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## COUNCIL

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**MINUTES** of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 23 February 2022 from 7.00 pm - 10.58 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Mike Baldock, Cameron Beart, Monique Bonney, Lloyd Bowen, Simon Clark (Deputy Mayor), Richard Darby, Steve Davey, Mike Dendor, Simon Fowle, Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, Ann Hampshire, Nicholas Hampshire, Angela Harrison, Alan Horton, James Hunt, Carole Jackson, Denise Knights, Peter Macdonald, Peter Marchington, Ben J Martin, Lee McCall, Pete Neal, Padmini Nissanga, Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin, Ken Rowles, Julian Saunders, David Simmons, Paul Stephen (Mayor), Sarah Stephen, Bill Tatton, Eddie Thomas, Roger Truelove, Tim Valentine, Ghlin Whelan, Mike Whiting, Tony Winckless and Corrie Woodford.

**PRESENT (Virtually):** Councillors Roger Clark, James Hall, Ken Ingleton, Elliott Jayes and Ken Pugh.

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** David Clifford, Lisa Fillery, Jo Millard and Phil Wilson.

**OFFICERS PRESENT (Virtually):** Robin Harris, Janet Hill, Chris Lovelock, Kellie Mackenzie, Larissa Reed and Emma Wiggins.

**APOLOGY:** Councillor Derek Carnell.

### 611 Tributes

Councillor David Simmons led the tributes to former Councillor and Mayor of Swale Honorary Alderman Colin Prescott who sadly passed away recently. He spoke of Alderman Prescott's 27-year term as a Swale Borough Councillor, serving two terms as Mayor. Councillor Simmons said Alderman Prescott was popular and a great champion to Swale. Councillor Angela Harrison acknowledged Alderman Prescott's contribution to the Council, particularly in Planning matters, and his all-round awareness of community issues in Swale. She spoke fondly of his mayoral terms and said he would be very sadly missed. Councillor Lloyd Bowen said that Alderman Prescott was one of the most passionate Mayors there had been at the Council.

Councillor Cameron Beart paid tribute to former Councillor Lynd Taylor who sadly passed away recently. He said that former Councillor Taylor had made a big impact in his one-year term as Councillor, was keen to volunteer and enjoyed his time as a proactive member of the Scrutiny Committee. He said he was a good friend and would be sadly missed. Councillor Lloyd Bowen said that former Councillor Taylor was a gentleman who looked for the positives.

The Leader passed on his condolences.

There was a minute's silence in memory of former Councillor and Mayor of Swale, Alderman Prescott and former Councillor Lynd Taylor.

## 612 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Mayor drew attention to the Emergency Evacuation Procedure.

## 613 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 10 November 2021 (Minute Nos. 413 - 424) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

## 614 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

## 615 **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor said that attendance at events was increasing and he had attended several Christmas functions. He said that £150 had been raised at an event for Raybell where participants decorated lanterns using plastic bottles. The Mayor welcomed three new vicars, Reverend David, Colin and Robert into the Sittingbourne area, two at Holy Trinity Church and one at St. Michael's Church. He spoke of his mayoress, Councillor Sarah Stephen meeting Peter the fox at an event for Kent Wildlife Rescue. Finally, the Mayor said that the highlight of his term was meeting His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall at the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Sheppey Matters in January 2022.

The Mayor announced there would be a change in the order of items, bringing forward the budget-related items first.

## 616 **Council Tax Support Scheme 2022/23**

The Leader introduced the report, advising that the current support scheme replaced the Council Tax Benefit Scheme in 2013. He said the initial Central Government financial support had steadily diminished and Swale had the second highest demand in Kent for support. The Leader advised that the contribution levels from those on low incomes had reduced from 25% to 20% in 2021, in line with most other Kent authorities. He highlighted the difficulties in collecting Council Tax at a higher liability. In proposing the recommendations the Leader said the Council would work towards a more banded system for 2023/24.

The recommendations were seconded by Councillor Angela Harrison.

The Group Leader of the main opposition group supported the consideration of working towards a more banded system in 2023 and fully supported the recommendations.

