

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Monday, 12 October 2020

Present: Councillor Chris Woodward (Chairman)
Councillors Thomson (Vice-Chairman), Atwood, Hayward, Morton, Ms Palmer, Pound
and Stanyer

Officers in Attendance: Stephen Baughen (Head of Planning Services), Jane Clarke (Head of Policy and Governance), Freya Jackson (Graduate Planning Assistant) and Mark O'Callaghan (Scrutiny and Engagement Officer)

Other Members in Attendance: None

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

OSC46/20 Apologies were received from Councillor Bland. Councillors Chapelard, Neve and Scholes were not present.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

OSC47/20 There were no disclosable pecuniary or significant other interests declared at the meeting.

NOTIFICATION OF PERSONS REGISTERED TO SPEAK

OSC48/20 There were no Visiting Members or members of the public registered to speak.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 21 SEPTEMBER 2020

OSC49/20 Members reviewed the minutes. An amendment was proposed to clarify comments made by Councillor Bailey during the Call-In item. The minute read that "Putlands was the only indoor leisure centre in Paddock Wood and provided services to other organisations such as the rugby club." There was no rugby club as such in Paddock Wood but there were a number of sports pitches that were affected by the closure of Putlands.

RESOLVED –

1. That minute OSC41/20 (page 5, paragraph 4, bullet point 3) be amended to replace "rugby club" with "adjacent sports pitches"; and
2. That, subject to the above amendment, the minutes of the meeting dated 21 September 2020 be approved as a correct record.

ITEMS CALLED-IN

OSC50/20 There were no items which had been called-in.

COVID-19 PANEL UPDATE

OSC51/20 The Chairman gave a verbal update on the Covid-19 Panel which included the following comments:

- Since the last Overview and Scrutiny meeting there had been one meeting of the Covid-19 Panel which was held on 6 October.

- The recent changes which required pubs and bars to close at 10pm was discussed and on the whole these new rules were being respected. A small number of incidents had been quickly resolved.
- Several premises who were not required to close had voluntarily agreed to close at 10pm to help the enforcement of the rules.
- The Panel also discussed the £500 support payment announced by the government to help those on low incomes who were required to isolate after getting, or coming into contact with someone with, Covid-19.
- The Panel were pleased to note that the Council had gone from announcement to implementation in 1 week with all the systems in place to process claims and make payments, an extraordinary effort by all involved.
- The Panel then heard from the next in the series of the Community Recovery Groups, this time on Housing:
 - Approaches from people either homeless or at threat from homelessness had increased and the Housing team were dealing with an average 100 approaches per month. A new member of the team had been recruited.
 - The council had been successful in its bid for £153k from the 'Next Steps Accommodation Programme which would be used to support the provision of emergency accommodation.
 - The Recovery Group were now looking at medium and long term solutions which may involve the Council building its own affordable housing, support for long-term private rentals through an investment company and further initiatives to encourage private landlords to work with the Council to return empty properties to the market.
- Next the Panel heard from the Business Recovery Group which consisted of Council officers and business partners with member oversight through the Covid-19 Panel. Their plan was built on the existing Economic Development Strategy:
 - There would be a number of significant changes to the business world which would require restructuring in both the high street and business in general.
 - The Council had commissioned some independent work on the future of the town centre and the repurposing of empty properties.
- Emergency Active Travel Fund Schemes:
 - Feedback on the High Street was generally positive, and a number of improvements were under consideration.
 - 'Parklets' to replace the plastic barriers were being considered, these would increase pavement space, seating or cycle parking over road.
 - Traffic on Vale Road was no worse than normal before the lockdown.
 - 'Wands' had been installed on the A26 cycle route, some of them had either been deliberately or accidentally removed but KCC had investigated how to make them more secure.
 - It was suggested that restrictions on Reynolds Lane were being ignored. KCC implemented traffic monitoring and the Panel was awaiting the results.

- The council had not received any negative feedback in relation to the town centre 20mph zone so this was expected to proceed shortly.
- In Paddock Wood the restrictions were regularly ignored by road users and utility works were due to start soon so it was expected that the scheme would be temporarily suspended.
- The Panel continued to receive a considerable amount of statistical information to help monitor the situation.

