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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, 21 June 2023 from 7.00 pm - 8.29 pm

**PRESENT:** Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Hayden Brawn, Derek Carnell, Ann Cavanagh, Shelley Cheesman, Roger Clark, Simon Clark, Tim Gibson, Kieran Golding, Alastair Gould, Angela Harrison, James Hunt, Elliott Jayes, Mark Last, Peter Marchington, Claire Martin, Ben J Martin (Deputy Mayor), Lee-Anne Moore, Pete Neal, Tara Noe, Tom Nundy, Chris Palmer, Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin, Julien Speed, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen (Mayor), Terry Thompson, Mark Tucker, Angie Valls, Karen Watson, Mike Whiting, Chris Williams, Tony Winckless and Dolley White.

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Robin Harris, Jo Millard and Larissa Reed.

**PRESENT (REMOTELY):** Councillor Ken Ingleton.

**OFFICERS PRESENT (REMOTELY):** Billy Attaway, Janet Dart and Emma Wiggins.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, Andy Booth, James Hall, Carole Jackson, Rich Lehmann and Charlie Miller.

### 119 **EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

### 120 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No interests were declared.

### 121 **MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Mayor said that it had been a busy few weeks, attending a variety of events. She said she had attended St. Augustine's Church, Painters Forstal for their 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as well as the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of The Arden Theatre in Faversham. The Mayor spoke about attending the first networking event at MenTalk, and described how emotional and powerful it was.

The Mayor had proudly attended the raising of the Blue Flag awarded to Sheerness and Minster beaches and finished the week waving off the 67<sup>th</sup> Sittingbourne Motorbike run.

Other events the Mayor had attended included the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Swale Community and Voluntary Services (CVS), Past Mayor Alderwoman Anita Walker's funeral and events as part of the armed forces week.

The Mayor advised that she had added a third charity to her Mayoral year, Challenger Troop, who work with young people.

Finally, the Mayor advised that she would be holding a Civic Mayor Welcome Service event at St. Michael's Church, Sittingbourne, on 23 July 2023 at 10am with a theme of charity and community and she invited all Members to attend.

## 122 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from the public.

## 123 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS

The Mayor advised four questions had been received from members.

### Question 1 – Councillor Lloyd Bowen

Can the Leader please confirm that the 'Teynham Area of Opportunity' which forms/formed part of the paused local plan review has been 'taken off the table' and 'out of the Local Plan' by the Council and that this applies to any future reviews of the Local Plan both current, paused or new and where this has been officially documented?

### Response – Leader

The Local Plan Review is in a state of abeyance as we wait for the revised National Planning Policy Framework, or NPPF, to be published. This was due in "spring 2023" but is still awaited. The reason why the revised NPPF is so critical is because it potentially includes revisions that could allow the local plan to progress with a reduced housing figure compared with the 1,086 dwellings per annum we are currently expected to deliver.

Once there is that certainty, formal stages of the Local Plan Review can progress at pace because officers have been continuing with the necessary background work needed. It will then be for officers to present potential development allocations to the Policy & Resources Committee for consideration.

### Question 2 – Councillor Ashley Wise

A recent spate of slingshot attacks on people, pets and property in my ward underscores how rising anti-social behaviour is affecting our communities after a decade of deep government cuts to policing.

Does the Leader of the Council understand why my residents expect Kent's Police and Crime Commissioner to be doing more given they hiked their Council Tax element by 6.57%, more than twice the rise from this Council?

### Response – Leader

I cannot speak for the Police and Crime Commissioner around setting of the precept or the current method of delivery of Neighbourhood Policing. That said Cllr. Richard Palmer is our representative on the Police and Crime Panel and I will ask him to take forward our residents' concerns. I am aware through discussion with our borough commander that the roll out of a new Neighbourhood Policing model

commenced in June which will see an increase in police officers at a neighbourhood level. As a Council we will continue to engage with the police through the Community Safety Partnership and look to tackle these issues with our limited resources.

### **Supplementary**

I invite the Leader and Councillor Richard Palmer to both write to the Police and Crime Commissioner to confirm when Swale residents will see more Police presence on the street.

### **Response**

I am happy to do so.

### **Question 3 – Councillor Kieran Golding**

This administration is very much focused on supporting pride in our towns and neighbourhoods. Does the Leader of the Council therefore share mine and my residents' concerns that this objective is threatened by the KCC proposals to close the Faversham Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC), which will mean a 20-minute minimum drive to the nearest recycling centre (Canterbury or Sittingbourne) in a time when we are promoting/encouraging people to reduce their carbon footprint. It could also result in Swale Borough Council facing increased costs to clear fly-tips and dumped rubbish, which will inevitably rise, at a time when it's reported that Swale already has one of the highest rates of fly tipping incidents in Kent.

### **Response - Leader**

Thank you for the question, Cllr Golding. You will have seen from my recent press statement that I clearly understand the need for all local authorities to look at how to save money against a background of increasing costs and inadequate funding. But it is difficult, if not impossible, to make any informed judgement on the impact these proposals will have on our residents, given the lack of data available to us.

