
Council

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 2 October 2024 from 7.00 pm - 10.10 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, Andy Booth, Lloyd Bowen, Hayden Brawn, Derek Carnell, Ann Cavanagh, Lloyd Chapman, Shelley Cheesman, Roger Clark, Alex Eyre, Charles Gibson, Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, Angela Harrison, James Hunt, Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Mark Last, Rich Lehmann, Peter Macdonald, Peter Marchington, Claire Martin, Ben J Martin (Mayor), Charlie Miller, Lee-Anne Moore, Pete Neal, Tara Noe, Tom Nundy, Chris Palmer, Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin, Ashley Shiel, Julien Speed, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen, Terry Thompson, Angie Valls, Karen Watson (Deputy Mayor), Tony Winckless, Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster.

PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Councillors Simon Clark, Kieran Golding and Mark Tucker.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Robin Harris, Jo Millard and Larissa Reed.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Simon Clark, Kieran Golding, James Hall, Mark Tucker and Mike Whiting.

285 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

286 **Minutes**

Councillor Tom Nundy raised a point of order under part 3.1.5 of the Constitution that the reason for the late addition of the Report for Standards subcommittee from 27 November 2023 as discussed at Full Council was noted and should be set out in the minutes. Councillor Richard Palmer referred to the Local Government Act 1972 and further raised that the special circumstances should be recorded in the minutes. Subject to the inclusions of the special circumstances being added, the minutes were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

287 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Shelley Cheeseman declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 13 Review of Current Principles under the Gambling Act 2005 as she ran a small lottery scheme.

Councillors Mike Baldock, Andy Booth and Rich Lehmann declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 10 Motion on Seashells Children's Centre as they were Kent County Council (KCC) Councillors.

Councillor Dolley Wooster declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 10 Motion on Seashells Children's Centre as she sat on the Seashells Steering Group.

During the debate on the Winter Fuel Allowance, the Mayor declared a non-pecuniary interest as he worked with Policy in Practice documentation.

288 **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor advised that there had been over 20 events attended by himself or the

Deputy Mayor since the previous Council meeting at the end of July 2024. He highlighted the Civic Service, Faversham Hop Festival, the RNLI Summer Ball on the Isle of Sheppey, a Sittingbourne Salvation Army event and the recent visit to Landsdowne Primary School whose pupils had impressed him with their Microsoft skills.

The Mayor welcomed Councillor Alex Eyre to her first Full Council meeting since being elected to represent the Priory ward in Faversham.

The Mayor advised that the funeral details of former Mayor, Alderman Steve Worrall had changed and would now be held on Monday 21 October 2024 at midday.

289 **Tributes to Former Mayor, Alderman Steve Worrall**

Councillor Angela Harrison led the tributes to Former Mayor, Alderman Steve Worrall. She said he was the first inclusive Councillor and was passionate about Labour politics when in the Chamber. Councillor Harrison said he always represented his residents well and had left a lasting tribute in his campaign for the successful development of a railway crossing at West Minster.

Councillor Mike Baldock said Alderman Worrall's passing was a sad day for Swale and the community had lost someone special. He said he had firm opinions and was a good speaker. Councillor Baldock said he would be remembered very fondly.

Councillor Lloyd Bowen said he felt lucky to have shared a Chamber with Alderman Worrall. He remembered him as passionate, loud, caring and with a wealth of knowledge and said he was a credit to residents and to the Council.

Although having not met Alderman Worrall, Councillor Hannah Perkin had spoken to those who had and they described him as a Councillor that worked hard, stood by his principles and commanded a room. She sent her condolences to the family.

Councillor Tony Winckless said Alderman Worrall was passionate and had taught him a lot. He referred to his forty-three year term and said he was a character.

Councillor Ashley Wise recounted his personal experience of the guidance Alderman Worrall had given him as a teenager to progress his interest in politics which led to him asking a public question at Full Council. He said he was an entertaining character, often with a twinkle in his eye.

Councillor Dolley Wooster said she hoped the family of Alderman Worrall would be very proud to hear how highly spoken he was by Members.

The Mayor said that past Mayors and the former MP had both contacted him to pay their tributes to Alderman Worrall who they had described as a man of principle who was well respected.

There was a minute's silence in memory of former Mayor, Alderman Steve Worrall.

290 **Questions submitted by the Public**

There were no questions submitted by public.

