

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2023 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Brown (Chairman)

Cllr. London (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Ball, Kitchener, Layland, Morris, Pender and Purves

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr. Barnes

Cllrs. Dickins, Dyball and McArthur were also present.

Cllrs. Dr. Canet and Dyball were in attendance via a virtual media platform which did not constitute attendance as recognised by the Local Government Act 1972.

22. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2022 be approved and signed as a correct record.

23. Declarations of Interest

For reasons of transparency, the Chairman, Cllr. Brown declared that for item 5 - Sencio Community Leisure (Minute 26) he used Sencio gym facilities and services.

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

There were none.

25. Actions from the Previous Meeting

Members noted the completed action.

26. Sencio Community Leisure

The Chairman welcomed the Chief Executive of Sencio Community Trust and the Asset Maintenance Engineer (Sencio) who were in attendance and gave a presentation to the Committee. The Chief Executive (Sencio) advised that due to the new Pure Gym which had opened in November 2022 there were higher numbers of cancellations of fitness memberships. However, demand for swimming had increased in the New Year which saw membership numbers increase slightly. There were also national shortages of staff as well as pool chemicals which had challenged Sencio's service delivery for customers and members in recent years.

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Sencio had run training courses and increased recruitment drive for swim teachers as a result. Sencio had also received a grant of £20,000 for the KCC Reconnect programme which allowed them to offer free swim lessons for children who struggled with swimming. It also enabled discounted rates for a range of activities as well as free gym memberships for disadvantaged young people. A customer survey in 2022 was also undertaken to gauge customer satisfaction against a national benchmark which showed an overall positive result. Members requested that the full customer satisfaction survey be circulated to the Committee.

Members asked questions of the Asset Maintenance Engineer (Sencio) around the quality and age of their assets and the reports of breakdowns. In response to questions Members were advised that there were problems with defective pipes and plumbing which had put a strain on maintenance. The Asset Maintenance Engineer (Sencio) explained that the building management system had difficulties operating with old hardware which had a knock on effect on energy usage and efficiency. There were large fluctuations in pool temperature which had resulted in sessions being cancelled and this had impacted service delivery. He confirmed that Sencio did not hold a planned preventative maintenance system but did hire contractors to assess the viability of assets. In response to further questions The Chief Officer - People and Places (SDC) confirmed that the Council had a responsibility for capital replacements and end of life responsibilities over buildings and assets while Sencio had cleaning, routine maintenance and compliance responsibilities. The Chief Executive (Sencio) stressed to Members the importance of prioritising maintenance problems given Sencio's scant resources.

In response to a question the Chief Executive (Sencio) also confirmed that the Edenbridge all-weather pitch had been closed due to drainage issues and explained that she had been working with the Chief Officer - People and Places (SDC) to secure funding to refurbish the ground. A survey had been undertaken which determined that the site could be revived.

The Chairman took the opportunity to ask about Sencio's financial position. The Chief Executive (Sencio) advised that permission was required from the Sencio Board to present financial information. This permission had not been given. In response to further questions Members were advised that the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) had given special permission for the Sencio Board to pursue a one-off 3 year audit of accounts from 2019 - 2021 which was underway. Due to the impact of the pandemic a decision was made to present all 3 years of audited accounts together. She also advised that Sencio management accounts were up-to-date and confirmed that Sencio had secured a different Financial Manager since 2018.

Members expressed concern that the financial information requested had not been forthcoming and the Chairman with the Committees agreement, requested that the Sencio Chief Executive return along with the Finance Manager with the accounts information requested. If the Sencio Board decided not to present the information, the Chairman of the Board was to be invited to explain the decision.

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The Committee thanked the Chief Executive (Sencio) and the Asset Maintenance Engineer (Sencio) for attending.

CHANGE IN ORDER OF AGENDA ITEMS

The Chairman, with the Committee's agreement brought forward consideration of item 7 - Questions for the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Investment (Minute 27), and item 8 - Questions for the Portfolio Holder for Cleaner and Greener (Minute 28).

27. Questions for the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Investment

The Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Investment who gave an update on his portfolio. Despite rising costs and inflation, the Council was in a strong financial position and maintained continued delivery of its balanced 10-year budget.

In response to questions the Portfolio Holder confirmed that expenditure and the cost of inflation were lower in some areas. As part of the budget setting process the Council looked into areas of pressure in relation to inflation and sought to contain council tax, deliver savings and maximise income wherever possible.

In response to a question it was confirmed that the changing approach regarding refuse freighters had been considered at the Finance and Investment Advisory Committee which would upgrade the Council's fleet earlier than expected.

Members thanked the Portfolio Holder for his update.

28. Questions for the Portfolio Holder for Cleaner and Greener

The Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Cleaner and Greener who gave an update on her portfolio. The Portfolio Holder advised that possible future challenges included reliance on partner organisations along with possible changes to legislation which could require glass and food waste to be collected separately.

The recent revision of waste collection rounds had made collections more efficient and in the first 10 weeks had saved the Council approximately 3,000 litres of fuel. As the new rounds were implemented District-wide there were initial difficulties as residents got used to the new system but with time it was hoped people would adjust to the new collections. The Portfolio Holder recommended that Members promote the new rounds as much as possible to ease the transition.

In response to a question the Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Council attempted to reduce the amount of waste that went to landfill by incinerating or recycling general waste. This meant that the vast majority of household waste in

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the district did not go to landfill. The Portfolio Holder also confirmed that the Council was a member of the Kent Resource Partnership which worked together to educate communities about recycling and reusing waste.

In response to a question the Portfolio Holder also confirmed that the second bid of £1.5 million to the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) for the improvement of Bradbourne Lakes would be submitted and the Council would hear if the bid was successful in June or July. The bid was backed by £500,000 of CIL money which was match funded and could only be used once the NHLF bid was secured. A separate capital bid was expected to be approved that would allow work to start earlier.

Members thanked the Portfolio Holder for her update.

29. Performance Indicators Report

Members considered the report which summarised performance across the Council as of the end of November 2022. Members were asked to consider 13 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 Finance and Investment and Cleaner and Greener Portfolios.

Members discussed the report and the Chairman advised that some indicators that were not meeting their targets were the result of new staff adjusting and bedding in new processes.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

30. Work Plan

The Work Plan was noted with the following additions:

21 March 2023

Chief Executive, Sevenoaks Hospital
Sencio Community Leisure

11 July 2023

Peter Fleming - Portfolio Holder for Improvement and Innovation
Julia Thornton - Portfolio Holder for Development and Conservation.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.57 PM

CHAIRMAN