

---

## SITTINGBOURNE AREA COMMITTEE

---

**MINUTES** of the Meeting held in the Committee Room, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 12 December 2023 from 7.00 pm - 8.55 pm.

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

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Janet Dart and Charlotte Hudson.

**OFFICER PRESENT (Virtually):** Jhilmil Kishore.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually):** Councillors Simon Clark and James Hall.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Inspector Vanessa Foster, Kent Police.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Shelley Cheesman and Charlie Miller.

### 510 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

### 511 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

### 512 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 September 2023 (Minute Nos. 251 – 261) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

### 513 POLICING IN SITTINGBOURNE

Inspector Vanessa Foster, Kent Police, was in attendance and gave the following updates, some of which were in response to questions asked:

Electric scooters – there had been many days of Police action which included confiscating scooters and holding publicity campaigns.

Road safety – beat officers were regularly out with speed guns and fines had been issued.

Anti-social behaviour (ASB) – there had been a spike in the summer months to October 2023. Further to the award of Government funding, seven-day week patrols had been carried out in hotspots, including Sittingbourne High Street. These had shown good results and 75% of parents had been receptive. Halloween had been a challenge, but the Police were planning for it next year. There were uplifts planned for weekends and Christmas.

Safer Streets – the award of this funding was providing an increase in lighting and closed-circuit television (CCTV) in certain areas.

Burglary – data was being used to target offenders and the Police were quick to react.

Robberies – there had been a decline following a proactive approach by the Police.

Shoplifting – the Police knew who committed shoplifting, there had been 13 charges made over the last weekend, the weekend before there had been 32 charges made. All recidivist offenders were currently in prison. The peak time for shoplifting took place after Christmas, there was an operation order in place to deal with this crime in January 2024.

Response times – there was a team of local Police officers whose role was to respond to 999 calls; the aim was to improve response times. There was another crime team to respond to other calls such as ASB and shoplifting.

Street drinkers – they were being dealt with by using community protection notices and community behaviour orders. However, the first approach had to be to give direction to leave before any action could be taken. The Swale Borough Council (SBC) Licensing Team had spoken to shops in the High Street about not selling alcohol to street drinkers, but they purchased it elsewhere. It was a problem that could be managed but not solved.

Reporting of crime – it was important for incidents to be reported to the Police as action could only be taken if it was recorded on the call log.

Milton Regis High Street, Sittingbourne, CCTV – a request was made to place a mobile CCTV camera on Milton Regis High Street. The Head of Housing and Community Services said there were a limited number of mobile cameras, but she would find out where they were currently deployed and look into the justification for a deployment in that area.

CCTV – following a question about the cameras that were installed in Iwade, the Head of Housing and Community Services said she would check how they had been funded but commented that parish councils sometimes fund them in villages. She said she would check the policy to see what community groups could do in unparished areas.

Inspector Foster asked councillors to support the Police when speaking to residents so that expectations were managed. The Chair added that Councillors should also encourage the reporting of incidents, so the Police could use the data to plan future action.

The Chair thanked Inspector Foster for attending the meeting.

## **514 COMMUNITY SAFETY**

The Head of Housing & Community Services, started her presentation by explaining that the Swale Community Safety Partnership (CSP) was a statutory partnership

which brought together a number of public sector agencies tackling crime, disorder, anti-social behaviours, substance misuse and it aimed to reduce re-offending.

The agencies included SBC, Kent County Council (KCC), Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, probation services, and health services. They worked closely with the local housing associations such as Southern Housing, voluntary and community sector organisations and His Majesty's Prison Service.

A Community Safety Plan was created each year, which set out the priorities for the Partnership, based upon data and consultation with partners and the public.

The Head of Housing & Community Services said each Area Committee was being asked for their views on what the priorities for their area should be for the period April 2024 to March 2025.

All those in attendance broke out into small groups to consider the questions asked, and feedback included:

What current Community Safety Issues were being experienced within your community?:

- There needed to be a focus on Milton Regis High Street, Milton Recreation Ground and Sittingbourne Town Centre;
- alcohol and substance misuse were a particular problem in the public toilets at Milton Regis and shop doors in Sittingbourne Town Centre;
- street drinking was a regular problem;
- night-time safety was a concern, business employees were subjected to verbal attacks and street lighting was poor in some areas;
- anti-social behaviour and low level intimidation was a problem in Milton Regis High Street, Sittingbourne Town Centre and the parks;
- perpetrators often covered their faces;
- bicycles were ridden the wrong way down Sittingbourne High Street;
- reporting of incidents needed to be encouraged;
- road safety;
- speeding,
- e-bikes and scooters;
- anti-social behaviour around pubs, drinking, and intimidation;
- safety of vulnerable people
- dogs out of control;
- petty crime and fighting;
- shoplifting;
- abuse of retail staff;
- men being abusive;
- the youth centres closing would cause more problems;
- Greggs in Sittingbourne High Street was targeted by shop-lifters;
- youths doing 'wheelies' on their bicycles;
- egging; and
- fireworks - shops should only sell them at certain times of the year.

