
COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting held in Sheerness East Working Men's Club, 47 Queenborough Road, Minster, Sheerness, Kent ME12 3BZ on Wednesday, 6 October 2021 from 7.00 pm - 10.15 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Cameron Beart, Monique Bonney, Lloyd Bowen, Derek Carnell, Simon Clark (Deputy Mayor), Richard Darby, Steve Davey, Mike Dendor, Oliver Eakin, Simon Fowle, Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, James Hall, Angela Harrison, Mike Henderson, Alan Horton, James Hunt, Ken Ingleton, Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Denise Knights, Peter Macdonald and Peter Marchington, Ben J Martin, Pete Neal, Richard Palmer, Ken Pugh, Ken Rowles, Julian Saunders, David Simmons, Bill Tatton, Eddie Thomas, Roger Truelove, Tim Valentine, Ghlin Whelan, Mike Whiting, Tony Winckless and Corrie Woodford.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Billy Attaway, David Clifford, Lisa Fillery, Robin Harris, Jo Millard and Larissa Reed.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Roger Clark, Ann Hampshire, Nicholas Hampshire, Lee McCall, Hannah Perkin, Paul Stephen (Mayor) and Sarah Stephen.

335 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Deputy Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

336 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 June 2021 (Minute No. 109 – 117) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Deputy Mayor as a correct record.

337 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

338 DEPUTY MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Deputy Mayor explained that he would be chairing the meeting as the Mayor was unwell. He wished the Mayor a speedy recovery.

The Deputy Mayor said that he had attended a Dyslexia Awareness event in Faversham the previous evening with Councillor Ben J Martin and the Mayor of Faversham, Mrs Alison Reynolds BEM.

The Deputy Mayor welcomed Councillor Mike Henderson to the meeting after his victory in the recent Priory Ward by-election.

339 LEADER'S STATEMENT

The Leader opened his statement by saying how pleased he was that the meeting was being held at the Sheerness East Working Men's Club and said he would concentrate his statement on the Isle of Sheppey exclusively.

He said that he played football for the Sheerness East Working Men's Club in the 1970's and he lived on the Isle of Sheppey as he taught at the Sheppey Upper Comprehensive School, including teaching two current Swale Borough Councillors.

The Leader spoke of the importance of investing in the Isle of Sheppey. He referred to the collapsed Lion Hope project in the 1990's, although one of the project's targets, the Second Sheppey Crossing, was built several years later. He said that the coalition was determined to increase the resources that came to the Isle of Sheppey, not just core services but additional items from capital spends, special projects or from Government funding. The Leader listed the following projects that had been carried out and those that were planned:

- Funding for Sheppey Hall and the War Memorial in Sheerness;
- improvements to disabled people's parking with additional bays at Sheppey Leisure Centre and the Little Oysters;
- new off-street parking for Kingsborough Manor woodland;
- a continuing programme of refurbishment of playgrounds at Queenborough, Sheerness and Eastchurch;
- new modern toilets at The Leas, Minster and refurbishment of the toilet at The Spinney, Leysdown;
- the Special Projects Fund support for CCTV and refurbishment of kitchens at the village hall, in Leysdown;
- supported the Sheppey Community bus service and Government Welcome Back funding supported the successful Hoppa Service;
- the Barton's Point Crossing bridge was replaced and car park improvements made in that location; and
- the Council had, and continued to support, community groups especially for children and young people such as the Early Childhood Development Scheme.

The Leader highlighted many significant projects still in progress:

- The repair of the Sheerness Clock Tower;
- regeneration of Master's House;
- continuing makeover of Sheerness Town Centre; and
- recovery of the pond at The Glen, Minster; and new drainage, toilet and shower block at Barton's Point Coastal Park.

Future projects included:

- Working with Sheerness Port and Historic England to develop the Sheerness Port and Dockyard initiative;
- reviewing the Mile Town and Marine Town Conservation areas; and
- working with the Ministry of Justice to secure the conservation of World War 2 aircraft carriers at Stanford Hill prison, Eastchurch.

Moving on to external funding and support, the Leader said that Swale had recently been visited by the High Street Task Force who initially considered Sittingbourne to be the priority for working around High Street improvements but it was Cabinet's view that Sheerness should be first. He added that the Isle of Sheppey had been made the priority for any scheme to submit to Government for levelling up and would remain a priority whether Government support was received or not.

The Leader said there were some issues that Cabinet had no direct control over but should speak for the Isle of Sheppey, and he spoke on the current shortage of GP cover and health inequalities and of the future of secondary education. He said that young people on the Isle of Sheppey should be given greater opportunities and could achieve great things. The Leader said working with the MP and Kent County Council was ongoing to achieve a better educational option for the Isle of Sheppey. He said that reports that KCC had plans to build a new school were incorrect and he referred to the correction made by the media. The Leader reminded Members that the Oasis was an Academy school, not a KCC school and the MP's input was vital in achieving a better option which could not be done without the involvement of the current provider.

The Leader spoke about local pride in the area, which could come from the growth of community activity, heritage projects, or even the success of local sports teams and he ended his statement by saying that this Council supported the Isle of Sheppey community and he hoped this would be reflected in the media.

In response, the Leader of the opposition group first welcomed Councillor Mike Henderson. He then spoke of his involvement in education and of the issues in students travelling from the Isle of Sheppey to attend schools off it. The Leader of the opposition applauded the work the administration had carried out on the Isle of Sheppey. He spoke of the importance of involving and communicating with residents on the Isle of Sheppey and said that the opposition would support the administration when they did the right thing and challenge when it did not.

The Deputy Mayor invited other Members to respond and comments made included:

- Educational buildings on the Isle of Sheppey had been replaced, investment in education to match was needed;
- there was talent and aspiration on the Isle of Sheppey which was not being used;
- the current education system was unsatisfactory;
- there had been world leaders in Maths and Science educated on the Isle of Sheppey;
- pleased with the administration's investment on the Isle of Sheppey and in other areas of Swale;
- Members should lobby the MP on education;
- there were good and outstanding primary schools but the secondary school required improvement;
- welcomed the proposed new Rushenden Primary School and Secondary SEN school;
- criticised the local media for unhelpful incorrect reporting;

- spoke of the Isle of Sheppey's rich heritage and pride of residents;
- hoped the introduction of Area Committees improved communication and resident participation;
- Swale Borough Council (SBC) provided help and assistance as well as funding for projects and ideas;
- encouraged visitors to the new Queenborough Market; and
- encouraged Members to be positive about the Isle of Sheppey.

In response the Leader welcomed Members' comments. He praised the interaction with community groups. Referring to education, he said that ideas and discussions that SBC, KCC and the MP had on two secondary schools on the Isle of Sheppey, one a vocational school, did not mean these would be built in the next year. He encouraged all Members to support ideas to make educational options better for the Isle of Sheppey.

340 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

The Deputy Mayor advised there were 4 questions submitted by members of the public.

Question 1 – Mr Chris Williams

Can the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property explain what, if any, projects are being considered for a bid to the levelling up fund in Faversham, and if no bid is being considered, explain, why not?

Response – Cabinet Member for Economy and Property

For the Faversham and Mid Kent Constituency, Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) had submitted a bid for a highways project that had been subject to considerable work in the preceding years. This had the support of the Member of Parliament and was able to demonstrate that it could meet the requirement for first round bids to begin spending within the current financial year. The outcome of this bid was awaited, and should it be successful it would be very unlikely that any bid could be successfully submitted for Faversham or Swale East. If MBC's bid is not successful, then proposals for that part of the Borough falling within the Faversham and Mid-Kent Constituency could be developed for submission. Some ideas had been discussed with the Faversham Borough Councillors, but at present no one proposal has been decided upon for this eventuality.

Supplementary question

There was no supplementary question

Question 2 – Linda Brinklow

Climate Change is a very big issue. I was one of the local residents, that took part, around 8 years ago in the Coastal Communities Consultation on Shaping Our Future by the Coast.

There were 3 areas covered. Thanet, Romney Marsh and Sheppey – all areas where climate change will have the greatest impact. Under the developing Business and Tourism section, the very first proposed action, was to support the development of a cross island cycle way.

Many of the other proposals have been implemented. Very little had been done about the cycle way. Plans were put forward by Sustrans, working with local councillors, residents and the tourism industry. These have been shelved.

If and when money becomes available to develop such a scheme, how many of your councillors would support its development. Currently we are trying to get the Leysdown to Eastchurch part of the project initiated.

Response – Cabinet Member for Economy and Property

SBC was a key partner in the European funded project - Coastal Communities 2150 - and had continued to use this work to inform and develop a number of our current key priorities – our commitment to the Climate Change and Ecological Emergency, the Visitor Economy and the Cycling and Walking Statement.

