
SHEPPEY AREA COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in The Criterion, 69 High Street, Blue Town, Sheerness ME12 1RW on Thursday, 21 September 2023 from 7.00 pm - 9.25 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Andy Booth, Hayden Brawn, Angela Harrison, Elliott Jayes, Peter Marchington, Lee-Anne Moore, Pete Neal (Vice-Chair), Tara Noe, Tom Nundy, Richard Palmer, Mark Tucker (Chair), Mike Whiting and Dolley Wooster.

PRESENT (Virtually): Councillor Ashley Shiel.

NOMINATED PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES: Parish/Town Councillors Geoff Partis (Leysdown and Warden Parish Councils (PC)), Ben Pointing (Minster-on-Sea PC), Mike Brown (Eastchurch PC), Chris Reed and Linda Brinklow (Sheerness Town Council (TC)) and Barbara Twiss (Warden PC).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Janet Dart, Zoe Hentschel, Dean Radmore and Emma Wiggins.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Richard Palmer.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually): Councillor Tim Gibson.

Inspector Vanessa Foster, Kent Police.

305 ELECTION OF CHAIR

Resolved:

- 1) *That Councillor Mark Tucker be elected Chair for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2023/24.*
- 2) *That Councillor Pete Neal be elected Vice-Chair for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2023/24.*

306 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

307 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Andy Booth disclosed a non-pecuniary interest as the Chair of Swale Community Leisure.

308 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 June 2023 (Minute Nos. 64 – 74) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

309 ENGAGEMENT WITH POLICE

Inspector Vanessa Foster, Kent Police, was in attendance to talk about Police presence on the Isle of Sheppey. She said that the new Countywide Neighbourhood Model went live in June 2023 which allocated a dedicated officer to every ward in Swale. The aim was to put neighbourhood policing back as the bedrock in community. So far, the department was only staffed at 50% but vacancies had been advertised.

Inspector Foster went through the Neighbourhood Model initiatives which included:

- Early identification of vulnerability and exploitation within the community;
- an online App called 'My Community Voice' was launched, this was a two-way communication App between the Police and the community;
- there was a Neighbourhood Task Force Team which would come into deal with more long term problems;
- the Child Centred Policing Team focused on the vulnerabilities of youth in the community; and
- over the summer period a 'Grip hot-spot' had been set-up to focus on Sheerness High Street and surrounding areas. Grip hot-spots received Home Office Funding to tackle problems in the area.

Inspector Foster said that every two weeks the deployment of the officers was reviewed to ensure they were in the correct zones to deal with issues as they arose.

The following questions were raised:

A member of the public spoke about drink and drug related problems in the Beachfields Green area. Inspector Foster responded that her team were aware of the problems in that area which was a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) zone and as such was provided with additional powers. However, she said that the Police and Swale Borough Council (SBC) shared responsibility for that area. Both partners would be tackling the problem collaboratively by issuing Community Protection Warnings (CPW), followed by issuing Community Protection Notices (CPN) to individuals who continue to offend. A CPN gave the power of arrest. There would be metal PSPO signs installed and possibly Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras installed to monitor the area.

A Member talked about a recent incident at Queenborough Railway Station when 999 was called and it took over an hour for the Police to respond. The officers that responded had come from Maidstone. He also said there was another incident at Queenborough seafront involving jet skis when 999 was called four times, the Coastguard attended, and they also called 999 but there was no response from the Police. Inspector Foster said that the Police Control Room would have transferred the call about the incident on the train to British Transport Police and it would have been their patrol that attended from Maidstone. Regarding the jet ski issue, different partners were working together on this problem and it was a Coastguard led matter. Inspector Foster said that there was a regular Police presence, including the Marine Unit, gathering intelligence on the seafront and docks, but they could not be there all the time.

A Member raised the issues of drug dealing and shop lifting and said there had to be a consequence for those offences. Inspector Foster said that regarding recidivist offenders, they were charged and remanded as much as possible as the issue was taken seriously. The Police needed to get shop owners on-board so that CCTV evidence could be used. She said that Shop Safe Radio had been reintroduced which resulted in quicker responses.