291 Questions submitted by Members

The Mayor advised that two questions had been received from Members.

Question 1 – Councillor Hannah Perkin

I have recently been helping a number of residents that are waiting an unacceptable time for their PIP reviews. One resident I have been supporting has already been waiting for 40 weeks and has been told that it will be a minimum of 55 weeks. Is there more that the council could be doing to support residents in a similar position?

Response – Chair of Housing and Health

I am aware that there has been a backlog of PIP reviews for several years, I have asked Officers to contact the DWP to understand the latest position and what more can be done, I am still waiting for their response. As a Council we will review any other benefits that a resident may be entitled to and signpost them to other avenues of support whilst they wait. We have developed our support in partnership with the Voluntary and Community Sector to help people access support through our One Swale Roadshows, our targeted support through Household Support Fund and our continued financial support of Swale Citizens Advice Service.

Supplementary

Will there be any One Swale Roadshows online to cater for those with mobility issues?

Supplementary Response

Thank you for the suggestion, it is a good idea which I will take back.

Question 2 – Councillor Hannah Perkin

The centre of Faversham is increasingly full of cars parked along previous double yellow lines that are being left to fade and reportedly now unenforceable. The JTB will not open a discussion on reinstating the lines because senior members are looking at other ways of controlling parking. The pedestrianisation of the Town Centre was mentioned. Could I please have an update on the scheme and an expected timeline.

Response – Chair of Community and Leisure

Members will be aware that the administration investigated support for town centre pedestrianisation schemes in the period following Covid-19-related town centre traffic closures. Following positive indications, we committed to exploring this further for Faversham, and dedicated town centre reserve funding to preparatory work.

As part of this, we undertook an Equalities Impact Assessment which was clear that the scheme would require exemption for blue badge holders in order not to have a negative impact for disabled residents / visitors.

Kent County Council would be responsible for enforcing violations of any ANPR-supported pedestrianisation scheme, and have advised

- they are working with their contracted camera provider to enable appropriate exemptions.
- All KCC schemes had been temporarily on hold as the Department for Transport changed vehicle owner access software. This hold was released to enable schemes to progress only in mid September.

We have been and continue to be, dependent on third party timescales.

Implementation will also require further formal engagement and consultation – from KCC on the use of their enforcement powers, and as part of the Traffic Regulation Order process via JTB.

Members may wish to note that KCC have very recently remarked the yellow lines on Preston Street, and the traffic order has been sealed, allowing enforcement action to be taken by SBC's enforcement contractor.

Supplementary

As there was no timeline at the moment whilst waiting for KCC, will there be any discussion around replacing yellow lines in the interim period?

Supplementary Response

This should be raised with the Faversham ward KCC Councillor at the JTB meeting.

292 Leader's Statement

The Leader said:

“Thank you Mr Mayor and good evening one and all. Firstly, could I, as leader of the council align myself with the tributes paid to former Mayor, Alderman Steve Worrall. Like many here this evening I never had the fortune of sharing the chamber with Steve, but through so many anecdotes from those that did I know that he was thoroughly respected, forthright and a truly outstanding representative, advocate and servant to his residents in Sheerness.

Whilst reflecting on Members past I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome our newest Councillor to the chamber and formally congratulate Liberal Democrat Councillor Alex Eyre on successfully being elected as member representing Priory ward after the sad passing of former Councillor Mike Henderson.

Moving on, it is fitting that it is in Steve Worrall's old political stomping ground of Sheerness where I continue my Leader's Statement. In particular with the Sheerness revival project where amongst other things young people will benefit from increased opportunities to learn the valuable skills that they need to support them as they embark upon their working lives, following approval of plans for the expansion of Sheppey College which is a key component of our £20 million project.

The new facilities will make provision for accommodating more students and also offer a wider range of vocational aligned courses, with subjects including creative skills, engineering, and logistics. Providing these opportunities will equip local 16–19 year olds with the pre-requisite skills that they need to thrive in today's job market and provide a

valuable contribution to the local economy.

Improving the education and training opportunities for young people in Sheerness and wider, is one of the fundamental strategies that we as an administration have strived to achieve.

Staying with Sheerness, young developing craftsmen and women will soon have a space to ply their trade and build their business with the support of a local charity. Our plans to transform the existing garages at Masters House into three workshops, a toilet and kitchenette have now been approved.

