

Minutes of the meeting of the **SCRUTINY (POLICY AND PERFORMANCE) COMMITTEE** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Tuesday, 11 July 2017 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor K Mills

Councillors: M I Cosin  
B J Glayzer  
M J Holloway  
D A Sargent  
P J Hawkins (as substitute for Councillor J M Heron)

Officers: Director of Finance, Housing and Community  
Director of Shared Services  
Assistant Director – Customer Delivery, EK Services  
Team Leader – Democratic Support

31 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T A Bond, R J Frost and J M Heron.

32 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4, Councillor P J Hawkins had been appointed as substitute member for Councillor J M Heron.

33 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

34 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

35 PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Team Leader – Democratic Support advised that no members of the public had registered to speak on items on the agenda to which the public speaking protocol applied.

36 DECISIONS OF THE CABINET RELATING TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SCRUTINY (POLICY AND PERFORMANCE) COMMITTEE

Members received the decisions of the Cabinet relating to recommendations made by the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the decisions be noted.

37 ISSUES REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE BY COUNCIL, CABINET, SCRUTINY (COMMUNITY AND REGENERATION) COMMITTEE OR ANOTHER COMMITTEE

There were no items of business for consideration.

38 ITEMS CALLED-IN FOR SCRUTINY OR PLACED ON THE AGENDA BY A MEMBER OF THE COMMITTEE, ANY INDIVIDUAL NON-EXECUTIVE MEMBERS OR PUBLIC PETITION

There were no items of business for consideration.

39 NOTICE OF FORTHCOMING KEY DECISIONS

The Team Leader – Democratic Support presented the Notice of Forthcoming Key Decisions to the Committee for its consideration.

Members requested that a copy of the final events policy document be circulated to the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Notice of Forthcoming Key Decisions be noted.

40 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Team Leader – Democratic Support presented the Scrutiny Work Programme to the Committee for its consideration.

Members were advised that the Regent Cinema scrutiny meeting would be held on 3 August 2017 at the Astor Theatre, Deal.

Members requested that the work programme be amended to include an update on Parks and Open Spaces and lorry parking related issues for both Dover and the wider District.

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be noted subject to the inclusion of an update on Parks and Open Spaces and lorry parking issues for both Dover and the wider District.

41 CLOSURE OF AREA OFFICES

The Assistant Director, EK Services introduced the report on the Closure of Area Offices.

The report sought Cabinet approval to withdraw face-to-face customer services at the DDC area offices (Aylesham, Sandwich and Deal) during 2017/18 due to reducing footfall and as part of progressing the Council's digitisation agenda of encouraging the access of services on-line. The Council would still retain face-to-Face customer services at Whitfield and Dover.

The Aylesham Area Office was currently open 1 day a week, the Sandwich Area Office was open 2 days a week and the Deal Area Office was open 3 days a week.

Members were advised that the Cabinet had requested additional information in respect of the Deal Area Office closure and that the decision in respect of it had been deferred pending an additional report to Cabinet on 4 September 2017.

Assuming that the changes were fully implemented by 1 October 2017, the closures would achieve an in-year budget savings of £22.5k in 2017/18 with savings of £45k per annum in subsequent years.

EK Services had conducted customer surveys between June 2015 – December 2016 to identify the types of customers who used the area offices, the purpose of their visits and whether they had access to an internet enabled device such as a smart phone. The results of the surveys were as followed:

- The 'average' Aylesham customer was female, aged over 65, travelled 0.8 miles to reach the Aylesham Area Office for the purpose of delivering documents and had a 50% chance of possessing a smartphone and/or having access to the internet. (Based on 49 responses)
- The 'average' Sandwich customer was aged over 75, travelled 2.1 miles to reach the Sandwich Area Office for the purpose of paying a council bill or enquiring about parking and had just over a 50% chance of possessing a smartphone and/or having access to the internet. (Based on 155 responses)
- The 'average' Deal customer is aged between 45-54, travelled 2.13 miles to reach the Deal Area Office for the purpose of delivering documents and was likely to possess a smart phone and/or having access to the internet. (Based on 384 responses)

The majority of face-to-face customer services could be dealt with via other methods (such as by telephone) and Members were advised that for other services, such as utilities, there was no face-to-face customer service provision. However, there would still be visiting officers who would be available to undertake home visits in exceptional circumstances.

