

## GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 27 SEPTEMBER 2018

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## GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

### MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 27 SEPTEMBER 2018

#### **Present:**

	Councillor J Windle .....	(Chair)	
	Councillor C Smith .....	(Vice-Chair)	
Councillor	S Boyle		Councillor B Rice
“	S Cornwell		“ K Tait
“	A Powell		“ C Tite

#### Also Present

Nathalie Etches – Business Centre Manager  
Grant Galloway – Head of Property and Estates  
Gareth Harper – Estates Manager

#### **238 Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C Cupit.

#### **239 Declarations of Interest**

Members were requested to declare the existence and nature of any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or other interests, not already on their register of interests, in any item on the agenda and withdraw from the meeting at the appropriate time.

There were no declarations of interest made at this meeting.

#### **240 Minutes of Last Meeting**

RESOLVED – That the Minutes of the meeting of the Growth Scrutiny Committee held on 19 July 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### **241 Scrutiny Review**

Members were reminded that the Committee had agreed to carry out a review into the provision of business and industrial units and the contribution which they make to promoting economic growth and development in the District.

In this context, the Committee received a presentation from the Business Centre Manager, the Head of Property and Estates and the Estates Manager. The purpose of this presentation, it was stated, was to help set the scene for the Committee's review by informing Members of how the service had changed in recent years and the challenges to be faced going forward.

The presentation covered a range of issues. The officers began by explaining that in the changing environment of the service, issues such as staff now no longer being required, an ineffective maintenance regime and inadequate lease-management arrangements had been identified.

Members were advised that to address these problems the Property and Estates Team had been re-structured. One of the key goals for this restructure was to re-target staff resources into the right areas to secure better on-site management. Sickness and redundancy had prevented its full implementation but work was ongoing. The Committee noted this.

The Committee also heard that more effective lease management arrangements had been put in place, with robust financial and identity checks now made on those wishing to become tenants. An induction process had been introduced for tenants, which included improved health & safety and fire safety on the sites. There were also improved reporting arrangements for any incidents.

The Committee welcomed these changes. Members also welcomed the introduction of a new standard lease template, which had helped to provide greater clarity about the responsibilities of both tenants and landlords. Members stated they would like to explore further the effectiveness of the new lease management arrangements.

The Committee received information about the financial performance of the business centres and the industrial units. Income received was now consistently exceeding the projected budget figure. Members learned that more units were now occupied, which had increased the level of income.

The reasons for the greater take up of units were discussed. In this context, the Committee was told that a commercial lettings agent had been appointed. This agent, was able to advertise vacancies on the 'Right Move' website (local authorities are prohibited from doing this). There had also been improved promotion of these properties through better advertising and targeted promotions had also helped.

Members discussed the use of this external commercial lettings agent, the costs and the potential for carrying out at least some of this work in-house. It was felt that this should be explored further as part of the review.

The officers then explained to Members that as a step towards developing a holistic approach to maintenance and future investment, the Council had commissioned an Asset Survey of its properties. This survey was presented and considered by the Committee. The Survey provided indicative information about the likely cost of repairs and upgrades. Collectively, this would then form the basis of a 30 year projected Capital Programme, so that the Council would be clear on what level of resources it might have to commit over this period.

The Committee discussed the presentation with the Officers and raised a number of points with them. Members made it clear that they wanted to explore whether the business centres and industrial units were currently meeting the needs of the District and whether they would continue to meet these needs in the future as the economy grows and changes. What became clear from the discussion was that although the current stock was generally seen as fit for purpose, (especially the small size units which are more popular with businesses) this might not be the case in the future, especially if investment was not targeted in the right areas and on the right properties. Members felt that it would be important to consider this as part of the review.

The officers were thanked by the Committee for their presentation and their contribution to the discussion. They then left the meeting.

The Committee discussed the proposed Project Plan and Timetable for the review. Members requested that as well as the suggested site visit to the Coney Green Business Centre they would also like the opportunity for some 'satellite' visits to a range of other sites across the District. It was agreed that the Project Plan and Timetable for the review be amended in order to reflect this.

Members supported the proposed review questions. However, the Committee asked that an additional question be included on the arrangements for fault reporting, in order to help determine whether these arrangements were working effectively.

The Committee also wished to explore whether more could be done to ensure that those renting industrial properties do not fall into arrears on their rents. In particular, they were concerned that debts may build up and wished to ensure that there was an effective process in place to highlight this promptly to the Business Centre Manager.

Members noted in this context that information on outstanding debts was considered by the Council's Audit and Corporate Governance Scrutiny Committee, which could be used to inform the review.

**RESOLVED –**

- (1) That the Officers be thanked for their contribution and their assistance to help set the scene for the Committee's review of business centres and industrial units.
- (2) That the Project Plan and Timetable for the review be approved, subject to the amendments agreed at today's meeting.

(Overview and Scrutiny Manager)

**242 Tourism and Growth Action Plan**

Members were advised that Cabinet had agreed an 'Action Plan' in response to the specific recommendations made by the Committee following on from its review of Tourism and Growth. The Committee discussed the Action Plan. Members heard that as part of the Cabinet response to the Committee's recommendations, a review would take place of the existing resources in order to develop a business case, if appropriate, for the creation of a designated Tourism Officer post. The Committee welcomed this.

RESOLVED – That the Committee monitors progress made in implementing the Action Plan agreed by Cabinet in response to its review of Tourism and Growth.

(Overview and Scrutiny Manager)

**243 List of Key Decisions – Issue No 77**

The Committee considered Issue No 77 of the List of Key Decisions which set out the major decisions being taken over the next few months.

The Committee confirmed that there were no key decisions it wished to look at, at this time.

**244 Work Programme**

The Committee noted its Work Programme for 2018/19 and the amendments that would be made as a result of today's meeting.

**245 Additional Urgent Items**

There were no additional urgent items.

**246 Date of Next Meeting**

The next scheduled meeting of the Growth Scrutiny Committee was 15 November 2018 at 1.00 pm.