**In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 19(5), a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:**

**For: Baldock, Beart, Bonney, Bowen, S Clark, Darby, Davey, Dendor, Eakin, Fowle, Gibson, Gould, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Harrison, Henderson, Horton, Hunt, Jackson, Knights, MacDonald, Marchington, Ben J Martin, McCall, Neal, Nissanga, Palmer, Perkin, Rowles, Saunders, Simmons, P Stephen, S Stephen, Tatton, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan, Whiting, Winckless and Woodford. Total = 41.**

**Against: 0.**

**Abstain: 0.**

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the Council Tax Support Scheme for 2022/23 is kept the same as 2021/22 and the Council Tax Support continues as a maximum award of 80%.**

**(2) To investigate the implementation of a banded Council Tax Support Scheme for 2023/24.**

## 617 **Review of Fees and Charges 2022/23**

The Leader introduced the report which set out the proposed fees and charges for 2022/23. He advised that the report had been considered by Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee and whilst Cabinet had considered the recommendations put forward by the Scrutiny Committee, there was not enough grounds to support them. He proposed the recommendations in the report which were seconded by Councillor Angela Harrison who reserved her right to speak.

The Mayor advised that two amendments had been received. These had been circulated to Members and published on the Council's website and, in accordance with Procedure Rule 15.3 included information from the Section 151 Officer on the impact of implementing the amendments.

### **Amendment 1**

Councillor Oliver Eakin proposed, and Councillor Mike Dendor seconded that:

*"To help town centre traders, this Council proposes to freeze car parking charges at the current rate for the 2022/23 financial year. This should be funded using the council reserves."*

Councillor Eakin highlighted the difficulties that High Street traders had suffered in recent years and said the Council should be encouraging people into the town centre. He said public transport was not a viable option in some parts of the Borough and many were reliant on their cars.

The Mayor read out the response from the Section 151 Officer.

Members debated the amendment and made points including:

- There was no evidence that lower parking charges increased footfall;
- why had some Swale Borough Councillors (SBC) who were also Kent County Councillors (KCC) not supported the use of reserves by KCC when bus services were recently cut?;
- the amendment should have been raised at Scrutiny Committee;
- the proposal encouraged drivers but did not necessarily benefit traders;
- highlighted unbalanced increases in parking charges in different areas of the Borough;

- town centres needed revitalising and freezing parking charges would encourage shoppers;
- as change was not given from parking machines, the realistic costs to the consumer were higher than the increases shown;
- it was a one-off for one year;
- SBC had some of the lowest car parking fees in the County;
- the cost of maintaining car parks was increasing and costs had to be met;
- the percentage increase in real terms was very small;
- could not keep freezing car parking fees;
- non-drivers should not have to supplement car drivers;
- could support traders in other ways;
- town centres were changing;
- Members should use their own High Street shops; and
- free parking was given during lockdown.

A Member raised concern over the use of emotive language during the debate and asked Members to consider this when speaking.

Councillor Dendor, who had reserved his right to speak reminded Members that freezing parking fees would result in a reduced income, but this was not a cost to the Council.

In response, the Leader warned of future difficulties in the budget should the proposal be supported. He said that it would be carried forward in future years resulting in a shortfall and it would be irresponsible to use all the reserves.

**In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 19(5), a recorded vote was taken, and voting was as follows:**

**For: Councillors Beart, Bowen, Darby, Dendor, Eakin, Fowle, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Horton, Hunt, MacDonald, Marchington, McCall, Neal, Nissanga, Simmons, Tatton, Whiting. Total = 18.**

**Against: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, S Clark, Davey, Henderson, Gibson, Gould, Harrison, Jackson, Knights, Ben J Martin, Palmer, Perkin, Rowles, Saunders, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan, Winckless and Woodford. Total = 23.**

**Abstain: 0.**

**Amendment 2.**

Councillor David Simmons proposed and Councillor Cameron Beart seconded:

*“That the fee for replacement bins is removed from the schedule of fees and charges 2022/23. Any shortfall of expected additional income to come from reserves in 2022/23”.*

Councillor Simmons said it was the wrong time to bring in a new charge when the waste contract would be renewed in 2023. He reminded Members that the charge did not relate to new housing as developers funded the cost of a new bin but the proposed fee to replace bins would raise £85k pa and a bin remained the property of SBC. He said that more investigation into why bins went missing was necessary.

The Mayor read out the response from the Section 151 Officer.

Members debated the amendment and made comments including:

- Why would £85k be raised in the first year but £200k the following year?;
- not against charging but the fee proposal was premature;
- more investigation was needed on fraudulent claims for replacement bins;
- the figures should refer to increase in percentage terms for replacements as housing increased, more replacement bins would be requested;
- gave examples of bins damaged by Biffa not reported by them;
- should look at issues this year then introduce the charge next year;
- should monitor where bins were lost;
- some properties had to leave bins at the front of their house and were more likely to go missing;
- was better to introduce this year so that terms for the waste contractor damaging bins could be added to the new contract;
- the fee would encourage bins to be looked after;
- there was CCTV on bins to check for damage caused by refuse trucks; and
- relying on CCTV of contractor was not impartial.

