

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Monday, 12 February 2018**

**Present: Councillor Tom Dawlings (Chair)**  
**Councillors Hills (Vice-Chairman), Hannam, Hill, Huggett, Mackonochie, Ms Palmer,**  
**Stewart, Uddin and Woodward**

**Officers in Attendance:** John-Jackson Almond (Assembly Hall Theatre Director) and David Candlin (Head of Economic Development and Property)

**Other Members in Attendance:** Councillors March

### APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

OSC52/15 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Chapelard and Gray.

### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

OSC53/15 There were no declarations of interest made, within the provisions of the Code of Conduct for Members.

### MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

OSC54/15 The minutes of the meetings dated 11 December 2018 were submitted.

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the Committee meeting dated 11 December 2018 be agreed.

### ITEMS CALLED IN UNDER OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROCEDURE RULE 13

OSC55/15 There were no items which had been called-in under Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 13.

### CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

OSC56/15 The Chair confirmed the order of the agenda.

### PORTFOLIO PLANS AND PROGRESS - TOURISM, LEISURE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

OSC57/15 Councillor Jane March, Portfolio Holder for Tourism, Leisure and Economic Development, highlighted her achievements in 2016-2017 as detailed in appendix A to the report and ambitions for 2017-18. Councillor March referred in particular to the following areas of her portfolio:

- The success of the House, as a venue for creative and digital workspace, was a result of partnership work with Kent County Council. It was now at 100 percent occupancy and extra premises were being looked at to extend opportunities.
- Two jobs and training fairs were facilitated by the West Kent Partnership, in partnership with Jobcentre Plus and the autumn event took place in the Assembly Hall Theatre, with 330 attendees and 31 businesses. The next event would be in March 2018, in Sevenoaks. The events included

workshops that helped attendees search for jobs and write CVs. The West Kent Partnership also hosted a Skillsfest in October 2017, in the Assembly Hall Theatre with 1200 students attending along with 75 employers

- The West Kent Partnership would be hosting a business event in February 2018 as part of the 'Grow Kent' series of business events. This would be an interactive panel session.
- The Council was part of the West Kent Leader Programme which secures grant funding for rural areas. Between 2015-2020, £1.8 million of grant funding would have been secured for farmers, growers, foresters, rural entrepreneurs and rural communities. Benenden Community Shop was an example of a rural community business that had benefited from the funding.
- The West Kent Network involved West Kent Partnership, Kent County Council, and the Careers and Enterprise Company and had established the Kent Enterprise Advisor Network. The Network connected schools and businesses to develop student and employer engagement programmes.
- Royal Tunbridge Wells Together was a town centre partnership with 60 members across a range of sectors and business sizes. The achievements of the Partnership and a 'town map' were tabled. The Partnership initiated, promoted and coordinated the September Food Festival in Calverley Grounds with 15000 visitors attending over a weekend and 77 percent of stallholders coming from Kent and Sussex.
- A town centre Business Improvement District was being developed with consultants about to be commissioned to look at a feasibility study. The lead in time could be several years.
- The Council, along with the Department for International Trade, organised a business breakfast seminar in December 2017. The event was attended by 100 local businesses and looked at international marketing.
- The [visittunbridgewells](http://visittunbridgewells) website had themed feature pages and guest blogs. The Council and Royal Tunbridge Wells Together had agreed to work together to update the shopping pages on the website. Shops in the borough had been asked to provide photos of premises facades to advertise on the website. The response had been low so the Council would be taking the photos itself.
- Explore Kent provided a complete range of circular walks aimed at improving health and fitness for residents. Signage and furniture on the route had been improved. Leaflets to advertise the route were available. Tour operators, who were interested in cycling holidays in the borough, including the Avenue Vert, had been invited to a tourism event. In partnership with VisitBritain, a press trip for Nordic travel journalists had also been arranged and the event would be taking place again in March 2018.
- Council officers attended an excursions exhibition in London where they spoke to approximately 85 different travel organisers and, alongside staff

from the Assembly Hall Theatre, promoted the tourism offer in the borough.

- The Council was building its communications around tourism through social media with 2255 followers on Twitter and a Facebook page due to be initiated.
- Two of the three stages for the creation of the Cultural and Learning Hub had been completed with the funding from Arts Council for England secured and planning permission approved.
- A scheme was being developed for the new theatre which would look at the audience, viability of use and an operational plan.
- The Council was promoting public art and public engagement was underway for three designs for three pieces of public art which would be installed in Grosvenor and Hilbert Park.
- Over a thousand tickets a week were being sold for the Tunbridge Wells Lottery and £30,000 per annum was being given to 60 good causes. The Committee would be receiving a report in April which would provide a detailed update on the scheme.
- The memorial wall and cloister garden at the Crematorium provided a restful and peaceful setting for visitors and were a much needed addition to the facility.

