

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2018 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Brown (Chairman)

Cllr. London (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Ball, Clack, Hogg, Kitchener, London, Purves and Searles

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. McArthur and Reay

Cllrs. Eyre and Hunter were also present.

DIRECTION FROM CHAIR

The Chairman advised the meeting that as he needed to leave the meeting early, with the Committee's consent, he would ask the Vice Chairman to direct proceedings on his behalf until assuming the Chair when he left.

1. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 24 April 2018, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Hogg declared that his wife was a volunteer for Citizens Advice in Swanley.

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

There were none.

4. Actions from the Previous Meeting

Questions were raised on the status of 3 sites in Swanley, the redevelopment of the White Oak Leisure Centre and the development of Bevan Place and Meeting Point. The Chief Officer for Communities and Business advised that Bevan Place and Meeting Point had been out to tender and the Council was waiting for West Kent Housing to value the residential units at Bevan Place. Local Members and Town Council Members would be provided with an update in Autumn closely followed by Swanley residents. The Chief Officer advised that newsletters were distributed to Swanley residents to update them on any changes as they occurred.

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Action 1: Chief Officer Communities and Business to report to the next meeting with any updates on the three Swanley sites, White Oak Leisure Centre, Bevan Place and Meeting Point.

Members considered actions 2 and 5 which related to planning decisions taken by the Development Control Committee, especially those which were overturned. Members compared the updates given and noted that only one of the six overturned decisions went to appeal. Appealed decisions were currently awarded a green performance indicator. It was noted that figures may appear inconsistent as they covered different periods of time. Members noted that information on overturned and appealed planning decisions were frequently requested from the Scrutiny Committee. It was advised that figures were provided to the Portfolio Holder for Planning, and considered that something similar could also be shared with the Scrutiny Committee and Development Control Committee. Scrutiny members thought it important that the Development Control Committee were aware of the costs involved in a planning appeal including the potential for costs awarded against us in the event of the Council winning and appeal. Members hoped these figures could help identify patterns and any issues for consideration.

Action 2: Chief Planning Officer to provide a brief report to the November meeting on the running totals of key planning figures including delegated and Committee decisions taken, overturned decisions and appeals. To also provide details of the cost accrued of any appeals regardless of outcome.

CHANGE IN ORDER OF AGENDA ITEMS

With the agreement of the Committee, the Chairman took agenda items 9 and 10 before agenda item 5.

5. In-Depth Scrutiny, Staffing - Interim update

Councillor Brown as Chairman of the In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group which was investigating the number of current vacancies and long term sickness across the Council, updated members on progress. The working group had held meetings with different departments and was also hoping to compare their findings with other authorities before submitting a report. Members were advised that the working group was ahead of schedule and they were expecting to present a report at the next meeting.

6. Work Plan

The work plan was noted.

Members noted that Kent Police and The Portfolio Holder for Finance would be attending the meeting on 13 November 2018. The working groups' report on staffing was also expected for the November meeting ahead of the scheduled February 2019 date. It was agreed that the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Sencio Leisure would be invited to the meeting on 5 February 2019. West Kent Housing would be invited to the meeting in Spring 2019.

(Vice Chairman in the Chair)

7. Citizens Advice

The Chairman welcomed representatives from Edenbridge and Westerham and North and West Kent Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) who gave a [presentation](#) on the work of Citizens Advice within the district. Robin Thompson, the Chair of CAB in North West Kent, advised the Committee that there were three main centres, three outreach services and a five days a week phone service providing free, independent and confidential advice across Sevenoaks District. Mr Thompson highlighted that their clients were often the ones with the most complex cases as basic information could be found on the Citizens Advice website.

Members asked for clarification on the budget for West Kent and Edenbridge and Westerham and how funding was split between the two organisations. In relation to North and West Kent CAB, budget allocation was considered for its centres within and outside the district. The representatives in attendance advised that clients were required to live or work in the district to access the service, except in the case of an emergency. They advised that alongside the introduction of Universal Credit, the Department for Work and Pensions had provided financial support to Local Authorities for Assisted Digital Support and Personal Budgeting. At this point it was too early to comment on the impacts of Universal Credit however it's effect was being monitored. In response to questions around volume of website users, Members were advised that clients would use a central website and CAB head office monitored the overall total of website users, but were not able to provide a figure for those accessing from within the district. The representatives advised that their clients frequently encountered issues with Employment Support Allowance (ESA) and CAB was involved in research, with their findings being used as evidence in internal and external campaigns. It was noted that hospitality gifts were sometimes received from clients, with incidence of gift giving being higher in Sevenoaks than elsewhere in the country. Members were advised that both organisations were currently running a deficit budget and if in receipt of more funding they would consider hiring more staff or opening a centre for an additional day.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked the representatives from North West Kent and Edenbridge and Westerham Citizens Advice for attending.

