
Council

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 11 October 2023 from 7.00 pm - 8.24 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, Lloyd Bowen, Hayden Brawn, Ann Cavanagh, Lloyd Chapman, Shelley Cheesman, Roger Clark, Tim Gibson, Kieran Golding, Alastair Gould, Angela Harrison, Mike Henderson, James Hunt, Carole Jackson, Mark Last, Rich Lehmann, Peter Macdonald, Ben J Martin (Deputy Mayor), Charlie Miller, Lee-Anne Moore, Tara Noe, Chris Palmer, Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin, Ashley Shiel, Julien Speed, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen (Mayor), Terry Thompson, Mark Tucker, Chris Williams, Tony Winckless, Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster.

PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Councillors Simon Clark and Elliott Jayes.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Robin Harris, Jo Millard and Emma Wiggins.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Andy Booth, Derek Carnell, James Hall, Peter Marchington, Claire Martin, Pete Neal, Tom Nundy, Angie Valls, Karen Watson and Mike Whiting.

343 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

344 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 July 2023 (Minute Nos. 216 – 225) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

345 **Declarations of Interest**

During the discussion on the urgent motion, GP Provision, Councillor Alastair Gould declared a non-pecuniary interest as he was a GP in Swale and Councillor Monique Bonney declared a non-pecuniary interest as she was a Governor on the East Kent Care Hospital Trust.

346 **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor said she had been very busy since the last Council meeting in July, attending 30 events which she thanked organisers for, and which included:

- Dedication service at the new Faversham Crematorium;
- Master's House, Sheerness;
- Opening of Fenner Forst's second hand record shop, in Sittingbourne;
- Communication Café project run by the song signing academy choir at the Healthy Living Centre, Sheerness;
- Dreamscapes Arts Exhibition at Swale Media Arts Centre;
- International Film Festival at The Avenue Theatre, Sittingbourne;
- opening of Pine Lodge Care Home Summer fete;
- Blair Park Care Home Dementia Charity Walk;
- Faversham Hop Festival;

- Murston Heart Project;
- National Heritage Week at Criterion Theatre, Bluetown, Sheerness
- Newington Historical Group walkers;
- Ceremonial March past for HMS Kent at County Hall, Maidstone;
- Royal British Legion Coronation dinner;
- Dedication of Exhibition space in memory of former Councillor, Alderman Ken Ingleton;
- Leysdown and Deal Carnivals; and
- Charity Quiz nights;

The Mayor advised Members of her charity event scheduled for 9 December 2023 at the Old Forge Wartime House museum, Sittingbourne further details to follow.

Finally, the Mayor asked Members to send their thoughts to all those impacted by the events in the Middle East.

347 **Questions submitted by the Public**

There were no questions from the public.

348 **Questions submitted by Members**

The Mayor advised five questions had been received from Members.

Question 1 – Councillor Tara Noe

The closure of the Eastchurch Gap has been a monumental victory for the Isle of Sheppey but there is great concern that the fly tipping that has been happening there has now been displaced to the Warden Bay site.

Can the leader share if the Warden Bay site is being monitored and any measurements taken to determine if the Eastchurch gap closure has had a negative impact elsewhere?

Response – Leader

Can I join you in congratulating all of the agencies that were and remain involved in this operation. Cases like the one we have seen at Eastchurch are complex and involve a huge amount of evidence gathering and consideration. Whilst the operation remains live, we can confirm there has been no further dumping of illegal waste at Third Avenue.

Legislation allows some disposal of material under permitted conditions which is regulated by the Environment Agency. The agencies continue to monitor all sites where we believe there is no permit in place or where conditions are not being met.

Unfortunately, the stopping of illegal activity in one location can end up in movement of the issue elsewhere. This is why it is not always the correct thing to stop the activity immediately. We need to gather evidence so we can make a long lasting legal intervention and prevent it moving elsewhere.

Question 2 – Councillor Lee-Anne Moore

Excluding those who pay council tax on their primary home address in Swale and those

who own and run holiday parks in Swale, can The Leader tell me how many holiday-home owners in Swale pay Council Tax to Swale Borough Council?

