

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2018 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Brown (Chairman)

Cllrs. Clack, Hogg, Kitchener, Lindsay, Purves, Reay and Searles

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Ball, London and McArthur

Cllrs. Dr Canet and Scholey were also present.

11. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 17 July 2018 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 (if any)

There were none.

14. Actions from the Previous Meeting

The Chief Officer Communities and Business provided updates on the 3 Swanley sites to be developed, White Oak Leisure Centre Bevan Place and Meeting Point. It was advised that Meeting Point and Bevan Place had been out to tender with responses expected by 7 December 2018. The Council was working with Alliance Leisure on redevelopment plans for White Oak Leisure Centre and feasibility work had been undertaken for this site. Strong community involvement would be central to the development of all sites and consultation could be expected in advance of any planning application.

Members considered the planning figures relating to decisions, overturns and appeals and noted these figures provided a greater insight than the relevant performance indicators. Members requested that similar figures be provided at the next meeting.

Action 1: Chief Planning Officer to provide running totals of planning figures (as provided at the previous meeting) relating to delegated and Committee decisions taken, overturned decisions and appeals and details of the cost

accrued of any appeals regardless of outcome. To clarify if the appeals determined in the specified time period all originated from planning applications in the same period.

The actions were noted.

15. West Kent Police

The Chairman welcomed Chief Inspector Tony Dyer, Sevenoaks District Commander of Kent Police to the meeting, who gave an overview of the levels of crime within the District.

Chief Inspector Dyer explained that Sevenoaks District has the first or second lowest recordings for most if not all crime categories in the County. The Sevenoaks District had seen a reduction in Anti-Social Behaviour and had the slowest increase in recorded crime in the County.

The Chief Inspector advised that there had been a ten-year reduction in crime nationally and crime statistics were now expected to level out. In Kent County victim based crime had seen a 20% increase, domestic abuse a 39% increase and residential burglary a 23% increase. Victim based crime in Sevenoaks had seen a 32% rise with 17,700 more incidents reported than the previous year. Nonetheless, Sevenoaks District was reported to have the lowest level of violent crime, sexual offences and theft in the County alongside high prosecution rate. The Chief Inspector praised the work of the Community Safety Unit, the Fire brigade and the Police in local high profile cases including Antisocial Behaviour at the Convent of Mercy site in Swanley.

Members were reassured that the perceived increases crime were a result of the Crime Data Integrity Inspection, affecting the way crime was reported and recorded. The roll out of Crime Data Integrity Inspections also made comparisons with other Councils outside of the Kent area difficult, however the Police would commence comparisons in 2019.

Chief Inspector Dyer responded to questions on the current strategy around visible policing which was influenced by limited resources and focused on the most vulnerable; victims of domestic violence, rape and sex related cybercrimes. Visible policing was largely carried out by Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) due to limited funds. In answer to a Member's question, Chief Inspector Dyer answered that, if there were an increase in funding, he thought the priority would be returning to a more proactive approach and increasing community policing.

The Committee were advised that the non-urgent 101 service had improved, with average waiting times down to seven minutes. Members highlighted difficulties with reporting crimes online, despite this being recognised as the most efficient method of reporting, it was noted that difficulties may discourage people from reporting crimes. Cross county lines crime was discussed however Members were assured that this was not a significant issue in Sevenoaks. It was also noted that the Sevenoaks District was not facing human trafficking and forced labour crimes.

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PCSOs were holding surgeries and residents could enquire at Parish Council Offices or to the PCSO team directly for information on surgery times and locations.

In relation to questions around shed burglaries the Chief Inspector advised that the Police regularly consulted the up-to-date list of burglaries and aimed to send an Officer to the affected properties, follow up with a phone call and where appropriate, provide shed alarms.

Members discussed if funding from Section 106 or the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) could be used to fund additions to the PCSO team.

Action 2: Chief Officer Communities and Business to investigate if Section 106 or CIL grants could be used to fund expanding the PCSOs team.

The Chairman thanked Chief Inspector Dyer for his attendance.

16. Performance Monitoring

Members considered the report which summarised performance across the Council to the end of September 2018. Members were asked to consider 7 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 Holder invited to the Scrutiny Committee meeting.

In response to numbers of green waste collections being missed, Members considered possibilities for providing clearer information to residents on waste pick up days. Options discussed were printing the Council website link for collection days on the bags themselves, sending information out with the permits for green waste bins, providing more information on waste collection in InShape and posting letters through resident doors.

