
POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne on Tuesday, 10 April 2018 from 7.00pm - 10.25pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Sarah Aldridge, Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, Andy Booth (Vice-Chairman), Lloyd Bowen (Chairman), Nicholas Hampshire, James Hunt, Peter Marchington, George Samuel and Ben Stokes.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Tracey Beattie, Philippa Davies, Zoe Kent, Sarah Porter, Bob Pullen, Nick Vickers, Steve Wilcock and Chris Woodward.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Cameron Beart, Sue Gent (Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs), Alan Horton (Cabinet Member for Safer Families and Communities), Gerry Lewin (Cabinet Member for Planning), David Simmons (Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs), Ted Wilcox (Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance) and John Wright.

APOLOGY: Councillor Duncan Dewar-Whalley (Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance).

602 FIRE EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the fire evacuation procedure.

603 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 February 2018 (Minute Nos. 490 – 495) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

604 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

605 DIGITAL STRATEGY

The Chairman welcomed the Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance, the Head of ICT and the Transformation Programme Manager to the meeting.

The Deputy Cabinet Member introduced the report which set out the direction the Council was taking with regard to offering a greater range of digital services for residents and businesses and encouraging innovation in this field, as set out in the Corporate Plan. The Transformation Programme Manager added that it was important not only to provide online services, but how Swale Borough Council (SBC) approached this, and also how on-line use was promoted. She explained that the aim was to achieve digital use, not by default, but by choice.

A Member welcomed the document and considered it summarised the direction that SBC was taking. He suggested there should be more detail within the document,

e.g. apps that could be used to access Council services. The Transformation Programme Manager explained that this was a strategic document, but there would also be an action plan to take the Strategy forward.

A Member stated that it was important that the digital services were user-friendly, and he suggested a user-ability study was carried out to test the online services. He considered this approach would also help with digital education. The Member also highlighted the need to consider the diverse population and that translated options would also need to be available.

The Deputy Cabinet Member responded by advising that the design of the website was been carried out 'bottom-up'. User groups were invited to give input at an early stage. The search engine on the SBC website would also be improved.

A Member suggested that consideration needed to be taken in areas of deprivation in the Borough, and also where there was a lack, or poor service, of Broadband.

A Member welcomed the report and considered the Strategy was crucial for the sustainability of the Council. He asked whether there were likely to be any job implications with an increase in digital take-up, and the reduction of telephone contact.

The Transformation Programme Manager explained that it was too early to forecast whether there would be any job losses. She explained that there was now more scope to carry out a wider range of work from home. The Deputy Cabinet Member further advised that within the wider Transformation Programme, a range of systems would be integrated in the future, with the aim to reduce bureaucracy.

A Member welcomed the improvements that were being made to the Council website. He stated that there were areas where Broadband quality was decreasing, as demand increased. He suggested information about the changes to the website and digital services could be communicated via workshops. He further suggested that a library of workshops could be filmed and used as a learning resource for Members.

The Head of ICT took the opportunity to remind Members that it was Swale's Communications Team who must take credit for the delivery and content of the Council website, not ICT. He further advised that the online training resource (ELMS) used by SBC staff, would shortly be made available to Members as well.

A Member stated that streaming of Council meetings should also be embedded in the Strategy. The Transformation Programme Manager advised that this could be added to the Action Plan. She explained that talks would need to be had with the Democratic Services Team to establish what their requirements were to enable this to go forward. In response to a question, she advised that there was no time-line for this to happen at the moment. The Chief Financial Officer explained that there were significant cost implications for streaming Council meetings and these would have to be considered by Full Council.

In response to a question on the digital skills of Councillors, referred to on page 8 of the report, the Deputy Cabinet Member advised that this was something that the Member Development Working Group would get involved with.

A Member stressed the importance of ensuring that any user-groups involved in testing new systems, were residents not affiliated with the Council to ensure that the testing was more real. The Transformation Programme Manager outlined the ways that volunteers were asked to test the system. These included flyers at the three Council offices, an advert in the 'Inside Swale' magazine, and by email, and social media.

There was further discussion on live-streaming of Council meetings, and the following points were raised: could see the merits of live-streaming; we were lagging behind on this, compared to other Councils; it would be useful to find out the costs and what other Councils had done, to make comparisons; the high cost of storage of data; and virtual meetings could be held.

