
Council

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 19 February 2025 from 7.10 pm - 10.08 pm.

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

PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Councillors Lloyd Chapman and Kieran Golding.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Lisa Fillery, Robin Harris, Jo Millard, Claire Stanbury and Philip Sutcliffe.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Martyn Cassell and Charlotte Hudson.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Roger Clark, Alex Eyre, Alastair Gould, Rich Lehmann, Peter Marchington and Mark Tucker.

661 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

662 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 January 2025 (Minute Nos 577 – 593) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

663 **Declarations of Interest**

The Mayor announced that there was a dispensation for all Members in discussing the Budget and Council Tax item.

During the discussion on amendments to the budget, Councillors Sarah Stephen, Paul Stephen, Simon Clark and Elliott Jayes declared a non-pecuniary interest as they sat on the Swale Community & Voluntary Services (CVS) organisation.

664 **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor said he had attended the Shepherd Neame Brewery Tour in Faversham and that details had been sent out for Members to attend the Brenley Vineyard Tour in April 2025. He advised that on Easter Saturday there would be a Women's Rugby event at Sheppey Rugby Club to promote Women and Girls' rugby, and to raise funds for his charities. The Mayor said this event would include the first Swale Women's rugby teams as all three teams from across the borough came together to play in a charity game.

665 Questions submitted by the Public

There were no questions submitted by the public.

666 Questions submitted by Members

The Mayor advised that three questions had been submitted by Members, one of which was later withdrawn. He advised that an additional question was submitted past the deadline, but in accordance with rule 3.1.13(iv) he had allowed the question to be put as there might be serious financial implications on the Council and delaying putting the question until a future meeting was not appropriate. The Mayor announced that as Councillor Alex Eyre was not in attendance, Question one could not be put.

Question 2 – Councillor Mike Whiting

The Council has a Policy that allows officers to offer VCS organisations a discount on the market-value rents in council owned properties. However, the Policy specifically excludes Swale House, which means officers are, and always have been, unable to offer policy-compliant discounts to VCS organisations renting space within Swale House.

Would the Chairman of the Economy and Property Committee agree to ask officers to prepare a report for her committee to 1) amend the VCS Rental Policy to include Swale House moving forward, and, 2) amend any existing leases to make them policy compliant?

Response – Chair of Economy and Property

Given the Voluntary and Community Sector Rental Policy was adopted in 2013, I have asked that a review of the policy as whole come forward to the Economy and Property Committee. This will be in light of the reviews of the Councils wider property asset policies that have already taken place since November 2023 including the Property Asset Strategy; Property Procedure Rules; the Disposals Policy and Community Asset Transfer Policy.

Urgent Question – Councillor Lloyd Bowen

A recent article, posted Tuesday 18/02/25, to Kent online regarding Highsted valley quoted The Sittingbourne and Sheppey MP as saying “But now the council has chosen to spend £700,000 of council tax money to fight the independent planning inspector.” I would like to ask the leader if he knows how Mr McKenna arrived at that figure and if such comments could jeopardise the council’s position at all?

Response – Leader

I have, since the question was tabled asked Kevin McKenna MP how he arrived at that figure and his response was that his source had been the Kent Messenger. It is worth reiterating here that there was and remains support not only from Labour Councillors but cross party, to endorse the officer’s recommendation in respect of the application. Whilst I do not intend to get into figures here, let me assure you as leader that there is absolute support and commitment to robustly defending the Council’s position and for that reason I don’t feel that the comments jeopardise the council.

Supplementary question

Is the MP creating a rift between local Labour party members on the decisions of your group?

Response – Leader

That is a question as much for the MP as it is the Labour group but I appreciate you asking it and the sentiments expressed.

667 Leader's Statement

The Leader said:

“As this evening’s meeting is potentially extensive in nature I intend my Leader’s Statement to be the antithesis of me, short and sweet, as there are far more important matters on the Agenda.

It will not of course escaped your notice that we are participating in the latest round of non-musical chairs as we now have a new group in the chamber, Reform UK, headed by its leader Councillor Richard Palmer, and whilst the group is new to us the majority of its Members of course are not so.

