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SOUTHEND-ON-SEA BOROUGH COUNCIL

Meeting of People Scrutiny Committee

Date: Tuesday, 6th July, 2021

Place: Council Chamber - Civic Suite

Present: Councillor L Salter (Chair)
Councillors H Boyd (Vice-Chair), B Beggs, M Berry, J Courtenay, T Cowdrey, A Dear, K Evans, D Garne, B Hooper, J Lamb, A Line, K Mitchell, I Shead, M Stafford and A Thompson

In Attendance: Councillors L Burton, I Gilbert, A Jones and C Nevin (Cabinet Members), Councillor D Nelson, T Forster, M Marks, B Martin, C Smith and S Tautz
O Richards (Healthwatch Southend), T Watts (Southend Carers Forum) (Co-Opted Members) M Faulkner-Hatt (Southend Youth Council) (Observer), T D'Orsi (NHS Alliance Director), P Johnson, J Hedges (Southend SEND Independent Forum)

Start/End Time: 6.30 pm - 8.10 pm

108 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from K Jackson (Southend Association of Voluntary Services) (Co-opted Member) and O Slaughter (Southend Youth Council) (Observer).

109 Declarations of Interest

The following interests were declared at the meeting:

- (a) Councillors L Burton, I Gilbert, A Jones and C Nevin (Cabinet Members) - Interest in the called-in items; attended pursuant to the dispensation agreed at Council on 19 July 2012, under S.33 of the Localism Act 2011.
- (b) Councillor L Salter - Agenda Item 6 (COVID-19 Update) - Is a dentist, husband is a consultant surgeon at Southend Hospital; daughter is a consultant at Basildon Hospital; son-in-law is a general practitioner in the Borough - Non-pecuniary interests.
- (c) Councillor B Beggs - Agenda Item 8 (Outcome Letter Following SEND Area Revisit - May 2021) - Family member is SEND and wife runs workshops for the National Youth Theatre for SEND - Non-pecuniary interests.
- (d) Councillor B Hooper - Agenda Item 8 (Outcome Letter Following SEND Area Revisit - May 2021) - Is Director of Blade Education, a not-for-profit company that works with young people - Non-pecuniary interest.
- (e) Councillor C Nevin - Agenda Item 6 (COVID-19 Update) - Employed at external National Health Service Trust; family members employed at Mid and South-Essex Trust hospitals; family member is Non-Executive Director of HARP (Southend's Homeless Charity) - Non-pecuniary interests.
- (f) Councillor K Mitchell - Agenda Item 5 (Disabled Grants Policy) - Friend works in the Council's Finance Department; Agenda item 7 (Special Guardianship Order Updated Policy) - Has recently been a member of the Fostering Panel; Agenda Item 8 (Outcome Letter Following SEND Area Revisit - May 2021) - Family member is

SEND and has previously received SEND services from the Council - Non-pecuniary interests.

- (g) Councillor K Evans Agenda Item 7 (Special Guardianship Order Updated Policy) - Member of Fostering Panel - Non-pecuniary interest.
- (h) Councillor D Nelson - Agenda Item 6 (COVID-19 Update) - Wife is employed by the National Health Service - Non-pecuniary interest.

110 Questions from Members of the Public

The Committee noted the responses of the Cabinet Member for Children and Learning and the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health Integration, to questions presented by Mr D Webb.

111 Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 March 2021

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 March 2021 be confirmed as a correct record and signed.

112 Disabled Grants Policy

The Committee considered Minute 58 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 15 June 2021, which had been called-in to the People Scrutiny Committee, together with a report of the Executive Director (Adults and Communities) seeking approval of the Disabled Facilities Grants Policy for Southend-on-Sea Borough Council.

The Leader of the Council undertook to provide a written response to questions raised by members of the Committee with regard to the publicity currently afforded to the availability of Disabled Facilities Grants by the Council and the level of applications made for grant funding for the provision of relevant facilities, by local residents.

Resolved:

That the following decisions of the Cabinet be noted:

- “1. That the removal of a means test for grants under £6,000 (£6,500 for a curved stairlift) to speed up prevention process for applicants, be approved.
2. That the circumstances where a discretionary disabled facilities grant can be considered, including relocation grants, special assistance grants and top-up grants, be approved.
3. That the Disabled Facilities Grants Policy document be adopted with immediate effect.”

