

LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2018 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Firth (Chairman)

Cllrs. Abraham, Coleman, Mrs. Hunter, Lake, McGarvey and Raikes

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Barnes, Bosley and Pett

Cllrs. Dr. Canet were also present.

14. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Advisory Committee, held on 28 June 2018, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

15. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

16. Actions from Previous Meeting

There were none.

17. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder and Chairman advised Members that the Council had gone out on a democracy roadshow, as part of National Democracy Week, to three secondary schools in the area, which had presentations including one from Lizzy Yarnold, and a mock polling exercise created by the Elections team.

She also advised that the first meeting of the guarantor board of Quercus Housing had taken place, with the results of the next meeting to be given at the next meeting.

The Chairman and Portfolio Holder also reported that Quercus 7 had an offer accepted on a new project in Gravesend and would be reported on at the next meeting.

She also advised that discussions were continuing for the London Borough of Bromley to join the Licensing Partnership.

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18. Referrals from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none.

19. Legal Successes

The Chief Officer Corporate Services presented a report showing the successes of the Legal team from 28 June 2018 to 4 October 2018.

Members asked a number of questions of clarification which the Chief Officer Corporate Services said he would ask the Head of Legal & Democratic Services.

Action 1 - Head of Legal & Democratic Services to answer Members questions regarding where covenant was and whether ward Members were asked about its release, and clarification of wording on financial recovery of Oakview Stud Farm.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

20. GDPR Update

The Chief Officer Corporate Services presented a report which updated Members on the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

In response to questions, the Chief Officer Corporate Services advised that the number of personal information requests could be supplied by the Head of Legal & Democratic Services.

Action 2 - Head of Legal & Democratic Services to supply Members with amount of requests for personal information since 25 May 2018.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

21. Budget 2019/20: Service Dashboard and Service Change Impact Assessments (SCIAs)

The Chief Finance Officer presented a report, which explained that this was the second stage of the budget process and ensured that all Members of the Advisory Committees had a role to play in the governance of the Council and the budget decision making process. He explained that since the current financial strategy was introduced in 2011/12, over £7 million of savings had been agreed.

To continue to have a balanced budget position and remain financially self-sufficient, a net savings requirement of £100,000 per annum was included in the budget. The Chief Finance Officer also advised Members that other pressures may come out later in the budget process such as when the Local Government Finance Settlement was announced in December. These may result in additional savings being required.

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One growth item had been proposed. Members were advised that the impact of £40,000 for Land Charges Searches showed that parts of the budgeted search income was no longer achievable as some requests were passed onto Kent County Council (KCC) to answer as they own the relevant datasets. Members were reminded the function operates on a cost recovery basis. Members expressed concern at the costs of the KCC part of the process not being recovered, which seemed at odds with the principle of running a costs recovery service. Members felt that the KCC part of the process should also be recovered from the end user and were not prepared to support the recommendation without more information, which the Chief Officer Corporate Services agreed to forward to Members of the Advisory Committee.

Members discussed possible growth items including investigating the feasibility of a shared service for the Legal team. A Member advised that Ashford Borough Council saved costs on legal fees by having a magistrate willing to take applications over the telephone, e.g. for injunctions, thus saving on costings applicable at court. Members also considered whether the £19,000 Equalities Legislation budget was still needed when the principle of complying with the Equalities Act 2010 was well embedded in the Council and if there was no proposal to fill the vacant post, there was no requirement to keep the budget.

Members also expressed an interest in looking at associated costs of agenda printing, and the delivery and the posting of documentation from the Council. Finally, Members mentioned again the possibility of the Council becoming paperless.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) the Portfolio Holder would advise Cabinet of the views of the Advisory Committee Members on the growth proposal identified in Appendix D (SCIA01, which would be supplied outside of the meeting after the Chief Officer Corporate Services had circulated further information and
- b) the following savings suggestions be discussed further
 - a shared service for the Legal team
 - a full time magistrate on call to support the Legal team
 - removal of the Equalities Legislation budget
 - review of the associated costs of agenda printing, delivery and Member postal arrangements.

22. Shared Services Update

The Chief Finance Officer presented the annual update, which provided a schedule of current and previous shared services.

He explained that by having shared services across the Council, savings of over £700,000 had been delivered.

Members queried whether the space previously occupied by Kent County Council & Moat Housing was currently vacant. The Chief Officer Corporate Services advised Members that as part of the Customer Redesign, the area would now be used for the Customer Solutions team.

Resolved: That the report be noted

23. Brexit Update

The Chief Officer Corporate Services provided an update to Members on how Brexit would affect the District and the challenges and opportunities that lay ahead.

The Chairman suggested that Sevenoaks District Council should consult local businesses on what they would require post Brexit, and whether a seasonal workers permit could be used. She also suggested this could be then fed to the Immigration Minister.

The Chief Officer Corporate Services confirmed that Brexit was an ever-changing situation and he hoped more information could be provided at the next meeting.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

24. Local Land Charges - Update

The IT Services Manager introduced a report that provided Members with an overview of the Local Land Charges Service, its background, performance and future considerations.

He advised Members that the Council would shortly launch a self-service for personal searches, which would reduce traffic of searches requested and provided a quicker response to customers.

Resolved: That the report be noted

25. Electoral Services update

The Chief Officer Corporate Services presented an update report on the activities of the Electoral Services team.

He advised Members on the current position of the team, and explained that the initial canvass was due to end in December, and current figures reflected that 52% of residents had responded online.

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He also advised Members that the outcome of the Boundary Commission Review on Parliamentary constituency boundaries was with Parliament, and would circulate to Members a link to the relevant website showing the proposed changes.

Action 3 - Chief Officer Corporate Services to provide Members with link to the website showing proposed changes to Parliamentary boundaries.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

26. Work Plan

The work plan was noted.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.45 PM

CHAIRMAN

