

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2017 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Brown (Vice Chairman in the Chair)

Cllrs. Ball, Brown, Clack, Hogg, Kitchener, McArthur and Searles

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. London, Purves and Reay

Cllrs. Dickins was also present.

32. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 7 February 2017, be agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to Cllr. Lowe being added in attendance.

33. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

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

There were none.

35. Actions from the last meeting of the Committee

There were none.

36. Pembury Hospital (Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust)

This item had been withdrawn as Angela Gallagher - Chief Operating Officer and Jim Lusby, Deputy Chief Executive Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust, were unavailable to attend the meeting.

37. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Direct & Trading Services

The Portfolio Holder for Direct & Trading Services presented a report updating the Committee on recent achievements and challenges ahead. Some of the challenges ahead surrounded behavioural changes around recycling, fly tipping and dog fouling. Recent achievements were enforcement action against fly tipping and the other work carried out by the Environmental Enforcement Officer, an extensive maintenance programme had been undertaken on car parks. New refuse freighters would include the slogan 'see you next week'.

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The Portfolio Holder responded to Members' questions.

Members were advised that in regards to parking appeals they were still waiting to hear back from the TPT to advise the number of successful appeals. Bradbourne car park would be opening on Monday 10 April 2017 and sales of season tickets were taking place. Petitions that were received by the Sevenoaks Joint Transportation Board (JTB) could take over 1 year to be implemented, unless there were substantial safety concerns where they would then be prioritised. Review of parking restrictions could also be brought to the JTB. Direct Services itself employed more than 100 Members of staff on refuse collection, street cleaning, vehicle maintenance and other cleansing services.

The Portfolio Holder responded to questions informing Members that the introduction of Safer School Parking zones was to strengthen enforcement against those parking inconsiderately around schools. Kent County Council were supportive of the scheme however it was important that the schools were also in support. The Council employed 7 Civil Enforcement Officers, which was a limited resource as they also had to be deployed elsewhere across the District.

When asked about the Pest Control service being brought into profitability, the Portfolio Holder advised that an action plan had been implemented after an informal tender exercise. The service had now fully covered its costs for the last two years.

In response to questions Members were advised that the CCTV control room would not be expanding however two awards had been won and one of them was for the innovation of joint partnership working. Unless Members were minded to change the way the service was provided then a manned CCTV control room would continue. The CCTV control room was maintained within budget and there were no recuperation costs from the Police, only for airwaves and streaming costs.

Members asked questions about the dog fouling initiative. The Portfolio Holder advised that DNA of the dogs would be stored and therefore dog fouling samples could be traceable to the owners. Dog fouling was a reputational issue and could have significant health issue for residents. Although the scheme would not completely solve the problem, by tracing the owners and fining them it could improve the perception of the Council's efforts and provide value for money.

When asked about the profitability of Direct Services, the Portfolio Holder advised that Direct Services should return a surplus of approximately £200,000 in 2016/17; that the garden waste service provided over £400,000 worth of income and services such as trade waste collection and cesspool emptying returned a net surplus. In response to further questions in regards to parking, Members were informed that there was no formal way of logging parking problems on the website, apart from reporting abandoned vehicles. Contact details for the parking team were available, and they should be contacted with parking problems.

In response to a question Members were advised that Oriental chestnut gall wasp issues continued. Costs to date were at £60,000 however some of the expenditure would be reclaimed from Timber sales, unfortunately the infestation had already

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spread to neighbouring sites. The Chestnut trees that had been coppiced would grow again. The Portfolio Holder advised that information regarding Night Flights in connection with Gatwick airport would be circulated.

Action 1: Night Flights consultation response be circulated.

Members thanked Cllr. Dickins for his attendance.

38. Chairman's Annual Report to Council

The Chairman introduced the draft Annual Report to be presented to the Council meeting on 25 April 2017. The report summarised the Committees' work plan which had focussed at each meeting on inviting the Portfolio Holders to discuss areas of focus or challenge and setting up In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group. Members noted that under external Invitees for this meeting, Angela Gallagher, Chief Operating Officer - Pembury Hospital (Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust) would be removed.

