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SHEPWAY DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes for the meeting of the Council held at the Council Chamber - Civic Centre Folkestone on Wednesday, 26 April 2017

Present: Councillors Mrs Ann Berry, Miss Susan Carey, John Collier, Malcolm Dearden, Alan Ewart-James, Peter Gane, Clive Goddard, David Godfrey, Mrs Jennifer Hollingsbee, Mrs Claire Jeffrey, Mrs Mary Lawes, Len Laws, Rory Love, Philip Martin, Frank McKenna, Ian Meyers, David Monk, David Owen (Vice-Chair, in the Chair), Dick Pascoe, Stuart Peall, Damon Robinson, Carol Sacre, Mrs Susan Wallace, Mrs Rodica Wheeler and Roger Wilkins

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Miss Susie Govett, Ms Janet Holben, Michael Lyons and Paul Peacock

190. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

191. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 February and 22 March 2017 were submitted, approved and signed by the Chairman.

192. Chairman's Communications

The Chairman for the meeting wished Councillor Holben a speedy recovery, and stated that in her absence, he would pass on her communications, which were as follows:

She had attended a St Georges Day service along with other civic events, including an event in Shorncliffe Cemetery which was organised by the Shorncliffe Trust. She had attended orchestral and choral music events, charity fundraisers – and had another visit with school children from a local school, which was co-ordinated by Councillor Claire Jeffry, and was a huge success. Two other events included the launch of a new business at Dymchurch and a visit by representatives from the Nepalese community.

It was always good to hear of a new business launching in Shepway, and through social media and word of mouth, she often got to know about new business launches. She was very pleased to go along to a new business launch recently in Dymchurch. The new business owners had organised the launch with great care and there were lots of families there all day to enjoy the facilities of Lathe Barn. She actually got to cut a ribbon for the launch and walked around meeting and chatting to attending family. The weather had been great and it was a lovely day.

The second event she had wanted to mention was a visit by a group of Nepalese people. She had been approached a month ago by two Nepalese elders who she knew well with a view to bringing a group of Nepalese people to the civic centre. After discussing the best way to do this, it had been decided to do a short presentation in the chamber about local government. On Monday 24

April, Kishor Sapkota, Dhan Gurang and Parish Councillor Colleague Nabin Siwa arrived with around 50 people from the Nepalese community, filling the Council Chamber. After welcoming them, she handed over to the Senior Committee Services Officer, Jemma West, who gave a brief presentation about local government and telling them about the services the council provided. Following on, Housing Options Manager, Bev Jackson talked about some of the most common issues around Housing and Benefits. Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee had then talked about her many community roles, and this was followed by a Question and answer session. Committee Services Officers Kate Clark and Sue Lewis had prepared small folders of information handouts to take away, and the event finished with refreshments and photographs.

It had been a most enjoyable few hours and so many of the attendees had said how worthwhile the session had been, and asked if it could be made a regular event. Although Councillor Mrs Holben would soon be stepping down as Chairman, she hoped it was something that the Council would continue to do.

193. Petitions

There were no petitions.

194. Questions from the Public

The questions asked, including supplementary questions (if any) and the answers given are set out in Schedule 1, appended to these minutes.

195. Questions from Councillors

The questions asked, including supplementary questions (if any) and the answers given are set out in Schedule 2, appended to these minutes.

196. Announcements of the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council, Councillor David Monk, stated that he would start with a bit of an end of term report, looking at performance which was monitored quarterly, and which was then scrutinised by the Corporate Management Team, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet before being ratified by the Council.

He stated that they were doing well and there were only a few areas (11 out of 200) which needed improvement and remedial action had been taken to improve them.

Benefit claims were the main issue, due to new processes being implemented, although he stated that it should be noted that the accuracy of the assessment continued to exceed target and he fully expected that the target would be met in May.

He stated that there had been significant success in areas of collection, be it financial or waste, and at the same time, the Council continued to pay creditors in a timely manner. All other Customer Service functions were performing extremely well and staff morale was high. He stated that the Council should be proud of its achievements, and for him, it was a typical end of term report: not at all bad, but needs to concentrate a little more.

