
POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Second Floor Conference Room, Swale House on Wednesday, 28 September 2022 from 7.01 pm - 8.38 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock (Chair), Monique Bonney (Vice-Chair), Lloyd Bowen, Derek Carnell, Mike Dendor, Tim Gibson, Mike Henderson, Alan Horton, Julian Saunders, David Simmons, Bill Tatton, Roger Truelove, Tim Valentine, Mike Whiting and Corrie Woodford.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Alison Blake, Philippa Davies, Lisa Fillery and Larissa Reed.

OFFICERS PRESENT (Virtually): Billy Attaway, Flo Churchill and Duncan Ellis.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually): Councillors Steve Davey, Ken Ingleton, Richard Palmer and Ken Rowles.

331 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

332 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Monique Bonney declared a disclosable non-pecuniary interest in respect of item 6, Sittingbourne Town Centre – Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) as she sat on Rodmersham Parish Council who had responded to the consultation on the SPD.

333 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 July 2022 (Minute Nos. 188 - 200) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Part A Minutes for recommendation to Council

334 **Miscellaneous constitution updates**

The Chief Executive introduced the report which explained the background to a number of fairly minor amendments to the Constitution and invited the Policy and Resources Committee to propose these to Full Council.

Members raised comments and asked questions which included:

- Referring to the proposed delegation set out in paragraph 3.17 of the report, considered the decision-making on the capital programme should be made by Full Council, rather than by an officer; and
- suggested the number referred to in paragraph 3.17 was incorrect as it referred to council tax and not the capital programme.

In response, the Director of Resources explained that she had requested this delegation to enable the process to be more workable if there were any changes in the budget process. She confirmed that the capital programme would be considered by this Committee, but the delegation to her would enable the best possible position for the Council to be achieved.

The Chief Executive acknowledged that there was an error in the paragraph number referred to in paragraph 3.17 and said this would be corrected when the report was submitted to Full Council.

Members agreed all seven recommendations, subject to the re-numbering of the paragraph referred to within recommendation (7).

Recommended:

That the following constitutional changes be recommended to Full Council:

- (1) Changes to the Environment committee areas of responsibility (paragraphs 3.1-3.3 of the report).***
- (2) An update to the Audit committee areas of responsibility (paragraphs 3.4-3.6 of the report).***
- (3) Changes to the table at section 3.6.7.4 of the contract standing orders (paragraphs 3.7-3.9 of the report).***
- (4) An addition to the list of areas to which the contract standing orders do not apply (section 3.6.2.3 of the constitution) (paragraph 3.10 of the report).***
- (5) Changes to the preamble to the scheme of officer delegations (sections 2.8.1.13 and 2.8.1.15 of the constitution) (paragraphs 3.11-3.14 of the report).***
- (6) A further change to the preamble to the scheme of officer delegations (section 2.8.1.5 of the constitution) (paragraphs 3.15-3.16 of the report).***
- (7) A new delegation to the Director of Resources (paragraph 3.17 of the report) – subject to amendment to the paragraph number referred to within paragraph 3.17.***

Post Meeting Note: With reference to the paragraph number referred to in paragraph number 3.17, the intention is to add 2.8.7.26 as a new paragraph to include the new delegation and move all other numbers down and not for the new delegation to be included in the current 2.8.7.26 and so no re-numbering will be necessary.

335 **Sittingbourne Town Centre - Supplementary Planning Document**

The Interim Head of Planning introduced the report and explained that work on this SPD had been ongoing since 2020, and was now in the final stage of consultation. She outlined the ways that the consultation had been advertised and said that 24 responses had been received which were recorded in Appendix I to the report. Proposed amendments to the SPD following the Planning & Transportation Policy Working Group meeting on 20 September 2022 were tabled at the meeting.

Members raised comments and asked questions which included:

- On page 22 of the agenda pack, Rodmersham should be referred to as Rodmersham **Parish** Council;
- who had considered the 'alternative options' under paragraph 4 of the report?;
- this was a very considerable piece of work by officers which had come out as being very balanced on all the aspects within the SPD;
- considered more improvements needed to be made on St. Michael's Road as it looked half finished;
- the High Street needed to be joined to the north side of the town;

- a footbridge was needed across the railway – realised this was within the gift of Network Rail, and this should be encouraged;
- clarification was needed on the Council purchasing leases on shops and then renting them out; and
- requested more detail on the proposed community corner in Central Avenue.

In response, the Interim Head of Planning advised that it was considered not an appropriate option to not to have an SPD and that having one helped with planning applications in town centres. The Chief Executive further clarified that it was the report author who considered the alternative options.

The Vice-Chair explained that she had recently met with Network Rail who were due to publish their 30-year plan shortly and this included the link bridge between the town centre and Eurolink Business Park. She considered it would be beneficial to include their plans within the SPD. The Vice-Chair referred to the gateway map on page 78 of the report and suggested the site of the new link should be included within the boundary of the SPD, especially if there was a request for funding in the future. In response, the Interim Head of Planning explained that she would need to speak to the report author to determine whether that would mean further consultation if the addition was considered too large. The Vice-Chair drew Members' attention to page 25 of the report where Network Rail had set out proposals for the footbridge and so it was already included within the document. The Chief Executive outlined the reasons for lease to let and explained this was a short-term option for the Council to assist regeneration, and generally assisted smaller businesses who were not prepared to take out longer leases. The Interim Head of Planning spoke on the proposed community centre on Central Avenue and suggested delegated authority be given to her and the Chair to make minor amendments to that scheme. She also confirmed that within the document, the written word took precedence over diagrams and said that amendments could be made to reflect the inclusion of the footbridge in the SPD.

