
Community and Leisure Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 21 January 2025 from 7.00 pm - 8.34 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Shelley Cheesman, Elliott Jayes (Vice-Chair), Mark Last, Charlie Miller, Lee-Anne Moore, Pete Neal, Tom Nundy, Richard Palmer (Chair), Hannah Perkin, Ashley Shiel, Terry Thompson, Karen Watson and Tony Winckless.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Martyn Cassell, Steph Curtis, Rachel Fowler, Jay Jenkins and Kellie MacKenzie.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Alex Wells.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Dolley Wooster.

APOLOGY: Councillor Tara Noe.

559 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

560 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Tom Nundy declared an interest in respect of item 'Swale Community Safety Priority Setting Consultation' as he was a member of the Community Safety Partnership.

561 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 September 2024 (Minute Nos. 195 – 204) and the Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting held on 11 December 2024 (Minute Nos. 493 – 497) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct records.

562 **Public Space CCTV Policy Review**

The Community Services Manager introduced the report which provided an overview of proposed changes to the Swale Public Space CCTV Policy 2025 – 2028 as set out at Appendix I of the report.

The Chair invited comments from Members and points raised included:

- Supported the recommendation and thanked the officer for the report;
- did any of the CCTV cameras have facial recognition built-in?;
- sought reassurance that the Council were not supporting firms which provided cameras for surveillance that breached human rights as highlighted by Amnesty International?;
- were the Council continuing to invest in their cameras;
- what were the alternatives for providing less intrusive cameras?;
- had visited the CCTV control centre and had been very impressed with the large areas covered by CCTV;
- what was the cost of the cameras?;
- did the Council own any portable CCTV cameras?; and

- the Council needed to ensure 'ethical' purchasing.

In response to questions, the Community Services Manager advised that the Council's CCTV did not currently have facial recognition. The Council did have a contract which was managed by HickVision, one of the companies raised by Amnesty International, and she referred to paragraph 2.3 of the report and the addition of Section 6.17 in Appendix I to address concerns about such companies. The Community Services Manager said the less intrusive alternatives included increasing police patrols in an area before installing CCTV. With regard to the cost of CCTV cameras, this was dependent on location and requirements, but generally each camera cost approximately £2,500. The Council owned approximately five portable CCTV cameras which were used to determine whether permanent CCTV was needed within a particular area. The Council also had two portable CCTV cameras for fly-tipping offences.

Councillor Ashley Shiel proposed the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Tony Winckless.

Resolved:

- (1) That the refresh of the Public Space CCTV Policy be approved and adopted by the Policy and Resources Committee.**

563 Swale Community Safety Priority Setting Consultation

The Community Services Manager introduced the report which provided an overview of the Swale Community Safety Strategic Assessment process and requested feedback from the Committee on the current Swale Community Safety Partnership (CSP) performance as well as any emerging issues it felt the CSP may need to focus on.

The Chair invited comments from Members and points raised included:

- Had trains stations in Swale been considered as a priority? This might improve liaisons with the British Transport Police, Kent Police and the Council;
- welcomed the inclusion of domestic abuse;
- the education of men and boys about domestic abuse against women and girls should be a priority;
- noted that Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) had increased and with the closure of New House Youth Club, Sittingbourne and others, it was so important that engagement with young people needed to be a priority;
- domestic abuse was not just against women;
- domestic abuse was a 'disease' within our society, and it was extremely important that it was a CSP priority;
- concerned about the rise in incel and misogynist terrorism, but did not consider this was a 'new' threat but should be included as a new category;
- incel and misogyny terrorism should be included in the Equality and Diversity statement and it made clear that domestic abuse affected women in a more disproportionate way than it did men;
- needed to capture the lack of reporting due to digital disadvantages;
- needed to be aware that ASB was not always caused by young people;
- Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) should be considered separately to domestic abuse;

- local charities working with the Council may be able to explore ways of encouraging people to report crimes;
- ASB at Thistle Hill, Minster was a huge issue;
- ASB involving motorbikes at Barton's Hill and The Leas, Minster needed to be investigated and, perhaps signage could be looked at as the first line of defence;
- requested that police officer resources on the Isle of Sheppey be looked at as it was currently very low; and
- there were nuisance vehicles at The Spinney, Leysdown and in rural areas on the Isle of Sheppey.

