

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2022 commencing at 7.00 pm

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

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Brown and London

Kent County Cllr. Brazier and Cllr. Maskell were also in attendance

Appointment of Chairman

As the Chairman and Vice-Chairman had given their apologies, the first item of business was the election of a Chairman for the meeting.

Resolved: That Councillor Morris be elected as Chairman for the meeting.

(Cllr Morris in the Chair)

11. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes from the meeting held on 12 July 2022 be approved and signed as a correct record.

12. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

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

There were none.

14. Actions from the Previous Meeting

There were none.

15. KCC Member For Highways and Transport

The Chairman welcomed Cllr. David Brazier, the Kent County Council (KCC) Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport who gave a verbal update on the work carried out by Kent Highways.

Members were given an overview of the responsibilities within the KCC Portfolio. In terms of Highways assets and infrastructure, KCC looked after 4000 miles of footways and 5400 miles of road excluding motorways. The value of highways

Scrutiny Committee - 8 November 2022

assets totaled over £24 million. The Highways Team had received 130,000 permit requests from Works and Utilities companies working on Highways.

KCC Highways also provided education, advice and training for 160,000 road users annually and managed a capital programme valued at £275million. The Team oversaw approximately 100 bus routes across the County and issued over 25,000 concessionary travel passes for children and 230 concessionary travel passes for the elderly and disabled with a revenue budget of £65million. Various schemes provided transport for 11,000 school children across the County.

Members took the opportunity to ask questions. Members raised concerns regarding parking in the District. The Cabinet Member encouraged Members to write to him with their specific concerns and he would respond.

Members asked questions regarding local Bus schemes. As providing certain Health and Social Care services was a statutory duty, KCC had made savings to discretionary services which involved withdrawing support for 36 bus services saving up to £2.4 million. Operators had also found that passenger levels were at 75% of their pre-pandemic levels and services had also suffered with the spiraling costs of diesel and a lack of drivers. The largest effect was felt on bus routes for school children. As a result, Transport funds had been used to provide substitute services in the district. Members thanked the KCC Cabinet Member for the substitute services that were implemented. Members were also advised of the Kent Karrier service which was a dial-a-ride service that included disabled access. The service costs had also spiraled but KCC believed that maintaining the service was imperative. Members discussed the bleak outlook on the Bus services.

Following questions on the winter service, Members were advised that KCC also provided a winter snow plow service which was valued by residents and would remain regularised throughout the coming winter. Members discussed the usefulness of previous information leaflets which had provided local maps of gritting plans and had been published in each Parish. The Cabinet Member would investigate the possibility of providing local maps of the winter service. He also advised that a detailed map was available on the KCC website. Members asked questions of clarification on drainage ditches and the utility of using local farmers' tractors to plow snow. Members were encouraged to contact the Cabinet Member should they know of rural roads that required the winter Service. Some Members also highlighted the success of neighbouring Council schemes including a volunteer snow-plow service.

Members discussed the Kent Karrier service and suggested the benefits of a community led service. The Cabinet Member confirmed that funding had been received to spend on voluntary and community transport and KCC would be willing to support such a scheme and would be happy to discuss the opportunity, however suggested that previous similar schemes had only been moderately successful as volunteers had not always been willing to commit the time required. Central Government had instigated a Bus Service Improvement Plan which it was hoped

Scrutiny Committee - 8 November 2022

would encourage operators to create a sustainable programme. However, due to budget cuts, rural bus schemes had been difficult to support.

Members asked questions regarding the out of hours Highway service provided by contractors Amey. Concern was raised regarding problems with outsourcing the service to staff with limited local knowledge which it was believed caused confusion and undermined the usefulness of the service. Members also highlighted problems with waiting times. The Cabinet Member had held discussions with the contractors and would raise the additional problems.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for his attendance and co-operation.

16. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health

The Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health who gave an update on his portfolio and took questions from the Committee. Previous years had challenged the services provided under the portfolio and a wide range of these problems had been overcome since the pandemic.

In response to questions it was confirmed that a framework had been put into place across Kent to manage the displacement of refugees through the Homes for Ukraine scheme. The Council had recruited a Resettlement Officer and Housing Officer to facilitate this in the Sevenoaks District. The Team had focused on maintaining conversations with existing hosts and welcomed the continuation of Government support for the scheme. Where host arrangements had ended, rematching opportunities were being sought, alongside private rented sector offers within the county. Support for refugees had been developed to help with language skills, jobs and training support and community based support. Officers were commended for their responsiveness to families that had been displaced by their hosting arrangements ending

The One You programme had seen an increase in GPs directly referring regular patients to the service. The service was funded externally by Kent Public Health and provided support and guidance on physical and mental health and wellbeing.

