
CABINET

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House on Wednesday, 8 October 2014 from 7.00 - 7.43 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Bowles (Chairman), Duncan Dewar-Whalley, Ken Pugh, David Simmons, Mike Whiting, Ted Wilcox and John Wright.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Anne Adams, Joanne Hammond, Abdool Kara, Donna Price, Jo Purvis, Mark Radford and Nick Vickers.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Mike Haywood and Mike Henderson.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Mike Cosgrove and Gerry Lewin.

274 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 September 2014 (Minute Nos. 224 – 232) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

275 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

PART B MINUTES FOR INFORMATION

276 PROPERTY ASSET STRATEGY - PROGRESS REPORT

Cabinet Member for Finance

Cabinet considered the report of the Head of Property and the above Cabinet Member which provided an update on progress against the Property Strategy Action Plan and reported the outcome of the annual Property Performance Indicators for 2013/14. The Cabinet Member for Finance explained that further work was being undertaken to review the options regarding grazing land. With regard to Table Eight: Rent Arrears, he confirmed that the outstanding rent arrears relating to shops had now been cleared.

A Member asked the Leader for his view on how the Council's Property Strategy could fit into a wider strategy to increase income for the Council?

The Leader confirmed that the Chief Executive and Strategic Management Team had been tasked with exploring options to reduce the Council's reliance on income from Central Government and increase the income generated locally.

A Member made the following comments: should more priority have been given to reducing rent arrears sooner?; regarding the Bridge Road, Sheerness site, was the Council's options really dependent on Kent County Council's (KCC) decision?; concern about the total floor area still categorised as in a bad condition – why was that, and what was being done to improve this?; and why were the toilet facilities in the Borough so expensive to maintain, particularly when some of the facilities were in a poor condition?

The Cabinet Member for Finance undertook to look into the Member's comments regarding toilet facilities and what was being done to improve those properties in a poor condition, and report back to the Member.

The Head of Property confirmed that she would review the detail behind the figures in Tables One and Two and provide further information to Members. She explained that there was a limited maintenance budget which had to be prioritised, and greater importance was placed on maintaining buildings open to the public.

The Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs suggested that grazing land did not have to be utilised to be of use, as green spaces were important in the planning process for mitigating land.

The Cabinet Member for Localism asked if the transfer of Council assets through the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Policy had reduced the call on the Council's maintenance budget?; could clarification be provided on industrial sites; and the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) were looking for a suitable building, could officers explore if there were any Council buildings which may be suitable and liaise with CAB?

The Cabinet Member for Performance welcomed the overall improvements in the condition of properties as illustrated in Tables One and Two.

With regard to industrial sites, the Head of Property outlined the current rental arrangements and explained that the Council had decided to terminate its leases at New Road, Sheerness, as the Council was unable to generate any income from the current arrangement. The Council would continue to benefit from ground lease rental. The Head of Property also confirmed that a maintenance budget was transferred with an asset as part of the CAT Policy.

RESOLVED:

(1) That progress made against the Property Strategy Action Plan be noted.

(2) That the 2013/14 Property Performance Indicator results be noted.

277 STAYING PUT FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT

Cabinet Members for Housing and Finance

Cabinet considered the report of the Head of Housing and Health and the above Cabinet Members, which sought approval to waive the existing requirement to procure a new Staying Put Contractor Framework for six months, and procure a new three and a half year Framework Agreement, starting in April 2015.

Members spoke in support of the Staying Put service and the benefit it provides to local residents.

A Member asked if the Cabinet could give serious consideration to providing the core funding for the Staying Put service if KCC decided to withdraw their funding?

The Leader explained that this would be considered at the appropriate time as part of the budget setting process.

The Cabinet Member for Localism referred to the proposed changes to Contract Standing Orders and the Local First Policy, and asked the Chief Executive to comment on how the ethos of local jobs for local people would be embedded within the procurement process?

A Member asked how the Council could be sure that the rates within the Framework Agreement were still competitive and should the Council be negotiating better rates for the remaining six months?

The Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Health considered that the Staying Put service was at the cornerstone of emerging health policy with a focus on enabling people to remain in their homes, and the service was well respected by the local Clinical Commissioning Groups.

The Cabinet Member for Housing advised that he would continue to work with officers to champion the service with KCC and stress the need for District Councils to be fully consulted on any proposals emerging from KCC regarding future funding. He explained that applicants to the Staying Put service could also acquire their own quotes, which ensured that contractors within the Framework Agreement remained competitive.

The Strategic Housing and Health Manager advised that there were earmarked reserves for Staying Put, which would enable the service to continue for a period of time should funding be withdrawn. Alternative funding options were being explored, as well as on-going discussions with KCC. She explained that the tender process would include a local element and the current rates had been through a competitive tendering process in 2011.

The Chief Executive advised that the tender process would reflect the Council's Local First Policy and there was every reason to believe that local providers would be successful in next year's tender exercise. He also advised that the small average size and cost of the jobs under the current tender made it difficult to achieve significant cost savings as part of the six month extension of the framework contract.

RESOLVED:

(1) That the Staying Put Contractor Framework be extended for a further six months from the framework end date of October 2014.

(2) That a new three and a half year Contractor Framework Agreement for Staying Put be procured.

278 MINUTES OF THE SWALE JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD MEETING - 8 SEPTEMBER 2014

RESOLVED:

(1) That the recommendations in Minute Nos. 219 and 220 be approved.

279 MINUTES OF THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK PANEL - 25 SEPTEMBER 2014

RESOLVED:

(1) That the recommendations in Minute Nos. 254 and 255 be approved.

Chairman

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All Minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel