
EASTERN AREA COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 21 September 2021 from 7.00 pm - 9.31 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Alastair Gould, Denise Knights (Chairman), Ben J Martin, Julian Saunders (Vice-Chairman), Eddie Thomas, Tim Valentine and Mike Whiting.

NOMINATED PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES: Councillors Beverley Ferrell (Oare PC), Kevin Hobson (Selling PC, remotely), Julien Speed (Lynsted with Kingsdown PC, remotely), Alan Stewart (Graveney with Goodnestone PC, remotely) and Chris Williams (Faversham TC).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Martyn Cassell, Janet Dart, Kellie MacKenzie and Larissa Reed (remotely).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Mike Dendor and Ken Ingleton (remotely).

Helen Whately, MP for Faversham and Mid Kent (remotely);
KCC Councillor Antony Hook, Divisional Member for Faversham (remotely);
Kent County Councillor Rich Lehmann, Divisional Member for Swale East;
Earl Bourner, KCC Asset Manager Drainage & Structures (remotely); and
Phil Lightowler, the Head of Public Transport at KCC (remotely).

APOLOGIES: Councillors Carole Jackson, Hannah Perkin and David Simmons.

290 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

291 CONFIRMATION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN

Councillor Denise Knights was confirmed as Chairman and Councillor Julian Saunders was confirmed as Vice-Chairman for the Municipal Year 2021/22.

292 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

293 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 June 2021 (Minute Nos. 96 – 108) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record. Councillor Ben J Martin abstained as he was not in attendance at the June 2021 meeting.

294 BUS SERVICES BETWEEN FAVERSHAM VILLAGES AND RURAL AREAS

The Chair handed over to the Vice-Chair Councillor Julian Saunders to introduce this item.

The Vice-Chair welcomed Phil Lightowler, the Head of Public Transport at Kent County Council (KCC) to the meeting and explained that at the June 2021 meeting, Committee Members requested a full discussion on the issue of bus services between Faversham villages and rural areas. As requested Phil Lightowler provided timetables for all services in the Eastern area as shown in the agenda pack.

Phil Lightowler started by giving an update on bus services in the area. During lockdown KCC supported bus services dropped to 20% of the normal service throughout Kent, due to a drop in demand. Services were now at 70% and it was hoped they would return to 85%. The elderly and disabled users had not returned fully and were at 50%. The Government Bus Recovery Grant continued until March 2022. The biggest change was that Arriva withdrew its service between Sittingbourne and Faversham in the pandemic, however, Stagecoach had taken on this service as well as introducing a new service between Sittingbourne and Maidstone.

In March 2021 the Government published the National Bus Strategy, Bus Back Better, which set out the vision and opportunity to deliver better bus services for passengers across England. It was an aspirational document which would set timelines for KCC to deliver key items. There would be an improvement plan to take forward suggestions for different areas. There was £3 billion of Government funding available across England, it was not certain that KCC would get all the funding required but they should hear back at the end of November 2021.

In response to questions, Phil Lightowler provided the following responses:

- KCC provided funding each year for Swale as follows:
 - older/disabled persons bus pass - £17.2 million;
 - Kent travel saver - £7.5 million;
 - supported services - £6.5 million; and
 - public transport development £450,000.
- To provide a daily bus service, one bus per hour, it would cost an average of £375,000 to £400,000 per month;
- schools did not always liaise with KCC or bus operators about changes to the timing of the school day;
- KCC tried to work closely with transport colleagues and districts over Section 106 agreements; and
- Stagecoach were moving to a more flexible season ticket model.

When asked if the Area Committee could practically improve bus services in the area, Phil Lightowler suggested consulting with the public to see what they wanted from the services. Councillor Mike Whiting put forward a proposal to bring back a funding proposal to the December 2021 meeting for a public consultation to find out what residents wanted from local bus services and a figure of £10k was suggested by Councillor Mike Whiting. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Alastair Gould and agreed by the Committee.

Resolved:

- (1) That a funding proposal be brought back to the December 2021 meeting to allocate £10k for a public consultation to find out what residents wanted from local bus services in the Eastern Area.**

The Chair thanked Phil Lightowler for taking the time to attend the meeting.

295 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Members noted the progress on actions.

With reference to the siting of plaques at places of interest, the Chair advised that as she had received no further suggestions for sites, Faversham Town Council be approached to see if they would like to take this project on and submit a funding bid. This approach was agreed by the Area Committee.

