

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2021 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Brown (Chairman)

Cllr. London (Vice Chairman)

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

Cllr. McArthur was also present.

1. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 23 March 2021 be approved and signed as a correct record.

2. Declarations of Interest

No additional declarations of interest were made.

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

There were none.

4. Actions from the Previous Meeting

The Deputy Chief Executive & Chief Officer - Customer & Resources gave an update on the action reporting on how missed Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) targets would be recovered.

It was reported that the Private Sector Housing team relied on Kent County Council (KCC) Social Service referrals for DFG adaptations to meet its target. The target was not met due to a reduction in Social Service referrals. This was in part due to KCC's Occupational Therapists being reassigned as a result of Covid-19 and pending referrals being put on hold due to clients not wishing to allow access to their homes due risk of Covid-19. Social Service referrals had since recommenced, with historic cases picked up, along with pending referrals from 2020/21 now underway.

The target for 2019/20 was 60 DFG completions. As the 2020/21 was the same, the target was missed by 1. To date, in 2021/22 22 DFGs had been completed compared to 12 at the same time the previous year.

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5. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Cleaner & Greener

The Portfolio Holder for Cleaner & Greener, Cllr McArthur, reported on recent achievements and challenges in her portfolio, including impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic.

It was reported that the Council had recently prosecuted a convicted fly-tipper for dumping waste in a country lane in South Darent.

Within Direct Services, there had been a restructure of staff to help generate additional income, ensure services were future-proof and allow career development in an aging work force. Within Emergency Planning, procedures and policies had been updated with new staff members in training.

From 1 July 2021, the Dartford & Sevenoaks Environmental Health Partnership had come to a close and the Environmental Health team had returned to the Council Offices in Sevenoaks. There was currently a staff shortage until the vacant positions could be recruited to.

Facilities Management had provided ongoing additional cleaning to maintain a safe office which had allowed more staff to return to the offices quickly following the Covid-19 lockdown. The Licensing team had been able to operate and offer near full functionality throughout the pandemic. In person taxi knowledge tests had not been able to take place but had resumed in May 2021.

The Council was committed to working towards Net Zero emissions by 2030 on Council assets and services. The Council would work collaboratively with Kent County Council (KCC), Parish and Town Councils, the Local Government Association and other local authorities.

Members asked questions of clarification. Following the news that Direct Services had won a parking enforcement contract tender for Tandridge District Council until 2024, it was queried whether there were enough Civil Enforcement Officers to carry out the service. There had been an increase in the number of Civil Enforcement Officers with the District since the contract started.

Temporary parking restrictions had been introduced near Knole Park in Sevenoaks to prevent dangerous and obstructive parking by visitors. It was noted that although the Council had no say in the parking restrictions, the Council had been working with KCC to seek a permanent solution. Residents were encouraged, in partnership with the National Trust, to park at Buckhurst 1 car park which was a short walk from Knole.

Members discussed electric vehicle charging points and how best to encourage residents to install them. It was noted that public points were still required for residents who would not have off street parking. It was clarified that the cost of the electric vehicle charging depended on the type of charger and company.

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Following queries, it was clarified that KCC would address a fly tipping case if it obstructed traffic, otherwise it was the responsibility of the Council to clear it.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for her attendance.

6. Performance Monitoring

Members considered the report which summarised performance across the Council as at May 2021. Members were asked to consider 10 performance indicators 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 Cleaner & Greener who was in attendance.

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

Resolved: That the report be noted.

7. Establishment of Member Working Group

An In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group was set up to evaluate the effectiveness of the Council's CCTV service. The Working Group ceased to exist following the meeting of Annual Council in May 2021, therefore the Working Group was required to be re-established in order to present their report to the Committee.

Resolved: That the In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group consisting of Cllrs Pender (Chairman), Ball, Kitchener and Purves, be re-established.

CHANGE IN ORDER OF AGENDA ITEMS

The Chairman, with the Committee's agreement, brought agenda item 9 forward.

8. Final Report - In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group CCTV

The Chairman thanked the Working Group for their report on the In-Depth Scrutiny of the Council's CCTV Service.

Cllr Pender presented the final report as Chairman of the In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group. The Working Group had considered the effectiveness of the Council's CCTV service in supporting Community Safety and its impact on privacy. The Working Group had recommended that the cameras the Council currently maintained be assessed to establish whether there was a pressing need for them and that audio recording hardware of the cameras in the Council Offices be removed with most video surveillance also removed. Further recommendations and observations were set out within the report.

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Members asked questions of clarification. It was confirmed that the CCTV Code of Practice had been considered in producing the report, however the Code had been considered the minimum requirement in the protection of privacy by the Working Group. It was queried whether businesses or the police who used the CCTV service had been approached to help cover the costs of the service.

Following questions on the benefits of CCTV to help find missing persons and deter crime, the Chairman of the Working Group advised that as addressed in the report, there were concerns that this was not sufficient justification to record all individuals in public spaces.

It was moved by the Chairman and it was

Resolved: That, under section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of Appendices A, B and C of the report, on the grounds that likely disclosure of exempt information is involved as defined by Schedule 12A, paragraph 7 (information relating to any action taken or to be taken in connection with the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime).

Members considered and discussed the exempt information as set out in the exempt appendices.

It was moved by the Chairman and it was

Resolved: That the public no longer be excluded from the meeting.

Members of the Working Group expressed concerns that there appeared to be little evidence to demonstrate benefits or disadvantages of the CCTV cameras for the Police. It was emphasised that cameras ought to only be in place if there was a “pressing need” for them.

The Head of Direct Services clarified that a log of what the operator was doing was maintained. Key performance indicators had been logged, but it was possible for more data to be recorded. The need for each camera had been regularly checked as required by the Code of Practice. Various factors relating to community safety had been considered during these checks, not just those relating to crime.

It was moved by Cllr London and duly seconded that it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) further information be obtained to assist in justifying the pressing need for CCTV;

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- b) the disabling of the audio recording hardware of the cameras in the Council offices or the introduction of an audio activation method, be considered; and
- c) a request to third parties, such as the Police, for them to recover costs of running the CCTV service, be considered.

It was moved by Cllr Pender and duly seconded that part a) of the motion be amended to read “cameras maintained by the Council be assessed to establish whether there is a clear justification to demonstrate their pressing need”.

Members debated the amendment.

The amendment was put to the vote and it was lost.

The Chairman of the Working Group expressed concerns that the disabling the audio recording was not sufficient and the software ought to be removed altogether. It was moved by Cllr Pender and duly seconded that part b) of the motion be amended to read “the audio recording hardware of the cameras in the Council offices and most video surveillance, be removed”.

Members debated the amendment.

The amendment was put to the vote and it was lost.

It was moved by Cllr Pender and duly seconded that part b) of the motion be amended with the omission of “be considered” for it to read “the audio recording hardware of the cameras in the Council offices be disabled or an audio activation method be introduced”.

The amendment was put to the vote and it was lost.

Members considered and discussed the motion. It was expressed that the safety of staff at the Council Offices was a priority.

The motion was put to the vote and it was

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) further information be obtained to assist in justifying the pressing need for CCTV;
- b) disabling the audio recording hardware of the cameras in the Council Offices or the introduction of an audio activation method, be considered; and

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- c) a request to third parties, such as the Police, for them to recover costs of running the CCTV service, be considered.

9. Work Plan

The work plan was noted with the addition of Establishment of In-Depth Scrutiny Working Group at the next meeting.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 9.28 PM

CHAIRMAN