During the last decade the Council worked very closely with Sustrans in developing a number of priorities for leisure routes on the Isle of Sheppey some of which were delivered (Harty Trail and Sheerness Trail) with others remaining under review and/or aspirational. More recent technical reports commissioned through Sustrans have informed other initiatives and demonstrate our commitment to working with funding bodies such as Kent Highways and the Department for Transport.

The cross Sheppey Cycle Way (2013) was, as you indicate, scoped and a number of community meetings were held to inform future work plans and in readiness to bid into to future government funding in support of leisure routes. At the time, Sustrans had a difficult meeting with Isle of Sheppey farmers/landowners as part of this community consultation, which identified some significant challenges in establishing a route.

While the Council was committed to developing tourism on Sheppey and encouraging leisure activities like cycling and walking this project currently remains aspirational given the technical guidance and reports that will be required, the legal agreements to be reached and the need for a strong evidence base of community support. Your help as a community champion is appreciated as community engagement and support would be critical in developing projects like this in the future. Thank you for your support and ongoing interest in our priorities.

Supplementary question

There was no supplementary question

Question 3 – Dolley White

With the changes to the cabinet structure proposed at tonight's meeting, could members of the Sheppey community be assured by Members that more voices

would be heard in discussion in the Councils committees. For example the marine group where Sheppey's best interests would be served by allowing more experienced voices from both the community and local business to have input in work that directly affects them like Queenbrough Creek and our blue flag beaches?

Response – Cabinet Member for Planning

Since coming to office, this administration has worked hard to deliver on their objective of reviewing the constitution to diffuse decision-making power more widely among elected Members and improve the transparency, responsiveness and public accountability of that decision-making, and to involve Parish and Town Councils to a far greater degree than has ever been the case previously.

To date this had included the creation of area committees, intended to give ward councillors a real say over local issues and provide an effective interface between the council and local communities, and to enable local residents, businesses and community groups to engage directly with the elected members at these Committees.

This year we have introduced Cabinet Advisory Committees, intended to enable Ward Councillors to bring greater influence to bear on Cabinet decision-making, and to give them greater insight into the policy-making process.

The next logical step in this process was the introduction of a committee system, which if agreed by Members tonight would give decision-making responsibility to all Councillors on the matters which were currently decided by Cabinet alone. While this broadening of the number of Councillor voices which were heard when decisions were being taken was important, the re-writing of the constitution would be necessary to implement the committee system was also an opportunity for us to strengthen the public's ability to engage with and to inform the decisions which are being taken. I will certainly be working to ensure that this ambition is realised.

Supplementary question

There was no supplementary question.

Question 4 – Dolley White

What progress is being made to hold Kent and Medway CCG to account over the closure of the DMC surgery that has a direct effect on all Sheppey residents?

Response – Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

As you will be aware responsibility for the Overview and Scrutiny legally rests with KCC HOSC Committee. I agree that this is an important matter for residents, and I have highlighted my concerns to the lead officer at KCC to request that it is considered by the committee who informs that members of the committee have received email updates about the situation, but it has yet to be discussed by the committee. Swale Council has would continue to raise concerns and lobby the relevant responsible authorities to improve the GP/patient ratio in our Borough.

In addition the KCC HOSC Committee would be looking at GP Provision at its meeting on 11th November 2021, it would be webcast and every KCC Member may attend and ask a question or make a comment about their area and I encourage Swale's KCC Members to attend.

Supplementary question

There was no supplementary question.

341 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS

The Deputy Mayor advised that five questions had been received from Members. Each Member was invited to put their question which was responded to by the relevant Cabinet Member. The questioner was then invited to ask a supplementary question:

Question 1 – Cllr Cameron Beart

Following the Leaders announcement at Full Council in June 2021 that he was to create yet another two paid cabinet positions, adding £18.5k a year to the allowances budget and bringing the total SRA spend to nearly £200k a year, could the Leader please explain to the local electorate how his ever growing allowances budget burden on the taxpayer is justified?

Despite his own election manifesto pledge of cutting the number of special responsibility allowances paid, in two years he has increased the annual spend by nearly £45k. Is this the real cost of loyalty in this coalition?

Response – Leader

I would like to thank the Member for his question and the opportunity to demonstrate how parsimonious we have been over the last two and a half years.

Under section 9c of the Local Government Act of 2000 our Cabinet can consist of 10 members, including the Leader. That we have worked so successfully with 7 Cabinet Members, during a period when we had no Chief Executive, of unmitigated challenge due to a pandemic and, frankly, when we felt there were changes needed after years of Conservative rule, will be appreciated by fair minded members of the public. It was our view when taking office that SBC needed to expand its vision, to recognise the significance of climate change, to do a lot more about the homelessness crisis, to be more engaged with the community, to show greater concern for our public environment and to broaden the meaning of supporting the local economy. For 27 months we have followed these aims with only 7 Cabinet Members. They have been well supported by deputies, who it was clear played a key role in expanding the vision of this Council.