Members expressed the following views:

Councillor Stewart asked for an update at the 9 April meeting on where the discussions currently stood for those organisations that would be losing their funding over the next two years. Councillor March said that it would be difficult to report on every discussion and that any update would be more of an overview.

Councillor Hill asked why the lantern parade did not take place in 2017/18. Councillor March said the event had got to a size where it was not possible to hold it in the same format and a new way of delivering it was being looked at.

Councillor Woodward felt more should be made of Tunbridge Wells as a place to stay and a base for visitors to explore more widely. He asked if there was anything planned that would raise awareness of Tunbridge Wells as a destination for centering a visit and providing an offer more widely than just Kent. Councillor March said the Council worked with VisitBritain and Visit Kent and had met with tourism organisations from other countries in an effort to get visitors to the borough. The Head of Economic Development and Property, David Candlin, advised that the council partnered with venues like Hever Castle and other areas outside of the borough. Mr Candlin referred to the 'Seven Wonders of the Weald' promotion and said the majority of venues were outside of Tunbridge Wells borough. Mr Candlin added that there was an incentive, however, to keep the tourism spend in the borough. Mr Candlin went on to say that, in terms of accommodation, the Council worked with providers and promoted them as the first point of contact for visitors.

Councillor Uddin referred to the work undertaken in 2016 on the borough's

economic needs strategy and asked what needs had been identified. He also asked whether tourism was being expanded and visitor numbers increased year-on-year. Mr Candlin said the Council used the Cambridge Economic Impact Model to measure tourism against previous years. Mr Candlin advised that it was a comprehensive assessment and was used every three years to give an indication of the direction of travel of the tourism market. Mr Candlin advised that Visit Kent had indicated that there had been a nine-fold increase in visitors since 2012 and overnight stays in Kent had increased by 17 percent.

Councillor Dawlings asked what the unemployment figures for Tunbridge Wells were. Mr Candlin said it was approximately 0.9 percent and added that more detailed figures would be available on the Office for National Statistics website. Councillor March said the low unemployment meant that some businesses had five or more vacancies at any given time and they were struggling to recruit locally.

Councillor Dawlings said there were a number of positive outcomes within Councillor March's portfolio and he felt they should publicised more widely. He went on to refer to the potential for launching a fundraising scheme for the new theatre. Councillor March said she would be part of the fundraising team for the Cultural and Learning Hub but providing a similar scheme for the new theatre had not yet been looked at. The Theatre Director, John Jackson Almond, said that, until planning permission had been confirmed, discussion over fundraising would be difficult as a 'story' would need to be provided.

Councillor Stewart said a response on the question of an economic needs study had not been provided. She expressed concern at the amount of land within the assessment given over to business. Councillor March said the economic and employment areas had to be near to residential areas. Mr Candlin said there was an intensification of use on existing sites, more people working from home and grants for farming and forestry to support diversification. Councillor Mackonochie referred to the Sports and Recreation Strategy and expressed concern that the land identified for sport and recreational use was near the town rather than spread across the rural parts of the borough and that, the sports focused on in the strategy, were still male orientated. Councillor March said it was an indicative assessment in terms of the sports identified and this was done to get a broad planning commitment to the land being used for sport. She added that female participation in the sports identified was high. She further added that demand for other sports had to be demonstrated.

**RESOLVED** to note the Portfolio Holder's update.

## **CIVIC DEVELOPMENT - VERBAL UPDATE**

OSC58/15 The Head of Economic Development and Property, David Candlin, provided an update on the Civic Development. Mr Candlin highlighted the following areas:

- The Supplementary Planning Framework document would be presented to Full Council on 21 February and identified a number of changes proposed. The document would also include the comments received to the Planning consultation.

