

Improvement & Innovation Advisory Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2023 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Bayley (Chairman)

Cllr. Thornton (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Abraham, Clayton, G. Darrington, Malone, Manamperi,
James Morgan, Varley, Waterton and White

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Hogarth

Cllr. P. Darrington was also present.

12. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held 27 June 2023 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to Cllr Varley's apologies being included.

13. Declarations of interest

There were none.

14. Actions form previous meeting

There were none.

15. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder gave an update on the services within their portfolio. They gave a presentation on the West Kent Rural Grants scheme, funded by the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF). These were administered by the Council on behalf of the West Kent Partnership. The Council were among the first local authorities in the country to allocate their REPF funding, and were used as an example of best practice by the Kent Rural Partnership. 16 out of the 23 applications received by the Council had been approved, with £227,000 allocated out of the £501,000 available for the two years. The Committee heard a breakdown of the demographics of the applicant businesses.

The Council had established a free AI-powered telephone service to help people that have received a penalty charge notice from the Council understand whether they should appeal.

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There was an ongoing consultation regarding two cycling routes – one from Otford to Sevenoaks directly, and the other from Otford to Sevenoaks via Seal. A drop-in session for the direct route would be held at Bat & Ball Train Station on Friday 13 October. The drop-in session for the route via Seal would take place on 27 September. The route could include significant improvements along the A25.

The Community Grants Scheme was open until 2 November. Grants of up to £5000 could be given to local community organisations. Members were encouraged to direct any interested groups to the Council's website for further information.

The Council had been shortlisted for the invite-only Investors In People UK Platinum Employer of the Year award, placing the Council in the top 10 employers within its category. The Economic Development Team had been shortlisted for the Institute of Economic Development's Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) award. The finalists would be announced in November.

In response to a request from the Committee, officers would investigate the possibility of adding EDI training to the Member Training programme.

16. Referral from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none.

17. Digital Tourism update

The Strategic Head for Commercial & Property presented the report, which updated the committee on the performance of the Council's digital tourism schemes. The Visit Sevenoaks website received 4100 users from 28 April to 28 July, and their engagement time with the site was above average. A majority of users found the site organically, indicating that its search engine optimisation was performing well. The Visit Sevenoaks Instagram account supplemented the website, providing information on tourism activity across the district, and continued to grow. The site would be updated to reflect the Sevenoaks So Much More branding.

The Sevenoaks: So Much More brand was supported by its own website and three social media accounts, which were performing above-average in engagement. These platforms highlighted the Council's presence at business events, advertised competitions, and promoted the four pillars of the So Much More campaign.

The Council also worked in partnership with Visit Kent to promote the district on their website, blogs, and social media channels. These platforms had a significant following on both a local and international level. Analytics data would be continually monitored to inform future development opportunities and keep pace with trends.

In response to questions, the officer explained that the Economic Development Team worked in partnership with marketing consultants Pillory Barn to manage the Sevenoaks: So Much More brand. The consultants were contracted to host and

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provide content for the first year of the campaign, and the possibility of extending the contract was under review. The Visit Sevenoaks website was updated frequently, to ensure information remained contemporary, and Visit Kent were informed whenever changes occurred, though their site was not managed by the Council. The Council did not profit from the digital tourism campaigns; the aim was to promote the district to bring income and opportunities for local businesses.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

18. Draft Council Plan

The Assistant Chief Executive presented the report, which outlined the proposed Council Plan, which set out the council's priorities and targets for residents, businesses, and communities. The Plan has been developed by the Leader of the Council and Cabinet.. It was noted that the Plan would be presented to Cabinet on 9 November and Council on 14 November 2023.

In response to questions, the Leader explained that the priorities were broken down into portfolios, and that the council's financial aims were contained under the Finance & Investment portfolio. These portfolios held specific services, which would work under the portfolio's promises. These portfolio sections had been broken down into past successes and future goals to provide a holistic overview for residents.

The plan was a framework to demonstrate the council's intentions and aims to the public and form a standard to work to. Formal deliverables were better addressed in other schemes, which would work to the framework this plan would create. Specificity in this regard would be avoided to allow for flexibility in implementation. In response to a question the Leader explained that weekly waste collections are a priority and would be maintained for as long as possible.

Values from previous plans had been incorporated in places, as they were felt to be still relevant. The Plan, if approved, would be available to stakeholders across the district, would be included in the InShape magazine, and would be displayed on the Council's website, to effectively communicate the council's updated promises across the district.

Resolved: That

- a) The Advisory Committee's comments on the draft Council Plan be noted.
- b) That the draft Council Plan be considered by Cabinet.

19. Work plan

The Work Plan was noted. Members discussed ideas for the Budget 2024/25: Review of Service Dashboards and Service Change Impact Assessments (SCIAs) item at the next meeting, including moving committee meetings to the daytime, and assessing the overall IT spend.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.03 pm

CHAIRMAN