The total saving by having 7 Portfolios rather than 10 over the last 27 months is just under £125,000

We have been able to limit Cabinet posts to just 7 in part because I personally have looked after two portfolios, those of the Leader and those of Cabinet Member for Finance. Councillor Mike Baldock had combined being Deputy Leader, with responsibility for Planning and Constitutional change. He was also chairing the Western Area Committee, for which he receives no SRA. Other administration members have taken on other key roles without SRA recognition, Councillor Gould as Chair of Policy Development Review Committee for two years and Councillor Carnell as Licensing Committee Chair. These selfless commitments add a further £19,045.22 to the savings made on SRAs by this administration

It may be protested that 10 portfolios were not necessary for a Council of our size. Well, they were in 2010 and 2011 and it was thought necessary to have 9 from 2013-2016. As my memory serves me, these were not times of progressive growth in the activities of this Council, so taking on board part of the question, perhaps it was a time for loyalty rewards.

Now we have added an 8th portfolio. I explained the thinking behind this at the last meeting when the whole Council supported a motion in favour of Climate Change legislation in Parliament. Since that meeting, we have had yet more demonstrations around the World of the threat of climate change from global warming. Given the all-party concern expressed at the last meeting, I would not expect any members to quibble about Swale's determination to lead the way by establishing a portfolio exclusively focussed on this topic.

I am sure it was important to the public to know too the qualities that Cabinet Members and their Deputies bring to the Council's administration. It was clear to me that we have some outstanding Cabinet Members. Without making comparisons with former office holders, not all here to defend themselves, it strikes me how committed and well prepared the current Members were, quite obviously on top of their brief when asked to speak at meetings with scrutiny, area committees and now Cabinet Advisory Committees.

Finally, I am glad that the Member noted the level of loyalty in the current administration but in this instance this did not come from Leader patronage but from the commitment that was shared, by the degree to which each portfolio was allowed to develop its agenda, by the obvious fact that influence and recognition is shared, without the restrictions, evidenced in some places, of a single Member, the Leader, wanting excessive control and attention at the inevitable expense of loyalty.

Supplementary question:

In accordance with the Local Authorities Members Allowance England 2003 & paragraph 72 of the Guidance on Regulations for Local Authorities Allowances 2003, the Swale Independent Remuneration Panel recommended in March 2020 that no more than 50% of Council Members should receive an SRA at any one time. This report was supported and endorsed by the Leader and administration at Full Council. Given that the Leader has created these 2 new positions, we now have 28 SRA's, 24 of which are currently being paid out. Could the Leader further explain why he has ignored the adopted advice of the Independent Remuneration Panel and created paid jobs for 21 of his 27 coalition?

Response:

We are on a mission to make Swale a much more effective Council. The kind of dynamism we have now embraced is very different to how it was before. I am convinced that the appointments made were appropriate for the needs of this Council. By having a Cabinet Member for Climate Emergency the Council had moved right up the agenda in both national and county recognition and the outcome of that was other environmental groups wanted to work with Swale, to the benefit of all of the people of Swale. I expect Swale to loom very large in Government funding that comes in to support the environment. I think those gains in support for a lot more tree-planting, for example, and other environmental measures was well worth the one extra Cabinet post for someone who, like the rest of Cabinet was very effective.

Question 2 – Councillor Cameron Beart

In June 2020, this council adopted the 'interim planning "policy" for park home residences'.

Could the Cabinet Member for Planning please tell Full Council;

- how many applications have been submitted using this "policy" as a basis?;
- how many new homes those applications would potentially yield if they were all approved;

and the outcome of those applications?

Response – Cabinet Member for Planning

Despite some hugely misleading, and quite frankly scaremongering, claims at the time that up to 7000 applications might be submitted, since the Interim Planning Policy was adopted in June 2020 there had been just one planning application for Park Home residences - which resulted in the planning approval of an additional 36 park home units at Beckenham Park, Otterham Quay Lane, Upchurch.

A further 9 planning applications were submitted for the relaxation of holiday park occupancy conditions rather than a change of use planning applications for Park Home use. Of those 9 planning applications, 7 were refused and 2 were withdrawn.

Supplementary question

There was no supplementary question.

Question 3 – Councillor Ghlin Whelan

Council agreed at its last meeting to support the Climate Emergency Bill before Parliament and also called on our constituency MPs to do likewise.

What response have we had from them?

Response – Cabinet Member for Climate and Ecological Emergency

At Full Council on 23 June 2021 a motion to support the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill was unanimously passed. Letters were sent to both Gordon Henderson MP and Helen Whately MP on behalf of the Council to ask that they add their support.

Gordon Henderson had responded to say he would not be supporting the bill, as it “has zero chance of ever being enacted without Government support”. He believes this support was unlikely due to the “unachievable 2030 net zero target”, compared to the Government’s 2050 target. The Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill did not set a 2030 net zero target. It required the Secretary of State to lay before Parliament a strategy to reduce the UK’s contribution to global greenhouse gas emissions at a rate consistent with limiting the rise in global mean temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius. The target is science-based. However, the science did require rapid, deep cuts in the UK’s greenhouse gas emissions.

In her response Helen Whately said: “I am not convinced that the provisions in the Climate and Ecological Emergency Bill are needed or helpful in our efforts to reduce emissions.” She would welcome suggestions as to how the Government can help Swale Borough Council achieve our targets.

It is regrettable that our Parliamentary representatives did not think it necessary to set out a clear strategy that would achieve the cuts in greenhouse gas emissions necessary to limit the catastrophic effects for humanity. As we approach the UN climate talks in Glasgow, it’s clear that our members of Parliament were not taking heed of the IPCC’s ‘code red warning for humanity’. Although the Conservative group on the Council supported the Council motion, Conservative members of Parliament clearly do not agree.

There were many ways in which the Government could help Swale Borough Council achieve our targets. We need a strategy to insulate all the energy-inefficient housing in Swale. Funding of a suitable scale is required to replace the failed Green Homes Grant and the Renewable Heat Incentive which ends in the spring. Insulating homes, especially for poorer families, was a top priority to reduce poverty, improve health and address the climate emergency. We needed more flexible funding to make public buildings more energy efficient. Much more substantial funding was required for public transport, and for walking and cycling facilities. Work to address the climate and ecological emergency was a new workstream for local government and it was an essential that adequate core funding for local government is provided to enable us to meet the challenge.

Supplementary question

There was no supplementary question.

Question 4 – Councillor Steve Davey

What impact has the Council had on rough sleeping over the last 27 months?

Response – Cabinet Member for Housing

Thank you for your question.

I'd like to start by thanking the whole Housing team for their work in this area. They have dealt with exceptionally high demand for our services over the past 27 months, and in particularly difficult circumstances during the pandemic.

Rough sleeper numbers had reduced 93.75% since the change in administration. At the annual count in 2018 there were 32 rough sleepers in Swale. Following the change in administration in 2019 we set up the Rough Sleeping team and the prevention team. By the annual count in Autumn 2019, we had already reduced the number of rough sleepers in Swale to ten. This was a 69% reduction and the second largest reduction in the country. In 2020 we had 2 rough sleepers, another significant reduction. We have supported 110 rough sleepers since May 2019.

We currently have 24 former rough sleepers housed in temporary accommodation under the Rough Sleeping Initiative and 8 housed at the Quays. We have successfully supported 35 former rough sleepers into permanent accommodation and 2 into Next Steps accommodation programme.

The team have supported these people with more than just housing. We ensured that they received their COVID-19 vaccinations, have assisted with drug and alcohol rehabilitation, helped them manage finances and learn new skills, even things as simple as cooking for themselves. We have assisted in getting them health care provision and in applying for benefit payments. In short we have helped them to rebuild their lives.

On top of all this, through the work of the prevention team we have we have helped 462 households avoid becoming homeless since 2019 and housed 295 families who had been made homeless.

This Council and all parts of it's housing team, especially it's rough sleeper team, prevention team and housing options team could be proud of what we had achieved so far, despite having to bid for funding for rough sleeper services on an annual basis when the LGA had lobbied consistently for a multi-year funding programme to enable us to better plan our services. Local Government, and this Council in particularly had stepped up, we must demand better from central government so that we could continue to work to eradicate rough sleeping. The time for empty words and broken promises from central government is long over, it is time for action. With that in mind I would like to remind members that the Annual Rough Sleeper count is due to take place on the night of 16 November 2021 from 10pm, and should Members wish to volunteer to assist to please contact Sue Davis.

Supplementary question

Could the Council provide better contact information and include information on out of hours contact and procedures?

