
WESTERN AREA COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Committee Room - Swale House on Thursday, 15 February 2024 from 7.00 pm - 8.02 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Ann Cavanagh (Vice-Chair), Lloyd Chapman, Chris Palmer, Richard Palmer, Paul Stephen (Chair) and Sarah Stephen.

NOMINATED PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES: Parish/Town Councillors Gareth Randall and Ross Richards (Bobbing Parish Council (PC)).

NOMINATED PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES (Virtually): Parish/Town Councillors Liz Cruise and Liz Trott (Bapchild PC), Sarah Poole (Bobbing PC), Eric Layer (Newington PC) and Vivien Rich (Tunstall PC).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Janet Dart, Kieren Mansfield and Larissa Reed.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually): Councillor Monique Bonney.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Mike Baldock, Roger Clark and James Hunt.

636 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

637 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chief Executive, Larissa Reed, disclosed a non-pecuniary interest as a Council appointed Parish Councillor for Tunstall Parish Council.

638 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 November 2023 (Minute Nos 461 – 472) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

639 LAND ASSETS IN THE WESTERN AREA

The Chair introduced the item by explaining that at a previous meeting, the Western Area Committee agreed to look at Swale Borough Council (SBC) owned land in the Western Area to discuss with parish councils which assets could potentially be transferred to them. In advance of the meeting, a web-based link was circulated to Western Borough Councillors and Parish Councils of detailed maps of land assets in the Western area. The maps showed the land assets by parish and ward.

The Strategic Programme & Assets Manager was in attendance and presented high resolution versions of the maps on the overhead screen. He said that at the last meeting questions were raised about the ownership of specific pieces of land. He confirmed they had been investigated and it was established that the maps were accurate.

A discussion took place, and the following comments were made:

- A question was asked about timescales should a parish council express an interest in a piece of land. The Strategic Programme & Assets Manager responded that it depended partly on the parish council and SBC resources to carry out the work.
- Councillor Monique Bonney spoke about the unregistered land in Bapchild which had a long history of being used as a tip. She said there were potential underground toxic gases which needed to be properly vented. Councillor Bonney said that Bapchild Parish Council had no interest in taking on the land and it was the responsibility of SBC to maintain the land. The Strategic Programme & Assets Manager said he would take the matter away to get further advice.

640 PUBLIC FORUM

Parish Councillor Gareth Randall said that there were a couple of drains in Bobbing that were blocked, and he had investigated arranging private drain clearance. He asked if any other parish councils would be interested in sharing the booking of the service. Councillor Ann Cavanagh confirmed that Borden Parish Council might be interested and would be able to confirm after the meeting.

641 SWALE TRAFFIC FORUM

The Policy & Engagement Officer introduced the report and said that the Policy & Resources Committee had approved the setting up of a multi-agency group called the Swale Traffic Forum (STF). The Forum would monitor the current programme of works and any future planned works and recommend interventions where and when appropriate.

The STF would assist Kent Highways and National Highways with traffic management plans by providing local knowledge, during significant works such as those at Junction 5 of the M2/A249, Key Street and Grovehurst, Sittingbourne roundabouts, to endeavour to maintain the flow of traffic along key corridors without impacting residential streets or the rural road network.

The report set out the proposed membership of the STF which was to include one representative from each of the four Area Committees.

Members asked if the representative had to be a Borough Councillor or if it could be a parish councillor instead. The Chief Executive agreed to seek advice and feedback to the Area Committee after the meeting so that a representative could be nominated at the next meeting.

In the meantime, it was agreed that Councillor Richard Palmer would be a temporary Western Area Committee representative and would attend the first meeting.

A discussion took place on the main issues that should be taken to the first STF meeting and the following comments were made:

- Parking outside schools, especially Fulston Manor School and Highsted Grammar School, Sittingbourne;
- speeding traffic along Woodstock Road, Sittingbourne making it dangerous for Tunstall Primary School, Sittingbourne pupils to cross;
- the large number of road works in the surrounding area were causing motorists to use the rural roads as an alternative route;
- utility companies were not coordinating road closures and inappropriate diversions were being advised;
- motorists were speeding outside Bobbing Primary School, Sittingbourne where there was no pedestrian crossing;
- Panteny Lane, Church Street and Stockers Hill were being used as a cut through due to road works/closures;
- there was degradation of country lanes due to the high use by motorists and heavy goods vehicles (HGVs), Rodmersham Village Green, Sittingbourne was being eroded;
- HGVs were attempting to use single track lanes to avoid congestion in Sittingbourne. This was damaging the banks either side of the lanes and was dangerous for pedestrians;
- ongoing repairs to the gas main on the A2 at Bapchild was causing delays;
- there were concerns that the planned five-week closure of the south-bound route of the A249 could cause increased traffic in the lanes; and
- it was suggested a recommendation be made to the STF to put signage in place to deter motorists from using the rural routes throughout the A249 road closure.

Resolved:

- 1) That Councillor Richard Palmer represent the Western Area Committee on a temporary basis on the Swale Traffic Forum. A permanent representative would be nominated at the next Area Committee meeting.**

642 SWALE LOCAL BUS FOCUS GROUP UPDATE

Members noted the update paper.

643 HOUSING SUPPORT FUND

The Chair drew Members attention to the update report on the Housing Support Fund.

A discussion took place, and the following action was agreed:

- A Parish Councillor suggested that cavity wall insulation could be added to the list of critical services delivered to the most vulnerable. Councillor Richard Palmer responded that there was already a Government scheme in place to provide this service but signposting to the scheme could be provided. The Policy & Engagement Officer was asked to feed this back to the lead officer.

644 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Members noted the progress on actions.

Conservation Reviews Article 4 briefing – the Policy & Engagement Officer advised that as the Senior Conservation & Design Officer had not been available to attend tonight's meeting, she was happy to hold a briefing via Microsoft Teams on an alternative evening.

The Area Committee agreed that the briefing should be offered to all four Area Committees and all parish/town councils in the Borough and the start time should be 7 pm. The Policy & Engagement Officer would liaise with officers to arrange the briefing.

645 LOCAL ISSUES TO BE RAISED

Councillor Richard Palmer raised the following issues

- The large amount of rubbish at the sides of roads. What can be done to get it cleared?;
- SBC needed to be more proactive about fly-tipping in the Borough;
- motorists parking on double yellow lines was an increasing problem in Newington and there did not seem to be any enforcement; and
- there were anti-social behaviour issues connected with parking.

It was agreed that the above issues should be referred to the Chairs of the Environment and Community Committees to see how they could be addressed.

Councillor Chris Palmer asked how much longer the Planning Service trial period would last with reduced times to receive phone calls. The Chief Executive responded that the trial had been successful as planning issues being dealt with more quickly. The Planning Improvement Board were happy for the arrangement to continue. The Chief Executive would, however, raise the concerns about call times at the next Planning Improvement Board meeting.

A parish councillor said that he had experienced problems with accessing the online Planning Portal, it was agreed to take this issue back to officers to investigate.

646 MATTERS REFERRED TO SERVICE COMMITTEE CHAIRS FOR CONSIDERATION

The matters raised under Local Issues regarding rubbish on roadsides, fly-tipping and parking, were to be referred to the Environment and Community Chairs for consideration.

Chair

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