A Member said that domestic abuse was a problem in his Ward, and he was aware that victims did not feel comfortable reporting incidents to the Police as they believed they would not be taken seriously. Inspector Foster said that the Vulnerability Department was heavily funded and was a high priority for the Police. She said she was sad to hear that people did not feel comfortable reporting incidents to the Police but there were other agencies they could speak to instead. Inspector Foster said that even if victims dropped charges, the Police would go ahead and prosecute on evidence. She said she would like to speak to individuals, if they were willing, who had not wanted to come forward to report incidents of domestic abuse so she could carry out some service recovery with the Vulnerability Department.

A Member asked about the current ratio of beat officers to wards with the current 50% staffing level. Inspector Foster confirmed that some beat officers were currently covering up to three wards. She went on to reassure Members and residents that her team were committed to doing their best to prioritise the vulnerable in the community on the Isle of Sheppey and Swale.

A Member said that residents in her ward were concerned about the time officers were spending off the Isle of Sheppey when they had to take an offender to the custody suite in Medway. Inspector Foster agreed it was a frustration, but it had been the Police and Crime Commissioner's strategy to close the custody suites at Sheerness and Sittingbourne.

A Member said that there were a number of issues in his ward such as illegal and noisy exhausts during the early hours, speeding, not wearing seat belts, drink/drug driving, anti-social behaviour, vandalism and arson that were not being addressed by the constant changes to Police structures. Inspector Foster said that she had the best officers on the ground within the current constraints. She said that all incidents must be reported and agreed there was a lot of work to do.

The Chair thanked Inspector Foster for taking the time to come and talk to the Area Committee.

310 LEVELLING-UP PROJECT UPDATE

Dean Radmore, the Capital Programme Manager, and Zoe Hentschel, the Capital Programme Officer, were in attendance to give a presentation on the progress of the Sheerness Revival Project.

The Capital Programme Manager reminded the Sheppey Area Committee about SBC's successful £20 million bid to the Levelling-Up Fund (LUF) and the aim of the

project was to improve health, education, leisure and employment opportunities in Sheerness.

SBC had been working with Alliance Leisure, who were the UK Leisure Framework's development partner, to move the project forward and to get accurate fee proposals. This would enable SBC to enter into a contractual arrangement with Alliance Leisure to deliver up to (Royal Institute of British Architects) RIBA 4 which was the detailed design phase of the project. This would then be followed by the tender stage for the main build contract and would need to go to the Regeneration and Property Committee for approval.

The Capital Programme Manager went through the progress so far on the three main projects:

- Regeneration of the Beachfields, Sheerness site;
- expansion of Sheppey College; and
- conversion of garages to workspaces at Masters House, Sheerness.

The Capital Programme Officer gave an update on the Communications and Engagement Plan for the project which had been approved by the LUF member working group. As part of the strict branding guidelines, a specific Sheerness Revival logo was being developed to be used on promotion and engagement materials.

The following questions were asked:

A Member asked about the timescales to complete the project, as the deadline for the bid had slipped. Had DLUC agreed an extension to build? The Capital Programme Manager said that there had been regular engagement with DLUC on this, although there was no formal confirmation of an extension yet, it was hoped to be received soon.

A Member asked how the costs had been affected due to inflation since the bid was put in. The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods said that as part of the bid there was a 10% contingency, however, the Sheppey Area Committee would be kept updated on costs as the project progressed.

A Town Councillor asked about improved access to the beach and promenade from Beachfields. The Capital Programme Manager said that the public realm improvements from outside the station to the route through would be improved significantly and open up the area, however, changes to the sea wall were not in the scope of this project.

A Member asked if the Beachfields area would continue to be maintained, particularly in terms of lighting and safety. The Capital Programme Officer advised that a Safer Streets bid had been submitted to address these issues. The contractor was aware of the problems in the area.

A Member asked what the SBC stake in the project was. The Capital Programme Manager confirmed that SBC were contributing approximately 10% on top of the £20 million but would confirm the exact figure after the meeting.

In response to a question from a Member, the Capital Programme Manager said that taking into account the extension period the project was likely to be completed by September 2025.

A Member asked when the last condition survey was carried out on the Sheppey Leisure Centre. The Director of Regeneration & Neighbourhoods said she would find out and provide the Member with the information after the meeting.

A Parish Councillor asked what was the anticipated date to get the first spade in the ground and after all the preparatory work such as surveys were carried out, would there be enough funding left to complete the project? The Capital Programme Manager advised he anticipated it would be about six to nine months before work would commence and that all the preparatory work was costed in the bid submission.