Response

The out of hours service provider has recently changed and the contact number was now a Swale number.

We are happy to work with officers and Members to develop guidelines.

Question 5 – Councillor Lloyd Bowen

The problems surrounding fuel and food deliveries highlight (amongst many other things) the working conditions of lorry drivers. The provisions of civilised parking facilities was lacking in this borough, county and country.

In 2019 the new coalition at Swale Borough Council refused to co-operate in building a lorry park. Did the Cabinet Member think we, Swale Borough Council, could do more to and maybe review that decision to help for this essential service? If she did, would she start talks with other local authorities near to us who might be able to help? Or was she still content to allow drivers to park all over the Borough without facilities available to them?

Response – Cabinet Member for Economy and Property

In December 2019 Cabinet resolved that the Council would engage with the Highway Authorities and other relevant stakeholders to help develop a set of actions to help address lorry parking in the Borough, but would wish to see this come forward as part of a wider strategy for Kent, if not the country. This remained the case and a subsequent letter to the Secretary of State made clear our wish to work with others but also the need for Government leadership on the issue.

Post-pandemic, the lack of facilities nationally for lorry drivers was beginning to be more widely acknowledged and I will work with all stakeholders who could help address the problem the Borough faces with fly-lorry parking and the need for provision. However, I also believe that the pursuit of a site at Brenley Corner in isolation was not appropriate at this time. The junction was already over capacity, landowners had not shown an interest and improvements to the junction are being considered by National Highways (formerly Highways England) as a potential pipeline scheme for Road Investment Strategy 3 (RIS3), post 2025. This work was in its infancy and land required to deliver any improvements uncertain. Given this, I believe that a proposal for lorry parking should only be considered in the context of any such improvements, as they come forward.

Supplementary question

Change has to start somewhere. Can the Cabinet Member show leadership to make it happen?

Response

SBC were a small fish in a big pond. Proper coordinated lorry parks were needed in the south east, like the set up on the continent. There was a flaw in the system and Central Government and the Highways Agency need to be pushed. It should not fall to small districts and political leadership was needed from Government.

342 MOTION FOR FREE SATURDAY PARKING IN TOWN CENTRES

In proposing the motion for free parking in Town Centres on Saturdays, Councillor Oliver Eakin said that high streets in the borough were in need of a boost and the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic had led to residents shopping elsewhere. He drew attention to the popularity of online shopping and said that high streets needed to attract more customers. He acknowledged the decrease in revenue that free parking would bring but said it was up to the Council to introduce policies to improve lives.

In seconding the proposal, Councillor Mike Whiting reserved his right to speak.

In the discussion that followed, Members raised points including:

- Similar motions had been proposed unsuccessfully in 2017 and 2019;
- free parking might lead to increase in traffic and pollution;
- should discourage online spending and support local shops instead;
- car parks in some areas of the Borough were already full;
- there was already free parking in some areas of Swale;
- the times of free parking proposed should be more specific;
- would prefer free transport and improving cycle and pedestrian routes;
- roads were already congested;
- praise for listening to community and bringing the motion forward;
- need to reduce the numbers of cars but increase the numbers of people shopping local;
- loss of revenue to the Council would be too high;
- needed to look at the issue but this was not the solution;
- this was a feasibility study for free parking on Saturdays;
- the financial implication had not been costed;
- suggested looking at the pedestrianisation report discussed at Swale JTB – needed to get footfall into town centres on the least busiest days;
- better products and facilities such as cinema and bowling encouraged shoppers into Town Centres; and
- improvement and ease of payment of parking tickets encouraged shoppers.

Councillor Whiting spoke in support of the motion and reminded Members that the motion called for a feasibility study. He highlighted that supermarkets offered free parking and said that options should be considered to assist retailers in the post recovery period.

In summing up, Councillor Eakin said this was not a reward for the motorist but with limited public transport, it was not reasonable for everyone to use public transport instead of a car. He acknowledged similar motions had been proposed before but said the issue needed to be looked at to assist traders.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 19(2), five Members requested a recorded vote, and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Beart, Bowen, Dendor, Eakin, Fowle, Hunt, Ingleton, MacDonald, Neal, Pugh, Simmons and Whiting. Total equals 12.

Against: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Carnell, S Clark, Darby, Davey, Henderson, Gibson, Gould, Hall, Harrison, Jackson, Jayes, Knights, Martin, Palmer, Rowles, Saunders, Tatton, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan, Winckless, Woodford. Total equals 25.

