

Cabinet

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2023 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Thornton (Chairman)

Cllr. Perry Cole (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Dyball, Maskell and Reay

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. McArthur

Cllrs. Camp, Clack, Grint, Gustard, Harrison, Robinson, Roy, Shea, Skinner, Streatfeild, Varley and Williams were also present.

Cllrs. Lindop and Manston were also present via a virtual media platform which is not recognised as attendance under the Local Government Act 1972.

41. Minutes

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held on 12 October 2023, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

42. Declarations of interest

No additional declarations of interest were made.

43. Questions from Members (maximum 15 minutes)

In response to a question regarding a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to support works at Bradbourne Lakes, the Chairman advised that as the Council was leading the bid, there was full support for the application. There was also strong partnership working to ensure that the bid was going to be as successful as possible.

In response to another question, the Portfolio Holder for People and Places advised that the Community Safety Unit (CSU) planned in advance for activities around Halloween and Bonfire Night. The Police mobilised their Beat Officers to work late shifts and concentrated in the high footfall areas in the District. The West Kent Policing Team had use of public order unit resource if needed from 999 calls. Fewer incidents were reported than in previous years.

44. Matters referred from Council, Audit Committee, Scrutiny Committee, CIL Spending Board or Cabinet Advisory Committees (if any)

There were none.

45. Local Plan Regulation 18 Consultation

The Portfolio Holder for Development & Conservation presented the report, which sought Members approval. He advised that the Regulation 18, Part 2 Consultation was the next step for the Local Plan, following part 1 demonstrating that the contribution of non-Green Belt sites would not meet the housing need. Therefore, a further consultation must take place to look at the opportunity for meeting the need and what opportunities could be used through some weakly performing green belt sites, in sustainable locations so that the strongly performing green belt could continue to be protected. The Development & Conservation Advisory Committee considered the same report and it was well debated at the meeting. They were in support of the recommendations.

The Planning Policy Team Leader further advised the Cabinet that the report recommended that the Regulation 18 Part 2 Consultation for the Local Plan 2040 be adopted. The consultation would run from 23 November 2023 to 11 January 2024, and would concern sites across the district, including the potential contributions of sites in the Green Belt. The Local Plan would help guide what could be built, and where, until 2040, and would address the district's housing and infrastructure needs in a coordinated manner.

The first Regulation 18 consultation, held last year, focused on sites in existing settlements, to optimise density in sustainable locations. The consultation offered three density scenarios - Low, Medium, and High density - of which Medium Density was the most popular in the feedback received. This option did not meet the total housing need for the district, which was for 712 homes per year, 5.7 hectares of employment land, 43 Gypsy & Traveller Sites, and to maintain existing retail provision in high streets. Thus, additional development sites would need to be considered outside existing settlements.

The Planning Policy Team Leader gave an overview of the Local Plan's evidence base. This included the Stage 2 Green Belt Assessment, which identified weakly performing Green Belt land on the edge of higher tier settlements in the district. The land was assessed against the purposes of the Green Belt as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The exceptional circumstances for amending the Green Belt in these areas were a combination of the acute housing need, particularly for affordable housing, the identification of available, sustainable, sites, and that the Green Belt land in question was weakly performing. Other elements of the evidence base were progressing in line with the Local Plan timetable.

The Consultation would cover three development scenarios, which would approximately meet the housing need, would meet the housing need, and would exceed the housing need respectively. All three options included a baseline consisting of the urban sites that were the subject of the first consultation, and Green Belt sites. The first option comprised of the baseline, and multiple smaller and medium sites that

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were in both the Green Belt and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The second option consisted of the baseline, and a standalone settlement at Pedham Place. The third option was a combination of the other two options. It was noted that an over delivery of houses would likely not occur, as it was expected that some sites would not be brought forward for development. The site at Pedham Place was considered for a range of possible uses, including as a standalone settlement with 2500 housing units and associated infrastructure, including a secondary school. Another option was as part of a wider mixed-use development, which would provide a multipurpose stadium complex, hotel, and training facilities for Wasps RFC.

The Senior Planning Officer outlined the consultation strategy. The consultation period was longer than the 6-week statutory requirement to account for the consultation taking place over Christmas. The consultation would be run online, via the consultation portal, and written responses would also be accepted. It would be publicised online through the Council's website and social media and through physical posters and summary leaflets. Hard copies of the consultation document, summary leaflets, and paper response forms would be available at all libraries and parish councils across the district. Members would receive materials to help promote the consultation, and pop-up sessions would be held in Sevenoaks, Swanley, Edenbridge, Westerham, and West Kingsdown. There were additional plans to target demographic groups that were harder to reach through traditional consultation methods, including young people, commuters, and gypsy and traveller communities. These included targeted consultation activities at secondary schools, additional displays at key train stations, and specific handouts for the gypsy and traveller communities. Conversations with key stakeholders and neighbouring authorities regarding the duty to cooperate would also continue during the consultation.

It was also highlighted to Members that Knight Kavanagh & Page (KKP) had been appointed to produce an updated Playing Pitch and Sports Facility Strategy and this would help to develop a leisure strategy for the District, setting out priorities, which would be included within the emerging Local Plan for future sports and leisure provision.

In response to questions, the Planning Policy Team Leader advised that it was not possible to give an exact date for the NPPF, but regular meetings with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUCH) but it was expected sometime between now and Christmas. In regards to KKP for sport and leisure evidence, it would take time to produce as they engage with sporting boards through their sporting seasons and that information would be available for Regulation 19. Engagement had already taken place with Sports England who were aware of the LDS timetable and had said they would not be raising objections at examination stage as they had signed up to the timetable and our methods.

