

ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2015 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Hogarth (Chairman)

Cllr. Horwood (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Ayres, Mrs. Ayres, Ball, Mrs. Cook, Fittock, Maskell, Miss. Stack and Miss. Thornton

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Mrs. Bosley and Butler

25. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2014, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

26. Declarations of Interest

No additional declarations of interest were made.

27. Actions from Previous Meeting

There were none.

28. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder reported that Cabinet had taken a decision after the consultation for parking charges and as a consequence there was to be no changes to the evening charges and no increases to on-street charges. He advised that he had asked the Chief Finance officer what the impact of freezing fees for one year would be and it had been a shortfall of £1.1m over the 10 year budget plan period.

He advised that Gary Connor, Parking Manager, was retiring in April and his expertise would be hard to replace. Andy Bracey, Senior Parking and Traffic Engineer, was also leaving. Both would be missed. It was confirmed that recruitment was underway.

Members discussed the need for more lateral and creative thinking with regards to car parking fees and finding other sources of revenue. Fees could not be raised in perpetuity; at some point there would be a tipping point and it would become detrimental to the local economy. Members discussed the need for the Council to have a clear aspiration for moving towards freezing parking fees where occasion allowed, for example with stable inflation.

Resolved: That Cabinet be requested to consider a Council aspiration as above.

It was noted that Scrutiny Committee had only recently carried out a car parking review. A Member advised that so far this year car parking charges recovery was better than

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expected, and with the introduction of the Marks & Spencer store the local economy seemed to be improving.

The Portfolio Holder and Chairman of the Committee introduced Mark Bradbury, Head of Economic Development and Property. He reported on the acquisition of the freehold interest in the Swanley Junction Working Men's Club which provided an opportunity for an improvement scheme incorporating existing Council owned assets at Bevan Place Car Park and 16 High Street and an opportunity to provide an attractive and modern gateway to Swanley Town Centre. He was hoping that a number of architects would express interest through a design competition. Options which met with planning policy guidelines would be widely and consulted on.

29. Referrals from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none.

CHANGE IN ORDER OF AGENDA ITEMS

With the Committee's approval, the Chairman brought forward consideration of agenda item 9 – 'Inward Investment – The Case for West Kent and Swanley.'

30. Inward Investment - The case for West Kent and Swanley

The Chief Officer Communities and Business advised that there were two studies, one for West Kent and one for Swanley. The West Kent Partnership had commissioned a study in order to be able to demonstrate the opportunities in the area and to help attract external funding. She presented Members with a truncated version of a presentation by Chris Cobbold of Wessex Economics who was carrying out the study. The presentation highlighted that West Kent had 20% of Kent & Medway's population and 23% of their jobs. Workers were better skilled and better paid with a higher proportion of people in work than Kent & Medway. A key opportunity was for the spill out from growth in London. Threat came primarily from locations outside of Kent but also from the lack of availability of employment sites, HSI, housing cost and an aging population. It was clear that West Kent was a net contributor to the Kent economy, with net commuting into West Kent from the rest of Kent of 11,700 people and 9,000 people who lived in London communities into West Kent. West Kent had received pro-rata fewer £ per capita and the lowest % of planned spend by Kent County Council (KCC) than other Kent sub-regions. The way to secure a bigger slice of funding as a whole was to have "funding ready" schemes and being in a position to provide match finding.

The early work undertaken on "The Case for Swanley" had identified the potential to use Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) owned land to raise the profile of Swanley; nurture existing employers and bring forward employment space; improve rail services; and improve skills. Proximity to London was again identified as a strength.

The Head of Economic Development and Property reported that he had requested more comparative data with other similar authorities in a similar location to the M25 which seemed to have achieved a better balance with similar challenges. The study would help with the economic strategy.

31. To note minutes of the Health Liaison Board

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The Minutes of the Health Liaison Board held on 3 December 2014, were discussed and noted. The Chairman of the Health Liaison Board highlighted the presentation by the Kenward Trust, which had demonstrated how working in partnership with small teams and small amounts of money could achieve so much; The Care Act 2014; and the Council's Switch and Save Scheme.

The Chairman agreed to look at the support to food banks. It was agreed that there needed to be some consensus regarding the Council's stance on food banks and that a paper needed to be brought forward to an appropriate Committee.

32. Community Grant Scheme Draft Allocations 2015/16

The Chief Officer Communities and Business presented a report which set out information about the Community Grant Scheme and summarised applications received by the Council from voluntary organisations for funding during 2015/16. Details of the appraisal process were provided, which had included a lengthy and detailed consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Economic & Community Development and the Deputy Portfolio Holder for Economic & Community Development, who were both trained in appraisal techniques.

Members were advised that it was the first time the report had come to the Advisory Committee, it was for information only, and was in order to be as clear and transparent as possible. Any changes to the recommended grants would require a revisit to the whole process. The Chief Officer Communities and Business agreed to check whether an application from Play Place Innov8 was intended to cover Seal in addition to other Parishes, before consideration at Cabinet.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That the recommendation to Cabinet to approve the grants, as set out in Appendix C of the report subject to the conditions set out in paragraph 14 of the report, be noted.

33. Citizens Advice Bureau Service Level Agreement 2015/16 - 2017/18

The Chief Officer for Communities & Business presented the report which outlined progress on the work of the Citizens' Advice Bureau during the current year and sought approval for the Service Level Agreement for the next three financial years. She advised that the current Service Level Agreement ran until 31 March 2015, and the merger was due to take place on 30 March 2015. The Portfolio Holder moved the recommendation contained within the report along with the additional wording that the agreement would be subject to his satisfaction and approval of the proposed future merger arrangements between Sevenoaks and Swanley CAB with Tonbridge and Gravesham CABs. The Chief Officer for Communities & Business agreed to revisit the agreement in relation to the clarity of 2.3 under Service Standards, in order to maintain face to face contact.

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Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That Cabinet be recommended to agree the draft Service Level Agreement for 2015/18 subject to the Portfolio Holder being satisfied with the future proposed merger arrangements between Sevenoaks and Swanley CAB with Tonbridge and Gravesham CABs.

34. Work Plan

The work plan as noted and it was agreed to add an Economic Strategy Update to the next meeting, to include an update on the new Economic Development & Property Team.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.49 PM

CHAIRMAN