

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2020 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Brown (Chairman)

Cllr. London (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Ball, Barnes, Firth, Kitchener, Layland, London, Morris, Pender, Purves and Williamson

Cllrs. Dyball and Thornton were also present.

28. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 30 January 2020 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

29. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Barnes declared for reasons of transparency that she was a Teaching Assistant in various schools in the area.

Councillor Brown declared for reasons of transparency that he had a child who had gone through the Grammar School selection process.

Councillor Firth declared for reasons of transparency that she had founded a community interest company for free catch up education classes in Kent.

Councillor London declared for reasons of transparency that he was a school governor at a school in Sevenoaks.

Councillor Pender declared for reasons of transparency that he taught at a Kent School but it was not in the District.

30. Responses of the Cabinet to reports of the Scrutiny Committee (if any)

There were none.

CHANGE IN AGENDA ITEM ORDER

With the Committees agreement the Chairman brought forward consideration of agenda items 6, 7 and 8.

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31. KCC Cabinet Members for Children, Young People and Education

The Chairman welcomed KCC Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Richard Long and Area Educational Officer for North Kent, Ian Watts to the meeting who gave a presentation on the provision of education within the district, including the provision of school places, standards, performance and intake.

In response to questions Members were advised that following the change in admissions arrangements for Skinners Grammar school it was unknown if it had impacted the number of students from the District as the school had been following the criteria since 2018. Academies, free schools and voluntary aided schools were able to set their own admissions criteria with some input from KCC. The admissions code gave examples of how the criteria should work. In relation to preferential placements for children of parents who worked at the school, the parent would have had to have worked at the school for 2 years before the priority place could be given, or be in a skill selective post. In regards to Grammar schools the child would still need to pass the assessment but could have a higher ranking in placement.

Parental preference was important when choosing schools and as much as possible was taken into account before local authority allocation. It was not always possible to place a child in the next available grammar school as this could be further away than a parent would want.

In response to questions following the Coronavirus outbreak, Members were advised that following advice from the Department for Education, every school was expected to open to all students from September. There were mitigations put in place to limit contact and risk of transmission and some elements of social distancing had been relaxed but where possible, should be continued. It was acknowledged that this was not always possible. There was a lot of emphasis on hygiene regimes, including personal hygiene including hand washing and spacing so every pupil was forward facing in classrooms. Social distancing, where possible for students and teachers should be maintained with adjustments to timetables to avoid groups crossings over.

Children should still be grouped where possible to limit contact outside of their 'bubbles' but it was accepted that the groups could be breached for special teaching and visitors for moderation. Risk Assessments needed to be carried out in line with school's current health and safety duty and staff should be consulted with. It was important that schools were open and transparent about measures being put in place.

It was not possible for all schools, in particular secondary schools to stagger start and finish times as altering bus timetables or having additional services were not always possible. As each school was different in regards to layouts, entrance points, outside space and travel guidance was there for each school to make the decision for what would work best for them.

Guidance was being put together, at a more local level following the advice from the Department for Education and this would be posted on the KELS website with

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the guidance evolving constantly. It was expected that lunch provisions would be back to normal from September 2020, being mindful of timings and seating arrangements.

A lot of work had been taken to ensure pupils mental health was taken into consideration. Information packs were put together for 1 June when pupils started returning to schools, however the same support for early help and preventative services were still there for schools to access, and online resources were available.

In response to further questions, Members were informed that a number of options were available to ensure that technology was accessible to the most vulnerable students including laptops, routers, dongles. Technology orders had been placed for secondary schools via the local authority. More work could be undertaken with schools to access Pupil Premium to help access the additional technology needs.

In response to a question, KCC could not dictate to schools what the curriculum the students were taught, and this was down to each school. Individual assessments would need to take place. There would be a catch up premium from central government to help students catch up. A consultation was being held for how examinations would take place, as those students entering into their final years for GCSE and A-levels had missed significant time at school.

In response to a question the Area Educational Officer advised that a mixture of schools, the private voluntary independent sector and childcare providers list was being compiled and would be provided under the Child Information Service. Child care provision was available in each District and Borough if parents required it.

Members were informed that in regards to funding, any mechanisms in place go through the schools funding forum and was consulted on with all schools, as well as being in the public domain. Rates per pupils for the minimum have been met and were within the regulations. Rates per pupils vary across Local Authorities.

Members were advised that the 52 ASD places were being commissioned for Broomhill Bank School and it was as when children were assessed and required those places. In total 108 places were being allocated across the two sites in Tunbridge Wells and Hextable over a period of time. The Education Area Officer advised that he would look into further statistics in regards to travel distance to the school.

In response to a question Members were advised that the Hextable Site, was on the KCC disposal's list. Currently there were not any plans to do anything on the site but it would depend on the Kent's Commissioning document to show whether there was anything needed going forward, the local plan, once finalised could have an impact. A Member expressed her thanks for the response by KCC to ensure the site was protected from access.