The Cabinet Member for Environment explained that SBC could not keep relying on reserves, which could be spent elsewhere. He said charging for a replacement was an incentive to look after a bin and the costs of collection were rising and economic efficiencies were required now. He added that SBC fees for replacement bins were at the lower end compared to many other Councils.

Councillor Beart, who had reserved his right, said that more investigation work was needed before reconsidering the charge next year. He said the reserves were residents' money and should be used for their benefit.

In response, the Leader said accepting the amendment would have a serious economic financial impact as £200k was the real costs, as the reserve fund for bins would be exhausted. He reminded Members that other authorities in Kent charged, mostly at a higher rate. Finally, the Leader said he was confident that the issue over lost and damaged bins would be addressed.

**In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 19(5), a recorded vote was taken, and voting was as follows:**

**For: Councillors Beart, Bowen, Dendor, Eakin, Fowle, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Horton, Hunt, Knights, MacDonald, Marchington, Neal, Simmons, Whiting. Total = 15.**

**Against: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, S Clark, Darby, Davey, Henderson, Gibson, Gould, Harrison, Jackson, Ben J Martin, McCall, Nissanga, Palmer, Perkin, Rowles, Saunders, P Stephen, S Stephen, Tatton, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan, Winckless and Woodford. Total = 26.**

**Abstain: 0.**

After discussing the amendments, Members voted on the substantive motion.

**In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 19(5), a recorded vote was taken, and voting was as follows:**

**For: Baldock, Bonney, S Clark, Davey, Henderson, Gibson, Gould, Harrison, Jackson, Knights, Ben J Martin, McCall, Palmer, Perkin, Rowles, Saunders, P Stephen, S Stephen, Tatton, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan, Winckless, Woodford. Total equals 25.**

**Against: Beart, Darby, Dendor, Eakin, Fowle, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Horton, Neal, Nissanga, Simmons, Whiting. Total equals 12.**

**Abstain: Bowen, Hunt, MacDonald, Marchington. Total equals 4.**

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the proposed fees and charges 2022/23 as set out in the report be agreed.***

***(2) That delegated authority be given to the Head of Housing and Community Services in consultation with the Director of Resources and the Cabinet Member for Community to amend the fees and charges as a result of the review of the charges in 2021/22.***

## **618 Budget and Council Tax 2022/23**

The Leader introduced the report and explained that it had been considered by the Cabinet Advisory Committees, Cabinet and Scrutiny Committee and a sub-group of Cabinet considered budget details and strategy regularly.

He thanked Cabinet, the Director of Resources, the Head of Finance and Procurement, Senior Officers and the finance team. He acknowledged the thanks given to officers at Scrutiny Committee for the greater clarity and presentation of the financial reports.

The Leader referred to Appendix I and II which detailed how the Council Tax totals for the Borough had been calculated and he said it was proposed that the Swale precept for a Band D Property be £189.27, a 2.7% rise which equated to £4.95pa, a weekly rise of 9.5p. He acknowledged that whilst this was a small amount, along with other increases in household spending, the overall Council Tax increase for Band D properties with an average Parish precept was over £60. The Leader said that the £4.95 increase was written into the Medium-Term Plan agreed by Council in 2019 and he had honoured that decision.

The Leader spoke of the challenges faced by Central Government, highlighting rising inflation, fuel costs and pressure on wages to keep up. He referred to Government borrowing during the Covid-19 pandemic and the expectations of improved health and social care financing. The Leader said that it was therefore unlikely that lower tier Councils would receive generous funding in the immediate future and Councils would have to face up to the inflationary pressures. He drew attention to paragraph 3.3 of Appendix III on page 56 of the report which made provision for inflationary costs on the Council's contracts which would be reviewed and monitored.

Drawing attention to the Council's reserves, the Leader said that Central Government anticipated the use of reserves in order to avoid impacting services. He compared Swale's favourable position to another Council in Kent that had to draw on £5million from reserves,

needed to find £7million in service savings in the coming year and had to make significant increases in car park charges.

The Leader said that Council income had remained static over time due mostly to the real term reduction in Central Government funding. He highlighted that Councils had become dependent on business rate income which could be variable and he listed the decline in support Swale had received from Central Government from £3.9million in 2017 to £2million for 2022/23. He warned it would fall further to £1.1million the following year.