These modern, sustainably built workshops will provide the perfect space for artists, ceramists, woodworkers, screen printers and more to practice their craft and create and grow a business.

The Launch It charity will work with and empower these young entrepreneurs assisting them to fulfil their potential by providing the space, mentoring, and training needed to start up a business.

Masters House is already home to a number of small businesses following a £1.5m investment into its refurbishment from this council, a venue which is expertly run under the auspices of former Borough Councillor Denise Knight, the Enterprise Manager at Launch It Kent

Crossing back onto the mainland we have teamed up with Kent Police and other partners to implement measures to tackle anti-social behaviour, such as street drinking and youth nuisance, in Sittingbourne High Street. Public Space Protection Orders are now in place to address street drinking and give officers from Kent Police and the Council powers to issue fines or take court action, in a bid to make the high street a safer place.

The Council's rough sleepers team have been working closely with the police in the high street to provide help and support to any individuals who are perceived to be homeless. However, it is the case that many of the offenders have been found not to be homeless at all.

Local charities, Forward Trust and Brogdale CIC, are also assisting in working to tackle the root cause of the problem by engaging with these groups and offering the support they need to change their behaviour.

The Council's licensing team have been working with licensed premises on the high street to make sure they are selling alcohol responsibly and looking after the welfare of their customers through limiting their alcohol consumption.

The Council's Safer Streets project, including uniformed marshals patrolling the high street, bolstering the council's Swale Link project and additional CCTV, has also contributed to tackling these issues.

We appreciate that Sittingbourne High St is not unique in having its Anti- Social behaviour problems and of course, we would have liked to implement these measures throughout the borough, but unfortunately the government's and subsequent PCC guidelines led to us having to target specified areas for engagement in order to access funding.

Moving on to the Eastern part of our Borough,

A one-of-a-kind "Newton Space Garden," complete with a space-themed play area and planetarium, has been created in Faversham.

The garden is the brainchild of the Brogdale Collection and centre stage will be a sapling grown from seeds of the very apple tree that inspired Sir Isaac Newton's theory of gravity.

The garden will also showcase eight additional apple trees with connections to space and Newton, a living willow planetarium - which has been planted, and a space-themed play area.

We provided a £7,000 grant from our Rural Swale Small Business Grant, funded by the Rural England Prosperity Fund, to help make this project possible.

We also provided the trustees of Graveney and Goodnestone Village Hall with a grant of £7000 from the Councils Community Infrastructure fund.

This funding, along with other grants, enabled the installation of 34 solar panels on the hall's roof and a battery system to store the generated electricity, reduce costs and potentially sell back surplus to the grid.

As a non-profit organisation the trustees have ensured that the hall has become a key destination for residents to meet, socialise and have fun. Initiatives like this will help bring Carbon reduction benefits, promote the use of renewable energy and assist in the long term sustainability of the hall in line with the Councils green agenda.

Finally we are looking to develop a new Disposal and Community Asset Transfer Policy which will outline a framework for identifying and transferring surplus assets, such as land, property, and buildings to charities, voluntary organisations, and town councils.

The goal is to promote greater community ownership and management of local assets.

Key principles which will underpin the approach to community asset transfers will include:

- 1. a focus on community benefit: Disposals and transfers must demonstrate a clear benefit to the local community, such as improving the economy, health, or environment*
- 2. financial viability: Transfers will only occur if they are financially sustainable for the receiving organisation and meet the long-term goals of the council*
- 3. transparency and accountability: A clear process for identifying surplus assets, evaluating them and ensuring ongoing accountability for the management of transferred assets*

Taking ownership of an asset comes with challenges, so the policy will also set out what interested organisations need to consider and ensure that transfers are successful.

This policy is part of the council's commitment to working in partnership with local communities and the voluntary sector, as outlined in the council's Corporate Plan 2024-2027 and Property Asset Management Strategy.

In closing with November not too far away I would remind you that we will be holding our

service of Remembrance on Sunday 10th November 10am at St Michael's Church in Sittingbourne followed by an act of remembrance at the Sittingbourne War memorial at 11 am.

Services are also been held throughout the remainder of the Borough and Councillors will be laying wreaths as a mark of respect.