A Member asked as the Sheppey College project was further advanced, could it progress at its own pace? The Capital Programme Manager confirmed it could.

311 PARKING POLICY

Councillor Richard Palmer in his capacity as Chair of the Parking Policy Member Working Group, gave a short presentation about the development of a draft Parking Policy.

He said that there was no formal Parking Policy, and it was something the Community Committee would like to be developed. They had agreed that a Parking Policy Member Working Group should be set up to work with officers to develop a draft policy.

The membership of the Working Group had been drawn up from the Community Committee with one representative from each political group, plus the Chair.

The Working Group had met twice to discuss the main themes that should be included in the scope of the policy. Councillor Palmer went through the proposed scope of the policy and asked if the Area Committee had any comments on it and whether they considered anything was missing.

The following comments were made:

- Could a refund system be set up for volunteers when they had to pay to park when they carried out their volunteer work?
- the Castle Connections, Queenborough car park was free-of-charge to park in and was used by commuters. There was a strip of land by the railway station owned by a German company, could Network Rail look at purchasing that land to provide a car park which would free up the Castle Connections car park?
- the Halfway car park was free-of-charge and was used by commuters. Suggested looking at charging at that car park after a short free period;
- evening charges had caused a lot of problems for businesses, people were particularly affected from the eastern end of the Isle of Sheppey as there was no public transport and it added an extra cost to having an evening out;

- there was no longer a refund option at the Sheppey Leisure Centre, as a result people in the evening were parking at Marine Heights which was causing noise and disruption;
- evening charges did not work in Sheerness, volunteers were being adversely affected;
- implementing an overnight charge for camper vans at Shingle Bank, Minster was suggested;
- some coaches had not been able to access the Sheppey coach park opposite Shingle Bank due to height restrictions;
- elicit activity was taking place at the Sea Thorpe Avenue car park at Minster, could a barrier be put up overnight?
- could all relevant groups be included in the formal consultation?
- SBC planning rules stated that extra parking in town centre developments should not be provided, however, this was causing residents to park on roads;
- concerned about providing free parking for volunteers as it would be very difficult to operate;
- the Ship on Shore car park, Sheerness was originally intended for the Sailing Club to use but was now used to park camper vans, the height restrictions had rotted away and not been replaced; and
- residents on Marine Parade did not have enough space to park, they either had to park on roads or pay to use the car park, could residents receive free parking permits?

312 CORPORATE PLAN UPDATE

Councillor Angela Harrison gave an update on the development of the SBC Corporate Plan. She went through the proposed priorities and asked for comments. The priorities were discussed, and the following amendments were suggested:

Community:

To enable our residents to live, work and enjoy their leisure time safely in our Borough.

Economy:

Support a thriving economy.

Environment:

To provide a cleaner healthier more enjoyable environment.

Health & Housing:

Everyone to have access to a decent home and improved health and wellbeing

Running the Council:

To engage with communities and outside bodies to deliver our priorities in an open and efficient way, working within our resources.

313 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Members noted the progress on actions.

The Policy & Engagement Officer read out an update by the Conservation & Design Team about the Sheerness Marine Town and Mile Town Conservation Area Reviews, the consultations for both were due to close on Friday 6 October 2023.

314 PUBLIC FORUM

Linda Brinklow gave an update on the project to uncover the foundations of the Sheppey Light Railway which was part of a long-term plan to enable people to safely walk and cycle from one end of the Isle of Sheppey to the other. There would be a public meeting at 7 pm on Friday 27 October 2023 at the Sheerness East Working Men's Club to discuss attempts to secure a cycle path from Eastchurch to Leysdown.

Chris Reed asked if SBC were considering expanding the '20 is Plenty' speed limit to all the residential streets in Sheerness to make it safer for children getting to school. Kent County Council (KCC) Councillor Andy Booth, Divisional Member for Sheppey said he would take this back to KCC.

Chris Reed asked if double yellow lines could be introduced along Sheerness High Street as there was a lot of traffic in that area where motorists were looking for parking space which was dangerous for pedestrians. KCC Councillor Andy Booth, Divisional Member for Sheppey said he would take this back to KCC.

315 LOCAL ISSUES TO BE RAISED

No issues were raised.

316 MATTERS REFERRED TO AREA COMMITTEE BY SERVICE COMMITTEES

No issues were raised.

317 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