PROPOSED REVISION OF THE STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

OSC52/20 Stephen Baughen, Head of Planning introduced the report set out in the agenda which provided details on the consultation undertaken by Planning Services related to the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI), including the comments received and how they are being considered, and provided details on the updates which had been introduced to the SCI.

Discussion included the following comments:

- There was a detailed document available on the Council's website which outlined a step by step guide, including screenshots, on how to set up an area of search and Communications would be asked to publicise this via social media.
- The 'Have Your Say' document, available on the website, gave a detailed description on how consultation was undertaken on Planning applications. Communications would again be asked to broaden the publication of this via social media and this included Next Door as well as Facebook and Twitter.
- The regulatory requirement was that Councils undertook consultation by either sending a letter or putting up a site notice or both. It was then advised that Planning Services had met these regulatory requirements given that they had put up site notices and the 'Have Your Say' document set out examples of where site notices were placed dependent on the position of the site relative to the street.
- Planning Services had continued to use technology to the best of their ability to engage with communities and had undertaken consultation through consultants, areas of collaborative working and engagement opportunities for remote collaborative working. The Council would continue to explore new emerging techniques in the years ahead.

RESOLVED – That the report be noted.

WORK PROGRAMME

OSC53/20 The Chairman presented the Work Programme and outlined the dates for the forthcoming meetings, comments included:

- The next meeting was scheduled for Monday 23 November and was the first after the normal schedule was resumed.
- It was advised that a resumption of the portfolio holder reports was requested and the proposed schedule was outlined:
 - Finance and Governance in November to coincide with the presentation of the Draft Budget;
 - Sustainability in January; and

- Communities and Wellbeing in March to coincide with the review of the Community Safety Partnership Plan.
- It had been agreed before the lockdown that the previous scope of the portfolio holder reports was too broad to be considered in detail at a regular meeting so the portfolio holder report would be distributed by the Clerk three weeks before the relevant meeting and the Chairman would ask Members for feedback on any specific areas they would like examined. The portfolio holder would be asked to focus on the particular issues identified at the meeting.
- If any issues are identified or any queries are unsatisfied the Committee may ask for a more detailed look at specific topics.
- The Committee could voice their opinion on both where they wanted to focus their attention but also where not to focus.
- Whilst not listed on the work programme the Five Year Plan was scheduled to come to the Committee at the November meeting.
- Consultation and Engagement Task and Finish Group:
 - The Chief Executive had not identified any particular issues that may impede the Committee resuming work. It was proposed that the Group got together with officers outside this meeting to review its terms of reference and aim to bring proposals back for the November meeting.
 - If it were found that new solutions for communication and engagement were needed the Group should focus more on what was to be achieved rather how it was to be achieved.
 - Membership of the Group was previously Councillors Hayward, Pound, Bruneau and Reilly. Councillor Pound had stepped back to lead on the Deprivation Task and Finish Group. Councillors Bruneau and Reilly were no longer on the Committee but could be re-invited on the Group.
 - Resources may be limited in supporting two Task and Finish Groups and it may be prudent to delay.
- This could be considered alongside the terms of reference for the Deprivation Task and Finish Group being worked up by Councillor Pound and others including Councillors Thomson, Atwood, Woodward.
- There was sufficient resources for senior Officers to give expert advice to both working groups.
- The Committee would have the opportunity to scrutinise the draft invitation to tender in respect of the Parks and Gardens Maintenance Contract and subsequently the choice of contractor.
- The Committee would also consider the Equality Action Plan in due course.

Actions:

1. Councillor Hayward to review the membership and terms of reference for the Consultation and Engagement Task and Finish Group to put together proposals for consideration at the November meeting;
2. Councillor Pound, in consultation with the members of the Deprivation Task and Finish Working Group and officers, to finalise terms of reference for consideration at the November meeting;

3. Councillor Morton to consult colleagues on potential membership of the Task and Finish Groups; and
4. Members to give ideas for future meetings.

URGENT BUSINESS

OSC54/20 There was no urgent business for consideration.

DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

OSC55/20 The next meeting was scheduled for Monday 23 November 2020.

NOTE: The meeting concluded at 7.35 pm.