The Community Services Manager responded to points raised. She agreed to feed-in concerns regarding train stations and explore whether an action could be included. She said she would be surprised if domestic abuse did not continue to be a priority for the CSP, and engagement and the education around VAWG at schools would continue and that The White Ribbon campaign was being refreshed and would feature as an action. Funding for youth services was reducing and would be a risk from April 2025, so would be discussed at the next partnership meeting. She reported that incel and misogynistic terrorism could be considered as a separate point. With regard to the lack of reporting due to digital disadvantages, the Community Services Manager said it was a concern and the Police did undertake Public Perception Surveys in locations where it was an issue but agreed that the problem needed to be considered further.

The Community Services Manager said they were aware of the issues at Thistle Hill and were looking to address them. Nuisance vehicles would be raised as something to be looked into. She reported that policing levels were monitored through the CSP and would feedback locations of concern.

The Head of Environment and Leisure said that vandalism caused by nuisance vehicles in the Council's open spaces was increasing and costly to repair.

The Chair encouraged Members to feedback any ward issues to the two CSP representatives.

Councillor Elliott Jayes proposed the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Tom Nundy.

Resolved:

- (1) That the feedback from the Communities and Leisure Committee informed its strategic assessment and priority setting process for 2025/26.***

564 Annual Parking Report 2023-24

The Head of Environment and Leisure introduced the 2023-24 financial year annual parking report which highlighted the key elements of the parking services operation in Swale. It detailed the principles followed and provided financial and performance statistics. Members were asked to consider and approve the report for publication on the Council's website.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions, and points raised included:

- Thanked officers for the report and the work undertaken;
- drew attention that some of the deployment maps had been duplicated;
- shocked about the high level of physical and verbal threats to Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) and considered they did a great job carrying out a difficult job;
- how did the Council keep CEOs safe, did they work in pairs or have panic alarms?;
- some yellow lines had faded in Faversham Town Centre, could these be repainted as Penalty Charge Notices could not be issued;
- pavement parking was a real concern, especially for Kent Fire and Rescue Service;
- requested that CEOs check The Butts Primary School, Brewery Road, Milton Regis, as aware of concerns;
- had witnessed CEOs not adequately checking parking at schools, so the hot spot maps were not necessarily proof of anything;
- the handy guide at Appendix 4 should be shared with Parish and Town Councils and included on the Council's Facebook page;
- did Kent Police investigate assaults on the CEOs, if not it should be fed back to the CSP?; and
- it was important to include percentages within the report.

In response, the Head of Environment and Leisure agreed to amend the duplicated geographical maps. He said the Council were actively monitoring the code red, code yellow and code blue and offered support packages and were 'buddied-up' when patrolling high risk areas. All assaults on the CEOs were reported to the Police but they did not always attend. With regard to pavement parking, he referred to Appendix 4 (Handy guide on who can enforce what) and said that in this regard they could only enforce where a restriction was in place.

Councillor Elliott Jayes proposed the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Tony Winckless.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be updated as minuted and approved for publication on the Council's website.

565 Cashless Parking Payments Contract Extension

The Chair made it clear that despite the heading, payment could still be made by cash.

The Parking Services Analyst introduced the report which summarised the possible options the Council could take once the current cashless parking contracted expired on 2 July 2025. The report included a recommended option of actioning the extension clause within the existing contract with RingGo UK Ltd, until 2 July 2027 in order to explore further options.

Members considered the report. A Member spoke about scammers using fake QR Codes for payment at car parks and asked that the Council ensured that residents were protected. The Head of Environment and Leisure said they had made it clear to RingGo UK that QR Codes were not to be used. He added that ticket machines were checked everyday for any unauthorised QR Code stickers which were removed.

