

**Draft Policy Development and Review Committee Annual Report 2015/16**

**Swale Borough Council**

## **Policy Development and Review Committee Annual Report 2015/16**

1. The Committee was established two years ago and held its inaugural meeting on 28 May 2014.

2. The report covering the Committee's programme of work for the year sought to summarise its purpose as follows:

*“to assist the Cabinet in developing or reviewing either new or existing policies, strategies or plans. Its workload is expected to be driven by the natural cycle of considering existing policies, strategies or plans of the council as they come up for review or providing advice to Cabinet on proposals for new council policy referred by Cabinet, Council or the Scrutiny Committee”.*

3. Membership of the Committee during 2015/16 was as follows:

- Councillor Lloyd Bowen (Chairman)
- Councillor Andy Booth (Vice-Chairman)
- Councillor Mike Baldock
- Councillor Monique Bonney
- Councillor Katy Coleman
- Councillor Alan Horton
- Councillor James Hunt
- Councillor Peter Marchington
- Councillor George Samuel
- Councillor Ben Stokes
- Councillor Roger Truelove.

4. Just under half of the members were newly elected onto the Council at the local elections held on 7 May 2015.

4. A schedule of meetings and the policies, plans and strategies considered by the Committee during 2015-16 is at Appendix II. This also provides a summary of what the Committee considered.

5. From the outset, as agendas were compiled, and policies, plans and strategies were identified for the Committee's consideration, the relevant Cabinet Member and Lead Officer(s) were invited to attend the meetings. This worked well and the minutes show that, except for one or two occasions when they were unavailable, Cabinet Members attended all meetings to which they had been invited.

6. One aspect which did come to light during 2014/15, and continued throughout 2015/16, was that while the relevant Heads of Service were attending the meetings, they were being accompanied by relatively junior members of staff and that these staff were being given the opportunity to present reports. This continued to have several benefits:

- it enabled staff who can often bring a local rather than a corporate view of how a policy might work in practice to meet and discuss emerging policy with members other than the Cabinet;
- it provided staff with an opportunity to develop their presentation skills;
- non-executive members actually got to hear from officers who had led on the development of policies; and
- this all took place in a forum which was less adversarial than overview and scrutiny can sometimes be.

7. A trawl of the Cabinet and Council agendas for the year shows that all major policies, plans, and strategies had been considered by the Committee prior to their approval. The exceptions were the Local Plan and Licensing Policy, which are in any case the preserve of the Local Development Framework Panel and General Licensing Committee respectively. This reinforces the need to maintain a robust register of policies and to liaise with Heads of Services regularly to ensure that the information held on the Policy Register is up to date.

## Appendix II

### Policies considered by the Policy Development and Review Committee during 2015/16

Date considered	Policy title	Summary of Committee considerations
22 July 2015	Planning Enforcement Charter and Strategy	<p>The draft Planning Enforcement and Charter sets out how the Council aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ be effective in dealing with breaches of planning control giving rise to unacceptable harm on public amenity and/or causing harm to land or buildings;</li> <li>▪ limit resources used in pursuing minor breaches causing no harm to amenity;</li> <li>▪ resolve complaints by persuasion and negotiation – however, when this is not possible then the Planning Enforcement Service has the power to commence enforcement actions;</li> <li>▪ operate in an equitable, proportionate and consistent manner and follow the advice in the Good Practice Guide for Local Planning Authorities; and</li> <li>▪ educate and inform stakeholders about the process, standards of service, procedures, and provide widely available information to all customers.</li> </ul> <p>The Committee considered the draft Charter and Strategy on two occasions, including a pre-consultation version on 22 July 2015. The Committee explored issues such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ how the Development Management Team worked with other services, such as the Mid Kent Legal Services;</li> <li>▪ new performance indicators;</li> <li>▪ case monitoring and performance reporting; and</li> <li>▪ enforcement action ‘out of hours’.</li> </ul> <p>The Committee’s comments were considered in the revision of the Charter and</p>

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		Strategy before it was issued for consultation.
16 September 2015	Communications Strategy	<p>The Council had developed a Communications Strategy to set direction for the Council's communications throughout the year, to support and publicise the services and key programmes being delivered by the Council, and to enable more effective forward planning of resources and communication channel management.</p> <p>The Committee considered issues around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• webcasting meetings;</li> <li>• interaction with the Customer Service Centre;</li> <li>• low response rate to consultations; and</li> <li>• the importance of maintaining non-digital communications with residents, e.g. via Inside Swale.</li> </ul>
“	Kent Environment Strategy Consultation Response	The Committee considered the Council's proposed response to Kent County Council's consultation on the Kent Environment Strategy and made some suggestions for the Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs to consider.
28 October 2015	Housing Allocations Policy	<p>The Council is under a statutory obligation to keep under review its Housing Allocations Policy and the Committee considered the impact of the changes which had been in place since 2014 and how the policy may need to be amended. The policy relates to the allocation of social housing.</p> <p>The Committee considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ constraints to available accommodation;</li> <li>▪ eligibility criteria;</li> <li>▪ reviews and appeals; and</li> <li>▪ refusals.</li> </ul> <p>The Committee made a number of recommendations for the Cabinet Member for</p>

