

Cabinet

Minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2024 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr Hogarth (Chairman)

Cllr Perry Cole (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs Dyball, Maskell, Horwood, Roy and Thornton

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs.

Cllrs. Clayton, Leaman, Cathy Morgan, Purves, Reay, Robinson, Skinner and White were also present.

31. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Cabinet held on 19 September 2024, be approved and signed as a correct record.

32. Declarations of interest

There were none.

33. Questions from Members (maximum 15 minutes)

Members took the opportunity to ask questions. In response to a question regarding the increase of housing numbers and the number of permissions granted but not started, the Portfolio Holder advised that the majority of major planning applications had been granted relatively recently and therefore were not considered as stalled, however there were some sites known that were under construction and had implemented their consents but then not progressed and could be considered as stalled. In permission terms, she explained that as per the April 2024 figures 3000 units had been granted planning permission but were either not yet started or were in construction was around 1083, a third of the total. The number not started was similar to the new figure which had been looked at for housing requirements per year.

Responses to consultations, requested government to provide councils with the mechanisms to be able to encourage permissions to be built, such as charging council tax on every unit built or charging business rates to have reassurance that permissions would be built out. It was unfortunate that councils had little way to force sites to be progressed but regular communication with developers, and a developer's land forum was taking place to build relationships and understand the problems faced.

Cabinet - 15 October 2024

In response to a questions regarding the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), the Portfolio Holder for Development & Conservation advised that the next meeting of the CIL Spending Board, would take place following a review of the governance arrangements of the CIL Spending Board to ensure that the approach was still effective. There were a number of local level projects which had been successful in the past, but it was important to look at the bigger picture and ensure that larger strategic infrastructure projects could be addressed, if required. Parish and Town Council's already received 25% of the CIL money. Each application was addressed on its own merits and without knowing the outcome of the review it was not possible to commit to what bids would be successful. Members were advised that information regarding the current balance in the CIL reserve and whether interest was accrued would be provided separately, as she did not have this information to hand.

In response to a question regarding waste and recycling implementation dates, Members were advised that the waste and recycling strategy would be coming to the next meeting of the Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee in November, however the relevant statutory guidance had still not come forward from DEFRA, and there was confidence that the 2026 deadline would be met for the glass and food waste collections.

34. Matters referred from Council, Audit Committee, Scrutiny Committee, CIL Spending Board or Cabinet Advisory Committees

There were none.

35. Economic Development Strategy Monitoring update

The Portfolio Holder for Improvement & Innovation presented the report which highlighted the work undertaken on the Economic Development Strategy to support businesses within the district. It was highlighted to Members that 90% of businesses in the district had a maximum of nine employees and was a reflection that the majority of businesses were small or micro, as well as noting the impact Covid and costs of energy had on businesses. The majority of performance indicators were green and this was pleasing to see.

The Economic Development Officer further advised Members that the strategy provided a framework for the activities undertaken as a team, and this was the second year out of a five year strategy. The strategy maximised the external funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Rural England Prosperity Fund. The appendix set out the details of the barometer which was used to understand the wider context for the delivery of schemes. At its current position 74.5% of actions were considered 'green' against the action plan.

The Portfolio Holder for People & Places took the opportunity to express her thanks to the Team, with the report also shared across her portfolio, and considered by the People and Places Advisory Committee. The ratings were pleasing to see, especially across the rural and visitor economy section.

Cabinet - 15 October 2024

The Chairman used his discretion and allowed a visiting Member to address the Cabinet who highlighted that it has also been considered that the performance indicators should include outcome measures as well as action based. The Portfolio Holder for Improvement and Innovation advised that this was being considered.

Resolved: That the progress with delivery of the Economic Development Strategy be noted.

36. Meeting Point Update

The Portfolio Holder for Improvement and Innovation presented the report which updated Members on the progress of the Meeting Point Hub in its first year of operation. He advised Members that A number of occupants had outgrown the space, and had moved out into the local area, demonstrating its capacity to help businesses develop. Feedback was regularly received from businesses who used the space on how it could be improved and adaptations had been underway. He highlighted that there were teleconference which enabled hybrid meetings and this was the only known space in Swanley to offer this type of meeting technology. It was acknowledged that the level of income had not been as projected but the report set out the challenges that had been faced in its first year of operation, including staffing issues which had led to an overrun on costs. He expressed that the clientele for the space started on nil basis, and that when the business that had used the space and then grown and left, new customers needed to be found.

It was important to understand how to make more of a success of Meeting Point, and this review would be brought forward to take place in December before coming to a future meeting of Cabinet.

The Chairman used his discretion to allow a visiting Member to speak. He advised that Sevenoaks Town Council had faced a similar problem when setting up their business hub. By corresponding with other local work spaces it was clear that each site offered different options and so were not in competition with each other. He advised that it was important to consider who the target audience was and that they were charged appropriately, but it had taken a few years for the business hub to be in profit.

Resolved: That the progress Meeting Point had made during the initial year of operation and to note the wider role Meeting Point has in supporting the district's economic development, be noted.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.30 pm

CHAIRMAN