Moving on, I would like to say what a privilege and pleasure it was to attend the EKC Sheppey College’s extension groundbreaking ceremony. This of course was a part of the £20million Government funded Sheerness Revival project put together by Swale Borough Council (SBC) under the stewardship of Councillor Monique Bonney. The ceremony was attended by all three ward Members, together with Members from across the Borough, including of course our very own Mayor, Councillor Ben Martin. It really was a landmark event which signals a real intent to invest in the young people on the Isle of Sheppey.

Back on the mainland, encouraging active lives is firmly on the menu. Swale residents can give tennis a try for free from next month thanks to a partnership between SBC and the Lawn Tennis Association. Free parks tennis sessions are being launched on Sunday 2nd March at 10am at King George’s playing fields in Sittingbourne. The sessions will be run by qualified trainers on the first Sunday of every month. The one hour sessions are open to anyone, no matter their ability or age, so there’s hope for me yet. All equipment will be provided making it easy for people to pick up tennis, socialise and get active.

People have learned how to make paper free workshops funded by a £5k injection from the Council’s Town Centre action grant to purchase the equipment needed to run a variety of workshops. The town was of course once home to one of the largest paper making mills in the world and last year marked the centenary of Kemsley Mill producing paper. The workshop took place on the first day of the ‘hands on the past make it last Swale Wassail Festival. The festival is running from 15th to 22nd February and aims to celebrate Sittingbourne’s heritage and the people who lived and worked here in the past and continue the tradition of wassailing by wishing prosperity to those here now and the people to come. Other free drop-in demonstrations including Roman hairdressing, early medieval weaving, singing, poetry writing and horse decorating and blacksmithing. The workshops will all be taking place in the Forum throughout the week culminating in the wassaling parade and Swale Wassail Day on 22nd February.

Moving east of the Borough to conclude my brief statement there will be an opportunity to meet some of your favourite or maybe not so favourite authors at the Faversham Literacy Festival. The event is being supported this year by a grant from SBC. Faversham Literacy Festival CIC received £3.5k from the Council's Town Centre Action Grant to help them put on a ten day festival. The event kicks off on 21st February and there's 9,000 tickets with a mix of free and paid-for events that draws in thousands of visitors to the town. This year's festival will feature more than 60 talks from well-known authors such as Sebastian Faulks and Pam Ayres, wide range of family events and workshops for all ages and is also a chance for up and coming local authors to showcase their work.

Having concluded my whistle stop tour through Swale there is of course so much more that I could have said and added but as I stated in the outset, I'll keep it short and sweet and accordingly that concludes my Leader's Statement."

The Leader of the Conservative Group said he welcomed the news on the Faversham Literacy Festival and wished them luck.

The Leader of the SIA Group advised that the Constitution Working Group would be considering the set timings for responses to speaking as there were now six political groups on the Council.

The Leader of the Reform Group said it was good to hear the coalition's achievements and what could be achieved when Councillors work together.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group said the Faversham Literacy Festival was the jewel in Faversham's crown and she praised the hard work of the organisers.

Councillor Terry Thompson, on behalf of the Green Group, said he enjoyed hearing about events that linked to the past.

In acknowledging the success in levelling up, a Member spoke in support of the cross-party efforts.

The Leader acknowledged all comments.

668 **Nomination of Mayor 2025/26**

Councillor Tim Gibson nominated Councillor Karen Watson for the role of Mayor elect for the 2025/26 civic year and gave a supporting speech. The nomination was seconded by Councillor Ashley Wise who gave a supporting speech. On being put to the vote, the nomination was agreed.

Resolved:

(1) That the Mayor elect for the Civic Year 2025/26 be Councillor Karen Watson.

669 **Nomination of Deputy Mayor 2025/26**

Councillor Sarah Stephens nominated Councillor Derek Carnell for the role of Deputy Mayor elect for the 2025/26 civic year and gave a supporting speech. The nomination was seconded by Councillor Tom Nundy who gave a supporting speech. On being put to

the vote, the nomination was agreed.

Resolved:

(1) That the Deputy Mayor elect for the Civic Year 2025/26 be Councillor Derek Carnell.

670 Pay Policy Report

The Leader proposed the recommendations which were seconded by the Deputy Leader.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat group suggested ways to address minimising the pay gap could be included in a future report.

