

IMPROVEMENT & INNOVATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2022 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Fleming (Chairman)

Cllr. Bayley (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Andrews, Bayley, Bonin, Hogarth, McGregor, Nelson, Pett and Waterton

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Abraham, Clayton and Eyre

12. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Improvement & Innovation Advisory Committee held on 23 June 2022 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

13. Declarations of interest

There were none.

14. Actions form previous meeting

There were none.

15. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder, and Chairman, explained that his update was concerned with developments that were covered more fully in Item 7 - Capital Schemes Programme Update, and thus moved to the next item.

16. Referral from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none.

17. Leader Programme Closure Report

The Leader Project Officer presented the report on the closure of the LEADER programme. The national programme was due to end this year, and the Council had been managing the closure of the West Kent program. The West Kent programme had been awarded £1.8 million, and had gained £2.7 million in match funding.

He advised the Committee that lessons learned from the LEADER programme would inform how future rural funding systems would be managed locally. This would

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involve a local-led decision making body drawn from the private, public, and the third sector, and a simple application process for smaller projects.

He then gave a presentation on some of the successfully funded projects.

In response to questions, the Strategic Head for Commercial and Property outlined the proposed application process for the future Rural England Prosperity Fund. He advised the Committee that although administration of the fund would be shared across West Kent, the funding the Council received would be ring-fenced for projects in the District.

He further outlined the scrutiny processes for the LEADER programme. All claims were conducted in stages, and evidence was required for each stage. A site visit was also conducted for each scheme to ensure funds were spent appropriately. The Committee discussed the ways in which the LEADER programme was publicised, and the importance of Local Action Groups in advertising and delivering grants.

Resolved: That

- a) the findings of the report and the on-going auditing requirements regarding post-payment monitoring and file retention, be noted;
- b) the 2014 LEADER programme's successful awarding of £1,812,550 of grant funding to rural businesses in West Kent, which in turn leveraged over £4.5m of investment into the sub-region's economy, be noted; and
- c) the Government's awarding of Rural England Prosperity Funding to Sevenoaks District Council, and the Council's plan to apply the good practices learnt from the LEADER Programme and build on its Legacy, be noted.

18. Capital Schemes Programme Update

The Strategic Head for Commercial and Property presented the report and updated the Committee on the Council's Capital Schemes.

The White Oak Leisure Centre car park was completed, and the Council were in the process of finalising management agreements prior to its public opening. The project had hit its key milestones within schedule. The White Oak Residential scheme involved modern methods of construction and further detailed design work would be undertaken.

Further feasibility and design work was being undertaken for Farmstead Drive, with another public consultation envisaged at the end of 2022. Comments from the public consultation in April 2022 were built on to produce the current plan.

The Otford Road development scheme was focused on providing additional employment-use land, following feedback from local agents, Locating Kent, and the Economic Development Team. Work on the feasibility of a business park for small and medium sized enterprises was underway.

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The Committee discussed the availability of amenity spaces within the District and the impact upon these by the Council's Capital Schemes.

Resolved: That the Council's progress in establishing and delivering a 10 year capital schemes programme that would generate new homes, regenerate the District's town centres, improve the public realm and provide new civic amenities, which promote health and well-being, and support the District's economy, be noted.

19. Meeting Point Update Report

The Strategic Head for Commercial and Property presented the report, which updated members on the 27 - 37 High Street development. They heard that construction of the site was on track for completion this year, to be opened in December. A draft business plan was being refined and the Hub Manager had been appointed.

The Committee discussed the Meeting Point and the risk that a business centre may alienate the community from the space. The Meeting Point Hub Manager explained that community support and engagement was a central focus of the development, and that the space was designed to be multifunctional.

Resolved: That the progress in the delivery of the Meeting Point project be noted.

20. Customer Insights Update

The Head of Information & Customer Solutions gave a presentation to update the Committee on the Customer Insights team. The Customer Solutions team had seen a sustained increase in demand for its services without an increase in its resources.

She outlined the AGILE approach the team was taking to provide the best service for this increased demand. It was based around constant feedback and evolution to improve service, and emphasised low code technology that was simple for customers and officers to use.

In response to questions, she assured Members that these projects were not a replacement for the phone line, but aimed to improve the quality of calls, by having more information easily available to both the public and the Customer Solutions team. She further explained that the Council was in the process of transitioning between communication systems, and that the issues Members described with contacting officers would be resolved once that was complete.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

21. Complaints & Local Government Ombudsman letter

The Head of Information & Customer Solutions presented the report, which updated Members on customer complaints and feedback for the year 2021/22. She outlined the three-stage complaints process the Council has, consisting of Stage 1,

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Stage 2, and referring the customer to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGO).

The year 2021/22 saw an increase in the number of Stage 1 complaints, which she explained was in line with the increase in customer demand. 83% of these complaints were deemed invalid. She further explained that the lessons learned from the upheld complaints were recorded and internally reported, to address any issues.

There were three Stage 2 complaints in the period, which reflected the Council's aim to resolve as many complaints as possible at Stage 1. The number of complaints to the LGO had increased compared to 2020/21, which she explained was due to customers complaining directly to them. Of the 24 complaints in the period, 5 were investigated, and 2 of those were closed after initial investigations.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

22. Work plan

The Work Plan was noted.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.14 PM

CHAIRMAN