In response, the Deputy Cabinet Member advised that the cost of technology and storage was coming down. He welcomed the Skype for Business facility that SBC staff now used and he hoped that all Councillors would use this as well in the future. He considered live-streaming of Council meetings could be in use at SBC within a couple of years.

Members agreed to the recommendation below.

The Chairman thanked the Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance, the Head of ICT and the Transformation Programme Manager for attending the meeting for this item, and also took the opportunity to thank all the report writers for their reports for each item on the agenda.

Recommendation for consideration by the Cabinet Member:

(1) That the Cabinet Member considers looking at the inclusion of live-streaming of Council meetings within the Digital Strategy.

606 DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENT POLICY

The Chairman welcomed the Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance, and the Revenue and Benefits Manager to the meeting.

The Deputy Cabinet Member introduced the report which set out the annual budget awarded from Central Government to provide payments to those Housing Benefit customers who had a shortfall between their rent and their Housing Benefit. He explained that this was an annual report and the Committee had the opportunity to review the Policy before it was formally adopted.

The Revenue and Benefits Manager explained that the Policy was out for consultation, prior to it being submitted to Cabinet on 30 May 2018.

A Member stated that he would like to see greater joined-up working with other agencies, that there needed to be more signposting, and it was important to ensure that the payments were awarded to the right people.

The Revenue and Benefits Manager explained that so far 110 responses had been received to the public consultation on the scheme, although only 52 responses had been fully completed. In response to a question, she advised that the consultation took about six minutes to complete online. The Revenue and Benefits Manager explained further the process of who received the payment, either to the claimant or to the landlord direct.

A Member questioned whether there was an opportunity for fraud to take place. The Revenue and Benefits Manager explained that they were aware that fraud could be committed, but this was rare, as a thorough investigation was always carried out on any rent arrears. She explained that most cases involved vulnerable people, and the department worked closely with other agencies.

In response to a question, the Revenue and Benefits Manager explained the process of who was given payment. Long discussions were held to decide if help would be given, and help would be turned down if the person had built up rent arrears, was working, but had spent their money inappropriately. A balance was needed as the person could end up in bed and breakfast accommodation if a payment was not made, resulting in further costs to the Council.

A Member asked if there was a cap on payments? The Deputy Cabinet Member advised that claims were made on a case-by-case basis and that if a resident kept coming back, he considered there was something wrong in the system.

A Member asked if there was any flexibility if the resident was not claiming benefits. The Revenue and Benefits Manager advised that the resident had to be in receipt of housing benefit or Universal Credit, but it was possible to negotiate with a landlord and go ahead and pay when the resident received those benefits. She further advised that if a person was declared bankrupt, the rent arrears would be written-off.

A Member asked whether the categories included in the tables on pages 12 and 13 of the report were mandatory? The Revenue and Benefits Manager advised that the categories came from the Department of Work and Pensions, and they enabled them to be able to see the shortfall between housing benefit and the rent.

The Chairman thanked the Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance, and the Revenue and Benefits Manager for attending the meeting for this item.

Recommendation for consideration by the Cabinet Member:

(1) That the comments made by the Committee be considered by the Cabinet Member for the final version of the Discretionary Housing Payment Policy.

607 SWALE STRATEGIC AIR QUALITY ACTION PLAN 2018-22

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs, the Chief Financial Officer, the Mid-Kent Environmental Health Manager and the Environmental Protection Team Leader to the meeting for this item.

The Cabinet Member introduced the report which set out the Swale Strategic Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) 2018-22 which would provide clear objectives for delivering air quality improvements in the Borough. He advised that work was evolving and at an early stage and he welcomed input from the Committee. He stated that the impacts of air quality had become more widely known and publicised. Five Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) had been established in the Borough, each with their own Action Plan. The Cabinet Member explained that these had only had minor success, and so an improved approach was needed. He advised that there was now an Action Plan for the whole of Swale. Consultants had been employed and had produced their report (Appendix II).

The Mid-Kent Environmental Health Manager explained that this was an overview of the AQAP. She stated that there was clear evidence that pollution came from vehicles and drew attention to table 6.1 (Strategic AQAP measures) and table 6.2 (Local AQAP measures) within the Interim Strategic Air Quality Action Plan 2018 – 22, some of which had been initiated already. A detailed traffic survey had been carried out on each of the five AQMAs. The Mid-Kent Environmental Health Manager advised that now it was time to look at potential action that could be taken. She welcomed the Committee's comments.