Of those issues, for each group, which were the top three themes the CSP should tackle?:

- Road safety;
- anti-social behaviour; and
- crime.

The Head of Housing & Community Services thanked everyone for their input and said this would be captured and shared with the CSP at their January 2024 meeting, when their priorities would be agreed. A refreshed Community Safety Plan would then be created by the end of March 2024 and would detail how the CSP could tackle those identified priorities. If Members had any specific issues they would like to report, they could email [csu@swale.gov.uk](mailto:csu@swale.gov.uk).

#### **515 MILTON REGIS CONSERVATION AREA REVIEW**

The Senior Conservation & Design Officer gave a presentation on the Milton Regis, Sittingbourne, Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Strategy. She explained the proposed boundary changes and key proposals for the management plan.

The public consultation was ongoing and scheduled to conclude on 22 December 2023. As of 12 December 2023, officers had received three responses. The next step was to present the report to the Policy & Resources Committee on 7 February 2024 and it was estimated that the final adopted document would be published on the SBC website by Easter 2024.

The following comments were made:

- With limited budgets, it would be difficult to action the proposals;
- the area had been neglected for a long time;
- there was a statutory requirement for property owners to maintain their buildings;
- there needed to be imagination and leadership to achieve the proposals;
- it was important to consider traffic management;
- it was suggested that a 20 mile-per-hour speed limit could be explored;
- the boundaries should cover more land than gardens;
- specific walls and trees had been demolished; and
- windows in one of the buildings identified in Milton Regis High Street had been either bricked up or replaced.

The Senior Conservation & Design Officer said she would investigate the contraventions mentioned. She encouraged everyone who had commented to responded to the consultation so that all issues could be included in the report.

#### **516 PUBLIC FORUM**

No issues were raised.

#### **517 ENHANCED BUS PARTNERSHIP - SWALE LOCAL FOCUS GROUP**

The Policy & Engagement Officer introduced the report and said that KCC used to manage and run Quality Bus Partnerships for each district to raise and discuss local issues. Those meetings ceased when the government started developing its National Bus Strategy.

The National Bus Strategy was launched in March 2021 and was the blueprint to help improve issues such as infrastructure, bus travel, and air quality.

KCC received funding from the government for various initiatives which were detailed in the report. As part of the funding, each area was required to set up an Enhanced Bus Partnership which was a statutory board. Other high-level groups had been set up but with no district level representation.

To bridge that gap KCC had suggested that Enhanced Bus Partnership, Local Focus Groups were set up in each district. KCC would send along representatives to these meetings but could not resource them.

It was agreed by the Policy & Resources Committee to set up a Swale Local Focus Group which would meet twice a year. It would be managed by the Director of Regeneration & Neighbourhoods who would chair and coordinate the meetings. SBC would be a conduit to bring partners together rather than leading or delivering any work directly.

Given the interest locally in bus infrastructure, it was proposed that issues to be raised were requested from each Area Committee prior to the Local Focus Group with feedback to the Area Committee after the Local Focus Group had met.

It was anticipated that the Swale Local Focus Group would hold their first meeting at the end of January/beginning of February 2024.

Each Area Committee were invited to nominate one representative to sit on the Swale Local Focus Group.

Councillor Tim Gibson proposed that Councillor Tony Winckless be nominated as the Sittingbourne Area Committee representative on the Enhanced Bus Partnership Swale Local Focus Group. This was seconded by Councillor Karen Watson and on being put to the vote was agreed.

Members were invited to report any issues they would like raised at the first Enhanced Bus Partnership Swale Local Focus Group meeting to the Sittingbourne Area Committee representative outside of the meeting.

***Resolved:***

- 1) ***That Councillor Tony Winckless represented the Sittingbourne Area Committee on the Enhanced Bus Partnership Swale Local Focus Group.***

**518 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

Members noted progress on actions.

**519 LOCAL ISSUES TO BE RAISED**

No issues were raised.

**520 MATTERS REFERRED TO SERVICE COMMITTEE CHAIRS FOR CONSIDERATION**

No issues were raised.

Chair

Copies of this document are available on the Council website <http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

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