In response, the Leader of the Conservative Group welcomed Councillor Alex Eyre. He acknowledged that Master's House was in the capable hands of former Councillor, Denise Knights. Referring to anti-social behaviour, the Leader of the Conservative Group said there was an increase in theft and anti-social behaviour linked to motorised scooters. He encouraged Councillors to get involved in the Local Government Boundary review and thanked those Councillors who had helped facilitate issues with the waste contract.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group reminded Members it was currently Black History Month and it was Dementia Awareness Day on 7 November 2024. She thanked those involved in Master's House and Sheerness Revival and spoke positively about the Newton Space Garden, Faversham.

Other Members were invited to speak and made comments including:

- Thanked those involved with the Sheerness Revival Project but was disappointed that KCC was removing services from the Isle of Sheppey;
- drew attention to anti-social behaviour at Archer's Park on The Meads, highlighting that the Police had not responded;
- there used to be more regular community safety briefings for Members;
- gave examples of anti-social behaviour when Police had not attended and the resultant financial burden to the Council including vandalism to its assets, tarnishing town centres and deterring businesses;
- asked all Councillors to contact the Police and MP's to take action to address community safety and anti-social behaviour;
- residents were served best when multi-agencies worked together;
- a Community Safety partnership was arranged earlier in the year but was cancelled due to low attendance;
- Kent Police had attended Area Committees and hopefully would attend again in future;
- the Police took a large proportion of Council Tax; and
- the promised increase in more neighbourhood policing had not delivered and questions should be asked.

In response, the Leader acknowledged and thanked the Chair of the Environment and Climate Emergency Committee for his work in addressing the less than satisfactory waste service. He thanked the Leader of the Liberal Democrat group for highlighting Black History Month and Dementia Awareness Day. The Leader agreed that the Safer

Streets project needed to be rolled out further across the borough to include rural areas. He highlighted that a Community Safety briefing was included in the Member Training Plan for 2024/25. Finally, the Leader acknowledged the shocking experience of anti-social behaviour a Member had described.

293 **Motion - Seashells Childrens Centre**

Councillor Elliott Jayes proposed a minor change to his original motion that was set out on the Agenda, which was supported by the seconder, Councillor Wooster and accepted by Members. Councillor Jayes then proposed the updated motion as follows:

“This Council requests Kent County Council do not cut services and/or funding from Seashells Childrens Centre”

Councillor Jayes said that facilities in the Borough were under attack from KCC and Sheerness was in one of the most deprived areas in the country and was the most deprived ward in Kent. He referred to plans to improve the education of the children in the area with two new secondary schools and a junior college, and the damage that the cut in KCC services could have on children’s future by cutting services to the Seashells Children’s centre. Councillor Jayes said that 2,000 children were supported by the centre in 2023, and that other alternatives such as the Sheppey Gateway and the facility in Leysdown were not suitable due to location, being open plan, no outside space and limited parking. Finally, he said that the savings made by KCC in cutting services would cost more in the long-run as services would be fragmented.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Wooster reserved her right to speak.

Members were invited to speak and made comments including:

- Short term cuts had long term consequences;
- KCC were in a difficult financial position, but needed to look at alternatives and consider the long term benefits to residents;
- many residents relied on the service;
- secondary school education was being addressed, whilst support for the early start was being reduced;
- gave a personal account of use of the service and the positive impact it had;
- expressed frustration at the way KCC managed their budget;
- the centre was a structured, engaging environment and the cornerstone of early childhood development;
- the centre was an investment in children’s future;
- considered the motion was premature, poorly written and factually incorrect as the decision had not yet been made;
- SBC had already written in objection;
- if KCC could not run it, SBC should;
- referred to the Davey report ‘Save the NHS’ which highlighted that Sure Start and family centres were the key areas for long term health;
- it was right for SBC to let KCC know their views;
- KCC did have difficult financial choices to make, but chose to increase Members’ allowances by 10% whilst SBC froze their Member allowances; and
- cutting funding to this vital service was bad economics as problems would increase without early support.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Wooster said that 73p in every pound of Council Tax collected by SBC went to KCC and it was disgraceful that support was being withdrawn. She praised the staff who worked at the Seashells Children's Centre, particularly Jim Duncan. Councillor Wooster said KCC had previously acknowledged the outstanding work it did. Councillor Wooster said that communication, support and representation from KCC to all areas of the Isle of Sheppey was poor. She advised that KCC were due to discuss funding to the Seashells Children's Centre on 21 November 2024 and KCC Councillors would have to make their decision and face the supporters of the centre that would be in attendance.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(2), a recorded vote was taken, and voting was as follows:

For: Baldock, Booth, Bowen, Brawn, Carnell, Cavanagh, Chapman, Cheesman, R Clark, Eyre, C Gibson, T Gibson, Gould, Harrison, Hunt, Jackson, Jayes, Last, Lehmann, MacDonald, Marchington, B Martin, C Martin, Miller, Moore, Neal, Noe, Nundy, C Palmer, R Palmer, Perkin, Shiel, Speed, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thompson, Valls, Watson, Wooster, Winckless and Wise. Total equals 41.

