
POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 16 January 2019 from 7.00pm - 9.00pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Cameron Beart, Monique Bonney, Andy Booth (Chairman), Tina Booth, Lloyd Bowen, Nicholas Hampshire, James Hunt (Vice-Chairman), Nigel Kay, Roger Truelove and Ted Wilcox.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Steph Curtis, Charlotte Hudson, Kellie MacKenzie, Bob Pullen, Roxanne Sheppard and Rebecca Walker.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Alan Horton (Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities), Harrison and Tony Winckless.

APOLOGY: Councillor Mike Baldock.

444 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

445 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 November 2019 (Minute Nos. 353 – 358) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

446 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

447 HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities, the Head of Housing, the Economy and Community Services, Housing Options Manager, and the Strategic Housing and Health Manager to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities introduced the report which provided an overview of the work currently underway to develop, the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy for Swale for 2019-2023. The Council had commissioned external consultants HQN to work with the Council on producing the Strategy. The Cabinet Member stated that six months into their work the consultants had found “pockets of excellence” within the Council’s Housing services, and some areas where things could be done slightly differently.

The Cabinet Member reported that HQN had identified the housing issues affecting Swale, and from that four objectives and eight priorities had been identified, these were set-out on page two of the Committee report.

The Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services spoke about the excellent work provided by housing. She explained that the Strategy would include the issues affecting Swale, not just national issues.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities asked Members to consider what should be included in the strategy.

Members considered the report, and in the discussion that followed, the following points were made:

- Considered the report was rather “thin” and made a lot of generalities and gave no measurement of local issues so further development required;
- would like a timetable of action to include what was likely to happen and when;
- why were consultants used? We have a Policy unit at the Council so could this not have been done in-house?
- required further explanation on SMEs and the point being made?
- need to explore the reasons why people have become homeless;
- consider that Swale should seize the initiative and develop its own social housing and not outsource to third parties;
- Swale’s Local Plan should be guiding this strategy;
- need to ensure that the right type of property was being provided within the Borough, as there was a lack of bungalows being built;
- option 3 needed to be expanded to include balance of types of housing;
- needed to include high price of established sheltered accommodation;
- objectives needed to be amended so it was clear that the Council were aiming for upper quartile improvements not just average;
- need to ensure that “rogue” landlords were on-board to ensure living conditions were improved;
- need to address the two-month a year homelessness issue caused by the ten-month occupancy rule on holiday camps, and the problems it creates every year for the Council’s housing department;
- welcomed improving social housing conditions, but how could you ensure this stays in place?;
- need to ensure that social housing properties were not sub-let;
- would like to see emergency out of hours procedures included;
- need to find a way of ensuring the final strategy was clear and simple;
- how did the strategy deal with homeless persons from London re-located to Swale?;
- there was a clear link between planning, the local plan and the housing strategy;
- how much were vulnerable households increasing by in Swale?;
- what stakeholders had been consulted?;
- persons released from prison with nowhere to go should be included as this was a big issue in Swale;
- more dialogue required with all housing associations to ensure their properties were up-to-scratch;
- important to identify who were the homeless and why they were homeless as this would help to provide the solution;

- sign-posting to places where people could receive help such as a decent meal should be included;
- need to make provision for affordable housing in large scale developments and monies for providing this secured from any Section 106 Agreements;
- there needed to be closer working between the housing and planning departments;
- the Housing Needs Assessment needed to sit side-by-side with this strategy; and
- need to look at housing solutions and be open to ideas and take a more holistic approach to reducing homelessness.

In response to queries, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities explained that the Council's housing department had not had the capacity to commence work on the Strategy due to work created following the imposition of the HRA legislation, so external consultants were used. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities confirmed that planning services were being consulted on the strategy and that this was a four year work programme.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities reported that £153,000 bid had been submitted to the Rough Sleepers Initiative Team at the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for aid to assist rough sleepers. He advised that support was in place for rough sleepers during periods of severe weather. He confirmed that the stakeholder event held on 15 January 2019 had been attended by various stakeholders including representatives from: health providers; police; private landlords; Kent County Council; and principal housing associations.

