
SITTINGBOURNE AREA COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in The Sapling Room, The Appleyard, Avenue of Remembrance, Sittingbourne ME10 4DE on Tuesday, 20 June 2023 from 7.00 pm - 8.34 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Derek Carnell (Vice-Chair), Shelley Cheesman, Tim Gibson, Mark Last (Chair), Charlie Miller, Angie Valls, Karen Watson, Tony Winckless and Ashley Wise.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Janet Dart and Philip Sutcliffe.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually): Councillors Ken Ingleton and Carole Jackson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Kent County Councillor (KCC) Mike Dendor, Divisional Member for Sittingbourne North.

APOLOGY: Councillor Simon Clark.

108 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

109 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Tony Winckless disclosed non-pecuniary interests as a Trustee of Milton Regis Society and Milton Creek Country Park.

110 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 February 2023 (Minute Nos. 709 – 717) and the Meeting held on 17 May 2023 (Minutes Nos. 41 – 42) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct records.

111 NEW COUNCILLOR INTRODUCTIONS

Each Sittingbourne Area Committee Councillor introduced themselves.

112 ACHIEVEMENTS REPORT

The Policy & Engagement Officer introduced the report which would also be going to the Full Council meeting on 21 June 2023. The report provided background information about the Area Committees and described how they had evolved since their inaugural meetings in September 2020.

One of the objectives of the Administration formed in 2019 was to diffuse power amongst Members and improve public engagement in decision-making and, Area Committees were set up to help achieve this objective. The meetings provided people in the community with the opportunity to speak directly to their local councillors and raise issues that were a concern in the area. They were also a

useful way to provide updates on projects coming up in the area and to consult with the community.

Meetings during the first year of Area Committees took place during the pandemic when it was not possible to meet face-to-face, but the ability to attend remotely proved very popular. Many people were keen to continue attending the meetings remotely, so it was decided to trial hybrid meetings in community venues. The 'Owl' was therefore purchased and provided there was reliable Wi-Fi at the venues, the meetings could be attended either in person or remotely.

For the first three years, Area Committees were allocated funding. They each set work plans which were used to develop priorities and criteria for awarding funding to projects and activities. The report set-out how the funds were operated and listed how a total of £534,000 of funding was allocated across the four Area Committees over three years to a wide variety of projects overseen by both external organisations and internally led by Swale Borough Council (SBC).

As part of the budget setting process for 2023/24, Members considered how to deal with the budget gap which resulted in funds being unavailable to allocate to the four Area Committees this year.

Members noted the report and said that it was good to see that the funding had gone to projects that had benefitted the community.

113 SITTINGBOURNE AREA COMMITTEE PRIORITIES

The Policy & Engagement Officer introduced this item and explained that although there was no longer funding available for Area Committees to allocate to support their priorities, it was still possible for areas to agree priorities and work towards achieving them without funding.

One of the first tasks for the new Council was to create a Corporate Plan which would set-out what the Council wanted to achieve over the next four years. This would help to make sure Council resources were allocated in an accountable and effective way.

Area Committees were being asked to have an input into the Corporate Plan at an early stage by outlining their own aspirations for their individual areas. The aspirations of this Area Committee could be issues that were the responsibility of SBC to achieve, or items that were the responsibility of external organisations which the Council could try to influence. They could also be ambitions the Area Committee would like to work towards in the future.

When considering what these aspirations should be, the Policy & Engagement Officer said it was important to bear in mind the challenging budget position which was likely to continue over the next few years and the capacity of SBC to deliver them on top of the previously agreed workloads.

A discussion activity took place with everyone in attendance splitting into groups to discuss what the priorities for the Sittingbourne Area were. Four questions were asked, and a summary of ideas included the following:

What issues affected residents in your Ward that fell within the responsibility of SBC?

