
Environment and Climate Change Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 15 January 2025 from 7.00 pm - 9.16 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Roger Clark, Carole Jackson, Mark Last, Rich Lehmann (Chair), Charlie Miller, Julien Speed, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen, Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster (Vice-Chair).

APOLOGIES: Councillors Alex Eyre, Claire Martin, Pete Neal and Ashley Shiel.

543 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

544 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 November 2024 (Minute Nos. 303 – 310) were taken as read, agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

545 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

546 **Climate and Ecological Emergency Annual Report DRAFT**

The Chair raised a concern that the proposed devolution of local councils would distract from the Climate and Ecological Emergency and would inhibit in allowing local interaction on the subject.

The Climate Change Officer introduced the report which set out progress on the Council's Climate and Ecological Emergency targets to achieve net zero carbon for the Council by 2025 and net zero carbon across the Borough by 2030. She referred to the sixth annual progress report set out at Appendix I of the report which would go to Full Council at the end of January 2025. She highlighted the actions completed and noted that whilst some targets may not be met, the Council had achieved a lot and remained committed to achieving net-zero across the borough.

The Chair invited comments from Members, and points raised included:

- Welcomed the report;
- how much weight was given in the document to emerging policy in terms of instructing developers particularly given that there was a real risk the Local Plan would not be adopted due to devolution?;
- welcomed the use of the Household Support Fund to continue the work of the Fuel and Winter Poverty advisors;
- when would the Council start engaging with local businesses about reducing their carbon footprint?;
- excellent to see trees being planted, but were there any after care issues such as vandalism and had that been factored-in?;
- would this be the council's last action plan?;
- referred to the roll-out of training in local secondary schools and asked how this

was progressing?;

- what were officers doing to pull-in internal and external funding?;
- the labour group met to discuss the priorities and then fed-back their points to officers, hoped the other groups did the same;
- the communication with local residents was important and it was good to see the progress made as a result of their input;
- improvements to recycling were about changing behaviours and this needed to be a focus of the new Action Plan; and
- promoting recycling away from kerbside collections needed to be addressed and communication with residents was key.

In response, the Climate Change Officer said that they would always refer developers to policies included within the emerging Local Plan and details from the emerging Local Plan would be factored into the Action Plan. The Council's Economic Development Team signposted businesses to the Climate and Ecological Emergency targets. With regard to the planting of trees, she reported that the survival rate across the borough had improved over the course of the action plan, and it was now high. The Climate Change Officer advised that officers were already working on the new Action Plan and the draft would be considered by the Committee at their next meeting on 18 March 2025.

The Climate & Ecological Emergency Project Officer reported that a trial of Carbon Literature Training was being delivered to Year 9 pupils at the Queen Elizabeth Secondary School, Faversham. He said that six science teachers had received the training and were now able to deliver the training to the Year 9 Pupils. The aim was that every child at the school would leave with a certificate for Carbon Literature Training. The Climate & Ecological Emergency Project Officer advised that he would check progress at the school in March 2025. He would then make any necessary changes to the training before rolling it out to other schools in the borough.

With regard to funding, the Climate Change Officer said that Heads of Services had worked internally with Members on budgets going forward. Officers worked closely with other local authorities to secure any external funding and the Council had secured funding from the Capability Fund from Kent County Council (KCC) for more Active Travel; and from the Great Big Green Week. Officers sought to secure any funding streams that were available.

The Head of Environment and Leisure reported that even if SBC achieved net zero carbon, they were not the major contributor to it across the borough, and the new draft action plan for consideration in March 2025, focused on influencing businesses and others to reduce their carbon emissions. He referred to funding secured via the Local Authority Tree Fund scheme which had enabled the Council to plant approximately 50,000 trees across the borough. The vast majority of this type of work was funded externally.

The Head of Environment and Leisure agreed that to encourage more recycling better communication and that behaviour change was key. He spoke about the importance of removing waste contaminants such as food and textiles.

The Chair spoke about new legislation that would add costs to certain wastes and that a map of places that could recycle items the Council did not collect such as electricals and textiles should be promoted.

The Environmental Services Manager reported that the Council were looking at opportunities and organisations that would collect and dispose of electricals and textiles.