The Chair proposed the following amendment: That recommendation (2) in the report be amended to include delegation to the Chair and the Interim Head of Planning for any minor amendments. This was seconded by Councillor Monique Bonney and on being put to the vote, the amendment was agreed.

Further comments included:

- Did not agree with the amendment to the recommendation;
- there were mixed responses to the document and did not consider these had been included;
- considered there was a significant number of small issues that had been raised;
- housing issues and no mention of Kent County Council's concerns with these;
- considered there was no evidence to back up the crime and disorder implications set out on page 15 of the report;
- it seemed that this was being rushed through, the SPD should be considered by the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group and then full council.

Recommended:

(1) That the revisions to the SPD following consultation feedback be approved.

(2) That delegation be given to the Chair and the Interim Head of Planning to make any minor amendments to the SPD prior to it being adopted by full Council.

Part B Minutes for information

336 Forward Decisions Plan

The Chief Executive explained the process for adding an agenda item onto the Forward Decisions Plan (FDP). She explained that the Chair set the final agenda and the FDP set out the items that were due to be considered throughout the year. In extreme circumstances an urgent item could be added to an agenda.

A Member considered fees and charges and the Council's budget should be considered separately at different meetings as there could be a knock-on effect on the budget after the setting of fees and charges.

The Director of Resources explained that fees and charges and the budget needed to be considered at the same meeting as they went hand-in-hand, with fees and charges underpinning the budget. The Chief Executive explained further that it was an administration budget as a whole, but that Chairs of the committees could suggest areas where there might be expenditure, and this could then feed into the overall budget.

A Member welcomed the clarification of the budget process and suggested that all Members should be made aware of it.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

337 Financial Management Report - First Quarter Monitoring 2022/23

The Director of Resources introduced the report which set out the quarter 1 revenue and capital budget monitoring forecast for 2022/23. The report was based on service activity for April – June 2022 and was collated from monitoring returns from budget managers. The Director of Resources explained that there was an overspend of just under £1 million, and this was mainly because of the increase in homelessness costs. She referred to the Kent Business Rates Pooling agreement as set out on page 116 of the report pack and explained that the decision as to whether the Council continued to be in the scheme would be decided by 7 October 2022.

Members raised comments and asked questions which included:

- An overspend on nearly £1 million was quite shocking;
- this indicated the upcoming issues brought on by the cost-of-living crisis;
- this was largely caused by the cost of temporary accommodation and it was alarming that the increase in private sector rents meant that the Council was in a vulnerable position;
- the Council needed to find an alternative housing stream, other than the private sector;
- the Council did well out of the Pooling agreement and considered we should remain in it; and

- considered delegation to the Director of Resources should be given at year-end, rather than now.

Councillor Alan Horton moved the following amendment: That the Leader of the Opposition Group be included in any consultation with the Director of Resources, as a positive move to including more Members in decision-making. This was seconded by Councillor Lloyd Bowen and on being put to the vote was agreed.

Resolved:

- (1) That the projected revenue overspend of £909,177 be noted.***
- (2) That the Pensions & Redundancy Reserve be topped up by £100k. This is to be met from the Budget Contingency Reserve.***
- (3) That delegated authority be given to the Director of Resources to assess the appropriate use of reserves to fund expenditure at year end.***
- (4) That the capital expenditure of £2,133,576 against the Revised Budget as detailed in Table 2 and Appendix I be noted.***
- (5) That the two new capital projects and their associated funding be noted.***
- (6) That the Council should in principle continue to participate in a county wide business rates pool but delegate to the Director of Resources in consultation with the Leader and the Leader of the Opposition Group the authority to change this decision if there is a significant change in circumstances.***

338 Risk Management update

The Interim Head of Audit introduced the report which set out an overview of risks which could prevent achievement of the Council's strategic priorities, and how these risks were being managed. She drew attention to the 15 corporate risks set out on page 127 of the report. The significant risks were demands and community pressure; design of major contracts; homelessness; and balancing the Medium-Term Budget.

Members raised comments and asked questions which included:

- Were there time limits on reducing the risks?;
- should the risk sit with the relevant service committee rather than with the Policy & Resources Committee?; and
- would like to see some more planned action under the Cyber Security Incident existing controls.

In response, the Interim Head of Audit said that target timescales could be included within the document in the future. The Chief Executive explained that the Resources & Property Committee had the overview of risk management, but each service committee had a scrutiny function and if there were concerns, the committee could ask for more information. She confirmed that references to the previous Cabinet regime would be removed from the document.

The Interim Head of Audit confirmed that in future documents the risks would be numbered.

The Chair moved the following motion: That more information be provided on pro-active action on the risk of cyber security and this was seconded by Councillor Derek Carnell. On being put to the vote the motion was agreed.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Council's corporate risks were being appropriately managed be noted.***
- (2) That more information be provided on pro-active action on the risk of cyber security.***

Chair

Copies of this document are available on the Council website <http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

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