Response – Leader

Thank you for your question. I understand that this question was also asked at the member finance training in July and the answers shared with members in August and so to confirm the information already circulated the total number of holiday homes/chalets registered for council tax in the borough is 1,400.

Question 3 – Councillor Julien Speed

New night-time parking charges were introduced by your administration earlier in the year. For both Q1/Q2 2022 and for Q1/Q2 2023, what are the total figures for a) parking income b) parking fines, c) cost of enforcement?

Response – Leader

The answers to the questions are set out in the table below. However please note the comments/context around the figures;

		2022/23	
		Q1	Q2
a	Parking Income (P&D)	£623,882	£580,979
b	Parking Fines (PCNs)	5,416	5,129
	<i>PCN Income*</i>	£134,026	£132,270
c	Cost of Enforcement	£101,849	£107,799

		2023/24	
		Q1	Q2
a	Parking Income (P&D)	£630,650	£710,430
b	Parking Fines (PCNs)	4,723	5,422
	<i>PCN Income*</i>	£128,499	£146,842
c	Cost of Enforcement	£120,173	£117,168

**PCN income has no direct relationship to the number of PCNs issued in this period, as income will be collected at different stages of the process and from PCNs issued within an earlier timeframe.*

The cost of enforcement rose due to contractual conditions to increase by inflation each year and not due to the fact of needing more enforcement time since the onset of evening charging. Both years purchased 15,000 hours of enforcement and even before evening car park charges, we had patrols across the day and evening.

Supplementary Question

Does the Leader think the income to the local authority justifies the impact on decrease in custom to business and night-time economy?

Response

There was a balance and judgement to consider – some will say it has had an impact,

others will say it has not but I will seek the views of the Head of Environment and Leisure for a response.

Question 4 – Councillor Charlie Miller

At a time where there is a clear increase in anti-social behaviour, young people openly telling elected members about the lack of places to go, does the Leader agree with me, the planned KCC cuts to youth clubs across Swale, is not only another example of the austerity obsessed Tories being way out of touch with young people, but also a real blow to our borough as a whole?

Response – Leader

I am extremely concerned by the proposals by KCC to make cuts to this vital and important service, particularly in the districts with greatest need. Youth Services during the 2010 austerity measures were significantly reduced and we have seen the impact that this decision has made on the outcomes for our young people in Swale. These young people have been significantly impacted by the COVID 19 pandemic; they need more support not less. Not only is anti-social behaviour an issue, but Swale has the second highest level on NEET's in the county and high levels of Childhood obesity. It has been evidenced that good quality youth provision can make a positive and significant difference to these outcomes. Whilst I welcome the introduction of Family Hubs, this should not be at the detriment to other vital services for young people. As a Council we have submitted a response to the consultation and this has also been followed by a letter to the Cabinet Member from Cllr. Richard Palmer as Chair of Communities Committee.

Question 5 – Councillor Ashley Wise

Would the Leader like to extend an invitation to the recently self-described “pro-motorist” Prime Minister to witness first hand the traffic misery drivers have to endure in Swale, and the poor state of our roads, thanks to Conservative-run KCC, and years of Conservative government failure to invest in vital infrastructure while pushing demanding housing targets on us?

Response – Leader

Thank you Cllr Wise, and can I begin by saying, the Prime Minister would not be at the top of my list for an invite to our wonderful borough.

Were I to have the Prime Minister's ear, however, I would impress upon him, as you rightly suggest, that the current central government housing targets are more than 'demanding', and remind him of how overdue the new NPPF is. But I'd be honest with him - I'm sceptical that whatever comes forward from him will solve the multiple legacy problems of an inadequate national planning system.

You will consider, incidentally, at the next Full Council the next steps in our Local Plan journey.

Going back to our proposed encounter, I would encourage the Prime Minister to read our consultation responses to proposed national planning reforms; to the Lower Thames Crossing proposals - where we are emphatic around the need for investment in the

wider road network in Kent; to Kent's Local Transport Plan 5 where we champion the benefits and potential of increased rail freight, and I'd urge him to work his way through our successful Active Travel bids. I'd highlight that, taken collectively, these seek to direct investment within our borough to a wide range of critical infrastructure. I would talk to him about our commitment to the climate change and ecological emergency, our investment in EV charging points, in car clubs, in a multi-storey car park and in the pedestrianisation of Faversham town centre.