Date considered	Policy title	Summary of Committee considerations
		Housing to consider.
“	Playing Pitch Strategy	<p>The draft Strategy sets out the Council’s intended approach and priorities for ensuring there is sufficient playing pitch provision to meet current and future demand across the borough.</p> <p>The Committee explored:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the availability of school pitches for community use as required through planning conditions;</li> <li>▪ the Council’s Community Assets Transfer Policy; and</li> <li>▪ the availability of fit-for-purpose changing facilities.</li> </ul> <p>The Committee made a number of recommendations for consideration by the Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Culture and Heritage.</p>
18 November 2015	Draft Indoor Sports Facility Strategy 2015 - 2025	<p>The draft Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy had been produced to determine what swimming pool and indoor sports facilities were required post-2019 to help meet the aspirations of the residents of Swale and the Council’s existing and developing core policies and objectives.</p> <p>The Committee considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• participation rates;</li> <li>• links to regeneration projects;</li> <li>• use of village and community halls for sporting activities;</li> <li>• the use of school facilities by local communities; and</li> <li>• play equipment on new developments.</li> </ul>
“	Local Engagement Forums and Swale Rural Forum reviews	The review of the Local Engagement Forums (LEFs) and Rural Forum had been requested by a member at Full Council in July 2015 and the Committee had been invited by the Cabinet Member for Localism, Culture, Heritage and Sport to consider

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		<p>the outcomes of the review.</p> <p>Kent County Council and Swale Borough Council established three Local Engagement Forums across the borough in 2009 to engage, inform and consult residents across Swale in order to achieve their ambition to create better services, build positive relationships with communities, and to create confident and skilled community members. As consultative forums, the LEFs sought to provide an opportunity for the public to meet with county, district and parish councillors, the Police and Fire and Rescue Service, and other public bodies such as AmicusHorizon.</p> <p>The Rural Forum was established in 2005 to discuss issues and make recommendations regarding rural problems, given the ambition to create better rural services and build positive relationships within the rural community.</p> <p>The Committee considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ public attendance at the Forums;</li> <li>▪ the staff resources needed to service them; and</li> <li>▪ alternative methods of engaging with residents and local communities.</li> </ul> <p>The Committee recommended to Cabinet that the Forums should cease in their current form and that other ways should be explored to engage with local residents.</p>
“	Access Strategy/Digital First	<p>The Council had developed a draft Customer Access Strategy setting out its approach and priorities for providing effective and efficient ways of accessing and delivering services to its customers in ways which meet their needs and preferences.</p> <p>The Committee considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ other social media to be used as channels of communication;</li> <li>▪ the Council’s website;</li> </ul>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ customers contacting the Council by telephone;</li> <li>▪ response times to e-mails (following the initial acknowledgement);</li> <li>▪ correspondence tracking;</li> <li>▪ webcasting meetings; and</li> <li>▪ increasing the volume of transactions which could be undertaken online.</li> </ul>
20 January 2016	Corporate Plan Action Plan	<p>The Committee considered a high-level action plan which had been developed as a mechanism for linking the 15 medium-term objectives to departments' annual service plans, with the clear understanding that every action on the high-level action plan must be reflected each year in at least one service plan.</p> <p>The Committee made a number of recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Performance regarding changes to the wording of the Action Plan.</p>
24 February 2016	Complaints Policy and Unreasonably Persistent and Vexatious Contact Policy	<p>The Council had developed two new policies to provide a framework for both staff and customers to follow when making complaints to ensure that all those associated with a complaint will know what is expected of them.</p> <p>The Committee made some suggested changes to the wording of each policy.</p>
“	Review of Council's Policy on use of Section 215 powers	<p>The Committee had requested that this policy be brought before it in connection with the Planning Enforcement Charter and Strategy which had been considered earlier in the year. Section 215 notices provides a local planning authority with the power to take steps requiring land to be cleaned up when its condition adversely affects the amenity of the area.</p> <p>The Committee considered the following points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the role of parish and town councils in the process;</li> <li>▪ liaison between the Planning Enforcement and other teams across the Council; and</li> </ul>



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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the demand for use of the powers.</li> </ul> <p>The Committee made a number of recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Planning.</p>
23 March 2016	Community Safety Plan	<p>The Swale Community Safety Partnership annually refreshes its Partnership Plan which is a rolling three year document highlighting how the Partnership plans to tackle community safety issues that matter to the community. The Committee were invited to comment on the latest iteration of the plan.</p> <p>The Committee made a number of comments and suggestions around:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• violence against women and girls;</li> <li>• crime;</li> <li>• anti-social behaviour;</li> <li>• safeguarding;</li> <li>• the troubled families programme; and</li> <li>• measures to reduce reoffending.</li> </ul>
“	Voluntary Code of Conduct for Street Entertaining and Busking in Swale	<p>A voluntary code of conduct for street entertaining and busking had been developed as a ‘light touch’ to help create a more vibrant street scene in the Borough.</p> <p>The Committee considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the timings that street entertainment and busking should be permitted, and whether different times should apply throughout the seasons;</li> <li>• copyright issues; and</li> <li>• the types of entertainment that should be permitted.</li> </ul>
“	Corporate Equality Scheme	<p>The Committee were asked to consider the Council’s draft Corporate Equality Scheme 2016 – 2020. The Scheme set out how the Council intended to discharge</p>

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		<p>its specific and general duties under the Equality Act 2010.</p> <p>The Committee considered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• the specific objectives that had been set;</li><li>• that the section on supporting Swale's vulnerable residents should be expanded to reflect the difference in life expectancy in different parts of the Borough; and</li><li>• that more should be done to promote that the Council could make publications and other material available in different formats.</li></ul>