Members thanked the team for all their work and noted that this stage 2 Regulation 18 Consultation remained in line and on course with the LDS timetable for the local plan as previously approved by Cabinet.

Public Sector Equality Duty

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Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That

- a) the content of the 'Plan 2040 Regulation 18 Part 2' at Appendix 2 for public consultation purposes, be approved;
- b) the presentation and formatting style, of the consultation document, as reflected in the indicative formatted chapter at Appendix 4, be approved and;
- c) the Chief Officer – Planning and Regulatory Services, be delegated authority, following consultation with the Development and Conservation Portfolio Holder, to approve the final formatting and presentation of the Regulation 18 (Part 2) Consultation Draft Local Plan and any minor pre-consultation text changes.

46. Community Grants 2022/23 Update

The Portfolio Holder for People & Places presented the report, which set out the monitoring information about the Community Grants delivered in 2022/23. In total 18 community grants were awarded totalling £49,800, and the full list of projects, services and activities funded were detailed in Appendix A to the report. Appendix B provided some case studies. The report was recommended for noting following a thorough discussion at People & Places Advisory Committee.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty

Resolved: That the report be noted.

47. Draft Council Plan

The Portfolio Holder for Improvement & Innovation presented the report and outlined the draft Council Plan, which set out the council's priorities and targets for residents, businesses, and communities. If approved at Full Council, the plan would be subject to regular reporting to Improvement and Innovation Advisory Committee to ensure that it remained relevant to the needs of the Council. The Improvement and Innovation Advisory Committee considered the same report and were in support.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That it be recommended to Council, that subject to final design and associated amendments, the Council Plan be adopted.

48. Treasury Management Mid-Year Update 2023/24

The Portfolio Holder for Finance & Investment presented the report, which gave details of the treasury activity in the first half of the current financial year, recent developments in the financial markets and fulfilled the reporting requirements of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management. He was pleased that the results from the 6 months were positive as the Council had benefitted from rising interest rates. The Finance & Investment Advisory Committee had considered the same report and recommended the report for noting.

The Senior Accountant advised that the report also provided an economic update provided by Link Treasury Advisors to help illustrate the impact of the investment market, as well as interest rate forecasts, a review of the agreed strategy and a review of the council's investment and borrowing portfolios.

Members attention was brought to the update on the Council's capital position as well as the funding of that programme together with an update on the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) borrowing and its rates.

Finally, The Senior Accountant was pleased to report that the investment income and the performance to 30th September was £293,000 above budget.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: that the Treasury Management Mid-Year Update for 2023/24 be noted.

49. Financial Monitoring 2023/24 - to the end of September 2023

The Portfolio Holder for Finance & Investment presented the report, which updated Members on the current financial position of the authority as at the end of September 2023 and the forecast to March 2024. The previous report to the end of July had forecast a full-year unfavourable variance of £1.489 million. Since then, Officers had implemented a number of actions, which had brought the unfavourable variance down to £971,000, which was moving in the right direction but was still a significant gap. Members would need to find solutions to bridge the gap. The report was discussed at Finance & Investment Advisory Committee.

The Chief Officer, Finance & Investment further advised that a number of actions had been looked at to address the budget gap and this included the use of specific

reserves including the Property Investment Reserve and more detailed forecasts. There was also a greater challenge regarding the need for items of expenditure as well as the necessity to fill vacant posts. These would continue and become more challenging for the remainder of the financial year to enable the unfavourable forecast to be reduced further.

He further advised that since the publication of the report the pay award offer had now been accepted. There would be additional staff costs of £750,000 against the budget assumption of 2%, which was reflected in the forecast position.

Members thanked Officers for their work.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

50. Care Leavers Support

The Portfolio Holder for People & Places presented the report which set out the statutory corporate parenting responsibilities and funding arrangements for care leavers under Kent County Council (KCC) whilst outlining the support provided through Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) to its customers, including care leavers. It also broke down the number of care leavers in Kent, by district. The report recommended that the Council do not sign the Covenant, noting and acknowledging the Council's existing support for care leavers.

The report also detailed the other organisations who had signed up to the Care Leavers Covenant. She noted that only councils with the statutory duty as corporate parent had signed up to the Care Leavers Covenant. Nationally, no lower tier Borough and District Councils had signed up. At People and Places Advisory Committee an in-depth debate had taken place and concerns were raised that if the Council signed up to the covenant, care leavers from other boroughs would be signposted to the Council, putting additional pressures on staffing resources and homelessness budgets.

Members discussed the report. Noting that the Council's HERO team was the designated point of contact for care leavers and if the Council signed up to the covenant, no additional funding would be received from Central Government as KCC were the Statutory parent who should be taking responsibility.

Public Sector Equality Duty

Members noted that consideration had been given to impacts under the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Resolved: That

- a) the statutory corporate responsibility and associated Government funding assigned to KCC to support care leavers, be noted;

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- b) to date, that the Care Leavers Covenant had been signed up to by councils with a statutory responsibility and associated funding for children's services and care leavers, be noted;
- c) the support provided by SDC to its customers, including care leavers, through existing service provision and resources, be acknowledged;
- d) the Council should not become a formal signatory of the Care Leavers Covenant, noting there were risks and resource implications (staffing and budget) to the Council in meeting the Charter's five pledges; and the report, be noted.

IMPLEMENTATION OF DECISIONS

This notice was published on 13 November 2023. The decisions contained in Minute 46, 48 and 49 take effect immediately. The decision contained in Minute 45 take effect on 21 November 2023. The decision contained in Minute 47 is a reference to Council.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.55 pm

CHAIRMAN