

## **SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting held on 24 November 2015 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. London (Chairman)

Cllr. Brown (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Ball, Brookbank, Clack, Hogg, McArthur, Purves and Reay

An apology for absence was received from Cllr. Lindsay

Cllrs. Firth, Fleming and Searles were also present.

### 11. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 14 July 2015 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### 12. Declarations of Interest

No additional declarations were made.

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

There were none.

### 14. Actions from the last meeting of the Committee

There were none.

### 15. Kent Police - Crime and Disorder in the Sevenoaks District

The Chairman welcomed Chief Inspector Roscoe Walford, Sevenoaks District Commander of Kent Police, to the meeting, who gave an overview of the levels of crime and disorder within the District.

Chief Inspector Walford explained that 12 to 16 crimes were reported in the District each day, while 183 active crimes were open. Kent Police were in the top 8 forces in the country for crime reduction and while Kent experienced 61 crimes per 1,000 people, Sevenoaks District experienced only 45 crimes per 1,000 people. The largest form of crime was domestic violence, which had seen a small increase in the last year. The next largest crime was shoplifting, which occurred most at the ASDA supermarket in Swanley. Thirdly was criminal damage which, together with anti-social behaviour, had experienced declines. Kent Police would encourage further preventative measures through winter, particularly in securing allotments and garages. However he said that the District was a very safe place to be.

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Questions were asked of Chief Inspector Walford.

The Chairman asked for the reasons in the rise in reports of domestic violence and whether the greater use of intelligence-led policing meant that fewer resources were required in general. Chief Inspector Walford replied that he believed the Police were, taking positive action at each incident and that victims were becoming more confident at reporting incidents. However, Police resources were stretched, with an 11% vacancy rate in Constables. Staff reductions were due to begin in 2016, commencing with the managerial level.

A Member raised concerns at the opening hours of the Swanley Police Station and the quality of the telephone service. Chief Inspector Walford noted that the Swanley and Sevenoaks stations were only open to the public during daytime and Edenbridge had no front-facing office. Kent Police were looking into web-based technology to be more accessible.

Members were concerned with road traffic incidents and asked what measures would be taken to improve safety. Chief Inspector Walford advised that he did encourage patrols to act if they saw poor driving. Although resources had to focus on areas such as Prevent, Child Sexual Exploitation and domestic violence, Kent Police would support volunteer schemes. He recognised that the schemes may suffer from volunteer fatigue but consideration was being given to how the Speedwatch volunteers might be better supported in terms of follow-up letters to those who had been recorded as exceeding the speed limit. He asked for patience whilst this was being considered.

Chief Inspector Walford was asked for his views on the 101 telephone service. He noted that there had been some inappropriate use of it, but it had assisted in real-time recording of incidents and formed part of the range of specialist hotlines for particular concerns.

A Member asked the likelihood of further visible police cars in the District. He explained that it was unlikely and he was concerned that personal policing was likely to reduce. He said that if further spending reductions were required then these would fall on staffing levels. It was not possible to reduce spending on equipment any further as 85% of the budget was staff rather than equipment. In order to free up staff, Kent Police were making greater use of restorative justice and, from 2016, remote working.

He was asked the number of unauthorised traveller encampments and whether there would be consistency of approach in enforcing against them. Chief Inspector Walford replied that the number of such cases had been low. Kent Police would allow land owners to lead on the eviction process, but provide assistance afterwards in directing them to leave. Following incidents at Brasted Pavilion and Swanley where there may have been inconsistencies, a common approach had been created for all Police Officers to follow.

The Chairman thanked Chief Inspector Walford.

### 16. Performance Monitoring

The Chief Officer Corporate Support introduced a report which summarised performance across the Council to the end of September 2015. Members were asked to consider

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three 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. The report also provided key performance indicators relating to the Portfolio Holders invited to the Scrutiny Committee meeting.

The Chief Officer Corporate Support updated the Committee that since the report was published the three exceptional performance indicators had moved on target.

Resolved: That the contents of the report be noted.

### 17. Questions to the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Policy & Performance

The Portfolio Holder for Policy & Performance updated the Committee on recent achievements within his portfolio. He explained that the Council was to hit a particular milestone in achieving financial self-sufficiency from the Government's Revenue Support Grant and New Homes Bonus. Discussions had continued with the Kent Leaders Group to discuss the Government's devolution agenda, however the number of local authorities involved made an agreement unlikely. Developments at the Sennocke and Bradbourne car parks and in Swanley High Street were continuing.

The Portfolio Holder responded to Members' questions.

The Chairman asked what the Council's approach to property investment would be after the departure of the Head of Economic Development & Property in January 2016. The Portfolio Holder advised that while here the Officer had done substantial work arranging the property portfolio in selling off, buying and redeveloping property. He was confident in putting in place alternative arrangements which he hoped to present to Members before Christmas 2015.

