

MATTERS CONSIDERED BY THE CABINET AND/OR OTHER COMMITTEES

PLEASE NOTE: These are extracts from draft minutes and as such are subject to amendment.

a. MONITORING OFFICER'S REPORT

Standards Committee (3 December 2009)

The Monitoring Officer informed Members that, in a change from last year, both the Performance and Governance Committee and the Standards Committee would discuss the report before it was referred to the full Council Meeting. This was because the report covered areas which fell within the Performance and Governance Committee's Terms of Reference. Members agreed it was appropriate that both Committees were given an opportunity to comment.

The Monitoring Officer was pleased to report that the Council had no cases of maladministration this year.

The Committee discussed Members' training and the Monitoring Officer was asked how many Town and Parish Councillors within the District had received training on the Members Code of Conduct. The Monitoring Officer stated that training events tended to receive good turnouts and were particularly successful when held locally. A Member of the Committee suggested targets in relation to Councillor Training could be a positive means of further encouraging training. Another Member commented that it should be recognised that not all Members wanted or needed training.

Following a query, the Monitoring Officer stated that Standards for England had established a Committee to review the process for completing the Annual Return Form and the information was to be included in the Annual Return.

Resolved: That the Monitoring Officer's Report 2009 be noted and referred to full Council for endorsement.

Performance and Governance Committee (16 February 2010)

To Follow.

b. INVESTMENT STRATEGY (*Performance and Governance Committee – 16 February 2010*)

To Follow.

c. BUDGET 2010/11

Services Select Committee (12 January 2010)

The Head of Finance and Human Resources introduced this item and explained that the original budget deficit had been projected at approximately £800,000. Appendix B to the report highlighted where growth and savings proposals had reduced the projected deficit to approximately £188,000. Further suggestions from Cabinet had

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left a projected deficit of approximately £50,000 - £60,000. The Head of Finance and Human Resources was confident that the remainder of the projected deficit could be closed. It was explained that the Council was currently looking at a number of options to do this.

Following a query on proposals for extending shared partnerships with other local authorities, the Corporate Resources Director explained that although these savings had been built into the proposed budget, these were subject to third party agreement and as such carried a significant degree of risk. It was also highlighted that in the current climate, and in order to balance the budget without reducing services, Members may feel this level of risk is acceptable.

Members discussed paragraph 20 of the report on the Capital Programme funding. The Head of Finance and Human Resources explained the Capital Programme comprised of discretionary housing grants and IT expenditure. Vehicle replacement was also included and this was funded from revenue contributions. Whilst borrowing was an option, given that there was annual capital expenditure under these headings, it was considered more prudent to fund this from revenue contributions than borrowing. It was highlighted that the Council needed a long-term, sustainable solution to fund its Capital Programme. The Corporate Resources Director informed Members that the need to fund the Capital Programme had already been built into the budget gap.

A Member of the Committee highlighted the issue of 'smarter procurement.' The Corporate Resources Director explained that this focused on the Council taking a more strategic approach to procurement to obtain products and services and best value. The Head of IT and Facilities informed Members recent tendering for multi-functional print devices had been done through Kent County Supplies. This service used pre-tendered companies to produce a competitive price for the Council.

The Committee discussed Council Tax and Council Tax capping. It was explained that capping would not be set by central government until all local authorities had agreed their 2010/11 budgets. It was, therefore, difficult to determine an accurate capping figure. The Council had information from a number of external sources that enabled officers to put forward an estimated figure and for financial planning purposes this had been included as 3%, although this could change.

Following a query on paragraph 31 of the report, it was explained that central government was seeking to re-distribute grant funding for concessionary travel fares among local authorities. Although the Council had put forward a robust position to retain its level of funding, it was not expected that this would be successful.

SCIA 16

The Committee discussed the budgeted increases to Members' Allowances. A motion reiterating the Committee's view that it would be supportive should the Council wish to consider a deferment, in part or in total, of the £41,000 total increase for Members' Allowances for 2010/11 was voted upon and carried.

SCIA 34

Following a query, the Head of Environmental and Operational Services confirmed that the Council was confident that savings of approximately £100,000 in refuse collection were achievable in 2010/11, as a result of a route optimisation exercise which would allow one full round to be removed.

SCIA 37

The Committee was informed that the Council had received positive enquires about joining the licensing partnership. It was anticipated that two more local authorities might join the licensing partnership, the first in 2011 and the second in 2012. Although it was hoped an authority might join the partnership as early as 2010.

SCIA 42

Members enquired as to why savings in insurance had not made sooner. It was explained that a re-tendering exercise in 2009 had reduced the cost.

SCIA 47, 48 & 49

Members expressed concerns that savings were being targeted at the more vulnerable groups under the Council's area of responsibility. With regards to SCIA 47 it was outlined that external funding had been identified for 2010/11 and the Council did not have to contribute to the fund in this year. Savings had been achieved in Private Sector Housing, SCIA 48, through increased efficiencies in the team, with minimal impact on service users. The full extent of any impact could be identified once the re-structure had taken place within the team.

ACTION 1 The Head of Housing would provide Members with details of the proposed savings and any impacts on service users.

SCIA 51

It was explained that central government funding for Gypsy Sites had moved away from revenue support grants to targeted funding, which local authorities could bid for by presenting a business case. The Head of Housing had been successful in securing funds through this process.

SCIA 52

The Chairman expressed concern that £10,700 had been spent by the Council sending a letter to residents outlining the dates of refuse collections over the Christmas period. The information had already been included in the Council's quarterly publication 'In Shape' which was sent out a week earlier. The Head of Environmental and Operational Services explained that as refuse collections had taken place on a bank holiday Monday (28/01/09) it was necessary to give residents this information. It was also highlighted that the cost of sending out the letter was compensated by fewer enquiries on refuse collection arrangements, creating efficiencies in the Contact Centre.

ACTION 2 The Head of Housing to update and re-circulate to Members

.SCIAs 50 &51, to include information that had been omitted.

Following a query, the Head of IT and Facilities clarified that an on-going review of the Council's processes had allowed it to utilise discounts on postage costs from Royal Mail.

The Vice-Chairman suggested that Members inform the Democratic Services Team of their postage preferences, with a view to creating a definitive list. This could then be used to make savings on the cost of postage. Members were informed that the Democratic Services Manager and the Facilities Manager were looking at the issue of Members' postage . The aim was to make savings whilst still meeting the needs of Members.

SCIA 53, 54 & 55

The Council had recently entered into a print partnership with Dartford Borough Council. It was the intention of the Head of IT and Facilities to 'backfill' any gaps in service, for the Council, with the funding from Dartford Borough Council.

Following a query with regards to SCIA 55, the Head of IT and Facilities confirmed that the saving of approximately £50,000 could not be made if the Council did not enter into the new contract for printers.

General Comments

Members were disappointed that the Committee had not been given options for savings in the Contact Centre. It was highlighted that the Cabinet had rejected this proposal when it formulated its budget proposals. However, the Committee could investigate the potential savings itself at a future meeting.

Resolved: That Members comments, including the suggestions made for further savings and the motion to postpone Members' Allowance increases until after the next election in the District be put to Cabinet for consideration.

Social Affairs Select Committee (19 January 2010)

The Finance Manager informed Members that prior to the budget round, the Council had been facing a budget gap of £889,000. The proposals contained within the Committee's papers, if accepted, would reduce the budget gap to £188,000. Further savings had also been proposed by the Cabinet at its meeting on 17 December 2009, which if accepted, would reduce the gap further to £50,000-60,000.

SCIA 6

In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Environmental and Operational Services informed Members that all the Council-run public conveniences were currently in working order. He informed Members that both Kemsing and Penshurst parish councils had offered a contribution to the Council to keep their

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public conveniences running, although cleaning might need to be undertaken on a less frequent basis. Sevenoaks Town Council were not interested in taking over responsibility for the Upper St John's public convenience, but were willing to take on either the freehold or the majority of the cost of the lower St Johns public convenience.

A Member asked whether the Upper St Johns site could be sold. The Head of Environmental and Operational Services advised that this was unlikely, as the site was very small. Another Member suggested that this site, and the site of the public convenience in Edenbridge, be demolished so that the Council could save money on business rates.

SCIA 21

A Member queried what was being delivered through the Council's Equalities Officer. The Community and Planning Services Director informed Members that the Equalities Officer ensured that the Council was meeting its obligations under equalities legislation and also ran the "DisabledGo" scheme, which allowed disabled residents to find out which venues in the District were accessible to them.

SCIA 25

The Finance Manager informed Members that although the papers suggested a £7,000 saving, the Cabinet had recommended a further saving of £15,000, leading to a total saving of £22,000. Some Members expressed concern that this was a very large saving for Sencio Leisure to find, particularly when some actions of the Community Plan relied on the work which Sencio undertook. Another Member felt that Sencio had money in reserve which they could use.

SCIA 26

The Vice-Chairman informed Members that in total, the proposed budget for grants in 2010/11 would be £268,000. This would be £78,000 after funding for the Citizens' Advice Bureaux had been deducted and would need to be allocated between 44 voluntary bodies or organisations.