Following a request from the Chairman, the Housing Options Manager agreed to provide figures of the number of vulnerable households in the Borough. In response to a query from a Member, the Housing Options Manager stated that whilst Councils from London Boroughs were able to offer large money incentives to private landlords to take their residents, they could not offer the support that the local Council could, however she was not aware that this was a huge problem in the Borough.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities thanked Members and welcomed the points raised.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities, the Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services, the Housing Options Manager, and the Strategic Housing and Health Manager for attending the meeting.

448 PUBLIC SPACE CCTV

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities, the Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services and the Safer and Stronger Communities Officer to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities introduced the report which set out the early stages of a public space CCTV Strategy for Swale. He explained that the current public space CCTV was old and not fit for purpose. Also

new legislation meant that the way in which it could be used and the justifications for its use had changed. The Cabinet Member spoke about changes and improvements in technology and considered the proposed strategy gave a clear view on where Swale was going in terms of CCTV provision.

The Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services advised that as well as improvements in technology, it was important to consider the changes in human behaviour in respect of CCTV and also privately run CCTV. She stated that the review was important to assess the future of CCTV in Swale.

Members considered the report and raised points which included:

- Welcomed provision of wi-fi in town centres across the Borough;
- mobile units were a good idea, especially for resolving anti-social behaviour (ASB) issues;
- noted the fall in operational incidents logged which showed the current CCTV system was failing and did not provide evidence;
- concerns that ASB might increase in certain areas if CCTV removed;
- CCTV has been used by the Police to find vulnerable elderly people suffering from dementia and also solve major crime, if there were less cameras these types of incidents would be harder to resolve. Reducing the number of cameras would have a detrimental knock-on effect;
- Eastchurch Parish Council had experienced operational problems with the current CCTV set-up and had pulled-out. Since then they had not experienced any issues without having CCTV;
- wi-fi was definitely the way forward;
- mobile cameras were particularly useful for combating fly-tipping;
- considered the Police should fund CCTV not the Council;
- technology was so advanced that less people were required to work the systems. That should bring costs down and should be included in the Strategy;
- how much would it cost to modernise?;
- areas of public access needed CCTV, especially at night to ensure people felt safe;
- the Council's street lighting policy needed to be considered in conjunction with this Strategy;
- Spring Street, Sittingbourne was very dark and people felt vulnerable in this public space;
- needed to ensure those in rural areas would be able to access the mobile CCTV;
- the Council should not rely on people using their mobile phones etc. to provide evidence;
- need to liaise with providers to ensure broadband in rural areas was available; and
- CCTV did not just assist the Police, the Council also benefited from CCTV particularly in relation to licensing.

In response to queries, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities drew attention to item 4 on page 7 of the Strategy which outlined that one of the purposes of the second generation public space CCTV systems was to support the

most vulnerable members of the community. The Council currently had a number of mobile cameras. He spoke about how human attitudes towards CCTV had changed and also how the Police priorities and working practices had changed. The Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities stated that the Police Crime Commissioner had made it clear that they would not pay for the CCTV.

A Visiting Member queried the number of officers monitoring the CCTV at Medway as he had previously visited the unit and believed that it was three or four. He considered the graph on page six of the report outlining the incidents logged to-date was inaccurate as there were now less cameras so the number of incidents would reduce.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities stated that the cameras which had been removed had been so because there were no incidents logged. The Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services confirmed that since 2012 there was only one operator at a time monitoring all of Swale's CCTV cameras.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities thanked Members for their suggestions. He stated that following the consultation they would bring the Strategy back to the Committee for their consideration later in the year.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Communities, the Head of Housing, Economy and Communities and the Safer and Stronger Communities Officer for attending the meeting.

449 COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Policy and Performance Officer introduced the work programme. He advised that he was aware of a further item from the Community Safety Unit which would be considered at the next meeting on 12 February 2019. The Tree Policy would also be considered at that meeting, and it was possible that other items might come forward.

In response to a question from a Member, the Policy and Performance Officer confirmed that the Sheerness Vision (regeneration strategy), would not be considered at the next meeting.

Chairman

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