Looking to the next administrative year, there were several exciting schemes coming forward that would help the council fulfil the top priority Corporate objective of providing homes and jobs. The Otterpool Park and Princes Parade schemes would be submitted for planning permission, and the council would look to start building at the Biggins Wood site as well as having the Military Road building completed.

He stated that he was often asked where the jobs would come from. For a start there would be at least thirty years of construction jobs and then there was the construction supply chain jobs. It did not stop there, the Home Builders Federation had calculated, and the Leader had difficulty in believing this, that for each home built there were 4.3 jobs created. Even if this was an exaggeration, and it was halved, it was still a tremendous number of jobs. Considering the number of people that were in the public and service sectors that were proportionate to the population then add inward jobs, the figures started to make sense.

He finished by stating how annoying PURDAH was, especially as it had caused the public consultation on Otterpool Park to be postponed, but it would continue at pace come June.

He stated that he looked forward to working with everyone in the next Council year.

Councillor Meyers, Interim Leader of the UKIP group, asked for his best wishes to be sent to Councillor Mrs Holben. He stated that he recognised the areas in which the Council had done well, and the areas where there was room for improvement, such as Benefits.

He added that he looked forward to the debate around developments such as Otterpool Park, and approved of the creation of jobs, as promoting employment was in everyone's interest. He stated that the UKIP party would work alongside the Conservatives to support this.

He stated that he also found PURDAH frustrating, and looked forward to June.

The Leader then responded to comments raised, and added that although there were areas for improvement, performance had been superb overall.

Proposed by Councillor Monk,
Seconded by Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee; and

RESOLVED:

That the announcements be received and noted.

(Voting: 23 for, 0 against, 1 abstention).

197. Draft Corporate Plan 2017-2020

Report A/16/29 outlined the draft Corporate Plan and supporting delivery plan for endorsement by Council. The Corporate Plan sets out the framework for delivering the Council's priorities over the next three year, outlining the strategic objectives, priorities and key outcomes to meet the vision for the council and district.

Proposed by Councillor Monk

Seconded by Councillor Mrs Hollingsbee; and

RESOLVED:

1. That Report A/16/29 be received and noted.
2. That the Corporate Plan and supporting delivery plan for 2017-2020, be endorsed.

(Voting: 22 for, 2 against, 0 abstentions).

198. Opposition Business

There was no opposition business.

199. Motions on Notice

There were no motions on notice.

Council – 26 April 2017

Public questions and answers:

1. From Mr Rylands to Councillor Dearden, Cabinet Member for Transport and Commercial

In 2008/9 and 2013/14 SDC made a surplus on its on-street parking, according to figures provided by SDC to DCLG. SDC must publish a report showing the breakdown of how the authority has spent its surplus from its on street parking account. When can we expect the reports for 2008/9 and 2013/14 to be published?

ANSWER

I would like to thank Mr Rylands for his question but unfortunately his information is not correct as the council did not make a surplus on its on-street parking accounts for the years he has mentioned. Firstly in 2008/09 there was, in any case, no requirement to publish any report and therefore his point is not relevant. However, he has picked up figures from the council's Revenue Outturn (RO) forms that are published on the Department for Communities and Local Government's (DCLG's) website and subsequently used in their publicity by the RAC. However, when looking at the cost of on-street car parking, there are a number of other costs which need to be included, including capital and management costs which have not been included in the figures he is quoting. These are included in the on-street parking accounts which appear in the council's audited accounts. If I refer him to note 30 of the 2013/14 accounts on the council's website then he will see this actually operated at a deficit of £169,000 for that year and therefore no report is required.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

The 2014/15 figures were already available on the DCLG website. When would a report be produced?

ANSWER:

I have already given my response to this answer.

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Full Council – 26 April 2017

Councillor questions:

- 1. From Councillor Mrs Mary Lawes to Councillor David Monk, Leader of Shepway District Council**

It is known that all or some of the Cabinet members have attended meetings about Princes Parade project, which the public were not allowed to attend.

Can you please provide a full list of all meetings since 1 January 2016, where one or more Cabinet members were present and the Princes Parade project was discussed? This should include meetings of the Princes Parade advisor group, the Princes Parade working group and any informal Cabinet meeting. And where can I or the public find these minutes?

