
Community Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 9 January 2024 from 7.00 pm - 8.29 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Ann Cavanagh (Substitute for Councillor Ashley Shiel), Shelley Cheesman, Mark Last, Peter Macdonald, Ben J Martin (Substitute for Councillor Claire Martin), Lee-Anne Moore, Tara Noe, Tom Nundy, Chris Palmer (Substitute for Councillor Elliott Jayes), Richard Palmer (Chair), Hannah Perkin, Karen Watson, Mike Whiting (Substitute for Councillor Pete Neal) and Tony Winckless.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Steph Curtis, Jay Jenkins, Kellie MacKenzie and Emma Wiggins.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Martyn Cassell.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Elliott Jayes, Claire Martin, Pete Neal and Ashley Shiel.

543 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

544 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 31 October 2023 (Minute Nos. 384 – 392) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

545 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

546 **Leisure Centre Options - Progress report on the Member Working Group**

The Leisure & Technical Services Manager introduced the report as set-out in the agenda.

The Chair invited questions from Members and points raised included:

- This was a good opportunity to secure funding for a much-needed full sized swimming pool for Sheerness;
- Sports England (SE) needed to explore the benefits of thermal heating systems for swimming pools in order to keep running costs low;
- needed to explore the possibility of refurbishing existing leisure centres;
- raised concern that the report did not include enough financial information for Members to make a decision;
- what would the financial consequences be of including Faversham Pools?;
- sports facilities on the Isle of Sheppey needed substantial improvement otherwise local residents would go elsewhere;
- considered that the existing contract should be extended temporarily to allow the Council more time to make decisions about the future of leisure centres so it was not rushed;
- stressed the importance of ensuring that all children in Swale could access local swimming pools at an affordable price;

- needed to explore securing funding via Section 106 Agreements for leisure centres; and
- would Serco be willing to extend their contract?

In response, the Leisure & Technical Services Manager reported that they had already spoken to SE about funding for sports provision on the Isle of Sheppey. In terms of costings, he explained that the report was providing Members with an update on the working group and the leisure centre options. Discussions with Faversham Pools were at an informal stage. He said that chosen options would be costed and reported to the Committee at the 6 March 2024 meeting.

The Leisure & Technical Services Manager said that extending the current contract (Swallows and Sheppey) was possible under the terms of the existing contract and seemed to be the working groups preferred option. He confirmed that discussions with Swale Community Leisure and Serco were ongoing with both parties appearing open to extending the current contract.

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods said that SE considered Swale a priority, but Members were facing some difficult decisions in terms of investment for sports provision. She drew attention to the Built Facilities Strategy (BFS) which would be considered by the Committee in March 2024, and that officers were keen to add the BFS to the evidence base list for the Local Plan. She hoped that it would help to assist the Council in securing funding for leisure centres via Section 106 Agreements.

The Chair thanked officers for the report.

Resolved:

- (1) ***That the Vision, Aims and Outcomes in Appendix I of the report be agreed.***
- (2) ***That the continued work programme and timescales in Appendix II of the report be agreed.***

547 Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) - update on further sports recommendations

The Leisure & Technical Services Manager introduced the report as outlined in the agenda papers.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and points raised included:

- Drew attention to recommendation (5) under appendix 7.1 (Football Summary) and raised concerns that the public were not being consulted and stressed the importance of due diligence and third-party involvement, to check the long-term consequences;
- also concerned about recommendation (5) of the football recommendations in terms of transferring assets or long-term leaseholds to Parish Councils, as they were having their precepts cut year-on-year and had other financial pressures;
- fully sported all of the recommendations;
- referred to recommendation (4) for netball under Appendix 7.2 of the report in respect of formal community use agreements, and asked whether the wording could also be included as a recommendation for tennis and football?;
- how would the increase in sports be measured?;

- would be helpful to map where sports were in the Borough to look at the accessibility of sports;
- how would the increase in sports be measured, as currently the Council did not have a Local Plan so how could the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) be progressed when the future expansion of the community was unknown?;
- welcomed recommendations (9), (10) and (11) under the football recommendations;
- important to consider accessibility via public transport;
- the Council needed to discuss with other local authorities as currently women needed to travel outside of the borough for some sports; and
- welcomed the extension Sheppey Rugby Club had made to their clubhouse to accommodate ladies rugby.

