

## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2017 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Brown (Chairman)

Cllr. London (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Ball, Clack, Hogg, Kitchener, Lindsay, McArthur, Purves, Reay and Searles

Cllrs. Hogarth and Piper were also present.

### 1. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2017, be agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### 2. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

### 3. Responses of the Cabinet to reports of the Scrutiny Committee

The response was noted.

### 4. Actions from the last meeting of the Committee

The actions were noted.

### 5. Performance Monitoring

The Chief Officer for Corporate Services introduced a report which summarised performance across the Council to the end of May 2017. Members were asked to consider 8 performance indicators which were performing 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 recommend 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 questioned at what point a vehicle was classed as abandoned within the indicators.

*Action 1: Chief Officer Environmental and Operational Services to advise when a vehicle was classed as abandoned.*

It was also noted that many of the below target indicators were due to staff vacancies. In response to a question the Chief Officer for Corporate Services advised that once the vacancies were filled the targets would be reached. The Chief Officer for Corporate Services advised that the number of vacant positions across the council would be circulated along with the number of staff currently employed in Customer Services.

*Action 2: Chief Officer Corporate Services to circulate the number of Vacant Positions in the Council and the number of staff employed in Customer Services.*

In regards to the Performance Indicator for higher risk food inspections, members queried what the higher risk categories A & B were.

*Action 3: Chief Officer Environmental and Operational Services to advise what higher risk categories A & B were.*

Members discussed the target for the average number of days to process changes of circumstances for housing benefit, concern was expressed that there were still 457 claimants outstanding. The Chief Finance Officer advised that the number was higher due to the focus being on new claims where the time taken has reduced. There were also a number of cases where information had been requested from the claimant but had not yet been received. The time for processing was not stopped whilst waiting for the information. The outstanding information was actively chased.

*Action 4: Chief Finance Officer to investigate whether there was a final deadline for information to be received from claimants.*

Resolved: That the report be noted.

## 6. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Planning

The Portfolio Holder for Planning presented a report updating the committee on recent achievements and challenges ahead. He advised that since the publication of the agenda papers an additional 19% of planning applications had been determined since the same period last year and 1 major application had missed the 13 weeks determination out of the 3 that had been received so far this year. However if none were missed for the remainder of the year the Performance Indicator would be above target. A new Enforcement plan was in draft form, following a review of priorities which would take a new approach to dealing with complaints.

The Portfolio Holder responded to Members' questions.

The Portfolio Holder explained that recruitment of the Enforcement Team Leader has been unsuccessful. It was anticipated that by Christmas all work would be electronically documented. When asked whether there was a problem with staff

retention in Planning, Members were advised that there was a high percentage of part time staff, and by offering flexible working hours, staff were retained.

A Member asked about density figures in Swanley. The Portfolio Holder explained that it was not just Swanley that would be looked at having an increased density but other Towns in the District. On average 80 units per hectare were currently built, albeit skewed by the redevelopment of Tubbs Hill House. Alternatives had to be investigated if the Green Belt was to be retained. Another Member queried what exceptional circumstances would be in Swanley. Members were advised that Swanley was in need of regeneration and increasing numbers of units in the Town may encourage new businesses to open, however until the Issues and Options consultation had been completed it was unknown what residents wanted.

A Member was in agreement with Swanley Town Centre needing regeneration. In response to a question, the Chief Planning Officer advised that Swanley Convent of Mercy crossed many Council services and a holistic approach was being taken.

In response to questions concerning the Local list, the Portfolio Holder advised that it was a supplementary planning document that would help to protect buildings which were not based in a Conservation Area or regarded as a listed building.

A Member queried how the Sevenoaks Town Council Masterplan worked. The Portfolio Holder explained that the plans were developed with help from the District Council. This ensured that there was conformity with local development plans.

The Chairman enquired whether there were conflicts of interest when it came to employing agents on the Council's behalf who had previously worked for developers. The Chief Planning Officer advised that there were corporate safeguards but the perception of residents needed to show it was unfettered. It was important that the best advice was provided but Officers were aware this could be an issue.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for his attendance.

