

## SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2018 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Brown (Chairman)

Cllr. London (Vice Chairman)

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

Cllr. Dickins was also present.

### 27. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 31 October 2017, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### 28. Declarations of Interest

No additional declarations of interest were made.

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

There were none.

### 30. Actions from the Previous Meeting

Members discussed the actions. With regard to Action 1, the website had been updated with the requisite wording. Members discussed the response from Communities and Business to their questions on the developments in Swanley. Members requested more information on the developments, including clarification on the White Oak and Bevan Place sites, and were concerned that the financial shortfall may be delaying the development of the new Leisure Centre.

*Action 1: The Chief Officer of Communities and Business to respond to the Committee on the following:*

- *Clarification of commitment to redeveloping the White Oak Site*
- *A plan and timeframe for the Bevan Place development*
- *Member and resident updates on Bevan Place*
- *The individual value of the three sites, the proposed cost of the new site and the shortfall figure*

The Chief Finance Officer provided an update on the costing and ability to record meetings in the Conference room. Initial quotes price the service at over £10,000

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Members discussed the pros and cons of recording meetings, what the price would include, and discussed the possibility of moving to the Council Chamber if only Scrutiny meetings were to be recorded.

Members noted the achievement of one appeal allowed following 28 decisions that were overturned by Development Control Committee following an officer's recommendation to approve.

*Action 2: For Chief Planning Officer to advise whether the 28 decisions referred to overturned decisions by the Development Control Committee or any decisions*

Members requested additional information on the vacant shop units in Sevenoaks Town

*Action 3: The Chief Officer of Communities and Business to advise If Sevenoaks Town also included the Bat and Ball Station area and an additional figure of the total number of shops in Sevenoaks Town*

### 31. Kent County Council Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education

The Chairman welcomed County Councillor Roger Gough, the Kent County Council Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education who gave a [presentation](#) on the provision of education within the district, including the provision of school places, standards, performance and intake. Mr. Gough referred to the Kent Commission Plan for Education Provision which laid out expected changes in school demand and strived to ensure every child in Kent would be offered a school place. So far the report had been fairly accurate in relation to year R and year 7, just falling short of the expected forecast in Sevenoaks with pockets of high demand in popular schools and areas.

Members were advised that there were only three public schools in Sevenoaks, and none were grammars despite many Sevenoaks children attending grammars. The introduction of the Weald of Kent Grammar Annexe will help to alleviate this however children were traveling out of district for both grammar and private schools in volumes that were disproportionate with the national average. It was noted a grammar provision in Sevenoaks was necessary to meet local demands. Despite secondary school demands rising with increasing pressure for secondary expansion, primary remained steady with no expected significant increase. Oasis, the Secondary academy in Hextable had now closed, with students being placed in other schools in the north of the district.

Trinity School which opened in 2013, had been very well subscribed throughout a temporary expansion and was now committed to a permanent expansion.

Members were informed that on primary offer day almost 90% of parents were given their first preference with only 1.7% of students not getting a place in their

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top 3 schools in Sevenoaks. Patterns of localised demand in Sevenoaks (especially in Seal) were highlighted. It was noted that changes in demand were more manageable in primary schools, for both expansion and spare capacity.

Mr. Gough explained that successful Primary School admittance appeals were restricted by national class size limit. Grammar Schools filled up fast and appeals had a much higher success rate as there was discretion that could be applied to class size and situations.

An Ofsted report of schools in the district was largely positive, with only one school (in Edenbridge) being found inadequate. Sevenoaks grades were good in comparison with the rest of the County especially for KS1.

Members asked questions in relation to quantities of students at Tunbridge Wells Grammars travelling from outside of Kent County. Mr. Gough recognised this as an issue, especially for highly selective schools, and also the limited authority Kent County Council had in individual schools' selection processes. Despite out of County applications almost doubling, acceptance rates had remained almost unchanged.

In response to questions around supporting secondary provision in Hextable, and considering a large volume of planning applications in the area, Members were advised that Orchards Academy remained slightly undersubscribed, however demand in the area would be closely monitored. Undersubscribed schools in the district were highlighted to be in Edenbridge (only 1/3 full), West Kingsdown, Hextable and Swanley St. Mary's. Members discussed with Mr. Gough at what level of undersubscription schools were likely to close.

Members asked questions on the gender specific performance of students at Knole Academy following the move of Wildernesse students. Clarification was provided on the meaning of 'bulge classes' and flexibility on maximum class size.

Members wanted to ensure acceptable teacher staffing levels, and were advised that there were no problems recruiting staff but retaining was more problematic with noticeable shortages in rural primary schools.

Questions were included on the real cost of transporting students to out of district schools, with the young person's 'freedom pass' having a total cost of around 20 million with £7-8 million being subsidised. Mr Gough confirmed he would provide this information.

On behalf of the Committee the Chairman thanked Mr. Gough for attending.

### CHANGE IN ORDER OF AGENDA ITEMS

With the agreement of the Committee, the Chairman took agenda item 7 before agenda item 6.

32. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Direct and Trading Services

The Portfolio Holder for Direct & Trading Services presented a report updating the Committee on recent achievements and challenges ahead. Some areas of interest included Bradbourne Lakes and the introduction of a Car Club and Automatic Number Plate Recognition (AMPR). The proposal for a Car Club was seen as suitable for the increasingly younger demographic and monitoring was underway of the Tunbridge Wells membership in the Municipal Car Club. Legal implications were recognised for the introduction of AMPR into carparks in the district.

Members were informed of the importance of security of income for Direct and Trading Services, including market tenders. Staffing was also considered as a potential long-term concern with many jobs in the department being heavy manual roles. Cllr. Dickins confirmed that a more in depth consideration of on street parking would take place following the completion of the Buckhurst 2 carpark. This would allow findings to be more accurate and would cover resident, business owner and visitor parking.

The Portfolio Holder responded to Members' questions. Members enquired as to how refuse sacks were disposed of. Black sacks were burned; clear sacks were recycled; and less than 2% waste was sent to landfill. There remained an interest in finding alternative materials and disposal methods.

Members requested an update on Bradbourne car park to which they were informed that it was more oversubscribed than expected with predictions of it becoming quieter before the opening of the hotel. Following the opening of Buckhurst 2 the levels of usage in Bradbourne would be monitored as some residents were believed to have relocated there temporarily.

Members welcomed the announcement of a CCTV renewal programme which they were advised would include updating computer systems, replacing hard drives, servers and other equipment which was allocated a cost of £50,000 this year and £20,000 next year.

Discussion took place on the parking concerns around Hextable Primary School where on street parent parking had been displacing residents and resulting in a safety hazard. This problem was thought to have been exacerbated by local care home restoration works and signs were due to be circulated advising drivers to park in the new carpark.

Interest was expressed in expanding Swanley market to two days per week.

Members discussed St John's Car Park and the recently granted application for Enterprise Car Hire to open on part of the site. Concerns were raised around current capacity and the potential for increased demand following the opening of Enterprise. The protection of resident car parking in the area was discussed in addition to the issues arising from on-street parking.

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Members were advised that the parking arrangements which were temporarily covering the Buckhurst 2 while under construction had been the subject of positive feedback.

Members considered the possibility of allowing longer maximum stay times for the Stag Carpark with the intention of supporting actors performing at the Theatre.

On behalf of the Committee the Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for attending.

### 33. Performance Monitoring

Members considered the report which summarised performance across the Council to the end of February 2018. Members were asked to consider 9 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 recommended 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 high level of applications for Temporary Event Notices.

*Action 4: The Chief Officer Environmental & Operational Services to provide further insight into the recent peak in temporary event notices.*

An amendment was made to the figures relating to the number of days taken to process a change in circumstances for Housing Benefit. The current value was 2 calendar days and the year to date target should be 9 calendar days.

Members considered the number of successful appeals against planning application refusal and found 1 in 3 decisions were overturned. Members were interested in the financial cost (and if there was a specific budget allocated to appeals) of successful appeals and if the right decisions are being made by the board. Interest was expressed in the reasoning given for overturning officers' recommendations and if any pattern could be found. Members recognised that the scale of the appeal should be considered in addition to the overall number of appeals.

*Action 5: The Chief Planning Officer to respond to the following*

- *Figures related to an officer recommendation to refuse measured against members going against officer recommendation to refuse when considering decisions resulting in appeals.*
- *The total cost of appeals and if a budget is allocated to appeals.*
- *If a pattern can be identified in reasons for overturning officer recommendations to grant planning permission.*
- *How many planning decisions were made in the last financial year under delegated powers, how many were brought to the Development Control Committee and how many of the decisions went against the officer's*

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*recommendation; how many were overturned in appeal contrary to the Committee's decision and, how many were the council found incompetent in.*

Members discussed the performance report for Direct and Trading Services. When considering Environmental Health Indicators, Members observed that the completion of higher risk food inspection was slipping and if it continued to fall it would need to be considered as it could pose a public health risk.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

### 34. Chairman's Annual Report to Council 2017/18

The Chairman introduced the draft Annual Report to be presented to Council on 1 May 2018. The report summarised the Committees' work plan which had focused at each meeting on inviting the Portfolio Holders to discuss areas of focus or challenge and setting up In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group. The Committee had also agreed to invite external representatives to discuss particular areas of concern and their activities within the district.

Members suggested an amendment to the approach section of the report, requesting the number of Portfolio members to attend Scrutiny Committee meetings not be specified.

Resolved: That, subject to the amendment requesting the number of Portfolio members to attend Scrutiny Committee meetings not be specified, the report be commended to Council.

### 35. Work Plan

The work plan was noted.

The Chairman advised that the first meeting of the Working Group for staffing Levels had been set for May and an update would be provided at the next meeting. It was requested that additional performance indicators be included with regards to the number of current vacancies and long term sickness across the council, with it broken down by department.

Members discussed the number of speakers to be invited to any Scrutiny Committee meeting in relation to time taken to host them, and importance of seeing Portfolio Holders. Members hoped that if questions were given to Portfolio holders in advance this should allow for a more concentrated discussion.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9.22 PM

CHAIRMAN