
Policy and Resources Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 22 March 2023 from 7.00 pm - 8.35 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock (Chair), Monique Bonney (Vice-Chair), Lloyd Bowen, Derek Carnell, Tim Gibson, Mike Henderson, Alan Horton, Julian Saunders, Roger Truelove, Tim Valentine and Mike Whiting.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Billy Attaway, Alison Blake, Flo Churchill, Steph Curtis, Lisa Fillery, Larissa Reed and Claire Stanbury.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Philippa Davies, Jill Peet, Gary Rowland, Baljinder Sandher, Emma Wiggins and Katherine Woodward.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY): Councillors Steve Davey, Ken Ingleton, Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Hannah Perkin, Ken Rowles and Corrie Woodford.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Mike Dendor, David Simmons and Bill Tatton.

790 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

791 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Monique Bonney declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in respect of Item 7, Q3 Budget Monitoring.

792 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 8 February 2023 (Minute Nos. 629 – 644) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Part A Recommendations for Council

793 **Boughton and Dunkirk Neighbourhood Plan: Referendum results and formal adoption**

The Interim Head of Planning Services introduced the report which recommended to Full Council that the Boughton and Dunkirk Neighbourhood Plan be formally made as per Appendix II of the report.

Members commented on the report and said that officers had done a great job working with both Boughton under Blean Parish Council and Dunkirk Parish Council to get the referendum organised and 'over the line'. Members added that both Parish Councils had undertaken a lot of hard work on the plan and had taken a sensible approach.

Councillor Alan Horton proposed the recommendation, and this was seconded by Councillor Mike Whiting.

Recommended:

- (1) That the Boughton and Dunkirk Neighbourhood Plan be formally 'made' and agreed at Council.**

Part B Minutes for Noting**794 Risk Update Report**

The Interim Deputy Head of Audit introduced the report which set out an overview of the Council's corporate risks that could prevent the achievement of the Council's strategic priorities, and the management of the risks. She drew attention to page 95 of the report which showed a small decrease in the overall number of risks from 145 to 142.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, which included:

- Good to see that the number of risks had decreased;
- risks that were most likely and impactful would have some financial impact on them, and had work been done to understand the resource implications of those risks?;
- page 98 of the report mentioned training for Presiding Officers (PO), was this being given to all POs not just Swale Borough Council (SBC) staff?;
- it was good to see that SBC had a thorough approach to risk management;
- thought there were a lot of risks and actions listed; and
- concerned that SBC officers had too many risks they were managing and asked the Chief Executive if she thought that less time needed to be spent on monitoring the risks?

The Interim Deputy Head of Audit responded to Members' questions by clarifying that there were six measures of a risk and one of those measures was financial impact of the risk and that officers took this into consideration when rating the risk.

The Chief Executive responded to the training given to POs and said that all POs were employed by her as the Returning Officer and that training was being organised for all polling station staff, not only the ones who worked for SBC.

The Chief Executive addressed the concern that SBC had too many risks and said that there would always be risk associated with Local Governments, but she felt that the risk register had the right balance. She added that it was a good sign that the risks had recently decreased slightly as this indicated that SBC officers were constantly monitoring their risks and how they could mitigate them.

Councillor Mike Henderson proposed the recommendation, and this was seconded by Councillor Derek Carnell.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Council's corporate risks and overall risk profile be noted.**

795 Q3 Budget Monitoring

The Head of Finance & Procurement introduced the report setting out the quarter 3 revenue and capital budget monitoring forecast for 2022. The revenue overspend on

services of £531k was shown in table 1 of the report.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, which included:

- The reason for such a large overspend was due to the cost of temporary accommodation and the struggling housing market;
- changes to Planning regulations had made it difficult for SBC to manage the developments in the borough;
- it was good to see that the overspend had been slightly mitigated by the parking income;
- welcomed the £11 million put a side of temporary accommodation but concerned that SBC could not purchase the properties quick enough to have a positive effect;
- paragraph 3.10 referred to an underspend in shared services and wanted clarification as to whether this meant shared service staff were being utilised to their full potential?;
- the leisure market was a tricky market to predict and the cost-of-living crisis made it even harder to manage;
- the planning system was failing and the borough was expected to deliver too many houses;
- there needed to be more affordable housing in the borough to combat the temporary accommodation overspend; and
- thought that Members had a responsibility to scrutinise and work together to find a solution to the overspend in temporary accommodation.

The Director of Resources responded explaining that the £11m put aside for temporary accommodation was budgeted in the capital programme for 2023/24 and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy included significant growth in costs to address the ongoing pressure on the Temporary Accommodation budget. In response to the shared service underspend, the Director of Resources said that this was due to vacancy posts that the services had not been able to be filled and not due to services being underutilised.

Councillor Monique Bonney proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Mike Whiting.