The Chairman advised that the Committee should only be looking at the information that was presented to them, as it was not possible to speculate on potential issues of any future development.

The Chairman suggested the report be split, and Members considered the officer report first, pages 23 to 27, then Appendix I (The Interim Swale Strategic AQAP 2018-22), section by section. Appendix II consisted of data, and Members were advised to speak to officers outside the meeting if they had any comments to make on that part of the report.

Officer report – pages 23 to 27

Members asked questions and made comments as noted below:

What did it mean being in an AQMA and what would it lead to?

The Environmental Protection Team Leader explained that an AQMA must have continuing monitoring, but not necessarily automatic monitoring, i.e. diffusion tubes could be used. A representative level within the area was required.

How realistic were the solutions, especially when the infrastructure did not allow for alternative routes, or initiatives like '20's plenty' were not workable?

The Environmental Protection Team Leader acknowledged that measures were limited to the existing infrastructure. The '20's' plenty suggestion had been made

some time ago. The best solution was smooth traffic flow, without stopping; it was the stop/start and acceleration that caused pollution.

A Member considered it was difficult to enforce 20mph speed restrictions. He raised concern with allocated sites for development that would make the AQMAs worse, and considered areas should be monitored prior to development being agreed.

The Environmental Protection Team Leader explained that his department worked closely with the Planning Team. He stated that there were insufficient resources to monitor air quality everywhere. Monitoring was carried out where it was suspected there was an issue. He explained that it was vital that air quality was taken into account in the Local Plan. Traffic modelling enabled predictions in levels of air pollution to be determined and he was confident that the worst areas in Swale had been identified at the moment.

A Member questioned the accuracy of the modelling of air pollution?

The Cabinet Member explained that the 2018 baseline data was a good starting point and modelling methods would improve in the future.

A Member considered that as it was known what was coming forward in the Local Plan, it should be possible to know the levels of pollution before planning applications were submitted.

The Cabinet Member explained that it was possible to make predictions of air quality, and welcomed the input from Members to make the Action Plan more realistic for the future.

A Member stated that the Borough Council was not in control of this situation. She considered it was not possible to affect traffic volumes, that was Kent County Council, but Councillors could influence the Local Plan.

The Environmental Protection Team Leader explained that the Council had a statutory duty to survey the Borough for air pollution, and that it took a long time to get meaningful data. It was necessary to get Kent County Council (KCC) Highways on board. He explained that Swale did more air quality monitoring than other local authorities, and followed national guidelines, and he considered the results were realistic. He added that the Council also held talks with local haulage and bus companies on the way forward.

A Member asked if there was a statutory duty to do anything, following the monitoring?

The Environmental Protection Team Leader explained that an AQMA had to be declared if an exceedance of the Government Air Quality Objectives for that pollutant occurred. He stated that each AQMA would normally need a separate AQAP, but in this instance they would be combined into one, as they shared a common issue from a common source. The monitoring was carried out to check the progress of levels and to produce the data for policy makers.

A Member asked about the timescales involved.

The Environmental Protection Team Leader said that to take into account seasonal variations, it should take at least a year to get accurate monitoring figures.

A Member asked what could be done to improve pollution and enable people to breathe clean air?

The Environmental Protection Team Leader stated that it was impossible to monitor air pollution everywhere to the level of accuracy needed. It was possible to see predicted levels from the DEFRA background predictions, and these were looked at regularly. He added that there were financial and human resources to manage monitoring throughout the Borough.

A Member paid credit to the Environmental Protection Team Leader and his team. The Member asked what the implications were in areas of deprivation which might have older, more polluting vehicles?

The Environmental Protection Team Leader explained that proportionally there were a small number of older-type vehicles and they increased the level of results disproportionately, these would decrease as time went on. In response to a further question, he advised that a significant amount of modern HGVs did not pollute.

A Member asked why only one pollutant was being tested?

The Environmental Protection Team Leader explained that Nitrogen Dioxide was monitored and some of the levels in Swale exceeded Government guidelines, but that particular matter (PM10s) was also monitored. This monitoring had shown there not to be any exceedances.