296 PUBLIC FORUM**Flooding in Whitstable Road, Faversham**

Several residents had advised the Chair in advance they wished to speak about flooding in Whitstable Road, Faversham, Helen Whately MP and Earl Bournier, KCC Asset Manager Drainage & Structures were in attendance for this item.

Residents commented as follows:

Colin Alderman said in the five years he had lived in Whitstable Road there had been increasing problems with surface flooding which caused significant flooding to gardens and road closures. He requested a full discussion at the December 2021 meeting with more detail involving the appropriate agencies.

Teresa Metcalf spoke about the water coming up to front doors and said that contaminated waste was a public health issue. Residents had to use flood gates. Cyprus Road, Faversham was also affected.

Chris Williams said that there were two issues that lacked investment, drainage capacity and sewage management. There had been environmental damage to the local area. KCC had tried to address the matter and work had been carried out to Cooksditch Stream but had not resolved the problem. Faversham Town Council had written to Southern Water requesting a meeting but that had not yet happened. Pressure needed to be put on Southern Water.

Veronica Smith said garages in Cyprus Road had been flooded, and urgent action was needed.

Earl Bournier from KCC responded that this was a complex situation and he took on board all the comments. All surface water went into Southern Water drains and there were severe capacity issues with the sewer, the drainage system was not designed to take the deluges that had taken place recently. KCC had been trying to get Southern Water to meet with them.

Kent County Councillor Anthony Hook commented that Southern Water had a monopoly and they had done as little as they could and had not been held to account.

Helen Whately MP responded to all the comments and said it was an unacceptable situation. She had written to Southern Water and Ministers and considered that the Environmental Bill would address the issue but that would take some time. Southern Water had committed to investing £2 billion but it was not known how much of that would be for Faversham and what their plans for the area were. Helen Whately confirmed she would be happy to lead on setting up a meeting with all the relevant agencies and residents who had brought the matter to the attention of the Area Committee.

Promotion of Area Committees

A member of the public submitted a question to the Chair asking about the purpose of Area Committees, how they were promoted and how public participation could be improved. The Interim Area Committees Coordinator responded to the questions. A suggestion was put forward that a poster be produced for each Area Committee which could be emailed to parish councils to print out and display in public places so that residents who did not have online facilities could find out about forthcoming meetings.

297 LOCAL ISSUES TO BE RAISED

A Member praised Sioux Peto for the Teynham in Bloom scheme which had made a big difference to the area and received a Bronze Award. He encouraged other parishes to introduce the scheme.

A Member asked if the Eastern Area Committee wanted to do anything to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee 2022. The Head of Environment & Leisure advised that officers at Swale Borough Council (SBC) had recently discussed this and information would be coming out advising what would be done to mark this borough-wide.

298 UPDATE ON WORK PLAN

Members agreed the Work Plan proposals and that the criteria for scoring funding applications should be that bids demonstrated that they would have a positive impact on the appearance, environment and facilities in the Eastern Area with a particular emphasis on projects/initiatives that would have a positive impact on transport in the Eastern Area.

299 CLOSED CHURCHYARDS

The Head of Environment & Leisure explained that a condition survey had been carried out on all closed churchyards that were the responsibility of SBC to ensure they were maintained for health and safety reasons. However, the Council did not have the funding to complete all the non-urgent heritage works and there were opportunities if Area Committees or Ward Councillors wanted to support this work.

The Area Committee noted the report.

300 MONITORING REPORT - FUNDING ALLOCATIONS 2020-21

Members noted the Monitoring Report for funding awarded during 2020/21.

Further updates were given on the Youth Project, the Parishes to Town Project and the Boughton-under-Blean Outdoor Gym.

301 MATTERS REFERRED TO COMMITTEE BY CABINET

No issues were raised.

302 MATTERS REFERRED TO CABINET BY COMMITTEE

The Area Committee considered where the December 2021 meeting should take place. The preference was that it should be a hybrid meeting held in a community hall but the Interim Area Committees Coordinator explained that this was not possible due to the Council not having the necessary equipment. Comments were also made on the limitations of the equipment in the Council Chamber.

Councillor Lloyd Bowen proposed a recommendation to Cabinet that consideration should be given for Area Committees to enact their business in an appropriate hybrid way of working. This was seconded by Councillor Mike Whiting. A vote was taken and the recommendation was agreed. One Member abstained.

Resolved:

(1) That Cabinet considers ways that the Area Committees can enact their business in an appropriate hybrid way of working.

Chairman

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All Minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel