

SERVICES SELECT COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2012 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Davison (Chairman)

Cllrs. Abraham, Mrs. Ayres, Ayres, Ball, Mrs. Dibsdall, Edwards-Winser, Fittock, Mrs. George, Horwood, Mrs. Parkin, Pett, Piper, Raikes, Scholey and Miss. Stack

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Brown, Neal and Towell

Cllrs. Mrs. Davison and Mrs. Hunter were also present.

21. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Services Select Committee held on 25 September 2012 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

22. Declarations of interest

No new declarations of interest were made.

23. Formal Response from the Cabinet following matters referred by the Committee and/or requests from the Performance and Governance Committee:

a) Universal Credit In-Depth Scrutiny Board – Findings (Cabinet 11.10.12 Minute 38)

Members noted the response. The Committee congratulated the Working Group on all their hard work.

24. Actions from the Previous Meeting

There were none.

25. Future Business, the Work Plan 2011/12 and the Forward Plan

Members noted the Work Plan. The Chairman advised that the Annual I.T. Update would be moved forward to be considered at the April 2013 meeting.

Members discussed the membership of the Under Occupation of Social Housing Working Group

Resolved: That Cllr. Horwood step down and be formally replaced by Cllr. Miss. Stack.

A Member asked whether it would be possible to carry out a scrutiny review of rural broadband. The Director of Corporate Resources, Deputy Chief Executive, advised that this area fell more within the terms of reference of the Environment Select Committee. He also reported that a number of Officers and the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) had already carried out a lot of work on this subject. There was a considerable amount of funding available. Councillors Ayres, Edwards-Winsor and Miss. Stack expressed an interest in being part of any joint working group formed.

Action 1: The Chairman to discuss with the Chairman of Environment Select Committee and the Director of Corporate Resources, Deputy Chief Executive, a possible joint scrutiny approach .

26. Kent Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy: Refresh of Policies

The Committee considered a report which advised that the first Kent Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy (KJMWMs) was adopted in 2007 by all thirteen Councils that made up the Kent Waste Partnership. The main targets outlined in the 2007 Strategy were actioned one year early in 2011/12 and it was therefore felt appropriate to refresh the Strategy.

Paul Vanston, the Kent Waste Partnership Manager gave a presentation setting out the key points of the report, and advising that it was just a strategy or guide. The Chairman pointed out that the strategy referred to household or 'municipal' waste and was not concerned with business waste. In response to questions, Members were advised that the Allington Quarry Waste Management Facility had more capacity than the rest of Kent could provide and as a private facility needed to make a profit to remain viable, and could provide power for 34,000 households.

Members expressed concern over the new conditions imposed at Kent County Council's (KCC) recycling centres. The Head of Environmental advised that this had been discussed at the Environment Select Committee in September where he had been tasked with liaising with KCC and reporting back to the Committee in May 2013 on the impact of the review once it had had time to bed down. It was noted that this was separate to the Strategy under consideration, but in light of Members' comments Mr. Vanston undertook to contact KCC the next day and convey the concerns expressed.

Referring to the work undertaken with the packing industries. Mr. Vanston advised that work here had been quite successful and packaging was getting lighter. An adverse effect of this was that dry recycling rates then came under pressure.

Resolved: That it be RECOMMENDED to Cabinet that the refreshed Kent Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy objectives and policies 2012/13-2020/21, be adopted.

27. Revenues, Benefits, Audit and Anti-Fraud Partnership Update Report

The Group Manager, Financial Services, presented the report which provided an update on the partnership between Sevenoaks District Council and Dartford Borough Council for

the delivery of Revenues, Benefits, Audit and Anti-Fraud Services. It also set out the current and future challenges facing the service, and the action being taken to address them. He advised that the staff within the partnership had successfully built a 'one team' culture resulting in it being difficult to tell which authority an individual was employed by as all staff completed work relating to both authorities. With reference to performance indicators he reported that the average number of days to process new claims was currently in the mid 30s; and average number of days to process change events was currently 19 and improving.

In response to questions concerning bailiffs. The Director of Corporate Resources, Deputy Chief Executive, advised that there was a cost to the bailiffs that was recovered by the claimants being chased. The Council was as sympathetic as it could be and maintained some level of understanding throughout the process, however one reason collections were effective was that the Council was known to pursue. With regards to bailiff behaviour, if anyone had a complaint they should first contact the Bailiffs and copy the Council in. If the issue was not addressed the Council could then follow it up. The bailiff company employed by the Council had a robust code of conduct and if there were examples of unacceptable behaviour these would be taken very seriously. He advised that there was generic data available on complaints about the bailiffs that could be shared.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

28. Localising Support for Council Tax - Verbal Update

The Group Manager, Financial Services, updated the Committee in light of a recent Government announcement. Currently council tax benefit was a national scheme administered by local authorities but funded by central government. From 1 April 2013 each authority would have their own local scheme. Government funding would be 10% less than present. Due to the high number of pensioners in the district. The 10% saving would be needed to be spread over the remaining 48% of claimants. Town and parish councils would not be affected.

The proposed scheme presented to Cabinet in July included a standard deduction of 18.5% on all non-pensioner claimants (i.e. if an individual currently receives 100% benefit, under the proposal they would receive an 81.5% discount.)

The Director of Corporate Resources had been negotiating with Kent County Council to reduce the proposal from 18.5% to 15% by the second home discount being abolished and checking the single person discount eligibility.

On 16 October 2012 the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) announced an additional £100 million in funding for councils to help support them in developing local council tax support schemes. This would be a voluntary transition grant for councils who set a scheme with a standard deduction of no more than 8.5% on all non-pensioner claimants. The £100 million would be insufficient to cover the gap in funding and it was likely to be only for one year. It was currently being investigated whether Kent could make a bid and share the funding.

Action 2: That an update be provided at each Committee meeting.

A Member queried the cost of collection. The Group Manager, Financial Services, advised that the practicality and cost of chasing low amounts was being looked at. In response to questions the Committee was further advised that the Government was not giving the option of amending the single person discount. An exercise is currently taking place to check the eligibility of people claiming the single person discount using credit reference agencies were a starting point.

29. 2013/14 Budget & Review of Service Plans

The Committee considered a report which set out proposals for updates to the 2013/14 budget within the existing framework of the 10-year budget and four year savings plan. The report presented some service changes that had been identified by managers and that needed to be considered before finalising the budget for 2013/14. At this stage the Committee was not being asked to find savings, but if needed a report may be brought back to the Committee in January 2013 asking Members to consider areas where savings could be made.

Members noted the additional tabled information in relation to Appendix C, and considered Appendix D to the report. In response to Members' questions concerning Human Resources (HR) (SCIA31), the Director of Corporate Resources, Deputy Chief Executive, reported that it had been the intention that shared staff would have access to the HR staff where they were situated. In effect this had not happened as the HR for the two Councils were arranged in different ways, Dartford Borough Council's (DBC) being outsourced.

With reference to Property Services (SCIA6,7) the Head of Property Services advised that there was an element of possible unrealised additional income not provided for as there were six desks available. However without substantial redesign of the layout, it could only be let to a public or quasi public body.

It was also noted that the growth item for Housing Homeless (SCIA2) was no longer required following additional work by officers.

Resolved: That the comments above be noted and referred to the Cabinet meeting on 6 December 2012.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.56 PM

CHAIRMAN