Against: None. Total equals 0.

Abstain: None. Total equals 0.

The Mayor announced the motion had been agreed.

Resolved:

(1) This Council requests that Kent County Council do not cut services and/or funding from Seashells Childrens Centre.

294 **Motion - Winter Fuel**

In proposing the motion, Councillor Hannah Perkin explained that, along with the seconder of the motion, Councillor Charles Gibson, she had accepted a minor amendment to the motion from Councillors Bowen and Speed, which was published on the Council's website and circulated to Members and this was now the substantive motion.

Councillor Perkin said that shortly after the announcement to withdraw the winter fuel allowance, Age Concern set up a petition to object to it, and it was often the voluntary sector that saw first-hand the daily struggles so many had to contend with. She referred to the likely 10% rise on the energy price cap and the unaffordability to so many during the cost of living crisis. Councillor Perkin said that Age Concern estimated that 2.5million pensioners who needed the money to stay warm this winter would not receive it, and they were concerned for those that missed out on the pension credit threshold, and the 800,000 eligible people that did not receive it. She drew attention to those that had high energy needs due to disability or illness and said the Government had admitted it had not carried out a Quality Impact Assessment alongside the policy.

Councillor Perkin acknowledged that some did not need the winter fuel allowance, but the policy would impact many and she said it was rushed and not thought through.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Charles Gibson reserved his right to speak.

The Mayor announced that a further amendment had been received, outside of the deadline, and he had used his discretion to allow the amendment to be debated, copies of which were tabled at the meeting. Councillor Harrison proposed the amendment to the second half of the motion which read as follows:

Council resolves to:

Request all group leaders within Swale sign a joint letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for the new Winter Fuel Payment policy to be suspended and reviewed.

Continue a significant awareness campaign to maximise uptake of pensions credits. This will include use of Council noticeboards, social media, promotion in local press and also targeted letters to those who may be eligible.

Councillor Harrison said there should be a cross-party missive to sign the letter and it was important for there to be a pause and review of the Winter Fuel Payment policy. She referred to the original motion and said that the Council had already been increasing promotion of pension credit including the One Swale Roadshow and individuals were already targeted to inform and assist to receive entitlements.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor Wise reserved his right to speak.

In the debate that followed, Members raised points including:

- The Labour Group did not want to stand up to Government;
- cross-Council sent out a stronger message;
- felt conflicted at the changes as agreed with some parts, but not others and could not support an amendment that took away the Council speaking with one voice, through the Leader;
- supported including to 'continue to' increase awareness as this was more accurate; and
- sought clarification on what the amendment replaced.

In response, Councillor Perkin, agreed that replacing the phrase 'Urgently commence.....' with an alternative such as 'Upscale' or similar, could be discussed. However, she did not support the other amendments proposed as she considered there should be accountability from the Labour Government.

Councillor Wise said the Labour group were in agreement that the proposal needed to be paused and means testing reviewed. Quoting another Member, he said that the Council were better when they worked as one and there had been cross party support for several important topics in past motions, and a letter from all groups was more powerful. Councillor Wise said the Labour Group wanted to go to direct to the Chancellor to pause, review and come up with an improved policy.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(2), a recorded vote was taken, and voting was as follows:

For: Brawn, Cavanagh, Cheeseman, T Gibson, Harrison, Jackson, Last, Miller,

Shiel, Valls, Watson, Wooster, Winckless and Wise. Total equals 14.

Against: Baldock, Booth, Bowen, Carnell, Chapman, R Clark, Eyre, C Gibson, Gould, Hunt, Jayes, Lehmann, MacDonald, Marchington, B Martin, C Martin, Moore, Neal, Noe, Nundy, C Palmer, R Palmer, Perkin, Speed, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thompson. Total equals 27.

Abstain: None. Total equals 0.