The Head of Environment and Leisure advised that the report would be considered at the Full Council meeting on 29 January 2025.

Councillor Dolley Wooster proposed the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Ashley Wise.

The Chair thanked the Climate Change Officer and Climate & Ecological Emergency Project Officer for attending the meeting.

Resolved:

(1) That the Annual Climate and Ecological Emergency Progress report be noted.

547 Barbeques in Public Spaces - Review

The Leisure & Technical Services Manager introduced the report which reminded Members of the Motion proposed and agreed by Full Council to ban the use of disposable barbeques in the Council's open spaces. The report provided updates following a further year of monitoring locally by Kent Fire & Rescue Services in 2024 and identified the experience from neighbouring authorities who had enforcement powers to ban the use of barbeques through byelaws and Public Space Protection Orders (PSPO). The report summarised the information previously provided and made a recommendation not to proceed with a specific ban on the use of disposable barbeques in Council open spaces.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, and points raised included:

- Supported the officer recommendation, but it was important that the risks of disposable barbeques were highlighted;
- could the Council provide dedicated areas within Council green spaces, for the public to use disposable barbeques?;
- thanked officers for looking into the issue and accepted that the evidence was not there to support a ban; and
- asked that officers keep monitoring the situation, particularly over the summer period.

In response to a question from a Member, the Leisure & Technical Services Manager explained that the existing byelaws covered a wide range of areas, but officers considered the way forward was to raise awareness. The report detailed the intention to run a social media campaign in the run up to the better weather. He said that officers could explore providing dedicated areas to use disposable barbeques within Council green spaces, however the management of any such areas would have cost and resource implications for the Council. The situation would continue to be monitored over the summer with an informal written update to Members afterwards.

Councillor Sarah Stephen proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Ashley Wise.

The Chair thanked the Leisure & Technical Services Manager for attending the meeting.

Resolved:

- (1) That the report be noted, and a specific Public Space Protection Orders ban on the use of disposable barbeques in Council open spaces not be progressed.**
- (2) That Officers undertake a media and social media campaign at the appropriate time of year to highlight the risks of use of disposable barbeques and fires in public open space, and to clearly state that they are not permitted under our current byelaws.**

548 Waste and Street Cleansing Contract Scrutiny Review report

The Chair referred to the Kent online article about the report and considered it was not as 'damning' as it could have been. He referred to some of the comments on the article which said there had been a 'cover-up' and he felt that this may be because the report outlined what had gone wrong rather than who was to blame. He said it was a good report and thanked Members and officers for their input and gave particular thanks to the Policy & Engagement Officer and said she was a huge asset to the Council.

The Policy & Engagement Officer introduced the report which summarised the scrutiny review of the mobilisation of the new waste and street cleansing service for Swale. It described the process taken in carrying out the review and set out the conclusions and recommendations proposed by the member panel going forward. The Policy & Engagement Officer referred to the Appendix conclusions and recommendations set out at Appendix I of the report for Members to consider and agree.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, and points raised included:

- Welcomed the review and report, and thanked the Waste and Street Cleansing Scrutiny Review Member Panel who had worked really hard to provide the recommendations;
- given there were 23 recommendations, did not consider there had been a cover-up;
- important that Members were kept up-to-date with progress of the recommendations and how they would apply to any future contracts;
- referred to recommendations (12) and (23) and considered that they exposed some real issues during the height of the issues and that there needed to be some flexibility during the 34-hour week;
- this was a very constructive report;
- it was important point that the Council learnt from mistakes made;
- there were still issues with missed collections in some areas of the borough;
- it was regrettable that only one tender had been received;
- officers should have spoken to other authorities that had used Suez;
- data-transfer had been the main issue;
- the re-routing of areas should be looked at annually;
- it was clear there had been no oversight by the Environment and Climate Change Committee;
- the document retention policy needed to allow flexibility so that learning could be carried forward for lengthy contracts;
- it was important that all Members understood the scrutiny process and asked that member training be provided;

- the contract should be considered by the committee every six months;
- the working group should consider the item prior to being considered by the Committee on a bi-annual basis;
- the recommendations were an example of excellent member and public input;
- what was being done to ensure the database was being updated?;
- hoped to see a significant improvement of the service in six months;
- there had been lots of doubling-up with reporting of missed bins;
- thanked the Council's Customer Service Centre (CSC) who had experienced a high volume of calls regarding missed collections;
- had a lot of sympathy for the binmen who had experienced abuse as well as the Council's CSC;
- management at Suez had not helped the situation;
- the Council policies needed to be fit for purpose and regularly monitored;
- Full Council should consider the report; and
- the Policy and Resources Committee should also consider the report given there were financial implications.