The Leader said that Councils had previously been encouraged to supplement their income through property investments but now Government warned Councils only to invest for regenerative purposes which the Sittingbourne Town Centre was. He said that Councils faced additional financial restraint due to the Covid-19 Pandemic and whilst Central Government helped financially through the height of the pandemic, it no longer offered assistance yet the costs continued in expenditure and income was reduced.

The Leader said the budget had to be balanced by law and £1.65million would be used from the Budget Contingency reserve fund to achieve this. He warned that it was not proposed to do this every year but to achieve savings from services over and above those already made would be irresponsible. The Leader said Councils needed greater clarity from Central Government about funding and what level of services were expected. He added that the Budget Contingency reserve for this year was established and this did not require funding from the General Fund which remained at a sustainable level.

The Leader said that SBC were not a well-funded Council but dismissed the view that it had not been prudent on the revenue budget over the previous three years and in comparing the last budget report of the previous administration which referred to the need to use reserves to help smooth 2018-19 and 2019-20 said there was little difference between 2019 and 2022, other than the impact of underfunding.

Drawing attention to the savings requirement of £1.65million shown in Appendix III, the Leader highlighted the net expenditure on Environment and Leisure which had increased by £387k, largely due to a loss of car park income of £300k as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic and this was not refundable to the Council. There was also an increase of £533k in Corporate and Finance due to Pension and Minimum Revenue Provision costs that were previously covered by reserves. The Leader said these extra costs had been covered by extensive efforts to produce savings as listed in Appendix III, which also showed staff salary savings and increases, and assumed a 2% rise in staff pay.

Turning to the Special Projects Fund which funded one-off spending that made improvements to Swale and helped aid recovery from the Covid-19 Pandemic, the Leader said that just under £3.2million had been allocated. He said that £1million of business rate reserves had been allocated to an Improvements and Resilience fund, £250k had been allocated to a Sheppey Improvement Fund and £1.55million to the improvements to Master's House. A further £887k had been reserved for High Street Improvements in Sheerness, Faversham and Sittingbourne, for which work had already commenced. The Leader highlighted the benefits to the community via small capital projects, grants to organisations and environmental initiatives and said that some of the projects were listed in the capital report for 2021/22.

The Leader acknowledged that it was Council tax payers money and that the administration had sought to give the public benefits to their community rather than keep savings for no purpose as the previous administration had. He said that the one-off funds

would be comprehensively reported on in due course and it was not intended to supplement these funds further in the next year.

The Leader spoke about the Capital programme and reserves. He said that the Capital Programme underlined the wide range of improvements taking place, funded by a combination of internal and external funds, Section 106 Agreements, capital receipts, special projects, High Street funding and improvement and resilience. The Leader said these would take time and resource to fully deliver and so the focus for the following year was on two projects, Swale House and Rainbow Homes.

The Leader said that the Council had long established that the General Fund should remain stable at £1.5million minimum. He said he was anxious to preserve it and it would not be called upon to meet the budget gap. The Leader said that the falling balance in the General Fund was principally due to transferring the 2020/21 underspend from the General Fund to a Covid Recovery Fund of £1.042million in case of extraordinary pressures in the current year due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. He said the pressures had not materialised and he hoped to be able to return a substantial amount to the General Fund. The Leader said that reserves had grown in recent years because of the wide range of business rate reserves allocated for growth projects and this money could not be used for anything else.

Finally, the Leader spoke about the challenging times for the public sector and wider economy. He said that the Council's budget was stretched with years of tight budgeting and limits to Central Government support, and the unexpected health crisis and whilst the budget was currently manageable, greater clarity about future funding and expectations of service delivery was needed. The Leader proposed the recommendations.

Councillor Angela Harrison seconded the recommendations.

The Leader of the main opposition group thanked the Director of Resources, the Head of Finance and Procurement and the Finance Team. He praised the layout of the report which gave a better understanding of reserves and said whilst he respected the Budget choices, he did not agree with them.

**In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 19(5), a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:**

**For: Baldock, Bonney, S Clark, Darby, Davey, Henderson, Gibson, Gould, Harrison, Jackson, Knights, Ben J Martin, McCall, Nissanga, Palmer, Rowles, Saunders, P Stephen, S Stephen, Tatton, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan, Winckless and Woodford. Total equals 26.**

**Against: Beart, Bowen, Dendor, Eakin, Fowle, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Horton, Hunt, MacDonald, Marchington, Neal, Simmons, Whiting: Total equals 14.**

**Abstain: 0.**

***Resolved:***

***(1) That Members note the Director of Resource's opinion on the robustness of the budget estimates and the adequacy of reserves.***



**(2) That Minute number 501/02/22 approved by the Cabinet on 9 February 2022 on the report on the Medium Term Financial Plan and the 2022/23 Revenue and Capital Budgets be approved.**

**(3) That the resolutions contained in Appendix I be approved.**

**(4) That in accordance with the proposals contained with SI 2014 No. 165 that a recorded vote be taken on the 2022/23 Budget and Council Tax.**

#### 619 Treasury Management Strategy

The Leader introduced the report which set out and sought approval of the Treasury Management Strategy 2022/23 and the Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators. The Leader proposed the recommendation.