A Member drew attention that the Head of Place job title should be consistent throughout the report.

Resolved:

(1) That the proposed Pay Policy Statement be agreed for publication on the Council's website.

(2) That the information within the Pay Policy Statement be updated with actual year-end figures before final publication.

671 2025/26 Final Budget and Mid Term Financial Plan including Council Tax Resolutions

The Leader introduced the report which sought Council's approval of the Council Tax Requirement, Revenue Budget and Capital Programme and Council Tax for the year 2025/26, as set out in the report to the Policy and Resources Committee on 5 February 2025, subject to any amendments, and to approve the Council Tax Resolutions set out in Appendix I.

The Leader proposed the recommendations. He said that despite the considerable financial challenges the Council continued to face, the proposals would help to ensure services that local people relied on would continue to be delivered and the Council would continue to work hard work to ensure that it got the most out of every pound spent.

A Member raised a point of order that the minutes of the Policy and Resources committee referred to recommendation (2) had not yet been published. Members agreed that the recommendation be amended to refer to the published report, not the minutes.

Another Member raised an issue on the report being an officer report that should be noted, and following the Monitoring Officer's advice, Members agreed the process to note the Policy & Resources Report and agree the Medium Term Financial Plan.

The Mayor advised that eleven amendments had been received, circulated to Members, and published on the Council's website and in accordance with procedure rule 3.1.16.4, included information and a response from the Section 151 Officer on the impact of

implementing the amendments.

Amendment 1 – National Insurance Contributions

Councillor Tim Gibson proposed that:

“Following the late announcement that the NIC grant funding allocation from central government does not cover the estimated costs arising from the change in threshold at which NIC will be payable by employers and the increase in the NIC rates from 13.8% to 15% it is proposed that reserves are used to offset the additional cost of £50,000.”

Councillor Wise seconded the amendment and reserved his right to speak.

The Mayor read out the response from the Section 151 Officer, as set out on the Agenda.

Members debated the amendment and made points including:

- Supported the amendment but was critical of the radical changes made to the budget after the initial consultation;
- referred to the impact of Central Government’s decision to increase National Insurance contributions on the private sector; and
- could have used the reserves for other worthwhile projects.

In seconding the amendment Councillor Wise said it was an unavoidable situation that had to be addressed.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(5) a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Baldock, Booth, Bowen, Brawn, Carnell, Cavanagh, Cheesman, S Clark, C Gibson, T Gibson, Harrison, Hunt, Jackson, Last, MacDonald, C Martin, Miller, Mishchuk, Moore, Neal, Noe, Nundy, C Palmer, R Palmer, Perkin, Pollard, Shiel, Speed, Thompson, Watson, Wooster, Whiting, Winckless and Wise. Total equals 34.

Against: Councillors Bonney, Jayes, P Stephen and S Stephen. Total equals 4.

Abstain: Councillor B J Martin. Total equals 1.

The Mayor announced the amendment had been agreed.

Amendment 2 – Using Funds from reserves

Councillor Charles Gibson proposed that:

*£100,000 to be taken from reserves to reverse the proposed reduction to playgrounds.
£47,000 to be taken from reserves to reverse the proposed cancellation of members grants*

*£12,500 to be taken from reserves to contribute towards the running of the Hop Festival
£36,000 to be taken from reserves to reverse proposed reduction to the Loneliness project*

£15,000 to be taken from reserves to reintroduce a budget for projects to combat climate change.

Councillor Charles Gibson thanked officers and former and current administration members for their work on the budget. He spoke of the challenges faced and thanked Members across all political groups across the Council for working together on the amendment. Councillor Charles Gibson said he hoped the amendments were a starting point to make the budget more palatable for residents and allow services to be delivered for the whole of Swale. He spoke about the importance of each of the projects outlined in the amendment.

The Mayor referred to the published response from the Section 151 Officer.

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

Members were invited to speak and made comments including:

- The amendment did not have full cross-party support;
- agreed with some elements of the amendment, but not all so could not support the motion;
- spoke in support;
- playgrounds were vital for young families;
- invited all groups to continue to work strategically; and
- all individual projects were laudable, but it was not fiscally responsible to spend over £200k from reserves.

