
COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in The Sapling Room, The Appleyard, Avenue of Remembrance, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 4DE on Tuesday, 1 November 2022 from 7.00 pm - 8.58 pm.

PRESENT*: Councillors Cameron Beart, Lloyd Bowen, Steve Davey, Mike Dendor, Oliver Eakin, Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, Nicholas Hampshire, Mike Henderson (substitute for Councillor Hannah Perkin), Elliott Jayes (Vice-Chair), Lee McCall, Richard Palmer (Chair) and Ken Rowles.

PRESENT (virtually): Councillors James Hall, Peter MacDonald and Pete Neal.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Steph Curtis, Charlotte Hudson and Jo Millard.

OFFICERS PRESENT (virtually): Kellie Mackenzie and Larissa Reed.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Mike Whiting.

APOLOGY: Councillor Hannah Perkin.

**There was some confusion at the start of the meeting as to who was present and in which capacity, but this was resolved by the time the first vote was taken such that there were no Conservative members substituting for other members.*

408 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chairman outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

409 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Steve Davey declared an interest in the tabled update Cost of Living Crisis as he was a trustee of Diversity House.

410 MINUTES

The minutes of the Meeting held on 7 September 2022 (Minute nos. 283 - 290) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Part B Minutes for Information

411 DOMESTIC ABUSE POLICY

In introducing the report, the Community Safety Manager said that Swale Borough Council (SBC) had been supporting victims of domestic abuse for many years through its safeguarding and community safety duties and had received funding for a domestic abuse post when the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 was implemented. She said that SBC were applying for Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation and as part of that process a stand-alone Domestic Abuse Policy had been developed which included the areas covered at paragraph 2.6 of the report. The Community Safety Manager said the report sought the Community

Committee's approval of the draft Domestic Abuse Policy to go out for public consultation for eight weeks and she highlighted the groups that would be consulted.

In the discussion that followed, the Community Safety Manager responded to questions from members. She said that procedures and processes were in place to refer children without parents. The Community Safety Manager confirmed that local NHS providers were included in the consultation and that a separate policy for staff referred to in paragraph 2.7 of the report was still under discussion but would include a support staff to deal with difficult cases through mental health first-aiders. She advised that according to statistics from service providers, peaks of reported cases of domestic abuse were in January 2022 and when large sporting events such as the world cup were held. She said that extra resource was provided at those times.

The Community Safety Manager clarified that foster children were included as family members, and this would be made clearer in the policy. She agreed to remove reference to the frequency that the policy would be reviewed. With reference to training, the Community Safety Manager said it was mandatory for staff and could be made available for members.

A member said that the phrase 'Domestic Abuse Champion' as referred to in paragraph 3.1 of the report was a misleading phrase. The Community Safety Manager said it was a nationally recognised term. In the discussion that followed, members discussed alternatives and agreed that suggestions for the correct term should be sought as part of the consultation.

There was a debate on the specific inclusion of abuse of people from groups with protected characteristics in the policy. A member asked whether consideration had been given to include reference to trauma informed practice within the policy. The Community Safety Manager agreed that this could be looked at and more work would be done around victims of protected characteristics. In response to a member's question on safeguarding, the Community Safety Manager advised that there was a separate Safeguarding Policy that was reviewed annually and the Domestic Abuse Policy provided an extra layer of good practice. She said the Safeguarding Policy was in the remit of the Housing and Health Committee and would be discussed in 2023. The Community Safety Manager confirmed there was no separate policy for vulnerable adults and children.

In response to a member's question on prevention, the Community Safety Manager said there had been less work around prevention and the Council aspired to do more. She referred to a campaign that Swale Action To End Domestic Abuse (SATEDA) were about to launch on healthy relationships in the younger generation.

In response to further questions by members, the Head of Housing and Community Services clarified the housing support given to victims of domestic abuse as set out in paragraph 5.1 of the report and spoke about specific legislation that protected children.

A member requested that information of numbers of domestic abuse victims by area be circulated. The Community Safety Manager said she was due to meet with Kent authorities in January 2023 and would seek this information.

The Chair proposed the recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Elliott Jayes.

Resolved:

(1) That the draft Domestic Abuse Policy go out for public consultation for a period of eight weeks.

412 MAYOR'S CIVIC AWARD

The Chief Executive introduced the report which proposed the setting up of a Mayoral Civic Award for Swale. She said there were many people in the Borough that did voluntary work for others, and she acknowledged the previous Swale Volunteer Awards which in the current economic climate, it was not appropriate to hold. The Chief Executive explained the proposal that due diligence would be carried out on nominees, with up to three awards given in each municipal year to be presented at a meeting of Full Council, followed by an invitation to afternoon tea with the Mayor.

In the discussion that followed members made points and asked questions including:

- The report was light on detail and criteria;
- accepted a lavish ceremony was not appropriate and admired the concept but this did not give the right recognition;
- to award in April 2023 gave a tight deadline and fell within the pre-election period;
- spoke in support;
- should be a separate event, suggested before a Full Council meeting;
- suggested external sponsors; and
- supported the limitation on number of awards as the prestige was greater.

