

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2018 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Brown (Chairman)

Cllr. London (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Clack, Hogg, Lindsay, London, McArthur, Purves, Reay and Searles

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Ball and Kitchener

Cllrs. Hogarth and Piper were also present.

19. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 31 October 2017, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

20. Declarations of Interest

No additional declarations of interest were made.

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

There were none.

22. Actions from the Previous Meeting

Members discussed the actions detailed and were advised that since publication of the agenda papers, some posts had been filled whilst others had been made vacant. Members were advised that at the last meeting payroll statistics had been provided and included posts that were still purposely vacant. In regards to full time equivalent posts that were waiting to be filled, there were 12 vacancies out of approximately 340 staff.

Members discussed the wording on the Council's website and requested that wording to advise that if a vehicle has no tax or insurance then it is abandoned and would be removed.

Action 1: For Communications and Consultations Manager to include on the website, 'if a vehicle has no tax or insurance then it is abandoned and would be removed.'

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Members were advised that a meeting would shortly be taking place with the Leader to discuss the sites in Swanley. Members were concerned that the site had been left vacant and the current state of the site. Members requested further information regarding the site.

Action 2: For Chief Officer Communities and Business to advise:

- *The timescales for the feasibility study taking place*
 - *Why it had taken so long and*
 - *What was going to happen to the site*
- and for a press release to advise residents what was happening with the site.*

The Chairman took the opportunity to ask Members view on audio recording the Scrutiny Committee meetings, to provide the public with the availability to listen to what was discussed, particularly in regards to the scrutiny of external bodies. Some Members raised concern that it could stifle debate.

Action 3: For Chief Officer Corporate Services to look into the costings and ability for recording meetings in the Conference room and to review what further Committee approval would be required if this were to be progressed

23. Performance Monitoring

Members considered the report which summarised performance across the Council to the end of December 2017. Members were asked to consider 6 performance indicators which were performing at 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 noted that a number of red indicators were due to staffing levels and sickness and that the figures were slowly improving.

Members discussed the percentage of appeals against planning application refusal dismissed and were advised that that only 18 had been upheld and the figure, as a percentage did not reflect the small amount that had been upheld. Members requested further information regarding the appeals.

Action 4: For the Chief Planning Officer to advise on the percentage of appeals that were allowed as a result of the Development Control Committee overturning an Officer recommendation to approve.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

24. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Economic and Community Development

The Portfolio Holder for Economic and Community Development presented a report updating the Committee on the recent achievements and work undertaken. He highlighted the success of the Visitor Economy Study which was undertaken by a volunteer; the gang's multi-agency working group; and the work undertaken for emergency planning.

The Portfolio Holder responded to Members questions.

The Portfolio Holder advised that he was proud of the charitable work undertaken by SupaJam based in Swanley who provided educational services to young people who had been excluded from mainline schools. Due to its success a second site would be opening up in Canterbury and the charity had received the High Sheriff's award. The charity worked with the young people to help them gain qualifications and into employment. The Council helped facilitate the building for the charity.

The Portfolio Holder explained that the gangs working group was a District wide multiagency working group, who looked for gang activity in the area, however in the District there were no organised gangs. The Covent site in Swanley has had long term discussions with Landlords and if other community problems arose contact should be made with the Community Safety Unit or Portfolio Holder to advise.

A Member queried whether an outside PR firm had been approached to publicise Sevenoaks rather than Kent as a whole with social media. Members were advised that there was a strategy to encourage more people to the District but the Visit Kent site was not always user friendly for uploading information in regards to the District.

The Portfolio Holder was asked whether there was a need for a Premier Inn with two other hotels in close proximity. The Portfolio Holder advised that one of the hotels catered for larger events whereas the Premier Inn was aimed at a different market with good forecast occupancy rates. In general, there was a need for more accommodation in the District.

A Member enquired whether more work could be undertaken with the Town Council. The Portfolio Holder explained that the District Council support the Town and gave an example of the Stag theatre. However, it was important for the experts of the area to continue the work and the Town Partnership were working together to solve recruitment problems for shops in the town. Members were advised that the cross portfolio working was very successful.

The Chairman made a request that figures were provided for under occupancy of shops within Sevenoaks Town.

Action 5: For Chief Officer Communities and Business to provide figures for under occupancy of shops within Sevenoaks Town.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for his attendance.

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25. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Planning

The Portfolio Holder presented a report updating the Committee on recent achievements and challenges ahead since the report in July 2017. He highlighted that the department was successful and around 70% of applications were dismissed at appeal. There had been problems with recruiting a Team Leader for Enforcement and consideration was being given to the next steps. Building Control was now fully resourced and was working well. In regards to the New Local Plan a response rate of 30% had been received, with a key view to protect the green belt. The second tranche of the local list concluded on 10 January with help from the Sevenoaks Society.

The Portfolio Holder responded to Members' questions.

The Portfolio Holder advised that the Brownfield Land register was required by government and there was more brownfield land than was originally thought, but much of it had already been built on.

A Member queried who was eligible to receive CIL. Members were advised that the CIL was a 'top up' rather than part funding infrastructure. Parish and Town Councils would receive 25% of the CIL contribution. The bids were for infrastructure which did not have to be localised but rather for the community, where 75% would be spent on health, education or roads. It was expected that the Transport study for Swanley would be in draft form by March or April.

A Member questioned what staffing support had been provided for the Local Lists. Members were advised that administrative support had been provided to the Sevenoaks Society but the gathering of data had been carried out by the local community.

Members discussed staffing and recruitment within the Development Management department. Members were advised that the two new members of staff within the Enforcement Team had customer services and statistic experience but both had worked within the Planning Team before being appointed to the new roles. Training was being undertaken and this would provide a starting point for a career path within planning. In response to further questions the Chief Planning Officer advised that exit interviews were provided and in the majority planners were leaving to work within the private sector for more money. Historically salaries were lower, however there were other benefits on offer to staff.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for his attendance.

26. Work Plan

The work plan was discussed and noted that Cllr. Lowe - Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health would be attending the meeting on 17 July 2018. Kent Police, Sencio Leisure and Cllr. Scholey - Portfolio Holder for Finance would be invited to attend the 13 November 2018 meeting.

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THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.54 PM

CHAIRMAN

