

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2021 commencing at 5.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Brown (Chairman)

Cllr. London (Vice Chairman)

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

Cllr. Fleming were also present.

48. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 10 November 2020 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

49. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

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

There were none.

51. Actions from the Previous Meeting (if any)

There were none.

52. West Kent Police

The Chairman welcomed the Chief Inspector Mark Stubberfield from West Kent Police who gave an overview of the levels of crime within the District.

Chief Inspector Stubberfield gave an overview of the statistics of reported crime for the year. The Covid-19 pandemic had impacted crime within the district. Reports of burglaries in dwellings had decreased by 56% compared to the previous year. There had been an increase in reports of domestic abuse during the pandemic. It was noted that multiple crime reports could come from one victim.

The police monitor the government guidelines against the Covid-19 pandemic in order to effectively enforce them. They often receive calls regarding breaches of the rules. Measures police take include visiting pubs to ensure they are complying with the rules and educating the public. There was currently no direction on when

to issue tickets with officers encouraged to consider whether they should on a case by case basis.

It was raised by Members that some residents had people visiting them at their doors attempting to intimidate them into purchasing items. Although there were no immediate risks, the Chief Inspector encouraged reporting the incidents so the police could protect vulnerable residents who may be intimidated into purchasing something and discourage breaches of the Covid-19 lockdown rules.

Chief Inspector Stubberfield advised that he monitors crime reports from the last 24 hours to anticipate trends in crime. This would allow the police to prepare for changes which would occur coming out of lockdown.

In response to questions on beauty spots within the district which had many visitors in the summer, Members were advised that a funded operation was put in place to combat crowds and any disorderly behaviour. There were 12 PCSOs within the district who worked in pairs within different wards. There were additional PSCOs who were more specialised in areas such as youth engagement and mental health.

Members were advised that safety measures had been put in place at police stations to protect staff against Covid-19. There had not yet been any outbreaks amongst staff which caused a significant impact to services.

It was clarified to Members that not all calls regarding breaches of Covid-19 guidelines would be able to be attended to due to the large number of calls. Breaching of rules were addressed through the presence of PCSOs and the Council's Town Ambassadors for engagement.

The Chairman thanked Chief Inspector Mark Stubberfield for his attendance.

53. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Improvement and Innovation

The Leader and Portfolio Holder for Improvement & Innovation, Cllr Fleming, reported on recent achievements and challenges faced by the Council and his portfolio, particularly in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic. The business rates team at the Council provided business support very quickly for businesses impacted by the pandemic. The Council had practiced remote working in preparations towards Brexit which meant there was a smooth transition to remote working for staff when the pandemic occurred. Covid-19 had an impact on services when a number of staff had to self isolate over the Christmas period.

A customer redesign project had been designed with aim to provide more efficient and effective customer service at the Council. The redevelopment of White Oak Leisure Centre was underway with the swimming pool recently installed. Planning permission had been granted for a new business hub at Meeting Point in Swanley. There were plans for Bevan Place in Swanley which were being considered.

Scrutiny Committee - 12 January 2021

In response to queries, Members were advised that a government scheme had partially covered the loss of income from car parking spaces when the Council car parks were shut during the first lockdown in March 2020. The business grants provided for the local businesses were fully reimbursed with the costs of administering the grants partly reimbursed.

The role of the new town ambassadors was clarified to Members of the Committee. The town ambassadors had been working with local businesses to ensure they were operating safely and had been checking that non-essential businesses were closed while in lockdown.

Following queries on a potential new health hub in Edenbridge, the Leader expressed that he recognised the importance of it materialising as there were few GP surgeries in the town.

The development of a business hub in Swanley had not been set back by the Covid-19 pandemic and instead had more local interest due to the change in working habits. With more people working from home, there was more interest in a local business hub.

In response to queries on the financial impacts of Covid-19 on government, Members were advised that there was not likely to be a financial impact in terms of Government funding for the Council as it was already running with little funding from government. Good foundations had been laid with a 10 year budget plan in place meaning the Council was in a comparatively good financial position for the future.

The Chairman thanked Cllr Fleming for his attendance.

54. Performance Monitoring

Members considered the report which summarised performance across the Council as at November 2020. Members were asked to consider seven 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 Improvement & Innovation who was in attendance.

Members were advised that the number of missed green waste collections had been performing at or above target rather than 10% or more below as set out in the appendix in error. It was noted that all performance indicators performing at 10% or more below target were related to impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic apart from the percentage of appeals against planning application refusals that had been dismissed.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

Scrutiny Committee - 12 January 2021

55. In-Depth Scrutiny, CCTV Working Group

Members were updated on the progress made by the CCTV Working Group. A final report would be brought to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

56. Work Plan

Members discussed the work plan. Members expressed an interest in having a representative from NHS Dartford attend a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee along with the Chamber of Commerce.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 6.38 PM

CHAIRMAN