

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 23 March 2021 commencing at 5.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Brown (Chairman)

Cllr. London (Vice Chairman)

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

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Kitchener and Morris

Cllrs. Griffiths, Maskell and McArthur were also present.

57. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 12 January 2021 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

58. Declarations of Interest

No additional declarations of interest were made.

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

There were none.

60. Actions from the Previous Meeting

There were none.

61. Sevenoaks & District Chamber of Commerce

The Chairman welcomed the Chief Executive, Julie Phillips, and the Chairman, Nick Brooker, from the Sevenoaks & District Chamber of Commerce who gave an overview of the activities of the Chamber within the district.

The Sevenoaks & District Chamber of Commerce was a non-profit membership organisation which offered support, guidance and networking opportunities for businesses. It primarily operated in Sevenoaks, Swanley and Westerham. Some of the services provided included workshops, webinars, and a LinkedIn group. The Chamber had an active social media presence in order to reach members.

Scrutiny Committee - 23 March 2021

The Chamber had made local connections, they included the Economic Development team at the Council, the Careers Enterprise Unit, the Town Councils of Sevenoaks, Swanley and Westerham as well as other Chambers.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the Chamber's services were quickly moved online. Specific support to help businesses cope with the impact of Covid-19 included the signposting of funding available and guidance on the Job Retention Scheme. The Chamber had been lenient on renewal of memberships. Virtual coffee and chat sessions had taken place for the wellbeing of members. The Chamber had been in contact with all members to ensure they have support.

Going forward, the Chamber had planned to continue networking meetings online. Some of the network events would be more sector specific. The resilience programme would continue based on the needs of members.

Members asked questions on the impact of Covid-19 on businesses within the district. They were advised that the extent of impact from Covid-19 depended on the type of business. Businesses in the hospitality industry had been financially impacted more than those that were business-to-business. The impacts of Covid-19 had created a greater sense of local community from members of the Chamber and the public seemed more interested in shopping locally. It was believed that the overall impact of Covid-19 would not be clear until the following year.

In response to queries, Members were advised that although Edenbridge had their own Chamber, members of the Edenbridge Chamber of Commerce were welcome to attend the Sevenoaks Chamber's events. They had kept in touch to consider opportunities for collaboration.

Following queries, it was clarified that the Chamber had not been in contact with parish councils, however it was something they would consider in future to reach rural businesses.

Following queries on support for young people's employment within the district, it was advised that the Chamber had run a work experience week to show young people what work was available within the district. A number of schools were members of the Chamber which helped connections with young people. There was a Next Generation group who were considering ways to introduce sixth form students to different work place scenarios.

Discussions were had on how the Council could support the Chamber going forward. The work the Council had been doing to support businesses was acknowledged. In particular, the quick distribution of grants to businesses was praised. The Council had run the Business Board meetings which had been taking place virtually once a month. This was an opportunity for businesses within the district to share their experiences. It was hoped that actions, where appropriate, would be taken following feedback received at the Business Board. It was suggested that the Council communicate to residents the importance of shopping local.

The Chairman thanked Julie Phillips and Nick Brooker for their attendance.

62. Questions to the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Health

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Health, Cllr Maskell, reported on recent achievements and challenges faced in his portfolio, including impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Since the Council had taken over the housing register from West Kent Housing Association, there had been an increase in housing register applications, notably during the pandemic. Housing register waiting times had therefore increased due to ongoing demands for more affordable housing and customer reluctance to accept offers into privately rented accommodation.

Government's "Everyone In" initiative to get rough sleepers in accommodation during the pandemic had been a challenge as there had been limited temporary accommodation and move-on accommodation. The Housing, Energy and Retraining Options (HERO) team had increased their focus on homelessness prevention.

One of the key aims of the Council was to increase affordable housing within the district. The Council had been working with housing associations to enable this. Rural housing survey work with parish and town councils had continued to explore various sites and applications. Delivery of the plans had been difficult. Officers had been working to put empty homes into use which was highly resource intensive as it had been difficult to get empty homes on the market. Acquisition and development opportunities had been explored through Quercus Housing.

Household adaptations, such as the Disabled Facilities Grants, had been made to allow those with mobility difficulties to move freely in their own homes. Due to Covid-19, and contractors being unable to enter homes, the work in this area was slow compared to the previous year.

The One You Service funded by Kent Public Health had been delivering their services remotely. There had been less customers engaged in the services in the last year, with a reduced number of referrals from General Practice and Medical Services due to impacts of Covid-19. Members were updated on the Health Liaison Board and advised that representatives from NHS services had not been able to attend due to priorities on Covid-19.

Members raised concerns on the aftercare of residents who had been housed by the West Kent Housing Association. The Portfolio Holder encouraged Members to contact him with issues raised by residents so that any shortfalls would be addressed.

It was clarified that what was considered "affordable housing" could be split into two categories: rented housing - which included Social Rented and Affordable Rented; and intermediate housing - which included homes for rent and sale

Scrutiny Committee - 23 March 2021

provided at a cost above social rent, but below market levels such as shared ownership.

As a result of the pandemic, fewer affordable homes would be delivered in the district and concerns were expressed that of the 22 affordable homes expected to be delivered by 31 March 2021, two would be genuinely affordable and would be for use by housing register applicants. The remainder was intermediate housing such as shared ownership.

The Green Homes low-carbon retrofit project on mobile home park sites was in place to make nearly 150 affordable homes more energy efficient and help tackle fuel poverty. It was clarified that people would not be able to refer themselves onto the scheme.

Following queries, Members were advised that the refurbishing of the existing supported accommodation provision at Vine Court Road by West Kent Housing Association was underway to support accommodation for rough sleepers. Consultation with local residents regarding the property had not taken place, but local members asked to be kept abreast of progress by West Kent Housing Association.

Members were advised that those in a shared ownership scheme who wished to resell would have to offer the property as a shared ownership on the help to buy website first. If the property was not sold after a period of time, then it could be put on the market for open sale.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for his attendance.

CHANGE IN ORDER OF AGENDA ITEMS

The Chairman, with the Committee's agreement, moved agenda item 8 forward with agenda items 7 and 9 to follow.

63. Chairman's Annual Report to Council

The Chairman presented the report and invited Members to provide feedback and ask questions.

COUNCILLOR LONDON IN THE CHAIR

64. Performance Monitoring

Members considered the report which summarised performance across the Council at as January 2021. Members were asked to consider 11 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.

Scrutiny Committee - 23 March 2021

The report also provided key performance indicators relating to the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Health.

Members were advised that most performance indicators performing at 10% or more below target were related to impacts from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Following queries, Members were advised that the number of missed collections had increased in January 2021 due to an increase in waste after Christmas. Another reason was that collection teams had to tip waste in Tunbridge Wells & Northfleet due to the Kent County Council Dunbrik site being closed.

Action 1: In relation to LPI_PSH 02, the Deputy Chief Executive & Chief Officer People & Places to report on how missed Disabled Facilities Grants targets would be recovered.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

65. Work Plan

The work plan was noted with the addition of inviting the Kent County Council Cabinet Member for Highways & Transport to attend the meeting in November 2021. The Portfolio Holder for People & Places and Portfolio Holder for Development & Conservation would also be invited to attend the November meeting.

Members discussed ideas for In-depth Scrutiny. They expressed interest in homelessness within the district and the Council's recovery from Covid-19.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 6.33 PM

CHAIRMAN