The Chairman also enquired whether he had a preference between the Cabinet, Committee or hybrid governance arrangements. The Portfolio Holder considered that the existing hybrid arrangements worked best for Sevenoaks, particularly in encouraging pre-implementation involvement. A delegation from Horsham District Council was due to attend the Policy & Performance Cabinet Advisory Committee meeting on 26 November 2015 to be shown how it worked. However, the political make up of a Council led some arrangements to be more or less appropriate in each case.

The Portfolio Holder was asked whether the Council's financial self-sufficiency model was something which could be translated to other local authorities. He explained that many of the Council's savings had been made at times when more resources were available and it was difficult to make such savings when a Council was under financial pressures. However, larger local authorities were becoming aware that they needed to make greater use of their assets.

Members asked about the risk surrounding property investment and whether use of the Council's reserves would give less flexibility in the event the rates of return were not reached. The Portfolio Holder said that the portfolio of investments was a mixed one, while the price of office space was rising, the Council would continue to hold the assets and investments such as the hotel would provide a fixed return. Investing in the

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regeneration of Swanley and the raising of property values had a benefit beyond the Council making money. The Council's reserves would continue to be reviewed by Members as part of the budget process.

The Vice Chairman raised concerns about the provision of infrastructure when planning permission was granted by the Council. The Portfolio Holder noted that in Swanley these issues would be considered as part of a Masterplan for Swanley & Hextable, enabling development to take place within a planned framework.

### 18. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Finance

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented a report updating the Committee on recent achievements within his portfolio. He highlighted that since becoming Portfolio Holder in May 2015 he had supported new ways of working, particularly in the use of IT.

The Portfolio Holder responded to Members' questions.

The Chairman asked whether the Portfolio Holder had concerns with the risks involved in property investment. The Portfolio Holder explained that clear expected rates of return had been set in the strategy, which were being achieved and exceeded. The investments were contributing towards achieving the 10-year budget.

A Member suggested that the Council Offices could be hired out for conferences at weekends. The Portfolio Holder said this could be considered.

In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder explained that before each property investment took place, the possible funding sources would be considered. The Council had invested in the Local Government Association's Municipal Bond Scheme which would allow the Council to borrow at better rates than from the Public Work Loans Board.

A Member asked whether the Council had made progress in identifying pieces of land the Council owned, across the district, left over from the property transfers to West Kent Housing. The Portfolio Holder advised that the work was ongoing and would consider whether to develop or sell the parcels already identified. Local Members would be advised of any such land in their ward.

The Chairman enquired about the progress of the draft budget. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that there was a £50,000 shortfall for 2016/17. Asked about any concerns he had, he advised that Economic & Community Development had more growth items than cuts and he felt the value of a potential Tourism Officer had not changed since the post was deleted two years before.

### 19. Leisure In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group - Update

The Committee considered a report from the Vice Chairman, as Chairman of the Leisure In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group, updating Members on their work. The Group had met on two occasions and had agreed that, within their terms of reference, they would focus on the questions of whether Sencio provided good value for money and, if it did, what costs could be reduced and what income could be increased. The Group had sought information from Officers and had met with representatives from Sencio.

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The Group intended to have four more meetings to gather evidence. They sought to meet with two trust providers and a private provider of leisure services. The Group would finalise a report for submission to the Committee in either February or May 2016.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

### 20. Update from Kent County Council on Education Questions

The Committee considered a report from the Vice Chairman which explained that he had written to County Councillor Crabtree, the Kent County Council (KCC) Deputy Cabinet Member for Education, requesting further information arising from her attendance at the Committee on 14 July 2015. The report set out the responses given by County Councillor Crabtree and KCC Officers.

The response from Kent County Council considered that the cost of transporting 1,100 children from the Sevenoaks District to Tunbridge Wells could not be well estimated as the children were mostly not entitled to free transport. However if they were entitled to free transport then the transport would represent a cost of between £850,000 to £1 million per year. If they were entitled to a Young Person's Travel Card then the subsidy would represent a cost of £370,000 a year. All secondary schools were supported by the County Council to produce school travel plans to focus on sustainable transport and the Young Person's Travel Card encouraged the use of public transport. However, private schools could not be compelled to engage with parents in encouraging public transport.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

### 21. Work Plan

The Committee agreed to add a representative of the NHS as a possible future external invitee, with Kent Police to be invited each year. The outstanding 'Councillor Call for Action' relating to the Gypsy & Traveller Site Consultation was to be removed from the plan given the time which had passed since it was initially raised.

In response to the Chairman's request for possible in-depth scrutiny topics, Members agreed that the provision of accommodation for vulnerable people and a brief scrutiny of the Council's investment in property ought to be added to the list, with highways to be removed.

Members clarified that at the meeting of the Committee on 23 February 2016 they hoped to focus their scrutiny of Kent Highways on the Swanley Traffic Plan, traffic flows on the A25 and slip roads, the effectiveness of the Joint Transportation Board, gulley cleaning, potholes and the balance of the highways budget between east and west Kent.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.46 PM

CHAIRMAN

