

## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2017 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Brown (Chairman)

Cllrs. Ball, Clack, Hogg and Purves

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. London, McArthur and Searles

Cllrs. Firth and Scholey were also present.

10. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 4 July 2017, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

11. Declarations of Interest

No additional declarations of interest were made.

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

There were none.

13. Actions from Previous Meeting

Members discussed the actions and requested that the definition of 'abandoned vehicles' be included on the website. Members expressed concern that the current vacant positions in the Council was at 25. Members requested that a breakdown of the staff vacancies and the impact on services.

*Action 1: For Chief Officer Corporate Services to provide a greater breakdown of vacant positions including, the impact on services, length of vacancies, type of roles and full time equivalent.*

*Action 2: For Communications and Consultations Manager to include the definition of abandoned vehicles on the Council's website.*

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

The Chairman welcomed Jim Lusby, Acting Chief Executive of Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust and Angela Gallagher, Chief Operating Officer to the meeting who gave a presentation overview of Tunbridge Wells Hospital with their recent successes and future challenges. Members were advised that over 5,000

staff were employed, providing specialist care to over 560,000 people living in Kent and East Sussex. Cancer services were mostly based at Maidstone Hospital. There were three main divisions of services: urgent care; planned care; and women, children and sexual health.

Members were advised that the performance for key standards included: quality and safety, activity, finance and workforce. Key performances in 2017 comprised of meeting the agreed 4 hours A&E wait time with increase attendances and emergency admissions. In regards to Cancer times, there had been continued improvement on the 2 week wait and 62-day standard. Other recent developments and achievements included an increase demand for elderly patients and the ‘frailty service’ provided at Maidstone. It was hoped that service would also be provided at Tunbridge Wells but space was an issue. The virtual fracture clinics had reduced the number of patients coming in for a check-up by 25%.

Listening into Action was a new programme to involve staff with improvements that were restricting staff such as faulty computers. Changes were being made to better empower staff so that they could have the power to make changes and make improvements. The response so far was positive.

Challenges and risks included, capacity and patient flow, increase in patient numbers, change in acuity and age profile, pressure on in-patient areas, staffing and finance.

In response to questions from the Chairman, Members were advised that as part of the hospital’s strategic objectives to be a caring organisation training courses were provided. Certain care levels were expected from staff and to gauge the level of care users were provided with patient experience forms and were regularly requested to be completed so that care could be improved.

Members asked questions into staffing levels and were advised that staffing was constantly being reviewed. Recently, there had been an increase of beds provided at the hospital and therefore an increase in staff. When recruitment took place, this had to have a creative approach to be an attractive employer. In regards to recent economy changes there had been some unsettlement among staff and more could be done to provide reassurances to staff. The current nurse vacancy rate was at 12 - 15%. It was normally expected that a 5 - 8% rate was tolerable. It was preferable to have own employed staff, rather than bank staff as it was more effective and efficient.

In responding to questions, the Acting Chief Executive advised that the lack of parking affected both patients and staff and the use of public transport was encouraged. Part of the problem was the increase in patients that was higher than expected 10 years ago. Parking had increased at Maidstone hospital.

A Member asked whether a proportion of A&E cases could seek help elsewhere. The Acting Chief Executive advised that in general terms it was not a huge issue and rather it was educating the public before they arrived and encouraged the use of NHS Choices to deal with minor ailments.

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The Acting Chief Executive was asked about waiting times with urgent referrals and he explained that it was dependent on the category of care, complexity and demand. If it was an urgent referral it was expected that care would be 6 and 8 weeks however this was less for cancer referrals.

In response to comments the Acting Chief Executive advised that a lot more could be done to eliminate the waste.

The Chairman thanked the Acting Chief Executive of Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust and The Chief Operating Officer for their attendance.

### **15. Performance Monitoring**

Members considered the report which summarised performance across the Council to the end of September 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 Holders invited to the Scrutiny Committee meeting.