Abstain: Councillors Horton and Marchington. Total equals 2.

The Deputy Mayor advised that the motion was lost.

343 MOTION - SOUTHERN WATER

In proposing the motion as set out on the Agenda, Councillor Julian Saunders set out the recent court case of Southern Water (SW) being fined £90million. He said between 2010 and 2015, SW had dumped between 16 billion and 21 billion litres of raw sewage into the sea from 17 waste water treatment plants, 4 of which were in Swale at Eastchurch, Queenborough, Sittingbourne and Teynham. Councillor Saunders explained the impact and said that national statistics showed that Southern Water were responsible for 4 times as many pollution incidents per mile than the national average. He added that the Environment Agency (EA) considered SW's performance consistently unacceptable. Councillor Saunders highlighted several recent incidents including sewer overflows.

Councillor Saunders said that the Council would be writing to MP's and the Department of the Environment seeking their investment in greater regulations and to revise management arrangements for the water industry. He referred to the profits made by SW and said the motion sought to ensure that the company's future pledges of £230million of investment and accelerated spending for future years were carried out and that there would be no serious pollution incidents affecting local rivers, streams and beaches caused by their operations by 2025.

He referred to the proposed £2million investment by SW to the Faversham Wastewater Works but said there was still much to be done.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Tim Valentine said that SW had promised to improve its service since 2015 but matters had worsened and he outlined the increase in self-reported raw sewage spillage incidents in Thanet from 2017 – 2020 which had increased by 160%. He said that SW had said they were working to reduce the number of historic Combined Sewer Outfalls (CSO's) with investment and nature based solutions but this did not appear in their Pollution Incident Reduction Plan. Councillor Valentine compared information collected on rainfall with SW's spill data for 2020 and said that discharges occurred more frequently during periods of low and medium rainfall. Further data showed there had been an increase in the discharge of raw sewage in recent years.

During the discussion that followed, Members raised points which included:

- SW had an appalling record and were criminally irresponsible;
- was not in favour of basic human needs being put in the market place;
- SW had not invested and infrastructure had suffered
- needed to do more than just write a letter;
- a Scrutiny committee meeting with attendance by SW was being pursued;

- highlighted the reputational damage caused to coastal towns with beaches and the possible decrease in visitors;
- the impact on marine life;
- gave examples of where lack of investment had caused long term leaks;
- SW had failed;
- the Council should claim financial compensation for damage inflicted on the community;
- spoke of the knock-on effect of not discharging correctly;
- highlighted the impact on businesses;
- encouraged working together to hold SW to account;
- spoke of negative experiences when dealing with SW;
- control of industry was inadequate - Ofwat and the EA should be pushed at a later stage; and
- consider uniting organisations and authorities to invite SW to a meeting.

In summing up, Councillor Saunders thanks Members for their support. He agreed there should be a coordinated approach and that sending a letter was the starting point.

On being put to the vote, Members unanimously agreed the motion.

Resolved:

That this Council:

(1) Supports the administration in demanding that Southern Water make the investment needed to:

- ***ensure that local water treatment works are functioning legally and safely and that our rivers, streams and shoreline are not affected by serious pollution incidents in the future;***
- ***improve the capacity and effectiveness of the local waste water infrastructure so that sewage is not discharged into local streets during periods of heavy rain.***

(2) Write to local MP's and the Department of the Environment asking that:

- ***Fine income be used to support improvements in the regulatory arrangements for water companies and to provide compensation to local authorities and local businesses that have suffered from the criminal activities of SW;***
- ***the current management arrangements for the water industry are revised so that private companies like SW cannot secretly pursue criminal activities over many years in order to avoid financial penalties and the cost of upgrading infrastructure.***

344 UPDATED CABINET PORTFOLIO RESPONSIBILITIES

The Leader proposed the recommendations which were seconded by the Deputy Leader.

Resolved:

(1) To note updated Cabinet portfolio responsibilities set out at Appendix I on the report.

(2) To note that the scheme of delegations set out in Part 3 of the constitution remains otherwise unchanged.

345 GOVERNANCE MODEL CHANGE

The Deputy Mayor advised Members that in accordance with Article 17 of the procedure rules, an amendment to the recommendations had been proposed by Councillor Tim Valentine and seconded by Councillor Monique Bonney.

The Deputy Leader introduced the report and said that moving to the Committee system was an important step. He referred to Area Committees and Cabinet Advisory Committees in widening engagement and in proposing the recommendations said that Committee Structure was more transparent. In seconding the recommendations, the Leader reserved his right to speak.