- The Planning application was submitted and validated in January 2018. Members were invited to a consultation event during the day at the Camden Centre then became a public consultation event in the evening. As part of the planning application, a report was submitted that focused on the wider economic benefits of the new theatre and office developments. Based on the statutory 13 week period for the consideration of major applications, the potential target date for consideration of the application by the Planning Committee was 13 April. This date was dependant on all the information required by Planning being provided on time.
- The Civic Complex, which included the Town Hall, the Assembly Hall Theatre, 9-10 Calverley Terrace and 30-36 Crescent Road were all buildings identified as potentially enabling development and were a separate work-stream. It was hoped that discussions with the Leadership Board on the timetable for the Complex would take place in March with a timetable produced in May. The advice was to bring the Complex to the Market approximately two years prior to the Council leaving the Town Hall. Some of the sites, such as the Crescent Road properties could be brought forward earlier as there were no operational restrictions. In addition, consideration was needed as to whether other Council owned sites in the block, were included or excluded.
- The Project Management team would be appointed through the OJEU compliant Homes and Communities Property Panel Framework which involved 16-22 different consultants. The tender evaluation would be based 50 percent on price and 50 percent on quality. Prior to Christmas a 'sifting' brief (with four key questions) was sent to the six consultants who had expressed an interest. Invitations to tender were sent out after Christmas for a lead consultant and project management services and these appointments were currently being completed. The decision to make the appointments had been agreed by Full Council as a delegated officer decision, to be made by the Head of Economic Development and Property and Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Leader and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance.
- The project would be a two-stage design and build process and the preferred route was the OJEU compliant (Official Journal of the European Union) Southern Construction Framework. There were eight contractors in this framework and five of the eight contractors who had been invited to express an interest had responded. A shortlist of tenderers had been agreed and the Southern Framework reviewed those who had responded and identified how they met the brief. The range of how well the tenderers met the brief ranged between 60-80 percent. Four contractors were chosen for the tendering process with responses due for submission by the beginning of March. A tender report and a recommendation result in a delegated officer decision, again with the consultation of the Leader and Finance and Governance Portfolio Holder.

Members expressed the following views:

Councillor Stewart asked if the Crescent Road properties had to be sold to develop Crescent Road car park. Councillor Stewart also asked why the Council would consider selling 33 Monson Road when it was bought as a commercial decision. Mr Candlin advised that the Crescent Road properties

and to some extent 9-10 Calverley Terrace had been in limbo since the start of the Civic Development process with a number of the Crescent Road properties having been boarded up for approximately two years. He advised that the cost of bringing the properties back in to a useable state would be more than any potential return. Mr Candlin said the properties were not required for the car park extension but had been held back until the outcomes for the Civic Development were better known. Regarding 33 Monson Road – it was recognised that it remained a good income stream but was included in the overall discussion in the interests of transparency. Mr Candlin added that the decision on the properties would initially be made by the Leadership Board.

Councillor Hill asked if the comments on the application received on the planning portal were being taken into account. Mr Candlin advised that Planning officers would review all the comments received and take them into consideration but there was a distinction between those comments that related to planning matters and those that were on other issues. Mr Candlin added that the developer would need to address a number of the comments which was not unusual in complex planning applications.

**RESOLVED** to note the update.

#### **TASK AND FINISH GROUP(S) UPDATE - VERBAL UPDATE**

OSC59/15 The Scrutiny and Performance Officer provided an update on the work of the Planning Application Process Task and Finish Group. Mr Peeters advised that the Group's final meeting had taken place and a final report would be circulated to the Group members prior to its inclusion in the 9 April agenda.

Councillor Hills updated Members on the responses to the final report of the Tackling Excessive Speeds in Rural Areas Task and Finish Group which had been circulated to a number of stakeholders including Greg Clark MP. Councillor Hills advised that a response had not yet been received.

#### **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2017-18**

OSC60/15 The Scrutiny and Performance Officer, Nick Peeters, provided an update on the Committees work programme. Mr Peeters referred to the reunification of the Tunbridge Wells West and Uckfield rail link which, although not on the Committee's work programme, had been raised previously as a topic for discussion. Mr Peeters advised Members that Lewes District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee had continued with its work in looking at the reopening of the Lewes to Uckfield link and produced a report which supported the reopening and electrification of the line. Councillor Woodward had supported this topic as there was a wider discussion to be had on providing better public transport links in light of the civic development and in particular the new theatre. Councillor Woodward felt that discussions could be held with Lewes District Council and the Spa valley Railway to explore opportunities. The Head of Economic Development and Property, David Candlin said internally, an officer report had been produced which looked at the opportunities involved in the Tunbridge Wells link and further on to Croydon. Mr Candlin advised that a Member update could be provided but reminded Members that, as yet, there was still no business case for the reopening of the line.

Councillor Hannam asked for an update from the on the tender document for the procurement of the Household Waste/Recycling contract at the 9 April Meeting. The Chairman, Councillor Dawlings requested that the update include discussions held on the recycling centres the county.

**URGENT BUSINESS**

OSC61/15 There was no urgent business.

**DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

OSC62/15 The next scheduled meeting of the Committee would take place on Monday 9 April 2018.

NOTE: The meeting concluded at 8.00 pm.