Members discussed the performance indicators and were concerned that the majority of red indicators were due to staffing levels.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

### **16. Questions to the Portfolio Holder For Finance**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented a report updating the Committee on recent achievements and challenges ahead. He highlighted that the budget was continuing to be the council remained financially self-sufficient. Concerns were around negative Revenue Support Grant (RSG) and what will happen with 100% business rates retention and some more challenges when Universal Credit starts in Summer 2018. The Internal Audit performance on the Audit Plan was positive.

The Portfolio Holder responded to Members' questions.

The Portfolio Holder explained that the income from the current properties owned by the Council was meeting the budget expectations. Presently properties on the market were not meeting the Council's criteria and it was hoped that some of the current sites owned by the Council would shortly be redeveloped. Concerns were raised at the lack of progress with the sites owned in Swanley and Members requested further details on these properties.

*Action 3: For Chief Officer Communities and Businesses to advise on the number of properties purchased and not developed; and the purchasing criteria.*

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A Member raised concern for purchasing properties outside the District. Members enquired about the impact of Government possibly removing the facility to borrow to fund investments outside of the District. The Portfolio Holder advised that nothing outside of the District had yet been purchased and the £25 million that Council had agreed to allocate to the property investment fund was not affected as yet and further details were awaited and updates would be provided to Cabinet when more information was known.

A Member questioned what was happening with the 100% business rates retention. The Portfolio Holder explained that the Council had submitted a joint application for the pilot scheme and it was hoped to hear whether the Council had been successful by the end of December 2017.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for his attendance.

### **17. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Legal & Democratic Services**

The Portfolio Holder for Legal and Democratic Services updated the Committee on recent achievements within her portfolio. She highlighted that the Legal Team was the smallest in Kent but had recently achieved the continuation of their Lexcel accreditation and high profile injunctions and prosecution. Democratic Services were currently a team of two and by the end of the municipal year would have serviced at least 84 committee meetings. Agenda deadlines had continued to be met as well as supporting the Chairman and dealing with day to day enquiries.

The Licensing team had met their targets with the exception of the issuing of one temporary event notice which missed its deadline by a day due to the Officer's working hours. Discussions were taking place regarding the London Borough of Bromley joining the Licensing Partnership.

The Elections Team had delivered the County and National elections with no significant complaints.

Future challenges included staffing within the Legal and Democratic Services Team. Other challenges were also around Quercus 7 and ensuring that investments were made in the right properties. Nine investment opportunities had been investigated and two remain active. Other investment opportunities were being investigated and this included looking at joint ventures in the purchasing of housing. Members were advised that a meeting for an affordable housing company would take place in December for Members to examine the business case.

The Portfolio Holder responded to Member's questions.

A Member raised concern at the Council setting up an affordable housing company. The Portfolio Holder explained that it would only be set up if a sound business case could be proven. The housing would be affordable at 80% or above the market rate for those people who met the qualifying criteria. There would be some costs for administering the company. She advised that it would not be modelled as 'right to buy.'

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Members discussed possible development sites and noted that Economic and Community Development were looking at sites owned by the Council in more detail. The Portfolio Holder advised that conversations were also taking place with Almshouses charities and one particular issue was that some areas of land were protected.

A Member asked whether rates would be fixed for the investment policy. Members were advised that this would be addressed before each decision but the rates were fixed for the full period of borrowing.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for her attendance.

### **18. Work Plan**

The work plan was discussed. The following changes were agreed:

- Kent County Council's Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education be invited to the meeting on 8 February 2018 to focus on Secondary Schools,
- Citizen's Advice Bureaux's be invited to 24 April 2017 meeting, and
- West Kent CCG be invited to attend the summer 2018 meeting.

Members discussed subjects to undertake for in-depth scrutiny. The Chairman proposed that due to concerns for staffing levels in the Council that an in-depth scrutiny group look into staffing levels including rates of pay, succession planning, diversity and sickness.

Resolved: That

- a) an in-depth scrutiny working group be set up to look at staffing levels within the Council
- b) the working group consist of Cllrs: Brown (Chairman), Ball, Hogg and Purves.

The Chairman thanked Democratic Services for their efficiencies whilst being short staffed and for statutory deadlines still continuing to be met.

**THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9.16 PM**

**CHAIRMAN**