Note: This is an Executive function
Cabinet Member: Councillor I Gilbert

113 COVID Update

The Committee considered Minute 53 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 15 June 2021, which had been called-in to each of the scrutiny committees, together with a report of the Chief Executive that provided an update on the action taken by the Council in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its approach to protect and support residents, local businesses, staff and the Borough in general.

Resolved:

That the following decision of the Cabinet be noted:

“That the action taken to date in response to the Covid-19 crisis, be noted.”

Note: This is an Executive function
Cabinet Member: Councillor I Gilbert

114 Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Updated Policy

The Committee considered Minute 59 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 15 June 2021, which had been called-in to the People Scrutiny Committee, together with a report of the Executive Director (Children and Public Health) setting out changes and updates to the Special Guardianship Order (SGO) Policy, including changes to the financial support provided by the Council when an SGO was made by the Family Court and how the Council would respond to requests for financial support throughout the term of an SGO.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Learning undertook to provide a written response to questions raised by members of the Committee, with regard to the current position on the backdated payment in restitution for all SGO cases where the transitional arrangements under the previous SGO Policy had been in place, and whether the financial means test to be applied under the new policy in situations where a Special Guardian requested financial support, was to be based on a national standard format and, if so, whether there was flexibility in how the means test was applied and whether a right of appeal was available.

Resolved:

That the following decisions of the Cabinet be noted:

“1. That the revised SGO Policy set out at Appendix 1 to the submitted report, be approved.

2. That the need to revise the Policy following the recommendation from the Local Government Ombudsman, be noted.

3. That the financial implications of the new policy for previous years and also for new cases going forward, be noted.”

Note: This is an Executive function
Cabinet Member: Councillor L Burton

115 Outcome Letter Following SEND Area Revisit - May 2021

The Committee considered a report of Executive Director (Children and Public Health) that presented the outcomes of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Written Statement of Action revisit undertaken by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Care Quality Commission in May 2021 and provided an opportunity for scrutiny of the progress made by SEND area partners since the local area inspection undertaken in October 2018.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Learning undertook to provide a written response to questions raised by members of the Committee, with regard to the current position on the development of the new quality and outcomes framework and co-production charter to inform joint commissioning decisions, that had been due for adoption in June 2021.

The Leader of the Council assured members that progress on improvements around the joint commissioning of SEND services would be kept under regular review by the Children's Services Improvement Board and that similar progress reports would also be made to future meetings of the Committee.

Resolved:

That the findings set out within the SEND revisit letter and the progress made by SEND area partners since October 2018, be noted.

Note: This is an Executive function

Cabinet Member: Councillor L Burton

116 Summary of Work 2020/21 & In-Depth Scrutiny Project 2021/22

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director (Legal & Democratic Services) on progress with regard to the in-depth scrutiny projects undertaken during the 2020/21 municipal year and which sought the agreement of a possible joint approach to in-depth scrutiny activity for 2021/22. The report, which was being made to each of the scrutiny committees in the current cycle of meetings, also provided information on the work carried out by the scrutiny committees during the previous municipal year.

The Committee considered the benefits of undertaking a joint scrutiny project around the 'Councillor Queries' process but felt that the nature of such scrutiny activity should be broadened to reflect the theme of 'Enabling Councillors to be Effective' and that the scoping of the project should incorporate appropriate matters of importance to councillors within this theme, including the 'My Southend' platform. The Committee was advised that the Place Scrutiny Committee had supported such approach to in-depth scrutiny activity for 2021/22 at its meeting on 5 July 2021 and had suggested that councillors' contact and engagement with the Council and residents, should also be included within the scope of the project.

The Committee was advised that the proposed project could also complement the work of a design group currently looking at councillor development as part of the leadership programme and were reminded that a separate review was to be undertaken of the Council's Constitution, to which all members would have an opportunity to contribute.

Resolved:

1. That the progress of the in-depth scrutiny projects undertaken during the 2020/21 municipal year, be noted.
2. That, subject to the concurrence of the other scrutiny committees, a single scrutiny project be undertaken on behalf of the three scrutiny committees during the 2021/22 municipal year on the theme of 'Enabling Councillors to be Effective.'
3. That the Council be recommended to appoint members to a Project Team to lead the proposed scrutiny project for 2021/22, in order that the scoping of the of the project can commence as soon as possible.
4. That no other topic(s) be selected by the Committee for additional in-depth review during 2021/22.
5. That the summary of the scrutiny work undertaken by the Committee during 2020/21 municipal year be noted.

Note: This is a Scrutiny function, save that the appointment of members to the Project Team constitutes a Council function.

Chair: _____

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