The closure of the Area Offices would not affect other services offered in the buildings in which they were based, such as the issuing of blue badges by Deal library staff, and the provision of alternative facilities such as a telephone link or computer access once face-to-face customer services were withdrawn was being investigated. Members were also reminded that while the impact of Universal Credit rollout would be monitored it was a matter for the Department for Work and Pensions not EK Services.

There were no redundancies expected as a result of the Area Office closures as the reduced staffing requirements would be absorbed through staff turnover.

Members expressed concern that there was not a compelling case to justify the proposed closures and that the report did not provide enough information in relation to vulnerable customers (such as the blind, elderly, etc.) or account for the district's changing demographics. There was also concern raised that changes to the Stagecoach timetables were isolating communities, making it more important that there was access to area offices.

The Committee agreed to let Ms Helen Williams representing Citizens Rights for Older People (CROP) to speak in respect of the proposals. She raised the following points:

- That the changes disproportionately affected older people
- That the research in the report demonstrated that older people were less likely to have internet access
- That instead of closing the area offices the alternative of reducing staff and/or open hours should be investigated

There were also concerns raised that the removal of face-to-face customer services would have an impact on Sandwich Town Council and Deal Library staff who would still be providing face-to-face customer services for their organisations.

RESOLVED: That it be recommended to the Cabinet:

- (a) That the decision to defer the decision on withdrawing face-to-face customer services and the closure of the Dover District Council service desk at Deal pending a further report to Cabinet in September providing further detail on the nature and necessity of customer visits, the number and vulnerability profile of individual customers and options for alternative service delivery be endorsed.
- (b) That the withdrawal of face-to-face customer services, and the closure of the Dover District Council service desks at Aylesham and Sandwich be deferred pending a further report to the Scrutiny (Policy and Performance) Committee and Cabinet in September 2017 providing further detail on the nature and necessity of customer visits, the number and vulnerability profile of individual customers, more recent customer data covering 2017 and the options for alternative service delivery.
- (c) That the Cabinet be requested to grant pre-decision scrutiny for the report in September and the relevant Portfolio Holder be requested to attend the meeting of the Scrutiny (Policy and Performance) Committee where the report is considered.

42 OUTSOURCING OF REVENUES, BENEFITS, DEBT RECOVERY AND CUSTOMER SERVICES FUNCTIONS (REVISION OF DELEGATIONS TO THE EAST KENT SERVICES COMMITTEE)

The Director of Shared Services (EK Services) presented the report on the Outsourcing of Revenues, Benefits, Debt Recovery and Customer Services Functions (Revision of Delegations to the East Kent Services Committee).

Members were advised that no decision had been taken at this time and that the report only sought permission for the necessary authority and delegations to develop a business case. EK Services had saved £1 million last year and needed to deliver additional savings going forward. The outsourcing of services could

potentially avoid the need for redundancies through an innovative solution while still delivering on-going savings.

The report had been agreed by Canterbury City Council and Dover District Council and would be considered by Thanet District Council later in the month.

A further report would be produced in October 2017 setting out if there was a business case for the outsourcing of the identified EK Services functions. A budget of £20,000 had been identified for the production of the business case.

RESOLVED: (a) That it be recommended to Cabinet that Decision CAB28 be endorsed as follows:

- (i) That, to the extent that they are not already authorised to do so, the East Kent Services Committee be authorised and requested to discharge the powers and functions of the Council to develop a business case for outsourcing the Council's functions in relation to the following:
    - (1) Council Tax Administration and Enforcement
    - (2) National Non-Domestic Rates Administration and Enforcement
    - (3) Housing Benefit and associated services
    - (4) Council Tax Reduction Scheme and associated services
    - (5) Debt Recovery
    - (6) Customer Services (together called 'the Revenues, Benefits, Debt Recovery and Customer Services Functions'), and to determine the actions to be taken in connection therewith.
  - (ii) That the East Kent Services Committee make appropriate delegations to each of the Director of Collaborative Services and the Director of EK Services to enable them to develop the business case, and report back directly to each of the three councils prior to further consideration by the East Kent Services Committee.
- (b) That the Cabinet be requested to grant pre-decision scrutiny on the report and the relevant Portfolio Holder be requested to attend the meeting of the Scrutiny (Policy and Performance) Committee where the report is considered.

The meeting ended at 7.40 pm.