Councillor Simon Clark, Chairman of the Audit Committee, seconded the recommendation.

The Leader of the main opposition group gave his support.

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the Treasury Management Strategy 2022/23 and the Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators be approved.**

#### 620 Pay Policy Report

The Leader introduced the report and proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Richard Palmer.

A Member asked why some salary bracket details were not shown in the organisation chart on page 216 of the report. The Leader agreed to find out and report back.

A Member spoke in support of the 2% increase in staff salary but warned of difficult times ahead and increasing inflation rates.

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the proposed Pay Policy Statement be agreed for publication on the Council's website.**

**(2) That the information within the Pay Policy Statement is updated with actual year-end figures before final publication.**

#### 621 Leader's Statement

The Leader read out the following statement to Members:

*“Swale Borough Council does not act alone. We are part of a wide network of governing bodies. The basic principle behind our engagement with others is to pursue the best interests of our communities, whatever the politics of those we work with. For example, Kent Leaders at County, Unitary and District level meet on a regular basis, with productive outcomes, especially during the height of the pandemic.*

*Leaders of the North Kent Councils also meet regularly, that is Dartford, Gravesham, Medway, Maidstone and ourselves, where the focus of our discussions over the last year have been very much about the quality of primary health care services and of the skills gap across North Kent. We also continue to work with Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells through our joint Mid Kent services.*

*Over the last two difficult years, it has been helpful to have the support of the District Council Network, which has been very effective in getting government to understand the financial difficulties of District Councils. It was significant that whilst the first tranche of Covid support went principally to Upper tier Councils, the balance was addressed in subsequent funding.*

*We are also members of the South East Councils network; we meet with the Thames Estuary Economic Partnership; Medway NHS Trust and I have monthly meetings with the MP for Sittingbourne and Sheppey.*

*Inevitably our relationships with Kent County Council and Central Government can be both positive and negative. We have very productive discussions with Kent County Council (and the local MP) about the provision of Secondary education in Swale, the concerns being about places but also outcomes for young people. I am disappointed by the decision of KCC to cut the funding of homelessness support but this and another KCC budget provision are the subject of member questions, so I will not expand on that. Like all of local government KCC has difficult decisions to make. I understand that.*

*What about the impact of Central Government on Swale? There are positives. We can all see the progress being made at Junction 5. This is of major importance to those who have to get to work from the north of the borough via the A249.*

*I also welcome the interest shown in our approach to tackling homelessness and rough sleeping. We have recently had a review of our service by the Government. The report highlighted the good work being done, and commended the “strong leadership at all levels of management within the housing team, with the Cabinet Member and Deputy Cabinet Member fully engaged and having a good understanding of the services and the challenges”. The report referred to a clear structure and positive and informed staff. I would like us to acknowledge the progress made by our excellent staff and the leadership provided by the portfolio holders.*

*We also hope that the Government supports our bid for levelling up on the Isle of Sheppey. Public support is vital, including that of our MP, which we have. Online consultation has been live since February 4<sup>th</sup> and is continuing for 2 more days. We are pleased that 312 people have taken the time to respond so far. That is a very high response. To date over three quarters of respondents support every aspect of the proposal. We are pleased that 85% support our proposals for wider placemaking and connectivity, 79% for expansion of Sheppey College, 75% for further investment in Master’s House and 75% for the Beachfields leisure and health regeneration scheme. Ideas coming back from the consultation which we are particularly keen to explore include soft play inside the leisure centre, boosting the emphasis on the area’s history, heritage and natural environment and a focus on arts and culture at the Master’s House studio.*

*There are areas of concern. The Government, and in particular Mr Gove, has recently published a White Paper that includes a number of positive missions, including improvements to pride in place, a priority of this Council. But it is Mission 12 that should exercise our thinking. In delivering levelling up infrastructure and funding in general, local*

