

IMPROVEMENT & INNOVATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2023 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Bayley (Chairman)

Cllr. Thornton (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Abraham, G. Darrington, Hogarth, J.Morgan, Malone, Manamperi, and White

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Clayton and Waterton

Cllrs. Barker and P. Darrington were also present.

Cllr. Manston was also present via a virtual media platform which did not constitute attendance as recognised via the Local Government Act 1972.

1. Appointment of Chairman

Resolved: That Cllr Bayley be appointed Chairman of the Advisory Committee for 2023/24.

(Cllr Bayley in the Chair)

2. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

Resolved: That Cllr Thornton be appointed Vice Chairman of the Advisory Committee for 2023/24.

3. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held 28 February 2023 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4. Declarations of interest

There were none.

5. Actions form previous meeting

There were none.

6. Update from Portfolio Holder

The Portfolio Holder presented an update on some key areas within her portfolio. She gave a [presentation](#) on the Council's Strategic Projects, explaining that most had been successfully delivered.

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The new Council Plan was being created by Cabinet, and a draft version would be presented to the Committee at the next meeting.

A staff event was held on 27 June to celebrate the Council's recent Platinum Investors in People (IIP) accreditation. This was the fifth time the Council had achieved the highest level accreditation in a row.

Members had toured the Dunbrik offices to see the recent changes to improve them. Another visit was scheduled for 28 June, for those that were unable to attend the first. The Communications team had organised Social Media Training for Members on 10 July. This would help Councillors manage the increasing number of resident queries and requests that were sent to them through social media.

The Portfolio Holder, as Leader of the Council, had attended the Leaders of Kent meeting. Leaders of the 12 District Councils within Kent gathered to discuss shared issues. She had also attended a meeting of the Sevenoaks Chamber of Commerce and would be attending the Local Government Association conference in early July.

In response to questions, the Portfolio Holder explained that the Council's neighbouring authorities outside of Kent were also regularly consulted with, particularly with regard to the duty to cooperate in planning matters.

7. Referral from Cabinet or the Audit Committee

There were none.

8. Role of the Advisory Committee and Key Challenges

The Chief Officer for Customer & Resources, the Assistant Chief Executive, and the Strategic Head for Commercial & Property gave a [presentation](#) on the services within the Committee's portfolio and the key challenges they were facing. They explained that teams were working to address these in several ways, including the implementation of new technologies to improve customer experience, but not at the expense of customers that required more traditional engagement.

In response to questions, they explained that the West Kent Partnership, of which the Council was a member, was working to collectively attract external businesses to the area, and ways to support the labour pool. The Sevenoaks and Edenbridge leisure centres had temporary lease arrangements in place, and long-term plans for them were still being investigated. Members were assured that local Members would be consulted before any disposals were presented to the Committee, and there would be opportunities for them to present their views to officers, the Portfolio Holder, and the Committee.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

9. Investors in People

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The Chief Officer for Customer & Resources gave a [presentation](#) on the Council's recent platinum IIP accreditation. This marked the fifth time in a row that the Council had achieved the highest level of the award. The Council scored in the highest grading (high performing) across all nine themes - a further improvement from the last assessment. This award was significant external recognition of the Council's approach to supporting and developing its staff.

In response to questions, the Officer outlined the benefits of this accreditation to staff recruitment and retention, which were two key challenges facing many areas of the Council. Competing with the financial incentives of the private sector and proximity to London was difficult within the Council's resources, so it was beneficial to recruitment to have external recognition of the Council's efforts. Members were advised that the IIP assessor had identified other potential areas of improvement which could be considered and that these would be investigated further. It was explained to Members the assessor's view was that hybrid working had been implemented with a managed and positive approach, and that it positively impacted recruitment and retention whilst maintaining productivity.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

10. Meeting Point Update

The Strategic Head for Commercial & Property presented the report, which updated the Committee on the 27 - 37 High Street and the Swanley Meeting Point development. The business hub was operational, with two offices occupied in long-term hires from local businesses, and there had been several inquiries into letting office and hot-desk space. The Housing Team was working to place residents in their new homes. The project had been delivered within budget, despite issues with utility providers and the pandemic. The Officer gave a [presentation](#) highlighting the improvement to the area as a result of the development.

In response to questions, it was clarified that the office rates were favourable and competitive within the market, making the space available for non-profits and charities to use. The site incorporated many green development elements, including air source heat pumps and building fabric that provided enhanced insulation.

Resolved: that the delivery of 17 new affordable homes and a new business hub in Swanley be noted.

11. Work plan

The Work Plan was noted with the following additions:

26 September 2023

- Council Plan

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- 2024/25 Budget Setting Process

5 December 2023

- Rural England Prosperity Fund Update
- Economic Development Strategy

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.40 PM

CHAIRMAN