The Mayor announced that the amendment had fallen and debate on the substantive motion continued.

Members made points including:

- that Labour had previously highlighted the negative impacts a cut in winter fuel allowance would cause when the Conservative Government included it in their manifesto and now the views had switched;
- 85% of pensioners were due to lose the allowance, including many who were vulnerable;
- there were better ways to tackle the country's finances; and
- it was important that the Council sent a clear message that cutting winter fuel allowances was wrong.

Councillor Lehman then proposed a further amendment to the second half of the motion, as set out below, which Councillors Perkin and Charles Gibson, as proposers of the original motion accepted as an alteration to the motion, and to which all Members agreed.

Council resolves to:

1. *Instruct the Leader to write, on behalf of the Council, to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, calling for:*
 - *the policy linking Winter Fuel Payments to Pension Credit receipt to be immediately paused and reviewed*
 - *the introduction of a new threshold to determine eligibility for Winter Fuel Payments*
 - *an Equalities Impact Assessment to be undertaken.*
2. *Request the Leader to write, on behalf of the Council, to all MPs covering Swale, asking for their formal support in halting the changes to Winter Fuel Payment eligibility.*
3. *Increase our ongoing awareness campaigns to maximise uptake of Pension Credits, including the use of council noticeboards, social media, promotion in local press, and targeted letters to those who may be eligible.*

Members then continued to debate the motion and made points including:

- Gave various quotes of those criticising the policy;
- the winter fuel allowance was a lifeline for many;
- cutting the allowance put many at risk of fuel poverty;
- said cutting the allowance would cost the Government more in pension credit and other benefits, and not save money;

- highlighted the health costs of removing the allowance;
- it would be left to charities to plug the gap to assist vulnerable citizens;
- National Labour were letting local Labour down, and urged those in the Labour group to vote in favour of the motion; and
- said that all groups agreed the policy should have been reviewed a long time ago.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Charles Gibson agreed that making cuts that impacted the most vulnerable was always the wrong choice, regardless of political party. He repeated the impact the cuts would have on the vulnerable and urged everyone to vote in favour of the motion.

In summing up, Councillor Perkin said the Labour Government should be accountable for the decision, just as any other political group that had made a wrong decision should be.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(2), a recorded vote was taken, and voting was as follows:

For: Baldock, Booth, Bowen, Brawn, Carnell, Cavanagh, Chapman, R Clark, Eyre, C Gibson, T Gibson, Gould, Harrison, Hunt, Jackson, Jayes, Last, Lehmann, MacDonald, Marchington, B Martin, C Martin, Miller, Moore, Neal, Noe, Nundy, C Palmer, R Palmer, Perkin, Shiel, Speed, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thompson, Tucker, Valls, Watson, Wooster, Winckless and Wise. Total equals 41.

Against: None. Total equals 0.

Abstain: None. Total equals 0.

The Mayor announced there was unanimous support for the motion.

Resolved:

Council notes the recent announcement by the Labour Government to end universal winter fuel payments and restrict eligibility to only those in receipt of Pension Credits and other benefits. Though many agree that universal Winter Fuel Payments are not necessary, Council is deeply concerned that many pensioners on lower and middle incomes will now not receive the payments. Across England and Wales the number of people eligible for winter fuel payments will fall by 10 million (from 11.4 million to only 1.5 million). In Swale the number of pensioners affected by the change in eligibility criteria is 24,056. That means 88.5% of pensioners currently eligible for winter fuel payments will no longer be able to claim the payment from this winter onwards.

Council believes that the Labour Government has set the threshold at which pensioners do not qualify for Winter Fuel Payments far too low. Only those receiving a pension of less than £218.15 a week (or £332.95 a week for couples) are eligible for pension credits. This is significantly lower than the living wage rate.

Council is also concerned by the low take up of pension credit with only 63% of those eligible nationwide receiving them – and over 880,000 pensioners not doing

so. Council recognises the role we have to play to increase awareness of benefits such as Pension Credit to ensure people are aware of the support they are entitled to. Council further notes that the Energy Price Cap is due to rise by 10% in October, which combined by the removal of Winter Fuel Payments will push thousands of local pensioners into fuel poverty.