All with a view to showing him the balance we strike with our own budgets in Swale and how committed we are to advocating for the right investment nationally.

On his way back to Downing Street, I might suggest he call by County Hall and have a chat about those potholes.

Supplementary question

If an invitation were to be sent and accepted by the Prime Minister to visit Swale, please could you suggest he brings his car so that he can experience the roads in the Borough?

Leader

Yes, I would.

349 Leader's Statement

The Leader said:

"In commencing my leaders statement this evening as you will be aware, following the sad passing of Cllr Ken Ingleton a byelection was held for the Minster Cliffs seat. The election was won by Peter MacDonald (Swale Independents) and I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Councillor MacDonald back to the chamber and to inform you that Councillor Ann Cavanagh has now joined the Labour group.

At a personal level I had the privilege of attending the Seashells Centre on the Isle of Sheppey and had the honour of presenting a Royal Humane Society certificate to a young lady called Emma Page. Emma, one of the staff at seashells, administered CPR to a man that she encountered while out driving, he had fallen from his cycle and was laying in the roadside entangled in it. Emma stopped her car and approached the man. It soon became apparent to her that the man's life was ebbing away and she commenced CPR.

The impressive citation on the RHS certificate read "for restoring a man to life" and this feat was even more remarkable given that Emma had only completed her training the week before. At the ceremony I was able to speak to the man who's live she saved and whilst expressing his eternal gratitude to Emma he also extolled the virtues of people being trained in CPR.

For that reason alone I would implore each and everyone of you to consider accessing CPR training, it is doesn't need to be anything particularly formal and it is quite easy to access training online. There is very little not available on you tube these days, other channels are available of course.

I also had the pleasure of opening our Council's "Domestic Violence the Hidden Harm" seminar, a multi agency event that showcased the benefits of working collaboratively with external partners and organisations. The event demonstrated how this council is not reticent in leading the way in challenging arenas and I cannot praise our officers highly enough and congratulate them for driving this agenda forward. What really struck me about this event was the clear integration of partnership working and a willingness for sharing support, advice and skillsets and the not insurmountable barriers to addressing the hidden harm, which I for one would never have considered prior to attending this seminar.

I attended a seminar in Clacton the theme of which was "Turning the Tide" addressing health inequalities in seaside towns. The event had many eminent speakers not least of which was Professor, Sir Chris, next slide please, Whitty, Government's Chief Medical Officer. In Sir Chris's briefing he asserted that even after adjusting for well recognised factors such as age, smoking, and deprivation, there remains a "coastal excess" of disease. Life expectancy, healthy life expectancy, and disability free life expectancy are all considerably lower in coastal areas and the Mortality Ratios for a range of conditions, including preventable mortality, are significantly higher too.

In terms of our own Borough, Sheerness shares similar drivers towards a clustering of poor health and there is a direct correlation in health related matters with housing, employment, educational opportunities and low personal aspirations impacting on the concentration of deprivation and ill health. Nationally many coastal communities of course were created around a single industry including previous versions of tourism, fishing, or port work that have since moved on, leading to employment that is often scarce, low paid, or seasonal and the result of course is that continuum of the cycle of deprivation.

I am pleased to say that at the event, feedback to me as leader of this council was extremely positive in terms of praise for our Health lead Cllr Angela Harrison and our officer Charlotte Hudson for their proactive drive enthusiasm and dare I say it forthright approach in engaging with partners and unashamedly seeking support and funding to address the important issue of health inequalities in our Borough, so thank you both.

With the cost-of-living crisis continuing, in an unrelenting way and continuing to put many under increased financial pressure, it has never been more important for local people to be able to access the resources that they may need. To assist with this we have carried out a series of local events across the Borough under the umbrella of our "One Swale Roadshows". The Roadshows provided the perfect opportunity for organisations including Citizens Advice, Department of Works and Pensions and our council to offer support and advice to those who were seeking it. Advice on accessing the Household Support Fund, health checks, emergency fuel and food, finances and much more were provided and very well received.