*government is offered three alternative “County deals”: one with a County Mayor elected; two, a county structure led by the County Council with districts relegated to a consultee status; and three, where County, Unitary and district authorities form a confederation to manage investment. The snag with these choices is that, whilst the Government says top-down reorganisation is not intended, the first option allows for powers across the whole levelling up agenda, the second allows for some and the third practically none at all. It’s not a very generous offer. We do need to address the implications of this as a Council and we will hold an initial member briefing before the next Full Council meeting on March 30<sup>th</sup>.*

*Another disappointment I have with Central Government is the increasing tendency to make sudden demands of district councils, without sufficient warning, with inadequate briefing as to what is required and with an apparent unawareness that we have our own work to do.*

*The latest example is the instruction to make the one-off £150 energy payments to local residents. This was announced without details and consultation. It started by being a Council tax rebate and morphed into a household payment. Of the 55,000 prospective recipients we have no bank details for about 20,000 whilst some are Council taxpayers and not the energy bill payers. It will put enormous pressure on our staff and our payments system. We will of course do our very best though we know these payments will not meet the need of so many with these energy bills.*

*Finally, the Government continues to expect us to achieve housing allocation targets which we all know are unrealistic.”*

The Leader of the main opposition group spoke about the situation in Ukraine and gave his support for its people. In response to the Leader’s Statement, he spoke optimistically on Levelling Up and said it was long overdue but was critical in how the funding was allocated. He said funding needed to be allocated to where the community needed it most. The Leader of the main opposition group referred to the White Paper proposals and acknowledged it was a difficult task.

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

- There was a positive response to levelling up but was the Leader disappointed in the lack of support?;
- highlighted the difficulties in allocating the £150 per household in Council Tax D and below;
- concerned that the South East would not receive as much funding as areas in the north yet some areas in the South East had high deprivation;
- the scheme to allocate £150 was poorly thought through, a lower energy cap or reducing VAT would have been more efficient;
- highlighted the negative impact the works at Junction 5 Stockbury were currently having on residents at Danaway, Borden; and
- was it a mistake to cease High Speed 2 with increased housing numbers set by Central Government?

In response, the Leader supported the comments made by the Group Leader of the main opposition group in relation to the situation in Ukraine, and he added that the world needed Leaders of great quality and integrity which it did not always have. He said he believed Michael Gove would progress the White Paper. The Leader said that it was unfortunate if the press had promoted negativity in levelling up proposals. He

said the allocation of levelling up funding should be considered differently and agreed that areas in the South East had deprived areas that should be allocated funding.

**622 Questions submitted by the Public**

There were no questions from the public.

**623 Questions submitted by Members**

The Mayor advised that four 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 – Councillor Mike Whiting**

I was grateful for the Cabinet Member's previously well-publicised opposition to the proposal for an Area of Opportunity for Teynham that, if agreed, would likely result in over 1,000 additional homes in Teynham and the creation of a Teynham bypass that would see the road traffic from those additional homes further increase traffic and pollution through the Air Quality Management Areas in Ospringe and Sittingbourne.

Given the ecological damage that would result should such a development take place, does he still oppose it?

**Response – Cabinet Member for Climate and Ecological Emergency**

Mitigation of climate change, improvement in air quality and restoration of ecology are major challenges in meeting the Government's standard calculation for housing need in the local plan review. The high number of new dwellings required and the fact that the zero carbon homes standard, which was due to come into effect in 2016, was abandoned by Government make the challenges all the greater.

As Councillors are aware the Council acted on the responses received during the original Regulation 19 consultation in Spring 2021 and made a decision to conduct a further Regulation 18 consultation at the end of 2021. The results of the consultation are due to be reported to the Local Plan Panel at its meeting on 24 March 2022. The Council will then progress towards a further Regulation 19 consultation which will consider the appropriateness of meeting the Government's current standard calculation for housing need, and which sites should come forward to meet the evidence which is being drawn together. Whilst I hold reservations about some of the sites being promoted, it will be necessary for all Councillors to review the evidence being presented as the Council moves forward on identifying new sites for development. I would expect issues surrounding transport, air quality and ecology to be important influences on such decisions.