A Member suggested that taxis transporting children to schools become less polluting and that this be taken up with KCC within their transport schemes.

In response to a question, the Environmental Protection Team Leader explained that they were considering actions that might impact on the A2 and that they still valued individual AQMAs Steering Groups and intended to bring them into the unified document. He added that a complete solution for the whole of the A2 might be the answer.

Appendix I (Pages 29 to 64)

Page 31

A Member asked with regard to the impact on air quality on current guidelines, how much weight was given to this?

The Cabinet Member for Planning advised that generally the National Planning Policy Framework asked for consideration to be taken of air quality, but was not aware of how much weight was given to this.

A Member raised concern with devices that some HGVs were fitted with that disabled AdBlue systems and as such increased pollution levels. The Cabinet Member agreed to look further into this.

A Member raised concern with localised data readings.

The Environmental Protection Team Leader explained that other pollutants were recorded in this instance, especially when there was a large built-up area.

Page 38

A Member considered that practical measures such as bus lay-bys and pedestrian bridges should be used to keep traffic flowing. He also suggested that air quality control zones were needed to catch polluting vehicles. He stated that practical issues needed to be implemented sooner than the document suggested. The Member also questioned which took precedence, air quality or planning policy, and an Action Plan was needed to mitigate any issues.

A Member asked what the cost of this project had been to-date?

The Chief Financial Officer agreed to forward this information to Democratic Services for circulation to Members. He added that resource implications should not inhibit Members' suggestions.

Page 44

A Member considered there needed to be cross-department working, i.e. with planning and licensing, and that developers needed to make improvements as standard.

Page 45

A Member asked if measures were *actively* being implemented?

The Cabinet Member advised that he was sure that this was the case.

Page 53

A Member made comments on cycle ways, and them being more joined-up.

A Member considered there needed to be further action with regard to residents using buses and trains. In response to a question, the Cabinet Member stated that a bus voucher scheme for new residents had been successful.

Pages 55 and 56

In response to questions, the Cabinet Member stated that signs could be installed in respect of anti-idling, school traffic plans could be looked into further, and when trees were taken down, they were replaced.

Page 57

A Member asked if there was a danger of fragmentation by having too many steering groups. The Environmental Protection Team Leader acknowledged that some groups were more active than others, and that the steering group was intended to act as an over arching group with information and decisions feeding in from the active local groups.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Environment and Rural Affairs, the Chief Financial Officer, the Mid-Kent Environmental Health Manager and the Environmental Protection Team Leader for attending the meeting for this item.

Members agreed the recommendations below:

Recommendations for consideration by the Cabinet Member for the final Swale Strategic Air Quality Action Plan 2018-22:

- (1) That Air quality monitoring to be undertaken at all sites where 100+ homes are allocated in the Local Plan, as well as those sites which are being mooted during the work on the revised Local Plan. This would not just be at the site's location but also at major ingress and egress routes to it;**
- (2) That given the data from additional monitoring undertaken in the A2/Key Street area, an Air Quality Management Zone be declared at Key Street/A2/Wises Lane, Sittingbourne;**
- (3) That Ward Councillors be engaged in discussions with officers on improvements required in AQMAs, and in areas where levels are of concern;**
- (4) That new licences only be awarded to cleaner vehicles used in the operation of taxis and buses in the Borough;**
- (5) That penalties be awarded to those that continue to licence older polluting vehicles on a per vehicle basis;**
- (6) That all council-owned vehicles or those contracted to work on behalf of the council on major contracts, to operate the newest, cleaner technology vehicles. This would include vehicles used by our street wardens, dust carts, etc.;**
- (7) That a 2-for-1 tree-replanting scheme where trees have had to be removed and re-planted as close to where they have been removed from, be implemented;**
- (8) That implementation of higher parking standards on new developments ensuring at least each property has 2 spaces attached to them in addition to suitable visitor/delivery vehicle parking that does not block the main routes e.g., passing bays, etc.;**
- (9) That there be orderly parking at key pinch points either through the provision of off street parking or regulated pavement parking in clearly defined bays;**
- (10) That bus stop locations be reviewed and ensure suitable passing points exist on congested routes;**
- (11) That construction of by-passes to North of Sittingbourne allowing for travel from Rainham to Teynham without having to touch A2. This would allow for average speed roads, and clean air zones to be implemented on routes;**