Councillor Baldock reminded Members that all the items were included in the draft budget agreed by the administration originally but were later taken out, so naturally many opposition Members supported their inclusion again. He said they were all important projects delivered by the Council. Referring to the Hop Festival he said that residents from across the whole borough enjoyed attending. Councillor Baldock said Swale Borough Council (SBC) had a realistic approach to climate change.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(5) a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Brawn, Carnell, Cavanagh, Cheesman, S Clark, C Gibson, T Gibson, Harrison, Jackson, Jayes, Last, MacDonald, C Martin, Miller, Mishchuk, Nundy, C Palmer, R Palmer, Perkin, Pollard, Shiel, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thompson, Watson, Wooster, Whiting, Winckless and Wise. Total equals 31.

Against: Councillors Booth, Bowen, Hunt, Moore, Neal, Noe and Speed. Total equals 7.

Abstain: Councillor B J Martin. Total equals 1.

The Mayor announced the amendment had been agreed.

Amendment 3 – Planning fees and sports facilities freeze

Councillor Lloyd Bowen proposed the following amendment:

Amend the fees and charges in the following areas:

Pre planning advice Amend planning advice fees as follows:

- *for major applications for 10-29 properties to £2954.17 + vat,*
- *major applications for 30-49 properties £100/per property + VAT.*
- *for LARGE major (50+ houses or flats) of £100 per house/flat +VAT and for commercial over 10,000spm a fee of £5000+VAT.*

Sports facility fees:

- *Freeze facility fees at the current rate for junior/mini football the costs covered from the proposed increases to other pitch fees.*

Councillor Bowen acknowledged the response from the Section 151 Officer and said the situation should be kept under review. He said the pre-planning fees were skewed against individual householders and he said developers, who made a profit, paid less. Referring to the proposal to freeze pitch fees he said those costs were met by the proposed increases to other pitch fees, and would be a positive benefit to health, particularly to young people.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor Julien Speed said the band of 10 to 49 houses in planning fees was too wide and he explained the reasons for the amendment. He said developers cost the Council a lot of money and it was reasonable to charge them more. Turning to the sports facilities fees, Councillor Speed highlighted that there was an obesity crises amongst young people and freezing pitch fees would encourage a healthy lifestyle and was cost neutral.

Members were invited to speak and comments included:

- Liked the proposal but was cautious and supported the Section 151 Officer's advice to monitor, if the amendment was agreed, as there were risks that if planning advice was not sought, fees would not be received;
- suggested a report before the next budget on the outcome of implementing the amendments, if they were agreed;
- spoke in support and said pre-application fees had always been too low, particularly when considering the profits made by developers; and
- supported the proposal and hoped it would encourage better sustainable development from large developers.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(5) a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Booth, Bowen, Brawn, Carnell, Cavanagh, Cheesman, S Clark, C Gibson, T Gibson, Harrison, Hunt, Jackson, Jayes, Last, MacDonald, B J Martin, C Martin, Miller, Mishchuk, Moore, Neal, Noe, Nundy, C Palmer, R Palmer, Perkin, Pollard, Shiel, Speed, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thompson, Watson, Wooster, Whiting, Winckless and Wise. Total equals 39.

Against: None. Total equals 0.

Abstain: None. Total equals 0.

The Mayor announced the amendment had been agreed.

A Member then raised a point of order at 3.3.3 of the Constitution (Process for developing the budget and policy framework), but following discussion with the Monitoring Officer, the Mayor advised that the meeting could proceed.

Amendment 4 – Extending car parking fees

Councillor Bowen proposed the following amendment:

Extend car parking fees on Leysdown Promenade from March to December. Currently March to October.

The Mayor drew attention to the Section 151 Officer's response.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor Andy Booth referred to the Section 151 Officer's comments and clarified the amendment was not to receive additional funding through enforcement but through legitimate parking.

Members were invited to speak and made comments including:

- Members should not be making policies 'on the hoof' at a budget meeting; and
- there was validity in considering the proposal but the proposals should be considered at the relevant service committee and then maybe for next year's budget.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(5) a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Booth, Bowen, C Gibson, Hunt, MacDonald, C Martin, Moore, Neal, Noe, Perkin, Speed and Thompson. Total equals 12.