Councillor Elliott Jayes proposed the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Lee-Anne Moore.

Resolved:

(1) That the extension of the Cashless Parking contract with RingGo UK Ltd to run until 2 July 2027 be approved.

566 **Swale Leisure Contract Options**

The Leisure & Technical Services Manager introduced the report which detailed the progress made by the Member Working Group for future leisure services and asked the Committee to agree with the Working Group's recommendation to proceed with an external procurement process for the Swale Leisure contract from April 2027 on a 10-year plus 5-year basis.

The Leisure Consultant reported that following 'soft' market testing 10 responses had been received six of which were from the main leisure operators, and all had confirmed that they were interested in tendering. The Leisure Consultant reported that the leisure operators were asked a series of questions and they all confirmed they would: be interested in the inclusion of Faversham Pools; expected a 10+ 5-year contract; prefer a shared area of risk; were happy to consider some capital investment; expected utility benchmarking; preferred that the operator delivered swimming lessons; and would consider the removal of car parking costs as a negative. They also all confirmed experience of developing approaches to reduce carbon consumption and use of greener energy solutions.

The Chair invited comments from Members and points raised included:

- Thanked officers for the report;
- Sheerness swimming pool had a disabled friendly gymnasium but there had been issues with opening hours being reduced. The contractor needed to supply hours that mirrored other gyms on the Isle of Sheppey;
- had the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) been taken into consideration?;
- important that solar panels be provided on leisure centres to save money;
- was the Council a Sports England (SE) Funding Partner?;
- how did officers think devolution would impact the leisure market?;
- thanked the Members Working Group and officers for their work; and
- were any other Kent Local Authorities leisure contracts close to ending?.

In response, the Leisure & Technical Services Manager said they were aware of review and changes at Sheerness Pool disabled gym (Innerva Suite) and were working with the current operator, to ensure the opening hours were flexible, in line with demand and consistent. The soft market testing documents had referred to the LUF project and that it would be an enhanced facility for the new contract.

The Head of Environment and Leisure said officers had worked closely with SE and with Active Kent and Medway and the Committee would be updated on this in due course. The Members Working Group had discussed devolution, and the Leisure Consultant said that with regard to devolution, there were two different local authority operating models she was aware of. The Head of Environment and Leisure explained that the

Members Working Group had considered the impact of devolution and considered that having a contract set pre-devolution and protecting the service for the residents of Swale was the right approach.

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods reported that senior officers would continue to engage with neighbouring authorities and as devolution progressed it was about being 'custodians' and securing what was best for the borough.

Councillor Elliott Jayes proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Mark Last.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Member Working Group's recommendation to proceed with a procurement process for delivery of an outsourced leisure contract on a 10 plus 5-year basis be agreed.**
- (2) That the Member Working Group continued in order to oversee specification development ahead of tender.**
- (3) That officers worked with the Members Working Group in finalising the tender specification and documentation and proceed with the tender.**

567 Forward Decisions Plan

A Member asked that the Forward Decisions Plan (FDP) should be for a longer period than it currently was, he said this would also benefit officers.

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods advised that officers were looking at how the FDP could be better used moving forward and that it would be critical in assisting Members and officers to plan and resource as devolution approached.

The Head of Environment and Leisure referred to the Overnight Parking Sheppey Consultation and Options and reported that over 1,000 responses to the consultation had been received. He provided an update on the Built Facilities Strategy that the Committee had agreed at their meeting on 6 March 2024, subject to any amendments by SE. He reported that SE had raised no concerns, and the Strategy would be published on the Council's website.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.**

568 Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no need to pass this resolution as Appendix III for item 9, Swale Leisure Contract Options, was not discussed at the meeting.

569 Swale Leisure Contract - Exempt Appendix III

This item was not discussed.

Chair

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

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