Resolved: That the report be commended to Council

39. Final Report from the Property Investment Strategy In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group

Cllr. Clack presented the report of the Property Investment Strategy In-Depth Working Group that considered whether the benefits of the Council's Property Investment Strategy outweighed the risks. The report detailed the summary of work that had been carried out by the working group including speaking with Ashford Borough Council, a case study on Suffolk House and speaking to the Leader. Conclusions of the working group and the recommendations were discussed including communication to Members, the professionalism and competence of Officers, self-sufficiency plus and affordable housing.

In response to questions Members were advised that Savills had been appointed as the Investment Advisors and would notify the Council if a property was coming up for sale. A Property Investment Strategy Update had been looked at by the Policy & Performance Advisory Committee and Finance Advisory Committee before going to Council on 25 April 2017 which was requesting that a further £25m be sought from external borrowing.

Members discussed 'self-sufficiency plus' and how this could work through Quercus 7. It was also discussed how information could be shared regarding purchases and how the Scrutiny Committee could be kept informed on individual properties performance, it was discussed that the performance monitoring should include information on the strategy. Members discussed the suggested recommendations to Cabinet.

The Chairman moved that recommendation within the report subject to the amendment of recommendation '(d) to explore possibilities of self-financing affordable housing and shared-ownership projects to help the less wealthy within the District' be amended to 'to explore the advantages and disadvantages of self

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financing affordable housing and shared ownership projects to help the less wealthy within the District’.

The motion was put to the vote and it was:

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) there be improved on-going communication with Members on progress with the exiting portfolio, the financial viability and returns being achieved, and details of new investments (as soon as it is appropriate to make Members aware);
- b) a single location be accessible to Members where all relevant information can be maintained and updated;
- c) in any month a purchase is made, an update be provided to Members, by the end of the same month (or within seven days, whichever is the latter) with details of the cost, source of financing and projected income; and
- d) the advantages and disadvantages of self financing affordable housing and shared ownership projects to help the less wealthy within the District be explored.

40. Update on Sencio

The Chief Officer for Communities and Businesses informed Members that since the Leisure in-depth Scrutiny Working Group, Cabinet had referred the conclusions to Housing and Health Advisory Committee who agreed a reduction in management fees went through the budget process. Sencio were pursuing improved health and leisure facilities due to the unmet latent demand for fitness in Sevenoaks. A report has been presented to Housing & Health Advisory Committee, Finance Advisory Committee and Cabinet asking whether Cabinet agree that Sencio be granted a loan of £600,000 over ten years at an interest rate of 6% per annum under agreed terms which would protect the Council.

The Chief Officer for Communities and Business confirmed that the loan would be paid to Sencio in instalments on receipt of the invoices and the interest would be accrued from the date of each payment. Terms of the loan agreement were being worked on by Officers now that Sencio had the full specification of works. Members were advised that the Council had carried out their own demand survey and the results were reassuring to show that the demand was there. The Chief Officer for Communities and Business reminded Members that Sencio was a not-for-profit leisure trust and therefore any profit would go into the upkeep of the building.

Members discussed the information provided and agreed that a report should be brought back to the summer meeting to cover the financial risks to the Council with the trading history and future performance of Sencio. The report should also

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cover how the payment of the loan would be affected if the management fee the council paid was removed.

Resolved: That a report be brought to the summer meeting.

41. Work Plan

Members discussed the work plan and it was agreed to move the Portfolio Holder for Legal and Democratic Services to the meeting held on 31 October 2017.

42. Performance Monitoring

The Chief Officer for Corporate Services introduced a report which summarised performance across the Council to the end of February 2017. Members were asked to consider 7 performance indicators which were performing 10% or more below their target with a commentary from Officers explaining the reason 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.

A Member expressed concern that the average number of days it took to process new housing benefits applications was still high. Members were advised that the figure was a significant improvement and it was going in the right direction. Members requested that the commentary be made clear to explain that the as soon as the information is received from the applicant the timing for processing the application starts, this includes the occasions when Officers had to go back to the applicants to ask for further information.

Members requested clarification be sent regarding the percentage of appeals against planning application refusal dismissed.

Action 2: Chief Officer for Planning provide further clarification on how the percentage of appeals against planning application refusal dismissed related to actual numbers.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9.05 PM

CHAIRMAN