

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2020 commencing at 5.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Brown (Chairman)

Cllr. London (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Barnes, Kitchener, Layland, Morris, Osborne-Jackson, Pender and Purves

An apology for absence was received from Cllr. Ball

Cllrs. Dickins, Eyre, Grint, McArthur and Thornton were also present.

38. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 14 July 2020 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

39. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Barnes declared, for reasons of transparency, that she had a membership to Sencio's White Oak Leisure Centre.

Councillor Brown declared, for reasons of transparency, that he was a member of the Sevenoaks Players who regularly used the Stag Theatre.

Councillor Osborne-Jackson declared, for the reasons of transparency, that he had a relative who worked for Sencio Community Leisure.

40. Responses of the Cabinet to reports of the Scrutiny Committee

There were none.

41. Actions from the Previous Meeting

There were none.

42. Stag Theatre

The Chairman welcomed the Chief Executive for the Stag Theatre, Andrew Eyre, to the meeting who gave a [presentation](#) on the Stag Theatre including the financial impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic.

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It was clarified that the cinema had been open since July 2020 with the theatre following in September. There had been safety measures in place to protect visitors against Covid-19 which involved restricting capacity in the cinema and theatre. Positive feedback had been received in response to the safety measures taken.

In response to queries regarding the Arts Council Sustainability Grant of £444,395, Members were advised that the grant was designed to make the business sustainable until the end of March 2021 even if a further lockdown was introduced. It was queried whether a further grant could be requested from the Arts Council and Members were advised that it would depend on government plans.

Members were advised that theatre was a marginal business, making it difficult to pay back loans. Therefore no loan would be taken by the Stag Theatre without careful consideration. To date, the Stag Theatre had only applied for and received grants.

In response to queries, Members were informed that volunteers had delivered 10,000 flyers around the district to help advertise The Stag Theatre's reopening.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive for his attendance.

43. Performance Monitoring

Members considered the report which summarised performance across the Council as at September 2020. Members were asked to consider 13 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 for Finance & Investment who was in attendance.

In response to queries regarding the number of households in emergency & temporary accommodation, the Deputy Chief Executive & Chief Officer - People & Places advised that the government's "Everyone In" initiative had required emergency accommodation to be provided for all rough sleepers. Since March, the Council had received 67 homelessness approaches. There were currently 17 rough sleepers accommodated in emergency accommodation. The Council had successfully applied to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government's Next Steps Accommodation programme which included funding for support and long term accommodation.

It was noted that most performance indications at 10% or below their target were as a direct result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

44. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Finance & Investment

The Portfolio Holder for Finance & Investment presented his report detailing the services within his portfolio including the recent achievements and challenges ahead.

The Portfolio Holder updated Members with the Council's financial situation and priorities going forward. The financial impact of Covid-19 for the Council was anticipated to be £1m in 2020/21. It was emphasised despite this impact, there was little change to the Council's priorities and there would continue to be a focus on income generation as well as service delivery at the Council.

Members were advised that there were plans to save £826,000 per year in the 10 year budget. It was highlighted that the Council was in a good financial position compared to other local authorities.

It was clarified to Members that although permission was granted for investment to be made into bond, equity, property and multi-asset funds, investments had yet been made. The Portfolio Holder would continue to work with Treasury Advisors to seek further opportunities in the market.

In response to queries regarding council tax, Members were advised that the government support schemes, such as the Job Retention Scheme, would allow residents to continue paying tax. When the schemes end, any issues with collection would be mitigated by encouraging the public to contact the Council to let them know in advance if they may have trouble paying council tax. There had been adjustments to the assumed council tax collection included in the 2020/21 budget. It was clarified to Members that, should there be a decrease in council tax collected as assumed, the Council would not have a disproportionate financial impact as the collecting authority.

Members were advised that the Net Zero Fund, put in place to meet the aim to produce net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, had £30,000 and after the next budget the fund would have £60,000. The commissioning of an energy survey and reviews of building management of the Council offices in order to save energy had been introduced.

In response to further questions, the Portfolio Holder advised that the budget contained revised assumptions on the use of car parks within Sevenoaks Town in 2021.

In response to queries on the financial support for businesses within the district, the Portfolio Holder advised that the Capital programme was put together to ensure it satisfied the aim to invest in attracting, generating and supporting business. Furthermore, the Reopening High Streets Safely Fund of £107,106 from the European Regional Development Fund was received to put in place measures to make the high street a safe environment for businesses and customers.

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The Chairman thanked Cllr Dickins for his attendance.

45. In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group CCTV

Cllr Pender updated the committee on the CCTV Working Group, advising that they held a further meeting and had continued data gathering. They had considered evidence and readings from experts in the field of CCTV. There were plans to meet with the police in December to discuss CCTV use.

The Chairman reminded the Working Group to consider reaching out to officers as they had been helpful to the previous working groups.

The committee was advised that, due to delays caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, a final report would not be completed by the next meeting.

Resolved: That the update be noted.

46. Work Plan

Members discussed the work plan. It was agreed that the final report of the CCTV Working Group be deferred from January 2021 to March 2021 with a draft report to be given at the January meeting instead.

Members requested that Kent Police and the Portfolio Holder for Cleaner & Greener be invited to attend the March 2021 meeting.

47. Sencio Leisure Centre

Resolved: That, under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that likely disclosure of exempt information was involved as defined by Schedule 12A paragraph 3 (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)).

The Chairman welcomed Jane Parish, the Chief Executive of Sencio Leisure, who gave a [presentation](#) outlining the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, safety measures taken during the period the leisure centres were open, and Sencio's current financial position.

Members discussed the presentation and asked questions of clarification of the Chief Executive of Sencio Leisure.

The Chairman thanked the Chief Executive for her attendance at the meeting.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.21 PM

CHAIRMAN