8. Performance Report

Members considered the report which summarised performance across the Council to the end of May 2018. Members were asked to consider 9 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 Holders invited to the Scrutiny Committee meeting.

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Members discussed the time taken to process a new Claim for housing benefit which was currently running at a significant delay. Members were concerned as this was considered to have a large impact on people's lives.

Action 3: Chief Finance Officer to provide further clarification into the delays when processing a new claim for Housing Benefit.

Members considered the figures for appeals dismissed against planning application refusal and noted that the variation of this figure from those stated in the actions was likely to be due to the figures being for different periods of time.

Members considered the possibility of changing the performance indicator target as some were viewed as outdated. Green waste bin collections had increased significantly to their current level of 8,000, since the target had been set at 9.

Action 4: Head of Transformation and Strategy to advise whether it would be possible to review performance indicators with a focus on those where measures need updating, including missed green waste collections.

Members noted the average number of working days lost to sickness and were advised that over a two-month period one and a half days were lost per employee with the indicator not differentiating between short and long term sickness.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

9. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health presented a report on recent achievements and challenges ahead. She covered the successes and challenges of housing, and health and leisure. Members were advised that Sevenoaks was one of the leading Districts in the country on health matters, also surpassing many unitary authorities. Pembury hospital had been reported to have met their discharge times, even during the winter and cold weather. An iESE Gold Award had been won for Transformation in Health and Social Care for the Council's unique approach to delivering health and wellbeing services. Member were advised that the Health and Wellbeing Board had been replaced by the West Kent Elected Members Forum for which the Portfolio Holder for Health and Housing was the Chair.

This was considered a great success as District Authorities promoting public health had little input to the Health and Wellbeing Board. Members noted that the building of 48 affordable homes in the past year was a success in relation to targets. The Portfolio Holder advised that residents facing accommodation difficulties should contact the Council as provisions were in place to support them. Assurance was provided to Members that the Housing advice provided by the Council did not overlap with that available from Citizens advice and clients were referred on if they believed the other service to be more suitable.

The Committee discussed the incidence of West Kent Housing charging customers rent on two properties when moving house within the West Kent service. Members were advised that meetings had taken place between the Council and West Kent Housing around these issues however customer complaints with typically received by Local Members. It was noted that there was considerable variation in the

quality of stock however Members noted that West Kent Housing was focusing efforts on building in more cost effective areas.

Members requested information on Quercus Housing, the first meeting of which would take place at the end of the month. The Portfolio Holder advised that houses would be allocated to those on the housing register who lived or worked district except in exceptional circumstances. The differences between Quercus 7 and Quercus Housing were highlighted, the former as profit making and the latter as non-profit with both having the same board members.

Members requested an explanation for the delay in the redevelopment of Swanley Leisure Centre and were advised this had been due to financial constraints. The Portfolio Holder highlighted homelessness and housing shortage as her biggest concerns with housing often being unsuitable and overcrowded. She hoped recently implemented measures would be improving these areas.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

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

The Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Policy & Performance who reported on recent achievements within his portfolio. He advised that the Council was undertaking a number of projects which were at various stages of development. The Premier Inn had been signed off this week and was expected to open in early August. Buckhurst 2 carpark development was reported to be on budget and on time to be completed by Spring 2019.

The Portfolio Holder advised that Bevan Place, Meeting Point and Working Men's Club sites in Swanley were out for tender with the Working Men's Club expected to be at planning application stage before 2019. Before any decisions would be made the Council would consult with Swanley Town Council and local residents. Options were still being considered for the development of the White Oak site and Leisure Centre. Members requested information into the redevelopment of White Oak Leisure Centre to which the Portfolio Holder cited financial constraints as the reason for the delay. The anticipated profits from the development of the 3 sites would not be enough to cover the cost of the Leisure Centre Redevelopment so other options were being explored. The value and sale price of land was also cited as a reasons behind the sites' development delay.

Members were advised that the 'Sevenoaks Suns' Professional Basketball Team, who were one of the leading basketball clubs in England, had expressed interest in supporting the opening of a new leisure centre. The Club was currently training at various locations including Sevenoaks School and Knole Academy, and it was hoping to secure a site with up to four courts and 500 spectator seats. Members discussed the possibility of the Club being based at a redeveloped Swanley White Oak Leisure Centre. Members enquired as to the access of other sports if White Oak was the base of the Sevenoaks Suns to which they were advise the Club had considered this in their business model.

The Portfolio Holder advised that the Corporate Plan was due to be submitted in September which would highlight emerging priorities. The Council was currently

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undertaking a customer redesign project which was hoped to improve customer experience when contacting the Council. The Portfolio Holder advised that long standing staff with a wealth of knowledge would be encouraged to share this with others to educate others and enable them to deal with a wider variety of issues.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9.00 PM

CHAIRMAN