We are concerned by the amount of additional journeys that will need to be taken and the impact they will have on routes that contain air quality management areas within them. Kent is saying that 6,000 additional homes would now be more than 20 mins drive from their nearest HWRC, but this figure is based on optimum traffic conditions and round trips would likely be in excess of an hour for most users from Faversham or Leysdown if travelling at the weekend.

Unfortunately, there are too many unanswered questions, will people make the longer journey or will it end up in household waste? This may mean more contaminated recycling loads and additional journeys being needed by our bin collection contractor due to heavier weights.

### **Question 4 – Councillor Dolley White**

Would the Leader of the Council like to join me in congratulating all involved in delivering the prestigious blue-flag status at Sheerness and Minster Leas beaches,

and does he agree that we can all play our part as a community and volunteers, in partnership with the council, in ensuring they are clean and tidy for all to enjoy this summer?

### **Response - Leader**

I would like to echo the thoughts of the ward Councillor for Sheerness. Our coastal assets are an important part of the Borough. Obtaining the Blue flags at Sheerness and Minster and the Seaside Award at Leysdown is an ongoing achievement as there is strict criteria that has to be met. This includes working with water agencies on bathing water quality, providing the beach cleaning team resource that empties bins and clears debris off the beaches, contracting the world leading RNLI to provide lifeguarding during the season and providing ancillary services such as public toilets/food and beverage concessions.

We are aware of the recent problems with a higher volume of rubbish washing up on the beaches this winter. Our teams are working on removing this as quickly as possible including additional specialist resource where needed. We also remain committed in taking enforcement action against those that fly tip the waste.

We are ever grateful for the fantastic support of the local community and voluntary organisations that help us out with litter picks. We provide grants for local groups to get litter picking equipment and can take the rubbish collected away after the event. If anyone is interested in joining in, they can contact [cleansing@swale.gov.uk](mailto:cleansing@swale.gov.uk).

### **Supplementary**

I congratulate all volunteers and if anyone is interested in volunteering, I can provide more information.

## **124 LEADER'S STATEMENT**

The Leader said:

*“On being elected Leader of this council I said that I would remain committed to working positively with all parties as we strive to achieve our ambitions to deliver for our residents throughout the Borough. To that end I and colleague coalition leaders have already agreed to meet regularly with the Leaders of the opposition groups to informally discuss issues in an air of mutual trust and respect.*

*Of course the intent to work with all parties is not mutually exclusive and has equal significance and importance looking outwardly as it does looking inwardly.*

*In support of that drive, since being elected I have attended and represented our Council at cross party meetings of the Greater North Kent Leaders, I have had a very positive meeting with the MP for Sittingbourne and Sheppey and I have attended the Kent Leaders forum which includes Leaders, Chief Executives and representatives from every District Council and both of the higher tier Councils in the County.*

*Having attended these meetings what I can say is, that there are inextricable similarities in emerging themes that are common to every one of those Councils*

and there is a real will to work together in a supportive way to achieve the best outcomes Countywide.

*On a truly pleasurable note I had the privilege of meeting Community Leaders, volunteers and invited guests at the re-opening of the Sheerness Dockyard Church. Having attended the serious fire there in my previous professional capacity, the 2001 fire that is, not the one 120 years earlier, I was absolutely amazed to see this true phoenix of a restoration, sympathetically maintaining many original features echoing times long past and cleverly combining it with the light and airy more contemporary style of the new interior aspects. On the day of the celebration we were looking forward to welcoming Dehenna Davison MP to Sheerness too, but unfortunately her planned visit had to be cancelled, but we do hope to be able to welcome her at some point in the future.*

*Moving forward we face many challenges and difficult choices will have to be made, our economy is barely off life-support, and we face the stark reality that so many of our residents are sadly, just not going to be able to manage. But as a coalition we are committed to looking at addressing the issue of affordable housing and homelessness and we will continue in our quest to tackle health inequalities particularly in terms of GP provision and accessing appropriate services locally.*

*The continuation and impetus in the excellent progress that we have made on Environmental issues which has put this Council at the forefront Nationally, will remain a priority going forward.*

*We will strive and lobby for Educational opportunities for our youngsters, in a system that is fit for purpose and allows them to have, and realise, their ambitions and dreams. Skills gaps in particular is an issue for us and we will look at how we can provide innovative ways to address this moving forward.*

*We must also not forget our businesses that are currently struggling, especially our high streets and local centres and how we might create opportunities to help to support them in challenging financial times for all. There is much, that is very special and unique about Swale and it is our role as members to make it a better, safer, kinder and prosperous place for people to live, work and visit.”*

Members were invited to respond. Questions and points raised included:

- The Conservative Group looked forward to a good working relationship, would act as a critical friend and hold the administration to account but would not oppose for the sake of it;
- supported integrity, inclusivity and respect, and the promotion of diversity;
- congratulated Swale residents Nimisha Raja (Founder, Nim's Fruit Crisps) on her MBE for services to Small and Medium Enterprises and to Victoria Golding (Wildlife Rehabilitator, Kent Wildlife Trust) BEM for services to Education, to Charity and to Animal Welfare;
- the Liberal Democrat Group welcomed progressive working together;
- welcomed lobbying for improvements in education, particularly the provision of Special Educational Needs which was lacking;
- referred to Swale being a kinder place and highlighted it was Pride month, and Refugee month;

- thanked volunteers who helped make the Isle of Sheppey a cleaner place;
- how would the Leader revitalise Town Centres?;
- thanked those involved for getting the Sheerness Dockyard scheme off the ground;
- the Committee System assisted in cross party working together;
- agreed that improving healthcare and education, particularly on the Isle of Sheppey, was vital; and
- pleased that there was a continued commitment to Environmental issues in the borough.

In response, the Leader thanked Members. He said he did not view those not in the administration as 'opposition' but as the 'opportunity' to work together for residents.

The Leader said he had raised the lack of Special Educational Needs with the Leader of Kent County Council (KCC). This had been acknowledged and budget costs were being looked at.

The Leader acknowledged Pride month and Refugee month and stressed the importance of words and actions to support.

Referring to the revitalisation of Town Centres, the Leader said there would be wider consultation of the Corporate Plan, to seek residents' views.

The Leader advised that the Chair of the Housing and Health Committee was liaising with the National Health Service around the lack of GP provision across the Borough.

## **125 MOTION - FAVERSHAM TIP**

Councillor Chris Williams proposed the motion as set out on the Agenda and said that Faversham Recycling centre provided an important facility for residents of Faversham and the surrounding villages. He referred to the safe disposal of hazardous material and said the proposed closure would be an environmental disaster. Councillor Williams also said KCC's proposals would see the closure of 20% of Kent's household waste facilities and he referred to the information in the consultation as being vague. He spoke about the popularity of the Faversham Recycling centre and questioned whether the closest alternative facilities had the capacity to service customers that could no longer use the Faversham site, and he referred to the many negative consequences of the proposed closure including the environmental impacts and consequences to SBC in dealing with fly tipping.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Hannah Perkin reserved her right to speak.

In the debate that followed Members raised points including:

- The Leader and the Chair of the Environment Committee had already written to the Leader and Cabinet Member for Environment at KCC to raise their concerns over the possible closure;
- supported the motion and agreed with the proposer's comments;
- agreed with the sentiments but questioned whether the Council should wait until after the results of the KCC consultation were published on 18 July 2023?;

- questioned whether the closures would save KCC money as the impact of the closures, including likely increased fly tipping, would still need to be dealt with;
- were KCC trying to find ways of passing costs on to District Councils?;
- the costs of implementing the closures negated the savings;
- the various options put forward by KCC impacted across the whole borough;
- and
- SBC needed to make views known now and after the consultation results.

Councillor Perkin, the seconder of the motion said it was not controversial to oppose before the consultation results were known and then provide a detailed response after. She said it was important to put forward a strong, collective, cross party response adding that residents and the environment deserved better. Finally Councillor Perkin thanked the Leader and the Chair of the Environment Committee for already contacting KCC on the subject.

**Resolved:**

***(1) That the Leader would contact the relevant Cabinet Member at Kent County Council to make the Council's strong opposition to the proposed closure of the Faversham Household Waste and Recycling Centre known.***

**126 AREA COMMITTEES ACHIEVEMENT REPORT**

The Leader introduced the report and proposed the recommendation.

In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Angela Harrison reserved her right to speak.

In the debate that followed Members raised points including:

- The purpose of Area Committees was to better engage with residents but did not feel this had been achieved;
- acknowledged that some good work had been done but needed to consider its future as the Committees could do little with no budget;
- referred to community engagement for the Levelling Up bid and said it was a big success for engagement;
- could still do a lot without a budget;
- congratulated and thanked those that had made projects possible;
- some good work had been done with allocated money but the Area Committees had outlived their usefulness;
- money was being wasted holding meetings;
- disagreed that Area Committees did not engage with residents, there had been some good results from issues voiced by residents;
- Area Committees gave people the opportunity to raise and prioritise issues;
- could still put forward priorities without a budget;
- Area Committees brought people together to work on common problems;
- it was up to Councillors to promote Area Committees;
- engagement and having a voice was important;
- some Area Committees were well attended;
- there had been some really useful presentations and information at Area Committees;

- attendance could be improved with more promotion;
- Area Committees gave residents the opportunity to talk to Councillors;
- KCC issues were often discussed; and
- spoke about some successful projects.

Councillor Harrison said that some projects needed time to progress and she gave examples of informative presentations and how the Area Committees had worked well.

***Resolved.***

***(1) That the report be noted.***

Mayor

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