## 7. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Economic & Community Development

The Portfolio Holder for Economic and Community Development presented a report updating the committee on recent achievements within his portfolio, highlighting the positive cross co operation between Portfolio Holders, especially with the Local Plan.

The Portfolio Holder responded to Member's questions.

In response to a question Members were informed that, following the acquisition of the M&Co building in Sevenoaks High Street, there was potential for combined thinking with KCC regarding the library and adult education services as well as potential to improve the bus stop arrangements.

A member sought clarification from the Portfolio Holder on whether the apprenticeship initiative had involved local schools and asked why it was difficult to recruit. He advised that the Economic Development team were programmed to visit schools in the District to promote the apprenticeship scheme and the pathway to careers. Employers reported that in some cases it was difficult to recruit as some young people lacked the skills to access apprenticeships.

Another Member raised questions in regards to the Kent and Medway Business fund. Members were advised that the loans were at 0% to small and medium sized businesses. The scheme was funded by loan repayments from the previous Regional Growth Fund Scheme, Escalate.

When questioned about the Council's projects in Swanley, the Chief Officer Communities and Business advised that feasibility studies were taking place as to the possible density, form and development on sites and what would be acceptable in planning terms. Valuers were then looking at how much the works would cost and the capital return. Once these works had been completed, Members would be consulted before going out to public consultation.

A Member queried how health related to the One Public Estate. The Portfolio Holder advised that the funding would be for feasibility studies in Swanley for GP surgeries and the potential to relieve some of the more administrative uses at Sevenoaks Hospital. The bid was in Partnership with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.

The Portfolio Holder was asked more details regarding the Council's business e-newsletter, Real Business. He advised that the e-newsletter had 800 subscribers. It was constantly being critiqued to ensure that it was valuable to its users.

The Chairman queried whether there were any challenges ahead. The Portfolio Holder advised that his role was looking ahead and helping to shape a positive way forward for those living and working in the District. One concern could be Community safety, in light of the national events in recent months and an increasing awareness of those threats. The Community safety partnership was there to reduce crime, reduce the fear of crime and involve communities in solutions which was a positive way forward.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for his attendance.

#### 8. Improvements to Sencio Leisure Centre

The Chief Officer Communities and Business and Chief Finance Officer presented a report detailing financial risks to the Council, trading history and future performance of Sencio following the agreement of a loan of £600,000 to Sencio Community Leisure. The report also detailed how the repayment of the loan to Sencio for improvements to the Leisure Centre would be affected if the management fee the Council paid was removed. Members were informed that the Licence for Alterations and Loan Agreement had been drafted. Sencio had also issued a letter of intent to their contractor. Arrangements between Sencio and

Sevenoaks Town Council for the payment of £95,000 towards the works were being finalised and it was hoped working would start on 17 July 2017.

In response to questions Members were advised that the Council carried out their own latent demand survey. The business plan put forward by Sencio was based on the number of Memberships, but the facilities were also used by non members.

Jane Parish, Chief Executive of Sencio responded to Members questions and advised that the deficit in 2015 was due to different factors, including the closure of the Wilderness Site and inability to retrieve loss of income and additional redundancy costs. As Sencio was a not for profit organisation, most surplus went into investing in facilities. The current year's costings would be taking into consideration paying all staff the living wage and pensionable contributions.

In response to concerns raised, the Chief Finance Officer advised that if Sencio defaulted on a loan repayment the Council could look to declare Sencio insolvent and would then re-tender the asset. The Council did not guarantee Sencio debts. The loan payments were solely for building works and would be made in tranches in line with the work being carried out.

Members thought that it was important to continue to monitor key financial information in regards to the loan and repayments.

It was moved by the Chairman that the Committee continue to monitor key financial information and work completion.

The motion was put to the vote and it was

Resolved: That the Scrutiny Committee continue to monitor key financial information and work completion.

#### 9. Work Plan

The work plan was discussed. It was agreed to remove Sencio Leisure Centre from the meeting on the 31 October and invite Pembury Hospital (Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust). If Pembury Hospital were unable to attend Darent Valley Hospital would be invited.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9.10 PM

CHAIRMAN