Resolved:

- (1) That the project revenue overspend of £531k be noted.**
- (2) That the capital expenditure of £5.3m against the Revised Budget as detailed in Table 2 and Appendix I of the report be noted.**

796 Domestic Abuse Policy Adoption

The Community Safety Manager introduced the report which provided an overview of the Swale Domestic Abuse Policy and the outcome of the consultation that had taken place. The Community Safety Manager added that if the Council adopted this policy it would improve SBC's application for Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) accreditation.

Members were pleased to see this policy but were disappointed that it was needed in the borough. There was a proposed small amendment to add that 'work with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) support charities' be added and the Community Safety Manager confirmed that it could.

Councillor Mike Henderson proposed the recommendations and the small amendment, which was seconded by Councillor Monique Bonney.

Resolved:

(1) That the Domestic Abuse Policy be approved with the additional amendment as minuted.

797 Revisions to the Covert Surveillance and Access to Communications Data Policy and Guidance Notes

The Senior Legal Advisor and RIPA Co-ordinating officer introduced the report which set out the revised changes and the amendments to the existing policy, shown at section 2 of the report.

A Member made a comment on the document containing individual officers names rather than officers' post. After a discussion with officers, it was proposed that the document be changed to only show the officers' job title and not their individual name.

The Chair proposed the amended recommendation, and this was seconded by Councillor Derek Carnell.

Resolved:

(1) That the revised Covert Surveillance and Access to Communications Data Policy and Guidance Notes set out at Appendix I be approved with the amended change as minuted.

798 34-Hour Week

The Chief Executive introduced the report which set out the results of the consultation with staff on the proposal to introduce a 34-hour working week and sought approval to implement the preferred option to a 34-hour working week. The Chief Executive explained that there was an error at recommendation (2) and that it should read 'with council offices closing at 13.30 on a Friday'. She added that the Trade Union was against the proposal and negotiations around a 34-hour week and a pay rise were on going.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, which included:

- Concerned with the offices closing at 13.30 on Friday and members of the public not being able to contact officers until the following Monday;
- had officers considered a different day that the offices could shut?;
- Members needed to consider that 57% of staff don't want this and neither did the Trade Unions so was it the right thing to do?;
- the relationship between the Trade Unions and the Council was a good one and did not want to ruin that;
- thought that this would impose an extra workload on staff;
- concerned that the service residents received would worsen;
- the cost-of-living was very high, and staff needed a pay rise to combat this;

- Members had to consider how the cost-of-living crisis had affected the council as contracts had increased by 20-30%;
- understood the concerns that staff had with the cost-of-living crisis and the need for a pay rise, but the council did not have money in the budget to fund a pay rise;
- it was more important to keep staff rather than make staff redundant due to pay increases;
- this was a trial period from May to December 2023 so Members would have a better understanding of how a 34-hour week would work in January 2024; and
- the council was in a very difficult situation because of Government funding and did not have the funds for a staff pay rise, so this was the best option.

In response, the Chief Executive said that the Trade Unions were not against the idea of working a 34-hour week, they were against the idea of not having any sort of pay rise for staff. She hoped that the recent £1,000 one-off payment proposed for grade 5 staff and below would help staff combat the cost-of-living crisis. She added that it was important to keep staff employed and hoped that reducing the working hours of staff, it would help fill vacancies the Council had difficulty filling and improve the work-life balance of staff.

The Chief Executive said that if a pay deal was agreed with Trade Unions after the decision was made, a report would be brought back to Members at Full Council to make a decision on if required.

Councillor Mike Henderson proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Roger Truelove.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(2), a recorded vote was taken, and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Carnell, Gibson, Henderson, Saunders, Truelove and Woodford. Total equals 8.

Against: Councillors Bowen, Horton, Whiting. Total equals 3.

Abstain: Councillor Valentine. Total equals 1.

Resolved:

- (1) That the results from the consultation with staff to change the contracted working week from 37 hours to 34 hours be noted.***
- (2) That the change in the working week from 37 hours per week to 34 hours per week with council offices closing at 13.30 on a Friday (except for emergency services) be agreed.***
- (3) That two additional days leave (pro rata) be taken between Christmas and New Year resulting in a close down of the council between Christmas and New Year be added.***
- (4) That a transition/implementation phase runs from 1 May 2023 until 31 December 2023.***
- (5) That the permanent change to start 1 January 2024 unless there was a compelling reason not to.***
- (6) That the Head of Paid Service has delegation to implement the permanent change.***

799 Forward Decisions Plan***Resolved:***

(1) That the report be noted.

800 Recommendations from the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group held on 20 February 2023***Resolved:***

(1) That the recommendation as set out on the agenda be noted.

801 Recommendations from the Swale Joint Transportation Board meeting held on 27 February 2023***Resolved:***

(1) That the recommendation as set out on the agenda be noted.

Chair

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