In response to questions by the Chairman, the Area Education Officer advised that it was at the school's discretion to manage and health and safety responsibilities. Robust cleaning regimes were required and emphasis on self-management so it could be that students would be required to clean their desks on leaving

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classrooms and creating staggered timings for use of classrooms. On designated transport for school the social distancing requirements and face coverings were not required, but there was a recommendation that face coverings could be used.

The Area Education Officer agreed to respond to the committee regarding the statistics around those students who were grammar school assessed and did not secure a grammar school place and figures around the number of those who passed the Skinners 360 test but was not offered a place.

The Chairman on behalf of thanked the Area Education Officer for his attendance.

32. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for People & Places

The Portfolio Holder for People and Places presented her report detailing the Council's response to the challenges of COVID-19 and recent achievements and challenges ahead.

The Portfolio Holder highlighted that the response to the Coronavirus had been a particular success with a high number of volunteers stepping forward. However, it was not without its challenges over the last few months, with particularly anti-social behaviour on the rise. This was not only in the Sevenoaks District but this had been seen throughout the County. The Community Safety Team were taking action against this and were still continuing their daily tasking groups.

Members were also updated with the progress on the development of the new White Oak Leisure centre, including conversations with Orchards Academy. The construction company ISG, were issuing regular newsletters to keep the local community informed of progress on the new build.

The Portfolio Holder responded to questions by advising that following Cabinet's meeting on 9 July 2020, it was hoped that further government funding would be available but there was no indication that Sencio Leisure Centre would be going into administration.

In response to Member questions, the Portfolio Holder advised that following the large number of volunteers who had gathered together to help respond to those in need following the outbreak of the Coronavirus, it was important that the connections were not lost. Members expressed their thanks to the Portfolio Holder for the excellent work carried out to the community and for progressing the connections between private, public and voluntary sector.

The Portfolio Holder advised, in response to a question, that the Community Grant process was always a challenge as there was always a high number of applications. The process undertaken to decide how the grant money was awarded was a very prescriptive and detailed process.

In response to further questions Member were informed that there were plans for supporting older people with wellbeing, especially those who had been isolating

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since the start of the Coronavirus outbreak. Every Step Counts walking groups had relaunched and it was vital to many in communities.

The Portfolio Holder advised that the Hero Team and Customer Solutions Team had been responding to queries for those who were facing financial struggles following the Coronavirus and signposting where help can be requested. The CABx had opened their helplines again.

In response to a question from the Chairman, Members were informed that the Economic Development Officer had been providing extra support to business, of which many had received business packs. The Council had also held its first Sevenoaks District Business Board where the Coronavirus crisis was discussed and how it had affected businesses.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Dyball for her attendance.

33. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Development & Conservation

The Portfolio Holder for Development & Conservation presented her report detailing the services within her Portfolio detailing the recent achievements and challenges ahead.

The Portfolio Holder updated Members with the progress of the Local Plan, highlighting all four grounds for judicial review were accepted as arguable and a date for the hearing was expected after the summer break. The Council had also lodged a formal complaint with the Planning Inspectorate regarding the service it received during the examination.

Due to Covid-19, most of the Development Services Team were working from home, and the Portfolio Holder expressed her thanks to the team for their work ethic and the year to date figure for planning applications determined was 540 in comparison to the same time last year which was at 506. Team meetings were continuing to ensure staff's welfare. She also highlighted the successes of the Enforcement Team and that there was a new member of staff dedicated for the Community Infrastructure Levy.

In response to questions regarding the Local Plan members were advised that every Council has a different plan, and Sevenoaks believed that the approach taken was best for the District. More consultation than required had taken place and the rationale for why the council was unable to reach the housing numbers as required.

In response to a question regarding planning reforms, Members were advised that new regulations and policy was expected in the autumn. Processes had already changed previously in regards to notification for prior approval.

Members expressed their thanks to the Development Services Team for their continued hard work through the unprecedented times. The Portfolio Holder advised that it was expected these would continue for some time and expressed

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her thanks to the Democratic Services Team for ensuring that meetings could continue and members were involved.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Thornton for her attendance.

34. Actions from the Previous Meeting (if any)

The action was noted.

Cllr Pender, the Chairman of the CCTV Working Group advised that for this working group now, travel expenses were not required and that he had managed to source an academic who was able to attend a meeting of the working group virtually. The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee advised Members that currently the CCTV team had dealt with a high number of out of hours calls, due to the Coronavirus Pandemic.

35. Performance Monitoring

Members considered the report which summarised performance across the Council as at May 2020. Members were asked to consider 7 performance indications which were performing at 10% or more below their target with a commentary from Officers explaining the reasons and detailing any plans to improve performance. The report also provided key performance indicators relating to the Portfolio Holder in attendance.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

36. In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group CCTV - Interim verbal update

The verbal update was considered as part of minute 34.

37. Work Plan

It was agreed to invite the Portfolio Holder for Finance & Investment and the Portfolio Holder for Improvement and Innovation to the November 2020 meeting.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9.38 PM

CHAIRMAN