The Chief Executive provided further detail on the proposal, comparing the presentation of the award ceremony to the Freeman of the Borough ceremonies held before a Full Council meeting. She said that certificates would be given to all nominees or groups, and she explained that the rules around the pre-election period were not to make controversial decisions, and this proposal was therefore acceptable. She reminded members that the Mayor's post was non-political. The Chief Executive said an advertisement for nominees would be placed in the "Inside Swale" booklet with a follow-up thank you to those nominated in the same publication.

A member referred to the Cabinet Advisory Committee in October 2021 which agreed that the Swale Voluntary Awards would be held in 2022. The Chief Executive said that teams had been restructured and staff departed since the previous discussion at the Cabinet Advisory Committee and that the previous award ceremony could no longer be resourced. She stressed the importance of thanks

and recognition to volunteers without additional burden to staff. The Chief Executive acknowledged the report should have included reference to the previous discussion at the Cabinet Advisory Committee. The Head of Housing and Communities added that in recent years sponsorship had declined and the cost of the Swale Volunteer Awards was no longer cost neutral.

The Chair said the previous Swale Volunteer Awards ceremony was not practical with the changes in staff and he spoke in support of the cross-party panel of judges.

A member spoke fondly of the Swale Volunteer Awards and paid tribute to a former employee who he had worked with on the awards. He suggested the awards should be presented at the annual Mayor making ceremony.

Councillor Nicholas Hampshire proposed an amendment to recommendation (2): ***That the first award be prior to the Mayor making ceremony in 2023 by the outgoing Mayor.*** This was seconded by Councillor Lloyd Bowen. On being put to the vote the amendment was agreed.

Resolved:

(1) That the setting-up of the Mayor's Civic Award be agreed.

(2) That the first Civic Award be given prior to the Mayor making ceremony in 2023 by the outgoing Mayor.

413 FORWARD DECISIONS PLAN

The Chair said the Coach Parking item that had been on the Forward Decisions Plan previously had been delayed. The item would be added to it again and taken forward. He suggested a yearly update on the Community Safety Partnership.

Councillor Mike Dendor acknowledged the Cost-of-Living tabled update and proposed the following amendment: That a Cost-of-Living update should be added to the Forward Decisions Plan for the future. This was seconded by the Chair. On being put to the vote the amendment was agreed.

In the discussion that followed, a member said the Committee should receive updates as well as make decisions. The Head of Housing and Communities said that service committees were primarily decision-making but there may be strategic issues that needed to be discussed. She warned against update items for update's sake and said members should be mindful of items coming forward.

A member raised the issue of community grants as a possible future item on the Forward Decisions Plan. The Head of Housing and Community said the budget for the Council had not yet been set and was an item for the Policy and Resource Committee, after which it might be appropriate for an item on community grants to be discussed at the Community Committee. The Chair said that the structure of grant funding from Government was changing and the Community Committee might be called upon to support the community more. A member said that the Community Committee did not have the input it should have to contribute to the conversations around the budget in the community. The Chief Executive said that if the

committee wanted to scrutinise an area within their remit, an item could be raised for officers to bring a report back to a future committee meeting.

Resolved

(1) That the report be noted.

414 TABLED UPDATE - COST-OF-LIVING-CRISIS

The Head of Housing and Communities introduced the Cost-of-Living Crisis update. She spoke about the most recent grants received from Government and highlighted that 7,797 households with pensioners and families with children, had received financial support from July 2022 to September 2022. The Head of Housing and Communities said the next tranche of funding had been confirmed and the update provided a summary of the situation which was fast moving and changing as access to different funding pots became available.

In response to a member's question on why the amount of grant funding had reduced whilst the cost-of-living crises had worsened, the Head of Housing and Communities explained that only the Kent County Council (KCC) grant funding received by SBC was included in the update, and some funding was delivered directly to residents, from KCC. She added that the details of the most recent grant on 8 September 2022 were circulated to members in their weekly update and in a press release, and the details of the current grant being processed would be circulated in the weekly update.

A member congratulated officers on the securing and distribution of funding. In response to a question on member involvement, the Head of Housing and Communities explained that due to the urgent nature of spending the grant within strict parameters with little flexibility, members were not involved. The Chair reminded members that officers had delegated authority.

During a discussion on the Shared Prosperity Fund, the Head of Housing and Communities explained the due diligence process and said it was mostly strategic organisations being worked with, but a wider network would be developed to include all organisations. She acknowledged the fantastic work carried out by those in both small and large groups in the voluntary sector.

A member highlighted the worsening economic situation and said there were many families outside the groups currently offered help that would require assistance going forward. The Head of Housing and Communities agreed that the client group was changing and advertising how to access support was important. She added that referral routes would be circulated but warned of limited funds and criteria.

The Chair reminded members to share information and how to direct residents to help, and he commented that local groups were often a lifeline to residents. Members shared their experiences and frustrations in trying to assist residents to access help.

There was a discussion around large foodbanks referring clients to smaller foodbanks and the Head of Housing and Communities said efficiency and avoiding overhead costs was important.

Members congratulated officers for the work carried out so far, but warned there would be future increases in homelessness and additional help for residents would be needed.

Resolved

(1) That the tabled update be noted.

Chair

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