Against: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Brawn, Carnell, Cavanagh, Cheesman, S Clark, T Gibson, Harrison, Jackson, Jayes, Last, Miller, Mishchuk, Nundy, C Palmer, R Palmer, Pollard, Shiel, P Stephen, S Stephen, Watson, Wooster, Whiting, Winckless and Wise. Total equals 26.

Abstain: Councillor B J Martin. Total equals 1.

The Mayor announced that the amendment had fallen.

Amendment 5 – Raise funds from amending car parking charges

Before proposing the amendment, Councillor Bowen clarified the response from the Section 151 Officer who confirmed the times for parking charges.

Councillor Perkin proposed the following amendments:

Raise £38,000 from adding charging to the two car parks on Sheppey originally set for

*charging in the Parking Review 2024 then amended at Community committee.
£30,000 scrapping 30 min minimum parking £5,983 SRA saving by merging Community committee with housing and health.*

Creating £73,983

To be used to introduce a flat rate parking charge across the Borough between 6pm and midnight at £2.50

Estimated cost £70,000 with the remaining to be used to reduce the budget gap

Councillor Hannah Perkin referred to the changes that were made to parking charges at the Community & Leisure Committee meeting and considered that the decision made at that meeting undermined the work the parking cross party working group had carried out. She referred to the imbalance of parking charges in different parts of the borough. Councillor Perkin drew attention to the parking issues in Faversham and how emergency services had raised concerns.

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

Members were invited to debate the amendment and made points including:

- The parking charges do need to be considered again but should be looked at by the Community & Leisure Committee with a proper consultation;
- the amendment was not in line with the decision made at the Community & Leisure Committee meeting;
- referred to the impact on the voluntary sector on the Isle of Sheppey;
- sought clarification on the figures and on which Isle of Sheppey car parks were referred to;
- spoke of the impact of parking at the Ship on the Shore, Sheerness public house;
- the detrimental impact on Isle of Sheppey residents outweighed any financial benefit
- there was a lack of evidence of costs and figures in the amendment;
- could not support without a proper consultation and more detailed information on the impacts;
- there was a lack of detail and too many estimates on the amendment;
- referred to the criticism on the subject on social media by the public and Members;
- supported the objectives for cheaper evening parking but did not support the delivery; and
- the amendment warranted further policy work to understand the logistics and impact.

Councillor Charles Gibson clarified that the amendment should have referred to three, not two car parks. He referred to the decision made by Budget Council the previous year and said the amendment was a reversal of that decision. Councillor Charles Gibson said he was glad so many Councillors were keen to reopen the parking review and for the Community & Leisure Committee to look at it again, and he added that the current policy did not support the whole of Swale.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(5) a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors C Gibson, C Martin, Perkin and Thompson. Total equals 4.

Against: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Booth, Bowen, Brawn, Carnell, Cavanagh, Cheesman, S Clark, T Gibson, Harrison, Hunt, Jackson, Jayes, Last, MacDonald, Miller, Mishchuk, Moore, Neal, Noe, Nundy, C Palmer, R Palmer, Pollard, Shiel, Speed, P Stephen, S Stephen, Watson, Wooster, Whiting, Winckless and Wise. Total equals 34.

Abstain: Councillor B J Martin. Total equals 1.

The Mayor announced the amendment had fallen.

Amendment 6 – Use of funds from increase in car parking charges to financially support Swale CVS

Councillor Baldock raised a point of order as he said the figures did not add up. The Section 151 Officer explained the theory behind the amendment, that £15,000 would be awarded to the CVS, and the balance would go to reserves.

The Mayor said that the Section 151 Officer was satisfied the amendment was balanced and he drew attention to the Section 151 Officer's comments as published.

Councillor Perkin proposed:

£38,000 from adding charging to the two car parks on Sheppey originally set for charging in the Parking Review 2024 then amended at Community committee. To be used to reinstate the £15,000 reduction to Swale community voluntary service with the remaining £18,000 to go towards reducing budget gap.

Councillor Perkin referred to the different activities and projects that the CVS supported and how important the service was to residents. She said the Chair of the CVS had described how the £15k reduction had a serious impact on the services that could be delivered and she said it would impact some of the most vulnerable residents. Councillor Perkin said she hoped that this or another amendment would result in not having to cut £15k out of one of the most valuable services the borough provided.

