

DISTRICT COUNCIL OF SEVENOAKS

Minutes of the Meeting of the Sevenoaks District Council held on 25 April 2017 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Raikes (Chairman)

Cllr. Abraham (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Mrs. Bayley, Ball, C. Barnes, Barnes, Bosley, Mrs. Bosley, Brown, Clack, Clark, Dickins, Dyball, Edwards-Winser, Esler, Eyre, Firth, Fleming, Gaywood, Grint, Hogarth, Horwood, Mrs. Hunter, Kelly, Kitchener, Krogdahl, Lake, Lindsay, London, Lowe, Maskell, McArthur, McGarvey, McGregor, Mrs. Morris, Parson, Pearsall, Pett, Purves, Reay, Scholey, Searles, Miss. Stack, Thornton and Williamson

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Dr. Canet, Cooke, Halford, Hogg, Layland, Parkin, Piper, Scott and Ms. Tennessee.

38. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 21 February 2017 be approved and signed as a correct record.

39. Declarations of interest not included in the register of interest from Members in respect of items of business included on the agenda

No additional declarations of interest were received.

40. Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman was pleased to announce that his Charity Dinner at Penshurst Place on 7 April had been successful. He expressed particular thanks to Cllr Abraham and the Westerham Sea Cadets; and sponsors Handelsbanken, Specsavers and Conway; along with Mr. Edward Raikes, Mrs. Margaret Crabtree, Mr. Stephen Arnold and Mr. Ian & Mrs. Pat Bosley.

He reported that he had been enjoying watching local talent, and had attended events such as D'Vine Singers, Sevenoaks Young Musician of the Year, St Michaels School Big Sing (involving over 100 local primary school children) and a couple of musical events at Knole Academy. He had also had the pleasure of attending a presentation by the High Sheriff of Kent to SupaJam for their work with disengaged youngsters.

There was a lot going on in the district and it was gratifying and heart warming to be able to attend events. Other events he had attended had included the unveiling of a rare artefact belonging to Anne of Cleves; the Visitor Economy Study at the Riverhill Himalayan Gardens; the Spring Investor Networking Event at Brandshatch Place Hotel; and official Launch of the Mercure Dartford Brands Hatch Hotel and Spa.

He took the opportunity to remind Members of the Knole Park Charity Run on 14 May 2017 which was to raise money for local dementia services. He also updated Members on the unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller encampment at Hollybush recreation ground where a member of staff had been assaulted, which was a distinct and separate event from the recent Romany funeral. He had written to the member of staff on behalf of all Members.

Finally he was very pleased to announce that the Council had yet again been successful and has been awarded CIPFA's Public Finance Innovator of the Year and, the overall 'Grand Prix' Public Finance Innovation Award.

41. Questions from members of the public under paragraph 17 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution.

No questions had been received.

42. Petitions submitted by members of the public under paragraph 18 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution.

a) Syrian Refugees

The Lead Petitioner, Mr. Humphrey Pring, had submitted a paper petition with 1170 signatures with a concurrently run 'online' petition with 402 signatures, both in the following terms:

"We, the undersigned, call upon Sevenoaks District Council to take part in the Kent Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme and pledge to provide at least one Syrian family a home in the next 5 years, as has every other District in Kent."

The lead petitioner, Humphrey Pring, addressed the Council in support of the petition. He acknowledged that since the commencement of the petition the Council had agreed to house a family in Eynsford, however he urged the Council to follow the examples of neighbouring authorities such as Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council and make a commitment to house a specific number of Syrian refugees.

The Portfolio Holder for Housing & Health responded advising that it had been possible to offer a house in Eynsford due to a unique set of circumstances. However the Council would not be committing to a target but would continue to look out for similar opportunities, and had fully committed to the Syrian Community Sponsorship Programme.

Cllr. Purves pointed out that Sevenoaks as a District was not new to welcoming refugees and had a history of doing so. She hoped that the Council would continue to look for suitable accommodation and find private landlords who would accept lower rents as this was a humanitarian not a political issue.

The Leader acknowledged the distressing situation over in Syria. He advised that from the start the Council had offered it's HERO service to all Kent Districts, however, like a number of London boroughs, Sevenoaks did have a buoyant private

rented market with above average rents so it was more difficult to find any private landlords and the Council did not own any properties. The property in Eynsford had been an opportunity to do something which had been ceased. He did not believe in setting arbitrary targets, but this did not mean the Council would not stop at anything to find suitable properties. At the moment, in the present situation, what the Council was able to do was help community groups, work with private sector landlords, and bring communities together when somewhere was found.

Resolved: That the petition be acknowledged, but that no further action other than that which the Council was already doing be taken.

43. Matters considered by the Cabinet

(a) Property Investment Strategy

Councillor Fleming proposed and Councillor Scholey seconded, the recommendation from Cabinet. The report updated Members on the progress of the Property Investment Strategy and looked at its future direction.

Resolved: That

- a) expenditure of a further £25 million be approved for the Property Investment Strategy as updated; and
- b) the updated Property Investment Strategy, as set out in Appendix A to the report, with the following amendments, be approved
 - i) deletion of current point 5 and replaced with ‘Investment opportunities are restricted to those within a 50 mile radius of the Council’s Argyle Road offices’
 - ii) point 7 - deletion of ‘3% net of borrowing costs’ and replaced with ‘in excess of 3% for schemes that include some external borrowing’
 - iii) point 11.i - deletion of ‘or 3% net of borrowing costs’ and replaced with ‘in excess of 3% for schemes that include some external borrowing’
 - iv) point 11.vi - deletion of ‘Rented’ to read ‘Private Residential’
 - v) deletion of point 11.vii as no longer relevant.

44. Reports from the Chief Executive or other Chief Officers on matters requiring the attention of Council

(a) Loan facilities to Quercus 7

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Councillor Fleming proposed and Councillor Scholey seconded the report which sought to amend the current delegated authorities to ensure openness and transparency of reporting and decision making.

Resolved: That the Chief Executive be authorised to offer loan facilities to Quercus 7 following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance in line with the rules set out in this report relating to State Aid.

(The Chief Finance Officer and Head of Legal & Democratic Services left the room and were not present during consideration of this item.)

45. Questions by Members under paragraph 19.3 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution

No questions had been received.

46. Motions by Members under paragraph 20 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution

No motions had been received.

47. Report of the Leader of the Council on the work of the Cabinet since the last Council meeting.

The Leader of the Council reported on the work that he and the Cabinet had undertaken in the period 6 February 2017 - 31 March 2017.

48. Report from the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee on the work of the Committee

The Chairman of Scrutiny Committee commended his report to the Council, thanking Members and Officers for their work. There were no questions.

49. Report from the Chairman of the Audit Committee on the work of the Committee

The Chairman of Audit Committee commended his report to the Council, thanking Members and Officers for their work. There were no questions.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.35 PM

CHAIRMAN