- Safety – use of closed circuit television (CCTV);
- speed limits – 20 mph;
- grass cutting;
- anti-social behaviour;
- parking;
- graffiti;
- vandalism;
- bins;
- parks and open spaces;
- homelessness;
- housing;
- fly tipping/litter;
- planting green spaces and grass cutting;
- parking particularly outside schools; and
- lack of toilets in Milton Recreation Ground.

What issues affected residents in your Ward that fell within the responsibility of external partners?

- Noise;
- pot holes;
- bus services;
- crime;
- school and school transport;
- GPs and health services;
- public transport;
- lack of bus service in Milton;
- leisure services;
- overgrown trees (bottom and top); and
- illegal use of e-scooters.

What changes would you like to see that could improve the life of residents in the future?

- Community Police, more police patrols;
- Swale road cleaning;
- heritage;
- improved situation for the homeless;
- empty shops, look to see if they could be used as a community asset;
- anti-social behaviour – use of CCTV;
- police community engagement; and
- more to do in Sittingbourne.

What were the top three issues you would like the Area Committee to take forward in the coming year?

- Increased CCTV;
- bins;
- pollution;
- anti-social behaviour including vandalism and policing, working with young people – constructive activities;
- tourism, leisure, hospitality and heritage offer – link together and prove information on attractions;
- bring rural element into the town, Milton Regis Country Park was an asset to the town;
- housing;
- employment;
- holistic approach to uniting the community (leisure, health, mental health services);
- condition and maintenance of roads;
- green spaces – improve and maintain;
- parking particularly outside schools;
- road safety;
- fly tipping; and
- improved transport to get around Swale.

The Chair thanked everyone for their input and said it was clear that anti-social behaviour, greenspaces and travel across Swale were issues that were of greatest concern in the Sittingbourne area and all issues raised would be fed into the preparation of the Corporate Plan.

114 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Members noted the progress on actions.

Pond safety – both Councillor Tim Gibson and KCC Councillor Mike Dendor, Divisional Member for Sittingbourne North, said they would follow up with the Kent Fire and Rescue Service to see what educational programmes they had planned for schools to ensure safety around ponds and lakes in icy conditions this winter.

115 PUBLIC FORUM

Mr Jackie Davidson (resident) said before the Pandemic there used to be a Swale Public Transport Group led by SBC which looked at improving public transport in Swale. Mr Davidson asked if this group could be reinstated. The Policy & Engagement Officer said she would pass on this request to the relevant Members and officers. Related to this the Chair confirmed that bus companies and representatives from KCC would be invited to the September 2023 Sittingbourne Area Committee meeting.

116 LOCAL ISSUES TO BE RAISED

Councillor Charlie Miller raised the issue of anti-social behaviour in Sittingbourne Town Centre. He spoke about incidents of vandalism and dangerous and illegal riding of e-scooters which needed to be addressed by the Police. He asked if this Area Committee could assist with bringing this matter to the attention of multi-

agency forums with a view to resolve the problem. Councillor Tony Winckless said that the CCTV camera opposite the Wine Bar in Milton Regis High Street, Sittingbourne had been removed and it needed to be reinstated to address the increasing problems in that area. It was agreed to invite a representative from Kent Police to a future Sittingbourne Area Committee.

Councillor Tony Winckless asked why flowers in Milton Regis High Street had to be paid for by the Milton Regis Society but the flowers in Sittingbourne town were paid for by SBC. The Policy & Engagement Officer said that she had consulted officers about this issue, and they advised SBC funded planters in the three main towns of Swale - Sittingbourne, Faversham and Sheerness, but there was no funding provision for planters in every area. Other sources of funding were suggested that the Society could apply for.

Resolved:

- 1) That a representative from Kent Police be invited to a future Sittingbourne Area Committee meeting to speak to Members and residents about anti-social behaviour.***

117 MATTERS REFERRED TO AREA COMMITTEE BY SERVICE COMMITTEES

No issues were raised.

118 MATTERS REFERRED TO SERVICE COMMITTEE CHAIRS FOR CONSIDERATION

No issues were raised.

Chair

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