

20 March 2018 at 7.00 pm

Conference Room, Argyle Road, Sevenoaks

Tabled: 20/3/18



# Legal & Democratic Services Advisory Committee

## Supplementary Agenda

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| 4. Update from Portfolio Holder | (Pages 1 - 2) |         |

If you wish to obtain further factual information on any of the agenda items listed above, please contact the named officer prior to the day of the meeting.

Should you need this agenda or any of the reports in a different format, or have any other queries concerning this agenda or the meeting please contact Democratic Services on 01732 227000 or [democratic.services@sevenoaks.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@sevenoaks.gov.uk).

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## Legal and Democratic Services – Portfolio Holder report

**20<sup>th</sup> March 2018**

The last quarter has been particularly successful for Legal & Democratic Services and I would like to highlight 3 distinct achievements:

- Firstly, the democratic services team won the prestigious **Civic Office of the Year Award 2018** for its work supporting the Council's Chairman. Awarded by the National Association of Civic Officers this award proves yet again that it is possible to do more with less providing you have the right people and the right business culture. The Civic Team, led by Vanessa Etheridge, have exemplified "**the Sevenoaks difference**", namely the provision of a more efficient and responsive service through innovation, dedication and the creation of a "Civic Team" approach. Most councils have a dedicated member of staff or a team supporting their Mayor or Chairman as, indeed, we had in Sevenoaks prior to 2011. Following a restructure this work has been carried out by the Democratic Services team for a number of years on top of their primary role which is running, organising and documenting all Council meetings. In addition, unlike most other councils, the Chairman's role is promoted so that he/she is a true community champion attending some 300 events in any given year. With support and advice from this Committee, the role and support for the Chairman has been further developed. Officers have focussed on a "Civic Team" approach and on digital first, in line with our paperless office aspirations. Making the Chairman's diary available to Portfolio, Deputy Portfolio Holders and the Chief Officer for Communities and Business ensures that the Chairman's work is supported by everyone in the council. An additional "ward" column has recently been added to the Chairman's diary to show what ward each event is taking place in, and the "Civic Team" are working on an automatic notification system so that individual members are notified when the Chairman will be in their ward so that ward members too can support the Chairman's work.
  
- On 24<sup>th</sup> January 2018 saw the launch of the second **Every Step Counts, well-being health walk in West Kingsdown** supported by the Chairman, former BBC newsreader, Peter Sissons and Kent Sports Trust. The walks are aimed at those recovering from illness and/or those who through age or lack of fitness are unable to tackle more strenuous exercise. Volunteers have already come forward to start one in Swanley and Brasted as soon as the weather improves and walk training for the walk leaders has been organised. This is proving to be a very successful formula and delivers on one of the 5 additional Equalities actions we set the Council at last June's Legal & Democratic Advisory Committee.
  
- On the 5<sup>th</sup> February 2018 we welcomed the **Rt Hon Sajid Javid, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government to Sevenoaks District Council** and showcased our achievements and plans for the future as the 2017/2018 Council of the Year. Prior to the visit Mr Javid launched this year's e-safety project ahead of National Safer Internet Day, **#DigitalSunsetChallenge**, at Sevenoaks Primary School. The visit which took some time to set up clearly

inspired the Secretary of State as he made a special mention of our achievements here in Sevenoaks when addressing the District Councils Network later that week!

### **Other work**

Member Training – the MT programme continues to be well received by members. The next training session is on the 5<sup>th</sup> June 2018 and will cover Local Government Finance. Please try and support these sessions as they were asked for by Members and are being provided by Officers out of their own time.

Quercus 7 – work is continuing on a site which matches the investment criteria. All being well this will form our first independent property investment in the next quarter.

Affordable Housing Company – work is continuing to test the viability of an affordable housing company following on from the advice given by this committee last December. I am receiving regular updates and my next meeting on this topic, when I hope all information will be available to make a final decision, is on the 5<sup>th</sup> April 2018.

Democratic Team – on the 21<sup>st</sup> February we welcomed Holly Phillips-White to be our new democratic services officer. She has made a good start and is now assisting Vanessa and Charlie following a particularly difficult period of reduced staffing levels.

Legal Team – the new Trainee Solicitor role has been filled by Farah Mahomed who has also made a good start and assists Kate Jardine (who has also joined the Council as a full-time employee) with High Court work.

Licensing – the licensing partnership continues to perform well and contact is still on-going with re LB Bromley joining the LP.

### **\*\*\*\* STOP PRESS \*\*\* National Democracy Week 2 – 8<sup>th</sup> July 2018 \*\*\***

The Government has recently announced that the inaugural National Democracy Week which is due to take place from 2<sup>nd</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> July 2018 to promote democratic engagement and inclusion in the democratic process. The week beginning the 2<sup>nd</sup> July has been chosen as it will mark the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act 1928 which gave women a truly equal right to vote. Central Government would like to see at least one event take place in every local authority across the Country to promote the importance of electoral registration and for as many Members of Parliament and local Councillors to speak in Schools – perhaps on the Friday when Members of Parliament are in their Constituencies.