Councillor Charles Gibson seconded the amendment and reserved his right to speak.

Members debated the amendment and made points including:

- The parking issues were considered by the Community & Leisure Committee;
- raised discrepancies in the calculations and number of car parks;
- it was not balanced to judge parking in Faversham with those in Minster as there was more on street parking available to visitors in Minster, and Queenborough was not as busy as Sittingbourne and Faversham;
- supported the objective but not the method;
- could not support the mechanism to reinstate the £15k; and
- the CVS had been informed of possible funding from the UK SPF Funding which could make up the loss of funding.

Councillor Charles Gibson said it was best policy and practice to convene a working

group, follow their recommendations and not to change the recommendations ad hoc with one third of the Council in attendance. He was pleased that so many Members were keen on the intent to protect the CVS but disappointed that others did not put forward amendments to do so.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(5) a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors C Gibson, C Martin, Perkin and Thompson. Total equals 4.

Against: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Booth, Bowen, Brawn, Carnell, Cavanagh, Cheesman, S Clark, T Gibson, Harrison, Hunt, Jackson, Jayes, Last, MacDonald, Miller, Mishchuk, Moore, Neal, Noe, Nundy, C Palmer, R Palmer, Pollard, Shiel, Speed, Watson, Wooster, Whiting, Winckless and Wise. Total equals 32.

Abstain: Councillors B J Martin, P Stephen and S Stephen. Total equals 3.

The Mayor announced the amendment had fallen.

Amendment 7 – Use of funds from increase in car parking charges to reinstate cuts to public conveniences

Councillor Perkin proposed:

£38,000 from adding charging to the two car parks on Sheppey originally set for charging in the Parking Review 2024 then amended at Community committee. To be used to reinstate the cuts to public conveniences.

Councillor Perkin said that public conveniences were not a luxury but a necessity ensuring dignity, comfort and accessibility and by restoring funding to the essential services. The Council would be showing that it valued the well-being of everyone in the community and the revenue from fair car parking charging would contribute to this.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor Charles Gibson said public conveniences were vital and must be protected.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(5) a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors C Gibson, B J Martin, C Martin, Perkin and Thompson. Total equals 5.

Against: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Booth, Bowen, Brawn, Carnell, Cavanagh, Cheesman, S Clark, T Gibson, Harrison, Hunt, Jackson, Jayes, Last, MacDonald, Miller, Mishchuk, Moore, Neal, Noe, Nundy, C Palmer, R Palmer, Shiel, Speed, P Stephen, S Stephen, Watson, Wooster, Whiting, Winckless and Wise. Total equals 33.

Abstain: Councillor Pollard. Total equals 1.

The Mayor announced the amendment had fallen.

Amendment 8 – make savings by merging the Community and Leisure Committee with the Housing and Health Committee and financially support Swale CVS

Councillor Perkin proposed:

To merge Community committee and Health and Housing committee saving £5,983 To disband the economy and property committee and move its function to Policy and resources saving £5,983 Resultant £11,966 to be used to fund Swale CVS.

The Mayor drew attention to the Section 151 Officer's published comments.

Councillor Perkin acknowledged the 'landscaping' of Local Government was changing and said it was crucial to adapt to remain responsive to residents' needs whilst maximising funding. She said some current committees overlapped responsibilities, creating inefficiencies and divided focus. Councillor Perkin questioned whether a more streamlined approach would be more efficient. Finally, Councillor Perkin referred to the recent Peer Review which suggested rationalising committees, and using the savings to support services that directly impacted residents.

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

Members were invited to debate the amendment and made comments including:

- Could not support as it was not the right process at Budget Council;
- did not want to take the opportunity away from all 47 Councillors playing a part in engagement and decision making;
- could use the UK SPF funding to benefit Swale CVS and other projects that would benefit the community and voluntary sector;
- full debate on the organisation of the committee structure, involving all Members was needed;
- could not change the committee structure at Budget Council;
- committee structure did need looking at but impacts and implications needed to be considered;
- merging committees could lead to more frequent meetings and could lead to the independent panel increasing the Special Responsibility Allowance;
- decreasing the number of committees would be a backwards step as one of the purposes of moving from the Cabinet to the Committee system was to allow more Members to have power;
- some committees might appear to have short agendas but there was a lot of work going on in sub-committees and working groups; and
- reducing committees would put additional burden on a small group of Members.

