

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2020 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Brown (Chairman)

Cllrs. Ball, Barnes, Kitchener, Mrs. Morris, Pender and Purves

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Firth, Layland and London

Cllrs. McArthur and Piper were also present.

18. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 12 November 2019 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to minute 16 paragraph 1, line 3 be amended to read as ‘the Community Safety theme and privacy impact within the Council plan.’

19. Declarations of Interest

Councillors Brown and Barnes declared for reasons of transparency that they were Members of Sencio Leisure Centres.

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

There were none.

21. Actions from the Previous Meeting

There were none.

CHANGE IN AGENDA ITEM ORDER

With the Committees agreement the Chairman brought forward consideration of agenda items 6, 7 and 8.

22. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health presented his report detailing the Council’s priorities, overview of housing within the District, and recent achievements and challenges ahead.

The Portfolio Holder advised that within his report he had included additional statistics which provided a comparison to neighbouring boroughs regarding housing

and homelessness. Within more rural locations there were Alms-houses and some had been upgraded. Looking forward it was hoped that this would be extended further. There was a Private Landlord Forum and it was proposed to set up an Alms-house Forum. There would be a Registered Social Landlord Conference later this year.

This year there would be 220 affordable homes built, the most that had been built in the District in any one year so far.

Future challenges ahead included the ongoing provision of housing stock within the District. This need was particularly acute because of the increase in the number of approaches, due to the increasing Homelessness Reduction Act. 80 people were currently homeless. To date 52 units were provided by housing associations, but with 80 people currently homeless the only additional available accommodation was out of the District.

In response to questions Members were advised that following the housing needs survey, there was an understanding of what was needed in the District, focussing on 1 and 2 bedroom properties. Members were also advised that, in addition to those already purchased, further purchases through Quercus Housing were being investigated anymore housing stock was needed especially for affordable housing rather than private or social rented housing.

The Portfolio Holder went on to explain that, unfortunately there was often a conflict with planning and housing and with 97% of the District in the Green Belt. Members discussed whether consideration was given to building up into airspace rather than locating new land.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Portfolio Holder responded that until Quercus Housing the Council had not had their own housing stock. Quercus Housing now had 9 properties but viability was part of the problem. Developers were required to provide up to 40% contribution to affordable housing.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Piper and the Housing and Health team.

23. West Kent Police

The Chairman welcomed Chief Inspector Jon Kirby, Sevenoaks District Commander of Kent Police to the meeting, who gave an overview of the levels of crime within the District.

Chief Inspector Kirby gave an overview of the statistics of reported crime for the year April 2019-December 2019. In Sevenoaks the number of vehicle thefts had increased, in particular in relation to catalytic converters which had seen a rise of 21.7%, with 75 incidents being reported. This increase was seen at national and local levels due to the value of the metal, however good progress was being made locally and arrests had been made.

It was reported that there was a 75% increase of shoplifting being reported which was 205 incidents. There was usually a rise in shoplifting cases around Christmas.

Scrutiny Committee - 30 January 2020

Chief Inspector Kirby reported that there had been a reduction in residential burglaries and compared to last year the figure was down by 14.7% which was a reduction of 84 cases. Other positives included that rapes cases and violence against the person had also seen a reduction.

Members were encouraged to report crime as the figures were recorded and this helped resources to be designated appropriately and for transparency.

It was reported that funding levels were increasing and this would result in an additional 139 staff being recruited, including PCSOs, Police Officers, Community Liaison Officers, cyber specialists and forensic officers.

The Chief Inspector advised that the number of calls received to the 101 non-emergency number in 2019 had decreased. In general the calls were being answered better and the number of abandoned calls was reducing. In response to a question, Members were advised that if a 999 call was abandoned, investigations were carried out and the number would be called back if it was safe to do so. There were also successes with the live chat service and frequently asked questions.

Concerns regarding knife crime were raised, particularly with the District being so close to London. Chief Inspector Kirby responded to concerns advising that the Police nationally were taking a proactive approach to knife crime, working closely with cross-border forces including the British Transport Police. Work also with schools was being undertaken to ensure safety of pupils and staff.

In response to questions the Committee was advised that the strategy going forwards was to be more visible within communities. This included an increase in PCSOs, polished neighbourhood policing, attendance at coffee mornings and working with parish councils.

It was queried whether CCTV contributed to solving crime. Members were advised that the use of CCTV was very useful as it could be the difference between someone walking away or being charged as the footage was able to show someone's whereabouts and the times, especially with quality of digital images improving over the years incidents were more easily identifiable.

In response to further questions, Members were informed that regular visits took place at nail salons, car washes and similar business to ensure that there were no modern slavery issues. This was a proactive approach but there was reliance on the public to be the eyes and ears and report any concerns.

Chief Inspector Kirby agreed to send more details regarding the use of CCTV and also modern slavery to the Committee.

The Chairman thanked Chief Inspector Kirby for his attendance.

24. Sencio Financial Report

Resolved: That, under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that likely disclosure of exempt information was involved as defined by Schedule 12A paragraph 3 (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)).

The Chairman welcomed Jane Parish, the Chief Executive of Sencio Leisure to the meeting. The Chief Officer Communities & Business presented the report which set out more recent financial analysis of Sencio, following the loan of £600,000 in 2017.

Members discussed the confidential report and asked questions of clarification of the Chief Executive of Sencio Leisure.

Members thanked the Chief Executive for her attendance at the meeting.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

It was moved by the Chairman that the public no longer be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of the rest of the Scrutiny Committee agenda.

Resolved: That the public no longer be excluded from the meeting for the consideration of agenda items 5, 8 and 9.

25. Performance Report

Members considered the report which summarised performance across the Council as at November 2019. Members were asked to consider 6 performance indications which were performing at 10% or more below their target with a commentary from Officers explaining the reasons and detailing any plans to improve performance. The report also provided key performance indicators relating to the Portfolio Holder in attendance.

Members discussed the Performance indicator for the number of missed waste collections and whether there was too much focus on a very small number missed out of a large number of permits. Members requested an update on fly tipping as the commentary mentioned a significant amount of industrial and construction waste had been reported. The sickness performance indicator was also discussed and noted that the figure was effected by long term sickness. Members queried if long and short term sickness performance could be provided. Officers advised this information could be provided.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

26. In-depth Scrutiny, CCTV Working Group Interim update

Scrutiny Committee - 30 January 2020

Cllr Pender updated the committee on the CCTV Working Group, advising that they had held their first meeting and were data gathering. Experts in the field of CCTV would also be invited to attend and it was queried whether travel expenses would be paid for.

Action: For Chief Officer Finance & Trading to investigate travel reimbursement.

Resolved: That the update be noted.

27. Work Plan

The work plan was noted and agreed for the CCTV final report and for KCC Cabinet Member for Education be invited to the July 2020 meeting.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9.07 PM

CHAIRMAN