- (12) That the A249 to have average speed cameras along its whole stretch. Either mimic the A202 or smart motorways such as M20.**
- (13) That the condition of road surfaces be monitored regularly and ensured they are in a reasonable state of repairs. Other authorities submit real-time information obtained from cameras attached to their freighters to those responsible for highways maintenance;**
- (14) That it be ensured that cycle paths are effective and can be used for their intended purpose. Review routes and consider how can be improved and the introduction of cycle highways;**
- (15) That a Swale bike scheme be promoted (like the Boris bike) and its linkages to healthier lifestyles and tourism initiatives;**
- (16) That it be looked at how other major towns address the relationship between public transport, cars, cycles, pedestrians, etc. e.g. Central London, Oxford, Croydon;**
- (17) That all Committees, particularly Licensing and Planning take environmental issues into consideration;**
- (18) That partners providing services, e.g. provision of taxis for taking children to school, and bus companies, consider the fuel that is being used;**
- (19) That more travel plans be put in place for schools;**
- (20) That good working practices be replicated where possible;**
- (21) That areas be actively air quality monitored;**
- (22) That the Action Plan has a forward projection on traffic modelling to factor in additional traffic, as part of the planning process;**
- (23) That there should be strict policy that all air quality or traffic modelling consultations be carried out by independent persons;**
- (24) That there be interaction with developers about changes they are doing, e.g. electric vehicle charging points;**
- (25) That Town Councils also be consulted, as well as parish councils;**
- (26) That residents living along the A2 be consulted;**
- (27) That major enterprises on the Eurolink industrial area be consulted;**
- (28) That there be a continuous dialogue about Section 106 agreements and Community Infrastructure Levies;**
- (29) That it be recognised that all major development in Swale would have an impact on the A2;**
- (30) That methods be sought to enforce Travel Plans;**
- (31) That it be made easier to plan and do walking in the Borough, with a link to tourism;**
- (32) That 'on-demand' bus service initiatives should be looked into;**
- (33) That there be pedestrian bridges at congestion points;**
- (34) That planning conditions need to be placed on all diggers and lorries (Euro 4 or above);**
- (35) That local incentives be given for electric vehicle charging points - a strategic plan was needed;**
- (36) That new developments be built to higher efficiency ratings to decrease fuel use;**
- (37) That there be pedestrian bridges by schools on the main road A2 or other congested points where public meets traffic causing it to stop;**
- (38) That school and commuter buses have lay-bys so traffic can get past without stopping;**
- (39) That school/industry/public services promote work shift patterns to change the spread of traffic volumes over a greater period;**

(40) That by-passes be constructed for Newington, Southern and Northern Sittingbourne, Ospringe and Teynham;

(41) That there be planning conditions for:

- a. electric power points private and public (there needs to be a strategy on the roll out of this);**
- b. clean construction lorries and earth moving vehicles;**
- c. higher standards of insulation and heating/power generation such as solar;**
- d. contributions to clean bus services;**
- e. planning for local services near to homes;**
- f. adequate and easy off road parking;**
- g. cycle ways and good foot paths in good condition;**
- h. plant and maintain good green infrastructure;**

(42) That there be good road surfaces /clean road surfaces to allow free-flowing traffic;

(43) That public education changes habits to lead a less polluting way of life;

(44) That there be 20mph zones where necessary;

(45) That there be local incentive schemes to change old vehicles and modes of transport;

(46) That there be real time monitoring and suggested alternative routes;

(47) That there be licencing of only 'clean' buses and taxi services; and

(48) That there be a recovery plan when things go wrong and get worse, with resources to put things right.

608 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Policy and Performance Officer reminded Members that the next meeting date had changed to 10 May 2018.

609 SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

At 10pm Members agreed to the suspension of Standing Orders in order that the Committee could complete its business.

610 RECORD OF THANKS

The Chairman thanked the Vice-Chairman and other members of the Committee for their input on the Committee over the past year. He outlined the policies and strategies that had been considered by the Committee.

The Chairman thanked the Policy and Performance Officer for his support throughout the year, and he also thanked the Democratic Services Team.

Chairman

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