Councillor Charles Gibson said that changing of decisions and policies happened quite frequently and making the decision to change the numbers of Committees could be carried out in various ways. He said the amendment would allow every Member of the Council to be a member of three service committees and all could be involved in working groups, which often excluded those that worked during the day.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(5) a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors C Gibson, B J Martin, C Martin and Perkin. Total equals 4.

Against: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Booth, Bowen, Brawn, Carnell, Cavanagh, Cheesman, S Clark, T Gibson, Harrison, Hunt, Jackson, Jayes, Last, MacDonald, Miller, Mishchuk, Moore, Neal, Noe, Nundy, C Palmer, R Palmer, Pollard, Shiel, Speed, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thompson, Watson, Wooster, Whiting, Winckless and Wise. Total equals 35.

Abstain: None. Total equals 0.

The Mayor announced the amendment had fallen.

Amendment 9 – Make savings by the Economy and Property Committee functions reverting to the Policy & Resources Committee, and financially support additional biodiversity planting

Councillor Perkin proposed:

To disband the economy and property committee with its functions reverting to P&R saving £5,983 Utilise this to reduce fund additional biodiversity planting. (Sea grass or native bluebells)

The Mayor drew attention to the Section 151 Officer's published comments.

Councillor Charles Gibson seconded the motion.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(5) a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors C Gibson, B J Martin, C Martin and Perkin. Total equals 4.

Against: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Booth, Bowen, Brawn, Carnell, Cavanagh, Cheesman, S Clark, T Gibson, Harrison, Hunt, Jackson, Jayes, Last, MacDonald, Miller, Mishchuk, Moore, Neal, Noe, Nundy, C Palmer, R Palmer, Pollard, Shiel, Speed, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thompson, Watson, Wooster, Whiting, Winckless and Wise. Total equals 35.

Abstain: None. Total equals 0.

The Mayor announced the amendment had fallen.

Amendment 10 – Make savings by merging the Housing and Health Committee with the Community and Leisure Committee

Councillor Perkin proposed:

To merge the housing and health committee and the community committee resulting in a £5,983 saving to go towards reducing budget gap.

Councillor Perkin was critical of some Members who laughed at the Liberal Democrat's efforts to submit amendments. She said, given the different conversations she had with various Members from different groups about the need to rationalise the work of the

Community and Leisure Committee, and the Housing and Health Committee as there was so much crossover, she would be surprised if Members voted against the amendment. Councillor Perkin said the same presentations had been given at both Committees, and by merging the Committees it would follow the Local Government Association's advice to reduce the amount of committee meetings and there would be extra money to put into the Council's priorities.

Councillor Charles Gibson seconded the amendment.

A Member said it would be wrong to remove the Community and Leisure Committee at such an important time of discussing the leisure contract. In response, Councillor Perkin said it was not removing but merging the committees and the work strands would remain the same.

Other Members made comments including:

- Changing committees should not be considered at Budget Full Council, but should be looked at; and
- applauded the Liberal Democrat group for putting amendments in and said they should continue to do so.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(5) a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors C Gibson, B J Martin, C Martin and Perkin. Total equals 4.

Against: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Booth, Bowen, Brawn, Carnell, Cavanagh, Cheesman, S Clark, T Gibson, Harrison, Hunt, Jackson, Jayes, Last, MacDonald, Miller, Mishchuk, Moore, Neal, Noe, Nundy, C Palmer, R Palmer, Pollard, Shiel, Speed, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thompson, Watson, Wooster, Whiting, Winckless and Wise. Total equals 35.

Abstain: None. Total equals 0.

The Mayor announced the amendment had fallen.

Amendment 11 – Take out £100k savings from playground reduction and fill shortfall by increasing all charges to 3%, and charge for coach parking on land opposite shingle bank, and withdrawal from Sheerness gateway

The proposer of the amendment, Councillor Elliott Jayes, with the agreement of the seconder of the amendment, Councillor Tom Nundy withdrew Amendment 11.

After discussing all the amendments, Members debated the substantive motion.