ACTION 1 The Head of Community Development agreed to circulate a list of the amount of grants funded in the current year and a list detailing the applicants for grant funding next year.

Members noted that priorities would need to be carefully evaluated, to ensure that limited resources were spent in the most effective way.

Members questioned whether the reduction recommended by the Cabinet was in addition to the £10,000 already accounted for, but were informed that this was the same £10,000.

SCIA 28

Members' queried what was being achieved by the West Kent Partnership. The Head of Community Development informed Members that it had been the original Local

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Strategic Partnership (LSP). However, when the District had decided to set up its own LSP, the partnership took on an economic development role. Members felt that the benefits which had been achieved by the West Kent Partnership needed to be carefully assessed, so that the Council could assess whether it provided value for money.

Members asked that the West Kent Partnership be an item for debate at a future meeting of the Committee.

SCIA 30

Members' discussed in depth the work undertaken by Applause Rural Touring. There was significant concern expressed by some Members as to whether this was delivering enough benefit to justify the expenditure. Other Members commented that although the Group's productions were of a high standard, attendance tended to be low and greater publicity of their events was needed.

SCIA 40

In response to a question from Members, the Head of Environmental and Operational Services informed Members that the target saving from greater partnership working in Environmental Health was subject to agreement from Dartford Borough Council and there was a risk that this would not be delivered.

CCTV

Members discussed the proposed saving suggested by Cabinet for CCTV. The Chairman thanked the Members and officers involved in the CCTV Working Group for their investigation into how savings could be made within CCTV. The Chairman of the Working Group informed Members that his Committee had recommended a proposed reduction in CCTV operatives by two staff, as well as a series of options for increasing income. This was because any greater reduction in staff would result in the CCTV team being unable to achieve its current income targets, thus negating the saving or the continued provision of an out-of-hours service for the Council. The Working Group had felt that the reduction in staffing should be achieved through natural wastage.

A Member suggested that the Council should charge the police for access to its CCTV footage. The Head of Environmental and Operational Services informed Members that the Council was legally obliged to provide the police with its CCTV footage.

The Portfolio Holder for Safe Community informed Members that she was meeting with her counterpart in Tunbridge Wells to discuss options for generating extra income for the service.

Summer Programme

Members queried the Cabinet's proposed saving on the Summer Programme, given that the service had been used so widely in 2009 and was highly valued by families, young people and children. They felt that Cabinet should reconsider this saving.

Other Savings

Members discussed the other savings proposals which did not fall within their terms of reference. This discussion included suggestions to freeze parking charges, reduce the number of editions of In-Shape and charge the police for their use of the Argyle Road offices. The Head of Community Development informed Members that discussions on police funding for office space were being pursued as part of the negotiations for phase 2 of the joint working initiative. However, Members felt that these charges should begin before phase 2 was implemented.

Resolved: That Cabinet be recommended to:

- (a) demolish public conveniences which were not in use and which had no prospect of sale, so that money could be saved on business rates;
- (b) thoroughly investigate whether the West Kent Partnership was delivering value for money and if not, consider making further savings;
- (c) thoroughly investigate whether the funding provided to Applause Rural Touring provided value for money;
- (d) reconsider the amount of the savings proposal for Sencio Leisure, to ensure that this does not place too great a financial burden on them;
- (e) reduce the number of CCTV operatives by two and actively pursue the income sources proposed in the CCTV Working Group report;
- (f) reconsider the proposed saving to the Summer Programme; and
- (g) charge the police for their use of the Argyle Road offices.

Environment Select Committee (9 February 2010)

To Follow.

Cabinet (18 February 2010)

To Follow.

- d. CAPITAL PROGRAMME & ASSET MAINTENANCE 2010/13 (Cabinet – 18 February 2010)

To Follow.

e. CHRISTMAS PARKING (Cabinet – 19 November 2009)

In the absence of the Chairman, the Cabinet appointed Cllr Ramsay to chair the discussion of this item.

Members noted the requests from local traders to make parking free in the run-up to Christmas, to help boost trade in the District's town centres. Members noted that the cost to the Council would be £6,000 for each Saturday when parking was free. Members felt that it was important that the Council help local businesses as much as it could during the difficult economic environment.

Resolved: a) That free parking be provided in all car parks and on-street parking areas throughout the District for two Saturdays in December, these being the 12 and 19 December or as otherwise specified; and

b) that the estimated resultant loss of parking income and additional expenditure incurred (which totals £6,000 per Saturday) be funded from supplementary estimates.