahead within his portfolio. Following an inspection in October 2014 the Council's co-mingled recycling was assessed as creating high quality recyclate, meaning there was no need to introduce separate collections for each material. The Council had been responding to issues raised by the Independent Inspector on the Allocation and Development Management Plan and had been progressing the Gypsy and Travellers Plan. The other challenges were the difficulties in recruiting and retaining planners and that Kent Highways was reviewing its policy on removing commercial flytipping, which could adversely impact the Council's own service for clearances.

The Portfolio Holder responded to a question by the Chairman and confirmed that the planning performance information in the report related to the percentage of applications responded to within the statutory deadlines.

*Action: The Chief Planning Officer to confirm to the Committee the total number of planning applications received by the Council in a year.*

A Member raised a concern that some properties were being built and sold at high prices but did not provide Affordable Housing contributions as it had been argued they would be unviable if provided. The Portfolio Holder felt that good Affordable Housing provision was being made at the West Kent Cold Store and could be made at Fort Halstead. Figures provided by developers on viability were assessed by the Council's external consultants, Adams Integra. The contract with this firm would be coming up for renewal soon and would be looked at critically. The Chief Planning Officer and Chief Housing Officer were also investigating whether the Council could develop its in-house expertise. The Portfolio Holder felt that Affordable Housing was a key issue and noted that in the last three years the Council had only achieved 11, 9 and 20% Affordable Housing when the policy was for provision of up to 40% on new developments.

The Portfolio Holder was asked whether there were any steps that could be taken to redress the relative shortage of 2-bed houses in the District. He advised that the Council could influence the private sector, but it had more control over the public sector housing. The Chief Planning Officer added that the Council would consider the Strategic Housing Market Assessment when the Core Strategy was reviewed, and would see how far the policy could be developed while still being found sound by an Inspector.

A Member was concerned that too many planning appeals were being dealt with through written representations when local Members may feel important issues needed to be raised. Although the Portfolio Holder asked that Members let him know of concerns as soon as possible as he had an open door policy, Officers confirmed that the Council was more successful on those appeals carried out through written representations.

Another Member asked what the implications would have been if the Council had needed to perform separate recycling collections for each material. The Deputy Portfolio Holder, who was also present, confirmed there would have been significant capital and staffing costs, possibly in excess of £2 million.

In response to a question, the Chief Planning Officer advised that it would be the planning application decision maker who would make the final determination on whether any Affordable Housing contribution would be acceptable.

### **30. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Economic & Community Development**

The Portfolio Holder for Economic & Community Development presented a report on the recent actions and successes within his portfolio. He highlighted the Economic Strategy Document which was due to be considered by Cabinet on 11 December 2014. The Council had now consulted with the major rural landowners and it was hoped the document would be the Council's strategic policy by the new year. The strategy had 7 aspects: Inward Investment, Skills and Support, Transport and Infrastructure, Energy and Sustainability, Places for Growth and Improvement, Rural Economy and Tourism.

Following departures in staff, the Economic and Property Teams within the Council had been reorganised with a new Head of Development and Property recently appointed, who had a strong background in economic development and who would begin in post in early December 2014. He would welcome a discussion with the Chairman of the Leisure In-depth Scrutiny Working Group once the final report was published.

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The Portfolio Holder responded to Members' questions.

A Member asked by whom the Emergency Plan had been considered and whether there were any particular messages he wished to make known to parish and town councils. He responded that the Plan had been considered by the Economic & Community Development Advisory Committee. Although town and parish councils had been involved in drafting the Plan he would ensure that it was circulated widely to their staff and Councillors.

Another Member asked what the costs to the Council had been in the application for redeveloping the Buckhurst 2 car park in terms of Officer time. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that this was an ongoing process but should be directed to the Portfolio Holder for Finance & Resources.

A Member asked the Portfolio Holder whether he had been involved recently in the discussion for the future of Fort Halstead. He advised that he had a meeting since his report had been published. The future of the site was also linked to the future of Biggin Hill, where there were plans for between 1,200 and 3,300 new jobs to be created and it was felt that the commercial development of Fort Halstead could provide some of those high-tech job requirements. He had had a meeting in the past week with the Leader and key stakeholders to take forward interim steps for the development as soon as possible and one commercial firm was particularly keen, whom he was keen to support. The timetable for the final move was currently the end of 2018.

### **31. Work Plan**

The Committee noted that the final report of the Leisure In-depth Scrutiny Working Group would now be presented to the Committee at its meeting on 3 February 2015.

The Committee agreed that the meeting of the Committee scheduled for 28 April 2015 be cancelled. It was noted the meeting would have been very close to the election and there would be insufficient time for a further working group to be established and to report.

Following the risk analysis by the Audit Committee and due to the work with EC Harris taking place, it was agreed to postpone the Investment in Property Working Group until there were further developments in the project.

Resolved: That the drafting of the terms of reference for the Investment in Property In-Depth Scrutiny Group be postponed until there were further developments in the project.

The Chairman asked Members to advise him of any further ideas they had for future areas of scrutiny.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.56 PM

CHAIRMAN

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