
POLICY, FINANCE AND HOUSING COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Virtual Meeting held via Skype on Tuesday, 13 July 2021 from 7.00 pm - 9.07 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Steve Davey, Oliver Eakin, Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, Alan Horton, Ken Ingleton, Lee McCall, Hannah Perkin, David Simmons, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen, Mike Whiting and Corrie Woodford.

OFFICERS PRESENT: David Clifford, Charlotte Hudson, Janet Dart, Jo Millard, Nick Vickers and Phil Wilson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Cameron Beart, Monique Bonney (Cabinet Member for Economy and Property), Roger Clark, Mike Dendor, Simon Fowle, Angela Harrison (Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing), James Hunt, Elliott Jayes, Ben J Martin (Cabinet Member for Housing), Pete Neal, Ken Rowles, Roger Truelove (Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance), Tim Valentine (Cabinet Member for Climate and Ecological Emergency) and Tony Winckless.

APOLOGY: Councillor Simon Clark.

144 INTRODUCTION

The Senior Democratic Services Officer welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that Councillor Alastair Gould had replaced Councillor Tim Valentine and Councillor Paul Stephen had replaced Councillor Bill Tatton on the committee.

145 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Members agreed to nominate Councillor Lee McCall to be elected as Chairman for the Municipal Year 2021/22, to be confirmed at the next in person meeting.

146 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

Members agreed to nominate Councillor Tim Gibson to be elected as Vice-Chairman for the Municipal Year 2021/22, to be confirmed at the next in-person meeting.

147 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

148 PURPOSE AND ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE - VERBAL UPDATE

The Head of Policy, Communications & Customer Services gave a brief overview of the role and purpose of the Cabinet Advisory Committees (CACs). He referred to the member briefing session on the committee system delivered in June 2021 and said that the advisory committees could be seen as a precursor to the committee system, but could also be seen as more specialised versions of the old Policy, Development and Review Committee (PDRC). In response to a question from a member, the Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance clarified that it was the

intention that the CAC's would lead to a full committee system but this could not be pre-empted.

149 BUDGET UPDATE

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report which gave a brief on the 2022/23 budget process and outlined options for balancing the budget moving forward. He drew particular attention to the staff costs in paragraph 9 and reminded members that one-off monies to fund administration priorities could not be used to balance the base budget.

The Leader highlighted paragraphs 11, 12 and 13 in the report which set out the estimated future budget and he drew attention to paragraphs 15 to 19 and asked members to consider the options to balance the budget. The Leader explained that whilst Swale set the third lowest Council Tax in Kent, it was the second most deprived area. He said the Council might be expected to call upon its reserves but once this was spent it was gone.

Members asked questions which the Leader responded to.

During the discussion, a member asked whether income could be generated longer term through the Swale Rainbow Homes scheme. The Cabinet Member for Housing said it was too early to say as final costs were not known but other projects to generate income could be considered.

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance said that a report would be coming forward to the next meeting on one off funds and he hoped constructive ways to reducing spending would be discussed.

150 HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPERS STRATEGY - PROGRESS UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Housing gave a comprehensive update and review of the progress of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping strategy that was adopted in 2019. He highlighted the progress that had been made during that time. The Head of Housing, Economy and Communities added that it had been developed as a four-year strategy but was now outdated. She said that they would be looking at a 'Moving On' strategy.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and the Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services responded to Members' questions.

In the discussion that followed, the Cabinet Member for Housing explained that areas of high deprivation such as Swale often had residents with complex issues and the numbers requiring temporary accommodation was higher than some neighbouring authorities. The Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services said that whilst there was landlord liaison with Swale Borough Council (SBC), many were not keen to take on residents with complex needs, and affordability was an issue. Some properties were also not appropriate to be rented.

The Head of Housing, Economy and Community Services said that relationships with landlords were vital and the landlord forums were being reviewed, but were paused due to the Covid-19 pandemic. She said there would be a re-focusing on what SBC needed from landlords and on the Moving On strategy.

At the suggestion of using part of Swale House for homeless accommodation, the Cabinet Member for Housing said that all options could be looked into, but housing must be adequate, of a satisfactory standard and must benefit the health and welfare of an individual.

During a discussion on energy saving schemes, the Head of Housing, Economy and Property highlighted the challenges but agreed to look at this in more detail.

In response to a question from a member, the Cabinet Member for Housing stressed that the Swale Rainbow Homes project would develop 139 affordable homes with an option that the tenure of the homes could be changed in future years if appropriate, and 10% would be affordable in perpetuity.

Chairman

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