With regard to recommendation (5) for football, the Leisure & Technical Services Manager explained that it was an option to be explored and the feasibility would be considered on a case-by-case basis and continued monitoring would need to be considered. The Head of Environment and Leisure confirmed that the Council's Community Asset Transfer Policy set out a clear method in respect of asset and the Property Asset Strategy set out a robust process to ensure full due diligence happened during any asset transfer.

The Leisure & Technical Services Manager clarified that only Parish Councils that expressed an interest in the transfer of sports facilities would be considered so was not a case of the Council "offloading" onto Parish Councils. He said officers could discuss with the consultants the possible inclusion of recommendation (4) from netball to be included for tennis and football. He said that a key message from the BFS was about opening-up community use agreements with the dry side facilities at a number of educational establishments. He explained that both demand and mapping was part of the audit undertaken by the consultants. He confirmed that neighbouring local authorities were being consulted as part of this strategy.

Resolved:

- (1) That the content of the report be noted and that the draft recommendations for the four sports be agreed and sent forward for review by key stakeholders at the next stage of the Sport England process.**

548 Community Safety Priority Setting Consultation

The Community Services Manager introduced the report as outlined in the agenda papers.

The Chair invited questions and points raised included:

- Spoke about Kent Police attending the recent Sittingbourne Area Committee and that the Police were able to respond positively to residents' concerns and hoped such meetings would continue;
- referred to Appendix 1 of the report and asked that a priority should also be included 'to achieve a full complement of Police officers within the next municipal year';
- at the last Community Safety Partnership (CSP) meeting the Police had been

positive about increasing resources but was concerned that this had not yet improved;

- Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) was on the increase and it was therefore imperative that the Council worked closely with the Police Crime Commissioner to ensure the local force was fully staffed in order to reduce ASB;
- shoplifting had increased possibly due to the cost of living crises, and wondered whether the CSP were working with local commerce about ways to tackle the issue?;
- was there anything else the CSP could do to reduce rates of ASB in areas of social housing?;
- important that the CSP engaged with schools about influencing and attitudes around domestic abuse;
- important to consider the impact that social media abuse had on victims especially the vulnerable;
- needed to encourage the reporting of crime;
- was there still a place for special constables?;
- disappointed that the Domestic Abuse Sub-Group had been cancelled given the severity of the problem in Swale;
- aware that charity/retail workers were often subject to abuse but were not encouraged to report it by their employers; and
- the issue of open drug dealing was a concern of local residents but not included as an objective.

In response the Community Services Manager agreed to feedback comments, with a view to tweaking the wording to Appendix 1, CSP Priorities 2023/24 in respect of resources for the 2024-25 municipal year. With regard to shoplifting, she explained that Swale Link was the Council's membership scheme with town centres business to provide them with a radio link to CCTV and was a really good system to tackle shoplifting. The Community Services Manager explained that there was a much broader range of Housing Associations within the Borough than previously, and they would continue to work with them to tackle ASB. She noted concerns regarding domestic abuse and negative influencing, and said that combined with the impact of the loss of youth services would likely be a new priority area.

549 **Forward Decisions Plan**

A Member asked whether the Committee could review the Property Asset Register policy. He raised concern that certain committees had control over certain policies but considered an holistic approach was needed. The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods said the Property Asset Register did not fall within the remit of the Community Committee to scrutinise but the Regeneration and Property Committee. She acknowledged there was some cross-cutting with certain policies and agreed to forward the Property Asset Register to the Member.

A Member asked that a watching brief be included on the Forward Decisions Plan (FDP) to include Kent County Council (KCC) consultations and any other relevant consultants. The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods explained it was often not possible due to timescales.

Resolved:

(1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.

Chair

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