Councillor Hannah Perkin moved the following amendment to recommendation (13) that the additional sentence be included: That the Member Development Working Group be asked to provide on-going training on Scrutiny as a governance mechanism in the Committee system. This was seconded by Councillor Ashley Wise. On being put to the vote the motion was agreed by Members.

In response to points raised, the Head of Environment & Leisure confirmed that officers had engaged with other clients of Suez. He thanked members of the working group for their input, and that officers would store relevant documents for the length of the contract. The Head of Environment & Leisure considered that the recommendations were sensible and would assist both SBC and the contractors.

The Head of Environment & Leisure explained that no waste contract ever managed 100% due to the nature of the work, but he was confident that the contract was not far from normal service and the Council could start to look forwards to some of the services improvements detailed at tender. He said that as the service 'settled' the working group would continue to scrutinise the contract and the Committee would receive regular updates. He acknowledged that the database was the route to resolving most of the issues and assured Members that the team were working really hard to build the database. The Head of Environment & Leisure also spoke about new government legislation on waste collection which the Committee would need to consider.

The Policy & Engagement Officer reported that the scrutiny report and updated recommendations were on the Council's website and a link to both would be sent to all Parish and Town Councils and the Area Committees. Hard copies would be provided for those residents that did not have access to a computer.

Councillor Carole Jackson moved the following amendment: That a waste contract update report will be considered twice a year by the Environment and Climate Change Committee with the first one in July 2025. This was seconded by Councillor Dolley Wooster. On being put to the vote the amendment was agreed.

The Environmental Services Manager reported that waste drivers and crews were involved with the re-routing and Suez had engaged with their drivers about the viability

of routes.

Councillor Hannah Perkin moved the following motion: That the Waste and Street Cleansing Contract Scrutiny Review Report be considered by Full Council. This was seconded by Councillor Julien Speed. On being put to the vote the motion was agreed.

Councillor Hannah Perkin proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Charlie Miller.

The Chair thanked the Policy & Engagement Officer, the Head of Environment & Leisure, and the Environmental Services Manager for attending the meeting.

Resolved:

(1) That the content of the Waste and Street Cleansing Scrutiny Review report be noted.

(2) That the conclusions and recommendations proposed by the Waste and Street Cleansing Scrutiny Review Member Panel as set out in Appendix I, subject to the amendment to recommendation (13) as minuted.

(3) That a waste contract update report will be considered twice a year by the Environment and Climate Change Committee with the first one in July 2025.

(4) That the Waste and Street Cleansing Contract Scrutiny Review Report be considered by Full Council.

Post-Meeting note

As the Committee had taken the decision to approve the scrutiny recommendations, the Council was bound by that decision under the Council's Constitution. However, to support the motion the decision of the committee would be reported to council by way of the minute of this meeting, for noting rather than the full report.

549 **Forward Decisions Plan**

The Chair drew attention to the Forward Decisions Plan and invited Members to make comments, points raised included:

- It would be useful to have a discussion around priorities post devolution;
- would like a discussion around whether the solar panels on Swale House would be appropriate in light of the devolution proposals, would it be a waste of tax-payers money?;
- referred to the Shoreline Management item and asked whether the Environment Agency (EA) could be invited to answer questions?;

The Head of Environment & Leisure said that it was sensible question with regard to the solar panels on Swale House but said that the pay-back period was very short, and the panels would also help SBC to reduce its carbon footprint during any period they were in place.

The Head of Environment & Leisure explained that the Shoreline Management report was more about SBC's responsibilities on the subject, rather than the EA, however he agreed to invite them to attend a briefing on their services prior to the next committee meeting if possible. The Head of Environment & Leisure reported that the Public

Convenience Contract extension report was missing and would be considered by the Committee in March 2025.

Resolved:

(1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.

Chair

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