Whichever sites are selected, a 'modal shift' in transport will be required to address the issues you raise. Walking, cycling and use of public transport must be used for many more journeys and, the private motor car must be used many fewer. Therefore, I was dismayed to learn that Kent County Council are proposing to remove local bus services including: the No 8 Sittingbourne to Conyer via Bapchild and Teynham, the 343, 344 and 345 covering Newnham, Doddington, Lynsted, Conyer, Teynham, Bapchild, Rodmersham, Bredgar and Sittingbourne schools and town; the 662 Teynham to Lynsted and Norton School, and then on to Doddington, Newnham, Ospringe and Faversham; the 664 Conyer to Teynham and Lynsted School; the 666 Faversham to Sheldwich and finally the No 9 service in

Sittingbourne. Instead of cutting bus services, forcing many more journeys, especially to and from school, to be made by the private motor car, KCC should be engaging with Swale Borough Council to develop an innovative approach which will enable many more journeys to be made by public transport. I hope you will join me in encouraging residents to strongly object to these cuts to public bus services in the forthcoming consultation.

### **Supplementary question**

Thank you for your answer, but do you still oppose it?

### **Response**

I await Reg 19 and once known what is in it, I will advise.

### **Question 2 – Councillor Steve Davey**

Could I ask the Cabinet Member for Housing what impact the ending of the support for the Kent Homeless Connect Service will have on the services provided by Swale Borough Council for the homeless and rough sleepers?

### **Response – Cabinet Member for Housing**

Thank you Cllr. Davey for your question, I have to say that I was shocked and disappointed by KCC continuing to cut support for some of the most vulnerable in our society at a time when many of them are facing significant additional challenges as a result of the pandemic. As part of the Kent Homeless Connect contract, those with additional needs are given supported accommodation, including at the Quays in Sittingbourne, which is one of the largest facilities utilised in the county. This service literally acts as a lifeline to some of the most vulnerable people in society.

I am extremely concerned about the financial implications for the Council in particular. District councils have been hugely impacted by the pandemic. We need to be clear that this is not a saving for KCC, but a cost shunt to this Council. Whilst the contract might have 'homelessness' in the title, homelessness is evidently the symptom not the cause of the issues being faced by vulnerable people and we estimate that this decision might push up costs to Swale Borough Council of approximately £0.5million per annum. Whilst this might be a small proportion of KCC's annual budget, it would increase our projected deficit significantly.

Swale could be amongst the hardest hit areas by the cut, not only due to the Quays, but also because we are host to Kent's remand prison. Currently half of those released from the prisons in Swale have no fixed abode, many of whom end up being referred to Kent Homeless Connect.

Our rough sleeping service has grown from strength to strength over the past 3 years, yet we are continually seeing new individuals rough sleeping every week, the loss of this service will no doubt increase demand for the RSI team. Officers are actively working with KCC around the transition arrangements and are proactively working with Riverside (who run the Quays) to look at alternative delivery models that we are also seeking to include in our next rough sleeping initiative bid to DLHUC due this week.

### **Supplementary Question**

There was no supplementary question.

### **Question 3 – Councillor Steve Davey**

Can the appropriate cabinet member explain the reasoning behind the wording of para 4 of the guidance notes regarding the application for a disabled parking bay, more particularly the requirement that the applicant should be in receipt of DLA or an equivalent. I am copying the para below for your reference.

4. Before a bay is granted, checks are made to confirm that it is justified:

- You must have a current and valid blue badge and you should receive the higher rate of mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance or an equivalent benefit.

### **Response – Cabinet Member for Community**

Thank you, Councillor Davy, for your question.

The Blue Badge (Disabled Persons' Parking) Scheme was introduced in 1971 under Section 21 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 which sets out the requirements to be met to obtain a Blue Badge, which for Swale residents are issued by KCC. The KCC website sets the criteria and can be seen at <https://www.kent.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/care-and-support/disability/apply-for-a-blue-badge#tab-1>.

SBC, however, install disabled bays on behalf of KCC (the highways authority) and the criteria is therefore set by them. Guidance notes can be seen at <https://swale.gov.uk/parking-and-streets/parking/disabled-parking-bays/request-a-bay#h2>. The application form and guidance notes were drafted by KCC for the Local Authorities to use. I have asked for the latest guidance from the Parking Manager at KCC just to make sure our guidelines document is still in line with the current KCC criteria.

It is my understanding that KCC ask for proof of the DLA (now the Personal Independence Payment) and attendance allowance for over 65's, as a way of assessing the applicant's mobility status through professional health care assessors.

It should also be noted that in para 4 on Swale Council's website it is stated in bold red text that '**Any exceptions to these circumstances should be stated, in writing and accompany this form**'. If the application is refused for not meeting the criteria, residents can appeal to KCC for decision. I hope you find this helpful.

### **Supplementary Question**

There was no supplementary question.

### **Question 4 – Councillor Tony Winckless**

Would the Cabinet Member for Planning explain what he thinks could be the impact on Swale Residents from the reduction in subsidy to Bus operators from Kent County Council?