ANSWER:

The dates of the Princes Parade Advisory Panel and Princes Parade Working Group meetings are set out below:

Princes Parade Advisory Panel

11th February 2016
23rd March 2016
30th June 2016
16th August 2016
18th October 2016
6th March 2017

Princes Parade Working Group

15th November 2016
11th January 2017

Additional portfolio holder briefings have been given by officers to Cllr Godfrey, as chair of the WG, on a regular basis". No records of these meetings are kept. Similarly there are no records of informal meetings of Cabinet members. It is not a formal meeting of the Council and therefore it is not necessary for agendas or minutes to be taken or to be published.

The minutes that are available to Councillors and the public (Princes Parade Working Group) can be accessed via Modgov.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION:

Were figures and costs discussed at the meetings of the Advisory Panel?

ANSWER:

Probably.

- 2. From Councillor Mrs Mary Lawes to Councillor Alan Ewart-James, Cabinet Member for Housing**

How many local residents have been made homeless, b&b in the last 2 years, while

others from London and elsewhere have been housed in the district? What is this Council doing to ensure that all residents from Shepway are not made homeless? And will this Council guarantee first choice for all social and privately rented housing within the district goes to local residents?

ANSWER:

Households present to the Council as homeless, asking us to assess their housing needs and whether they are eligible for social housing. Over the past two years, the council has placed over 500 households in B&B.

Households are often made homeless as a result of their tenancy agreements coming to an end, parents or family unable to continue to provide them with accommodation, partner disputes, rent arrears, anti social behaviour, a growing family unsuitable for their existing accommodation. Where possible, the Council's Preventions Officers will work with tenants and their landlords to negotiate an extension of their contract, pay off rent arrears etc. However, this is not always possible, particularly where a tenant has ignored the terms of their tenancy agreement.

The Housing Allocations Policy, which was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in April 2017, gives more clarity to social housing applicants, stating that priority will be given to only those people with a local connection and a housing need will be permitted to join the Shepway Housing List.

Councils do not have any legislative powers to decide who can and can't be placed in private rented accommodation per se; this is the discretion of the private landlord as a private business.

However, we do regularly contact landlords to find out if they have available accommodation to place those individuals that present as homeless into private rented accommodation. However, as Local Housing Allowance has been set (by Central Government) at £500.01 per month in Shepway, there are very few rental properties available at such a low rent in the district, which often means the Council has to place people in B&B, whilst their homeless application is assessed or until an affordable property can be secured for them. Individuals are also able to bid on social housing properties on Kent Homechoice and contact private landlords directly.

However, Shepway District Council has established a joint partnership with Ashford Borough Council to provide a Social Lettings Agency, which supports local landlords in managing their properties at the Local Housing Allowance Rate and with the Council receiving nomination rights.

A growing issue for Kent authorities is the increase in the placement of homeless families in Kent by London Boroughs. We do not have access to precise data on the number of families placed in Kent, because London Boroughs do not always notify the relevant Authority when they place families, but it is clear that numbers are rising. The transfer of homeless households from London into Kent impacts the local accommodation market (in terms of cost) and the availability of housing for local district and boroughs. With much higher temporary housing budgets, London Boroughs are able to significantly outbid local areas, raising local temporary accommodation prices and causing a ripple effect as local homeless families then also have to be housed further afield. Helen Grant MP is due to meet with Housing & Planning Minister, Gavin Barwell, on behalf of Kent MPs, to make representations and raise the highlighted concerns being discussed across Kent.

3. From Councillor Mrs Carol Sacre to Councillor David Monk, Leader of the Council

Who owns and is responsible for the public toilets (which have been closed for some considerable time), located in Folkestone bus station? I have not been given a conclusive response from those parties I felt would have the answer.

ANSWER:

The toilets are owned and are the responsibility of Bouverie Place Shopping Centre. The Council is not responsible for the toilets. The Head of Commercial and Technical Services has previously provided contact details for the centre manager and will supply those details again to Cllr Mrs Sacre this week.

SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTION

Is it Shepway District Council's responsibility to repair and redecorate the toilets, to enable them to be reopened?

ANSWER:

Shepway District Council do not own the toilets, and the owners have a right to repair or not repair as they see fit.

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