The Council's Housing Strategy had been adopted earlier in the year. A Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy had also been drafted, which would focus on the prevention of homelessness, housing supply and continue to build relationships with landlords and Housing Associations in the District. Following queries, the Portfolio Holder advised that the need for affordable housing was increasing and the Team were active in encouraging more affordable housing during the planning process. 15 new homes had been acquired by Quercus Housing at 11-13 High Street, Swanley, which were fully occupied from May 2022. Following a question, Members were advised that Quercus Housing had purchased the residential units from a developer, but did not acquire the shops, which remained in the developer's ownership. It was confirmed that West Kent Housing owned 98% of the housing stock in the district, with the second largest social housing provider being Moat Housing.

Scrutiny Committee - 8 November 2022

Action 1 - For the Chief Officer - People and Places to update Members with the figures for the number of affordable housing units managed by Housing Associations within the District.

In response to a question on housing standards Members were advised that all housing providers reported to the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH), which promoted a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver and maintain homes of appropriate quality that met a range of needs. RSH was an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

The Portfolio Holder advised that a range of Housing Associations were also being engaged to raise the market for competition in the sector and increase the social housing offer in the District. In response to a question Members were also advised that travel warrants could be issued for emergency housing applicants, where eligible and if necessary.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for his attendance and update.

17. Performance Report

Members considered the report which presented performance indicators that were not meeting their target levels along with the Housing and Health portfolio performance report.

Members asked questions of clarification. It was confirmed that the figures for missed green waste collections were for the month of September and did not include figures for the new rounds implemented in October. Members were informed that the new rounds operated at a high level of collections as the Council served upwards of 50,000 households around the District. Missed collections were comparatively low and actions were being identified to address any missed collections effectively. As the missed collections for general waste were at target levels as at the end of September, they were not included in the report. Members discussed the other performance indicators. In regards to LPI_PA 002, due to the implementation of a new statutory Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) policy which had resulted in increased cancellations Members suggested that the targets be altered to reflect this.

In response to a question regarding the Customer Solutions Team the Chief Officer - Customer and Resources confirmed that 4 new staff Members had been appointed to replace outgoing staff and were currently being trained. It was hoped that the new staff would help to meet the increased demand on the Team in recent months.

Following further questions it was clarified that the Health Action Plan was a partnership document and the indicators related to a number of areas which were not under the deliverable remit of the Council.

Scrutiny Committee - 8 November 2022

Resolved: That the report be noted.

18. Scrutiny Committee - In-depth Working Group Outcomes Report

Members considered the report which laid out the recommendations of previous Working Groups and their outcomes.

Members discussed the value of the Working Group recommendations and their contributions. Some apprehension was raised as to whether the recommendations were taken forward. Some Members reflected on the usefulness of previous Working Groups they had been involved in.

Members were advised that Cabinet were entitled to decide how best to proceed with any of the recommendations made to them. In response to a question it was confirmed that further information could be provided on the outcomes of previous Working Group recommendations.

Resolved: That the report be noted and further information be provided to the Committee summarising the outcomes of previous Working Group recommendations.

19. Report of the Covid-19 In-depth Scrutiny Working Group

Members considered the final report of the Covid-19 Working Group which had looked at the Council's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and assessed the Emergency Plan and District Emergency Centre (DEC).

Members discussed the recommendations. Some concern was raised over the usefulness of formalising a volunteer network and the effectiveness of having Officers review the Emergency Plan.

It was moved and duly seconded that the recommendations within the report be agreed.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Cabinet that

- a) a small peer review of the Emergency Plan be undertaken
- b) the Emergency Plan be reviewed by the Chief Executive every 2 years, to ensure it remained up-to-date
- c) the Emergency Plan be reviewed by Members every 4 years, either at Cabinet or the relevant Advisory Committee
- d) the process for getting volunteers be formalised to create a body of trained volunteers with available contact details
- e) scenario exercises be undertaken every 4 years with the involvement of Gold and Silver Commanders

Scrutiny Committee - 8 November 2022

- f) the inventory of the Emergency Command Centre be regularly audited and kept in better condition

20. Establishment of In-depth Scrutiny Working Group

Members considered a report which proposed the establishment of an in-depth Scrutiny Working Group. Members discussed the timeframe for the Working Group and the possible constraint of the upcoming May local elections which could result in a change of Membership to the Committee. It was discussed that the timeframe restrictions might also rush the Working Groups report should one be established. Members were advised that they were welcome to submit potential topics for the Working Groups and these would be added to the Work Plan.

Resolved: That the establishment of an In-depth Scrutiny Working Group be deferred until the 2023/24 civic year.

21. Work Plan

Members discussed the Work Plan and requested that the below items be added:

19 January 2023

- Performance Indicators Report
- Portfolio Holder for Cleaner and Greener
- Portfolio Holder for Finance and Investment

21 March 2023

- Performance Indicators Report
- Portfolio Holder for Improvement & Innovation
- Portfolio Holder for Development & Conservation

In addition a number of external invitees were suggested for future meetings of the Scrutiny Committee depending on their availability.

Possible External Invitees

KCC Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Chief Executive West Kent Housing

Chief Executive Sevenoaks Hospital

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.49 PM

CHAIRMAN