Council resolves to:

(1) Instruct the Leader to write, on behalf of the Council, to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, calling for:

- **the policy linking Winter Fuel Payments to Pension Credit receipt to be immediately paused and reviewed**
- **the introduction of a new threshold to determine eligibility for Winter Fuel Payments**
- **an Equalities Impact Assessment to be undertaken.**

(2) Request the Leader to write, on behalf of the Council, to all MPs covering Swale, asking for their formal support in halting the changes to Winter Fuel Payment eligibility.

(3) Increase our ongoing awareness campaigns to maximise uptake of Pension Credits, including the use of council noticeboards, social media, promotion in local press, and targeted letters to those who may be eligible.

295 **DBS Checks for Members**

In proposing the recommendations, the Chair of the Standards Committee, Councillor Wise, thanked Members of the Housing and Health Committee for bringing the proposal to the Standards Committee. He said the Council should lead by example and it should be the minimum standard required when elected. Councillor Harrison seconded the recommendations.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 3.1.15 (18), Members moved to the vote.

Resolved:

(1) That Council agreed to introduce basic DBS Checks for elected Members, at the time of their election until the point that their appointment ceases (and for current Members, at the point of approval of this proposal by Council); and that for Members with an existing, relevant DBS check that this can be used as part of this process.

(2) That Council agreed that the Chief Executive, in conjunction with the Leader and support from the Monitoring Officer, to manage the process for failure to complete DBS checks and if the check did reveal an offence.

296 **Review of Current Statement of Principles under the Gambling Act 2005**

The Chair of the Licensing Committee, Councillor Derek Carnell, proposed the recommendation which was seconded by the Vice-Chair, Councillor Tony Winckless.

Resolved:

(1) That the draft Statement of Principles be approved and published no later than 2 January 2025.

297 Political Balance - Allocation of Committee Seats

The Leader introduced the report which set out the changes to the Political Balance and committee seat allocations and memberships as a result of a recent by-election. He updated the meeting that the Labour Group would be giving up a seat on the Licencing Committee. The Leader of the SIA Group advised that his group would be giving up a seat on the Housing and Health Committee. In seconding the recommendations, Councillor Perkin, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, said that she would advise Democratic Services who from her group would fill the two seats allocated to her group once her group had met.

On being put to the vote, Members voted in support.

Resolved:

(1) That the political balance calculation as set out in Appendix II be agreed.

(2) That the seats and appointment of Members allocated to those Committees in accordance with the wishes of Group Leaders as set out in Appendix III be agreed, subject to the inclusion of the two seats gifted, and changes to Members allocated from the Liberal Democrat group.

298 Member Development Strategy

Councillor Jayes, Chair of the Member Development Working Group (MDWG), introduced the report. He thanked the officers who had worked hard on the strategy and asked that Members ask their group representative for any training needs. In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Wooster, Vice-Chair of the MDWG said the Strategy was a perfect example of cross party working at the Council and she thanked the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group for putting the idea forward.

The Leader of the Conservative Group supported the Strategy, but asked that the MDWG considered the personal needs and availability of working Members or those with families, in order that they might attend training and briefing sessions.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group welcomed the document and said she hoped it would assist in the smoother transition of becoming a Councillor.

On being put to the vote, Members voted in support.

Resolved:

(1) That the Member Development Strategy 2024- 27 be adopted.

299 Exclusion of Press and Public

Councillor Richard Palmer raised a point of order under the Local Government Act 1972,

paragraph 10 of schedule 12 and said Members should have the ability to weigh up whether the information in the report was exempt information, and he considered there was a public interest in knowing why the Member had not attended a meeting for six months. He compared a case at KCC which was heard in public and said there were many other examples and Members should vote to decide this. The Mayor advised that the process was for Members to decide whether to go into private session. A debate ensued and all Members in attendance except Councillors Baldock, Carnell, Chapman, Jayes, MacDonald, Nundy, C Palmer, R Palmer and P Stephen voted in favour of the resolution.

Resolved:

(1) That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act:

1. Information relating to any individual.

300 Waiver of six month Councillor attendance rule

As the recommendation was not proposed and no discussion took place, the recommendation was not agreed.

Resolved:

(1) That current personal circumstances impacting on physical health were not an appropriate reason to waive the requirement under s85(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 for Councillor James Hall to attend a council meeting within six months of his last attendance.

301 Standing Orders

At 10pm Members agreed to extend standing orders in order that Council could complete its business.

302 Adjournment

There was an adjournment from 8.45pm to 9:03pm.

Mayor

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