I attended the formal ribbon cutting ceremony at Masters House and met representatives from Launch It. They are a group of charities who work to empower young people to fulfil their potential by providing the workspace, mentoring, and training needed to start a business. This has created an enterprise centre where 18 to 30-year-olds on the Isle of Sheppey can get help bringing their business dreams to life and move towards fulfilling their ambitions and aspirations. I have to say that Councillor Bonney and you yourself madam Mayor together with our officers have done an excellent job in having the vision to make this a reality. I was good to hear that the refurbishment was

carried out by a local firm who installed a new lift, a suite of new kitchens and toilets. The building's carbon footprint has been significantly reduced by installing an air source heat pump, upgraded windows and insulation throughout the building.

Swale Borough Council has installed a pirate ship themed play area in Beachfields. This was done in collaboration with Sheerness Town Council who undertook consultations with the local community and provided half of the funds. The new play area has been installed in the Beachfields Sandpit to replace the castle that was burned down last year.

The colourful, bespoke designed, "Man O War" multi activity unit includes a zipline, slide, fireman's pole and rope ladders, manufactured from durable weatherproof materials created using recycled plastic.

The Council has submitted a bid via the PCC for Government safer streets funding to assist in driving down neighbourhood crime, anti-social behaviour, violence against women and girls and improving the safety of public spaces for all. I am hoping to be able to bring news on the outcomes of the bid to our next full council meeting

As a council we have raised concerns about Kent County Council (KCC) proposals to change youth services across the borough. The council has written to Kent's Cabinet Member for Communities and Regulatory Services, register its opposition to cut externally commissioned youth services, as part of proposals to create new family hubs to support children and families.

To finish on a lighter note the people of Swale are being invited to help name Swale's new fleet of 24 waste collection and 4 sweeper vehicles that will be working across the borough from March 2024 and our Environment Committee chair Rich Lehmann is particularly hopeful for that we have some creative responses."

In response, the Leader of the Conservative Group congratulated Councillor MacDonald, acknowledged Councillor Cavanagh's move to the Labour Group and commented that whilst changes were a fact of political life, a change in groups so soon after the Borough election was unusual. He spoke of how valuable having CPR skills were, and congratulated Emma Page on her award. The Leader of the Conservative Group acknowledged the good work in collaboration with partners to address Domestic Violence and the 'One Swale Roadshows' taking place throughout the borough to assist residents during the cost of living crisis.

The Leader of the Conservative Group raised concern that five months since the administration had formed, there was not yet a long-term plan for the Council. He said SBC were reactive but not proactive and to avoid going bankrupt as some other Councils had, the Council needed to plan for the future. The Leader of the Conservative Group referred to names already suggested for the new waste fleet.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group also welcomed Councillor MacDonald and acknowledged Councillor Cavanagh's move to the Labour group. She spoke of the increased chances of survival from a cardiac arrest when CPR was performed and praised Emma Page. She said she was inspired to learn that the good work from officers in trying to reduce domestic violence and of Councillor Harrison and the Head of Communities continued. The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group suggested that the number of residents helped by the roadshows be recorded in order to plan for the future. Referring to cuts in early years provision, the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group warned Members to be aware of potential closures to children's centres in their wards.

Finally, the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group congratulated Faversham Town Councillor Josh Rowlands for reaching the finals of the National Association of Young Councillor of the Year awards.

Other Members were invited to respond and points made including:

- Could the Leader ask for an update at the Kent Leader's meeting on any closures of KCC buildings?;
- the One Swale Roadshow had provided useful information, advice and products including the Hygrometer (with thermometer) from the Fuel and Water Poverty Advice service;
- CPR was essential and should be taught in schools;
- CPR and defibrillators were key to survival;
- Members had provided funding from grants for defibrillators; and
- pleased to see the Beachfields site open after vandalism but needed more Police input to avoid vandalism.

In response, the Leader said that the Corporate Plan was at an advanced stage and there would be an update at the next Council meeting. He said he did not see SBC in the same way as those Councils that had gone bankrupt as they had not invested poorly. He reminded Members that the cuts to services were as a result of budget priorities at a national level. Finally, he congratulated Faversham Town Councillor Josh Rowlands.

350 **Allocation of Committee Seats**

The Mayor confirmed with Members that they had received all tabled papers.