Action 3: Chief Officer Environmental and Operation Services to advise on whether the Council can provide even more information to residents on green waste pick up days.

Occasions where targets had not been met were attributed to an increase in demand for the green waste service with further increases expected. Work was underway to make the service more effective as routes were reconsidered.

It was noted that shortages of Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) drivers affected both the waste collection and street cleaning services. Members considered training drivers through apprenticeships and diversifying the vehicle fleet to include smaller vehicles.

Action 4: Chief Officer Corporate/Environmental and Operation Services to advise whether smaller vehicles could be used for waste collection and/or street cleansing services in response to the shortage of HGV drivers.

Members requested further information on the indicator relating to debts outstanding more than 61 days especially those relating the Building Control Services.

Action 5: Chief Planning Officer to provide information on how soon after service we request payment and if measures can be taken to ensure payment is made prior to the Council signing off on Building Control Services.

It was noted, that Council had increased obligations since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2018 and Universal Credit was likely to affect the number of households living in B&Bs. Members advised that the Council was in receipt of funding from Central Government for providing temporary accommodation.

Action 6: For Chief Officer Communities and Business to provide additional information on households living in B&B accommodation. How much is the accommodation costing? How many days on average do families stay? What the families living situations are prior to the B&B accommodation? The location of the B&B accommodation (in or out of district)?

Resolved: That the report be noted.

17. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Finance

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented a report updating the Committee on recent achievements and challenges ahead. He highlighted that the Council has been successful in delivering a 10 year balanced budget and remained self-sufficient from direct central government funding. He outlined the Council's plans for property investment and advised Members that investment continued to be targeted within a 50-mile radius of the office. Members discussed the possibility of investing outside of this 50-mile however regulations were anticipated which would aim to restrict borrowing for property investment outside of the local area. Property Investment was included in the budgeting process and the Council would continue with the current approach and review as appropriate.

The Portfolio Holder advised that the Income Strip Funding Working Group was a Working Group of Council and would therefore report its findings directly to Council.

Members were advised that the Facilities Management 20 year costed maintenance programme would allow the Council to prepare for required investment expected in the coming years.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for his attendance.

18. In-Depth Scrutiny, Staffing - Final Report

Councillor Brown presented the final report as Chairman of the In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group. The working group had been investigating the number of current

vacancies and long term sickness absences across the Council. Meetings had been held with different Officers and an external recruitment agency. The Chairman noted that salaries were given as the primary reason by staff for leaving the Council, with competition from London and the private sector. Certain areas were identified as more problematic to recruit for, and Market Related Payments (MRPs) were offered in some circumstances.

Members noted that free parking at the Council Offices should be reflected in the list of current staff benefits.

Possibilities for increasing flexible working opportunities for staff were discussed including job share, working from home and 10am to 2pm shifts. It was hoped that these arrangements would appeal to parents returning to work and those living out of District. Members discussed widening the radius for relocation policy and considering commuting time in addition to distance.

The possibility was discussed of introducing a shuttle bus for staff between the train station and the Argyle Road Offices, however Members felt this would not be appropriate and be at odds with the Council's commitment to Health promotion.

Staff referral schemes were considered to support recruitment whereby current staff could recommend friends and relatives and would receive financial incentives if their recommendation was appointed and successfully completed probation. It was suggested that the Council review where posts were advertised. This could include in local and general newspapers, on Social Media and local online forums including 'mumsnet' and 'dadsnet'.

Members discussed the current practice of staff being required to pay back training costs if leaving the Council within two years of training completion for a job in the private sector. It was considered if this could be increased to three years and expanded to also including moving to other Local Authorities. Options around tapered payback were discussed and Members supported full payback after one year with a lower percentage payback after the second and third years.

Members enquired as to the cost of agency staff and requested further details on how these compared with full time staffing costs.

Action 7: Chief Officer Corporate Services to provide information on agency costs in comparison with that of full time staff for specific roles.

Members agreed that the report should be referred to Cabinet following the inclusion of feedback from Committee Members.

Resolved: That

- i) delegated authority be given to the Chairman of the Working Group to make appropriate amendments to the report prior to submission to Cabinet; and

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- ii) subject to the amendments above the report be recommended to Cabinet.

19. Work Plan

Members noted that West Kent Housing and the Portfolio Holders for Legal and Democratic Services and Economic and Community Development would be attending the meeting on 5 February 2019. It was agreed that the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Heath would be invited to attend the meeting on 2 April 2019 alongside Sencio and the Portfolio Holder for Planning.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9.22 PM

CHAIRMAN