Councillor Bowen, leader of the Conservative group, acknowledged that the Revenue Budget was balanced, but reserves had to be used, with additional reserves used as a result of the amendments. He referred to the increase in Council Tax, reminding Members that the Labour Government had promised to freeze Council Tax. Councillor Bowen spoke about some Government grants that were ceasing, whilst new grants were being introduced. He spoke of the savings made from some cuts to services and said the budget pushed the Council to further problems and he urged that further work for

proper efficiencies in the future be carried out. Councillor Bowen said dedicated officers, Council Members and residents cared about making every penny and pound count but he could not support the budget in its current form. He said the Council should look at funding the essential services first then see what funds were remaining to carry out some of the nicer projects.

Councillor Baldock, leader of the SIA group, reminded Members that much of the budget went out for consultation under the coalition but some of the items were then removed by the administration, and then put back under the agreed amendments. He said there were inconsistencies from the previous speaker. Councillor Baldock spoke of historical budgets and decisions made, when Council Tax was not increased or was even reduced, that had resulted in the current financial situation. He said local government had borne the brunt of austerity and underfunding which impacted on many residents. Councillor Baldock said the budget balanced fiscal responsibility whilst still delivering for residents and enabling groups to support their communities.

Councillor Richard Palmer, leader of the Reform UK group, thanked finance officers for their hard work on the budget and their support for Parish Councils. He said that whilst difficult decisions had to be made, he felt comfortable with the budget and going forward everyone should work together to make those decisions whilst working for the best for residents.

Councillor Perkin, leader of the Liberal Democrat group, said local government had been 'starved' year on year by central government, council tax being frozen and the crippling economy that impacted many people. She said she was pleased that amendment two was agreed, acknowledging groups working together to agree a set of priorities. Councillor Perkin said she was surprised at the lack of support for some of her group's amendments but she was proud of her group for working together on these. She said her group would continue to be a constructive opposition to the administration.

A Member thanked those that put forward amendments and hoped that some of the suggestions to consider changes via other channels would be looked at soon. She referred to historical decisions made not to increase Council tax, and the resultant consequences.

The deputy leader, Councillor Wise, thanked officers and Members. He said the budget attempted to strike a balance between limiting savings from services so they were as comprehensive as the financial position allowed, in a time of sustained demand on statutory services. Councillor Wise said the budget, as amended, could and should command support whilst acknowledging that no budget would ever contain what everyone desired. He said there was still work to do to continue to seek savings and generate income to work towards a more balanced budget. Councillor Wise said he was confident that through committees and political compromise, groups could work together.

The Leader, Councillor Tim Gibson, gave thanks to all the group leaders.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(5) a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Brawn, Carnell, Cavanagh, Cheesman, S Clark, T Gibson, Harrison, Jackson, Jayes, Last, MacDonald, Miller, Mishchuk, Nundy, C

Palmer, R Palmer, Pollard, Shiel, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thompson, Watson, Wooster, Winckless and Wise. Total equals 27.

Against: Councillors Booth, Bowen, Hunt, Moore, Neal, Noe, Speed and Whiting. Total equals 8.

Abstain: Councillors C Gibson, B J Martin, C Martin and Perkin. Total equals 4.

The Mayor announced the motion had been agreed.

Resolved:

(1) That Members note the Director of Resources opinion on the robustness of the budget estimates and the adequacy of reserves.

(2) That the report at Item 5 of the Policy and Resources Committee of 5 February 2025 on the Medium Term Financial Plan and the 2025/26 revenue and capital budgets be approved.

(3) That the resolutions contained in Appendix 1 be approved.

(4) That in accordance with the proposals contained with AI 2014 No. 165 that a recorded vote be taken on the 2025/26 Budget and Council Tax and the Budget be approved including the agreed amendments.

672 Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26

The Leader introduced the report which set out and sought approval of the Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26 and the Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators. He proposed the recommendation which was seconded by the Deputy Leader.

Resolved:

(1) That the Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26 and the Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators be approved.

673 Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned from 7.40 pm to 7:55 pm and from 8.45 pm to 9 pm.

674 Standing Orders

The Mayor extended Standing Orders from 10 pm to 10.30 pm in order that Council could complete its business.

Mayor

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