The Leader introduced the report and proposed the recommendations which were seconded by the Leader of the Conservative Group.

Resolved:

(1) That the political balance calculation as set out in Appendix II of the report be agreed.

(2) That the allocation of seats of Members to Committees, in accordance with the wishes of Group Leaders, as set out in Appendix III of the report, be agreed.

351 **Urgent Motion - GP Provision**

The Leader of the Conservative Group, Councillor Lloyd Bowen, proposed the motion as set out on the Agenda. He referred to comments made by the public in respect of GP salaries, in the newspaper report on the motion online, which were factually incorrect. The Leader of the Conservative Group said GPs had a huge responsibility, earned low salaries and there was little incentive to become a GP. He spoke of the wellbeing of GPs, the GP shortage and recruitment difficulties. The Leader of the Conservative Group referred to the quality of care and access to services and how the increased cost of housing, particularly in the south east, precluded GP's from living in the area. He said funded solutions needed to be sought and the motion had brought all Group Leaders together.

In seconding the motion, the Leader gave an example of the unbalanced ratio of patients to GPs in his ward and said GPs were stretched to the limit. He highlighted the excessive hours worked by GPs for poor pay and said that GP's were not valued in this country, resulting in some looking to emigrate.

The Leader of the Swale Independent Alliance referred to Central Government's high housing targets and its nonsensical approach of Councils having to prove GP's were needed to challenge targets. He said Central Government should ensure the necessary infrastructure was in place when setting targets. The Leader of the Swale Independent Alliance said GP services were critical and had to be provided at the rate people needed. He spoke of the cross party support for the motion. All Group Leaders had given their strong support for the motion.

In the debate that followed, Members raised points including:

- Pleased to support the motion and supported collaborative working;
- initiatives such as key worker housing brought in by Government would take time to work and action was needed now;
- providing affordable housing for GPs to live and work in the area was vital;
- the internal housing market was impacting availability of GP premises;
- the struggles faced by GPs and the NHS was devastating to watch;
- housing development added to the issue, suggested taking Legal advice to consider a planning condition to ensure manageable GP ratio was in place before development;
- letter should be sent to both Integrated Care Partnerships (ICP) and Integrated Care Board (ICB);
- highlighted the lack of space to accommodate GP's and the ICB's Estates review of Community Services carried out which stated that Swale did not need more space;
- referred to the lack of other options if unable to book a GP appointment;
- lack of GPs had an impact on hospital services and raised concern over the poor care many residents had received at Medway Maritime Hospital;
- gave an example of a successful project out of the borough to recruit and house newly-qualified GPs that could be considered in Swale; and
- spoke about the impact that poor housing and relocating due to high rent cost had on health.

Councillor Alistair Gould spoke passionately about the issues facing GP's. He said there was a ten year difference in life expectancy in residents in low and high areas of deprivation, highlighting that affluent areas were more attractive to GPs and often had less issues relating to drug use or mental health. In addition, patients could choose their practice and it was difficult to compete against practices with patients requiring less complex support. He said that there was an inequitable outsource of the service, and the ICB needed to be much more proactive in supporting struggling practices and find out what pressures they were under. Councillor Gould spoke of the impact on neighbouring practices if a surgery folded and drew attention that Section 106 funding only provided 66% of a premises cost, the remainder to be funded by GPs themselves. He said that any system that was based on competition would create losers and winners, and a more holistic approach was required from the ICP because when a practice struggled, their patients were at risk of a poorer service.

The proposer of the motion, Councillor Bowen, thanked Members for their comments. He agreed that the letter should include reference to deprivation. Referring to the comments made around poor care at Medway Maritime Hospital, Councillor Bowen said that staff morale was very low, and this could impact patient safety. He asked the Leader that any response to the motion should be shared, and a similar letter to be sent to the Shadow Secretary of State for Health.

The motion was then put to the vote and there was unanimous support.

Resolved:

(1) That Council agrees that the Leader write to the Secretary of State for Health (cc'd to Swale MP's) asking him to work with the Council to provide innovative, funded solutions to encourage more GP's to locate in Swale. This could include financial assistance give to the council/GP to assist with housing for a fixed period.

Mayor

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