Councillor Tim Valentine proposed an amendment to the recommendations to change the date of implementation to May 2023 from May 2022. In proposing the amendment, Councillor Valentine said that he supported moving to the Committee system but in considering officer resource, a longer lead in time was preferable. He said implementing the Committee system earlier might be a diversion to the Council's priorities. Councillor Bonney seconded the motion and reserved her right to speak.

In the discussion that followed Members raised points including:

- Why wait another year to improve democracy?;
- the Committee system should be tested prior to 2023 new Members being elected;
- delaying implementation was more of a diversion;
- it was unreasonable to elect new Members at the same time as a new system;
- some Members might not wish to stand in an election with a Committee system;
- a delay gave officers time to deliver on priorities that had been delayed due to Covid-19;
- should implement in 2022 or not at all;
- Members needed to see it through;
- was a step too far for new Members and a new system;
- current Members needed to be responsible for their actions and decisions;
- it was dishonest to agree the Committee system but defer the start start;
- officer resource needed to be considered; and
- rewriting the constitution was a big project that needed a lot of resource.

Councillor Bonney said that officers were already very overstretched and delivering on projects within the Council's priorities would be very difficult if the Committee System was implemented in 2022 and careful management of officer resource would be needed.

In response, the Deputy Leader said he had listened to a number of different options and a number of valid points had been raised but on balance, any problems needed to be ironed out before new Members joined the Council.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 19(2), five Members requested a recorded vote, and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Bonney, Darby, Henderson, Gould, Jackson, Jayes, Knights, Martin, Tatton, Thomas, Valentine. Total equals 11.

Against: Councillors Baldock, Beart, Bowen, Carnell, S Clark, Davey, Dendor, Eakin, Fowle, Gibson, Hall, Harrison, Horton, Hunt, Ingleton, MacDonald, Marchington, Neal, Palmer, Pugh, Rowles, Saunders, Simmons, Truelove, Whelan, Whiting, Winckless, Woodford. Total equals 28.

Abstain: 0

The Deputy Mayor announced that the amendment was lost.

Members then debated the substantive recommendations.

Under Council Procedure Rule 16 (19)(b) Councillor Ken Ingleton proposed the substantive recommendations be put to the vote. This was seconded by Councillor Mike Whiting and on being put to the vote, this was agreed.

Resolved:

(1) That the Council's current lead-and-cabinet governance arrangements will be replaced with a committee system, to come into effect at the Annual Council meeting in May 2022.

(2) That the cross-party constitution review working group continue to develop proposals with respect to the detailed working of the new system, including the number and remit of committees, for endorsement by Council between now and May 2022.

346 STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES UNDER THE GAMBLING ACT 2005

The Deputy Mayor advised that this item was added to the Agenda in error and the report would be considered at the next Council meeting in November 2021.

347 LOCAL AREA PROFILE UNDER THE GAMBLING ACT 2005

The Deputy Mayor advised that this item was added to the Agenda in error and the report would be considered at the next Council meeting in November 2021.

348 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPROVAL

Resolved:

(1) That Minute Nos 253 – 254 from the Licensing Act 2003 Committee held on 9 September 2021 be noted.

349 INDEPENDENT PERSON EXTENSION OF CONTRACT

The Leader introduced the report and proposed the recommendation which sought to extend the period of appointment of Patricia Richards and Christopher Webb as Independent Persons for a further four years to September 2025. In seconding the recommendations Councillor Alan Horton thanked the Independent Persons for their service.

Resolved:

(1) That Council extend the period of appointment of Patricia Richards and Christopher Webb as Independent Persons for a further four years to September 2025.

350 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was not necessary to pass the resolution to exclude the press and public.

351 EXEMPT APPENDIX - INDEPENDENT PERSON EXTENSION OF CONTRACT

There was no discussion on the Exempt Appendix.

352 DECISIONS FROM EMERGENCY COMMITTEE**Resolved:**

That Council noted the decisions made by the Emergency Committee that agreed:

(1) Lisa Fillery be designated as the Section 151 Officer for Swale Borough Council

(2) Health grounds were an appropriate reason to waive the requirement under s85 (1) of the Local Government Act 1972 to Councillors Roger Clark, Mini Nissanga and Bill Tatton to attend a meeting within six months of their last attendance

353 ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned from 8:53pm to 9pm.

354 EXTENSION OF STANDING ORDERS

At 10pm Members agreed to the extension of Standing Orders in order that Council could complete its business.

Chairman

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