

Improvement & Innovation Advisory Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on 29 February 2024 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Bayley (Chairman)

Cllr. Thornton (Vice-Chairman)

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

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Clayton and Hogarth

Cllr. Paul Darrington was also present.

29. Minutes

In response to questions, the Portfolio Holder clarified that the proposed consultation for the Land East of High Street, Sevenoaks site had been delayed, to finalise costings and further consult with partners and Members. A full time plan would be presented to Members at a later date.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held 29 February 2024 be approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

30. Declarations of interest

There were none.

31. Actions from previous meeting

There were none.

32. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder gave an update on the services within her portfolio. 1st April 2024 would be the council's 50th anniversary. She invited past and present Members to share their memories of the council, and outlined the history of the council.

Barclays Eagles and Canterbury Christchurch University would join the Swanley Business Hub team, to provide business advice and support for small businesses and entrepreneurs. The Council had secured £1.5 million as part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, and the Economic Development Team were supporting two grant schemes, for rural and green development, to support local organisations. The council would jointly host the West Kent Expo at the River Centre on 14 March, with over 40

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exhibitors attending. The Expo would hold a programme of workshops, mentoring, and networking opportunities.

The Growth Gurus project would start in the new financial year. The project aimed to support young adults in Swanley that were not in education, employment, or training, and was funded through the government's Shared Prosperity Fund. In partnership with The Education People, the project would ensure young adults had access to training, wellbeing support, housing support, and life skill development opportunities through volunteer organisations and local businesses. A report on the project would be presented to the committee later in the year.

In response to questions, the Portfolio Holder explained that the council were working with Swanley town council and partnership organisations around the Bevan Place scheme. A hotel group had expressed interest in the site.

33. Referral from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none.

34. Digital Transformation and Customer Insights - 6 month update

The Head of Information and Customer Solutions presented the report, which updated the committee on the Customer Insights Team. The Council had faced increased service demand since the pandemic, which had outpaced staffing. The Customer Insights Team had worked to address this through reducing avoidable contact. 42 new digital forms had been produced, to give customers more opportunities for self-service where suitable, and information was presented in cleaner, simpler forms for customer convenience. Customer satisfaction remained at a high level, with 86% of customers reporting they were satisfied with the service in 2023.

In response to questions, the officer explained that digital transformation had not come at the expense of customers without digital access. The Council remained committed to serving customers in person, either by telephone or face to face, however the digital transformation work was enhancing the Council's service to customers, by enabling people who are willing and able to self-serve at times that are convenient to them. This in turn reduced overall contact, enabling officers to provide direct support to those that most need it.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

35. Communications Strategy

The Communications and Consultation Manager presented the report, which set out the Communications Strategy 2024-27. He gave a [presentation](#) to the committee, which outlined the six priorities within the Strategy. He provided three examples of the Council's campaign work.

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In response to questions, the officer outlined the communication activities surrounding the changes to black sack provision and a planned second tranche of communications before the recycling sack for life scheme was implemented. The most recent residents' surveys was discussed. The officer confirmed the survey was carried out in line with the Local Government Association's LG Inform methodology, and the 300 respondents were broadly representative of the District population as a whole.

Members discussed the Council's social media following, and how it compared with other councils. The Chairman noted that it compared favourably to those in Kent with similar populations. Members heard the Communications Team consisted of two officers. Members further discussed the Communications activities surrounding the Local Plan.

Members suggested that another priority be included in the Strategy, reflecting the Council's commitment to openness, honesty, and transparency in their communications. They further suggested that the phrase "unlike other councils" be removed from Appendix 1 of the Strategy.

Resolved: that

a) The following comments be considered by Cabinet:

- That another priority, encompassing the Council's commitment to openness, honesty, and transparency, be included
- That the phrase "unlike other councils" be removed from Appendix 1 of the Strategy

b) That it be recommended to Cabinet that the Communications Strategy 2024-27 be approved.

36. Work plan

The Work Plan was noted.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8:30PM

CHAIRMAN