## **Response – Cabinet Member for Planning**

I would like to thank Cllr Winckless for this very pertinent question.

This savage slashing of the bus subsidies by Kent County Council of almost a third is a terrible blow to many sections of our community. It will particularly hit those who are the most vulnerable, such as our pensioners and disabled who may not have access to a car and for whom the price of taxis is prohibitive. It also hits at our young people, leaving them ever more reliant on their parents for transport.

Socially, it is yet another nail in the coffin for sustainable rural communities.

It is a decision that runs counter to all progressive policies, including KCC's own policies. It undermines their commitment to supporting alternative transport to the car, it undermines their commitment to active travel, and with the knock-on increase in car usage that will result, it runs counter to their claims of wanting to improve air quality and improving the environment. It also means more wear and tear on our highways - highways which are already severely over-congested, underfunded, and in desperate need of dramatic investment.

Whilst this Conservative Government is imposing ridiculous housing targets across Kent, there is a huge need to achieve a modal shift in transport usage away from the car - again, this short-sighted, counterproductive decision by KCC makes such a shift even harder to achieve.

The results for all our residents is overwhelmingly negative and counter-productive. It diminishes the vulnerable by further removing their self-reliance, it undercuts once more the fabric of rural communities, and it means more congestion on the roads for everyone else.

It is incumbent on all of us who support the vulnerable, who support rural communities or who support the maintenance of an ever-deteriorating highway network to oppose these cuts and to ensure that when public consultations are carried out we help as many people as we can to respond, letting those at KCC who voted this cut through to be fully aware of the pernicious impacts of their voting when setting this year's budget.

### **Supplementary question**

There was no supplementary question.

## **624 Nomination of Mayor 2022/23**

Councillor Roger Truelove nominated Councillor Simon Clark for the role of Mayor elect for the 2022/23 civic year and gave a supporting speech. The nomination was seconded by Councillor Angela Harrison who also gave a supporting speech.

On being put to the vote, the nomination was agreed.

### ***Resolved:***

***(1) That the Mayor elect for the civic year 2022/23 be Councillor Simon Clark.***

625 **Nomination of Deputy Mayor 2022/23**

Councillor Mike Baldock nominated Councillor Sarah Stephen for the role of Deputy Mayor elect for the 2022/23 civic year and gave a supporting speech. The nomination was seconded by Councillor Roger Truelove who also gave a supporting speech.

On being put to the vote, the nomination was agreed.

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the Deputy Mayor elect for the civic year 2022/23 be Councillor Sarah Stephen.**

626 **Change of Governance Model: Outline of New Committee Structure**

In proposing the recommendation the Deputy Leader referred to the briefing delivered to Members on the Committee System earlier that evening. He said that this report was the next step on an exciting journey for Swale.

The Leader seconded the recommendation and said that the Committee System would lead to more democratic decisions at the Council.

The Leader of the main opposition group thanked the Chief Executive and the Monitoring Officer for the helpful briefing but expressed disappointment that some Members were still not engaged in the process.

A Member referred to paragraph 3.4 of the report that set out the proposal for the current Local Plan Panel under the Committee System, and said that it introduced an unnecessary step.

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the outline of the future governance model as described in the report be agreed.**

627 **Standing Orders**

At 10pm and 10.30pm Members agreed to the suspension of Standing Orders in order that the Council could complete its business.

628 **Climate and Ecological Emergency Annual Report 2022**

The Cabinet Member for Climate and Ecological Emergency introduced the report which provided an annual update to progress targets set in June 2019 to achieve net zero carbon for the Council by 2025 and net zero carbon across the Borough by 2030. He referred to the graphic on page 227 which gave a summary and highlighted the main achievements which included:

- Nine electric vans with charging points;
- a car club in Faversham to be rolled out to other parts of the Borough;
- single use plastic within SBC by 2021; and



- provision of a fuel and water advice service.

The Cabinet Member for Climate and Ecological Emergency said he was proud of the achievements and he thanked the Head of Environment and Leisure, the Climate Change Officer and the Climate and Ecological Emergency Officer.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Alastair Gould said the report illustrated what could be achieved and whilst the figures were small numbers against the challenges faced, the Council had set a good example.

The Group Leader of the main opposition group said work on the Climate and Ecological Emergency should be a priority.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the progress in the Annual Climate and Ecological Emergency progress report 2022 be noted.***

629 **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 9.30pm and reconvened at 9.43pm.

Chairman

Copies of this document are available on the Council website <http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

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