
Policy and Resources Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 16 October 2024 from 7.00 pm - 8.35 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock (Vice-Chair), Monique Bonney, Lloyd Bowen, Derek Carnell, Charles Gibson, Tim Gibson (Chair), James Hunt, Mark Last, Rich Lehmann, Peter Marchington, Richard Palmer, Julien Speed, Karen Watson (Substitute for Councillor Angela Harrison), Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Billy Attaway, Paul Casey, Mark Goodwin, Deborah Hardy, Jay Jenkins, Zoe Kent, Claire Stanbury, Emma Wiggins and Katherine Woodward.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Hayden Brawn.

APOLOGY: Councillor Angela Harrison.

341 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

342 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 September 2024 (Minute Nos. 221 – 233) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

Minute No. 229 (Local Plan Review – Vision and Objectives and Growth Options), recommendation (2) be amended to read '*That a Member Briefing on all six options be progressed, prior to Full Council*'. Minute No. 231 (Local Plan Review – Housing historic delivery and Local Plan Review housing targets), fourth paragraph be amended to read '*The Chair confirmed that it was likely that the item would next be considered by the **Vice-Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee** at the meeting on 27 November 2024.*'.

343 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor James Hunt declared a non-pecuniary interest with respect to Item 14 (Beach Hut Phase 1 Tender Award) as he owned a lease to a beach hut.

344 **Risk Management half yearly report**

The Head of Audit introduced the report which set out the overview of risks which could prevent achievement of the Council's strategic priorities, and how these risks were being managed.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, which included:

- Page 16, reference G, why was the risk of major contracts only rated amber?
- page 17, reference J, the 34-hour week was no longer out to consultation as it was already in place;
- more information sought on the new Human Resource (HR) methods in recruitment and how it was going to attract more people in applying for those jobs?;

- page 16, reference H, actions planned on Junction 5, M2 roundabout proposals needed changing as the work had recently been completed;
- page 18, reference N, was there anything that could be delivered now in the actions planned?;
- page 20, operational risks, why was cyber-attacks in red?;
- page 13, reference A, there was a suggestion that the priorities the Council had, needed to change as it was clear the funding to carry out the priorities was not available; and
- were officers considering moving data onto a cloud system to reduce the risk of cyber-attacks on outdated servers?

The Head of Audit responded to points raised on the waste contract and said that it was reviewed in June 2024, and was rated a red risk. However, it was understood that the service had since improved, and so had reverted back into an amber risk rating.

With regards to reference J, the HR department were working on a new work force strategy and there were discussions around the recruitment of an officer to help improve the recruitment process. Career grading opportunities were being explored to allow recruitment of less experienced staff, who could then develop into those more advanced roles.

The Head of Audit responded to points made on reference N and said that the actions progressed were part of the procurement process and something picked up in performance monitoring of contracts.

In response to Operational Risks, the Head of Audit referred to IT risks being the most significant risk to the Council, and this was being constantly monitored due to the ever changing methods of cyber-attacks. She added that the ICT department were looking at moving away from outdated servers and putting systems onto the cloud.

The Vice-Chair proposed the recommendations and this was seconded by Councillor Ashley Wise.

Resolved:

- (1) Agreed that the Council's corporate risks, overall risk profile and key risks were being appropriately managed.***

345 Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025/26

The Head of Revenues and Benefits introduced the report.

Councillor Derek Carnell proposed the recommendations and this was seconded by Councillor Lloyd Bowen.

Resolved:

- (1) That the income banded Council Tax Reduction Scheme be noted.***
- (2) That the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025/26 be recommended to Full Council and delegated authority be given to the Director of Resources to amend the income bands to align with Department for Work and Pensions benefit changes.***

346 Debt write off over £10k

The Head of Mid Kent Revenues & Benefits introduced the report.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, which included:

- How did officers work with individuals to make sure they did not increase their debts?;
- the business rates debt was a lot of money;
- did officers explore every possible method to recover the debt?; and
- was the size of the debt something officers would expect from these types of businesses?

The Head of Mid Kent Revenues & Benefits responded to say that when an individual took up an Individual Voluntary Arrangement (IVA), the support agency worked with the individual to help them manage their finances so that they could pay council tax in the future. She assured Members that the team looked at every possible way of recovering the debts, including passing business to Economic Development for advice, putting charges on properties and using enforcement agents if required.

The Head of Mid Kent Revenues & Benefits said that business size often affected the size of debt that accrued, but it was often due to poor management that resulted in smaller businesses not being able to pay their business rates.

Councillor Charles Gibson proposed the recommendation and this was seconded by Councillor Lloyd Bowen.

Resolved:

(1) That the debts in excess of £10k be written off.

347 Communications Strategy

The Communications & Policy Manager introduced the report.

The Chair invited the Members to make comments, which included:

- The communication sent out to residents about specific local areas, needed to come from residents in those areas;
- the Inside Swale magazine was often not sent to some residents in Faversham so thought officers needed to review its despatch;
- it was a good report but expected Social Media presence to be mentioned frequently throughout the document;
- could another section be added to link existing policies and documents that related to the communications policy?;
- communication channels needed to include 'Swale means business' and 'Visit Swale';
- external audiences did not mention Parish Councils;
- no mention of upgrading the website, but this should be a key objective;
- could officers look at using our partners and their tools of aiding our communications that reach residents;
- agreed with points raised on page 7 of the policy, as it was important to change the relationship with residents and use communication as a form of engagement, not just an advertisement board;
- the core principles on page 47 focused on residents rather than policies which was

good to see;

- priority one and two of the work plan mentioned the reputation of the Council, but nothing about the residents who should be the main priority of the work plan;
- the actions in the work plan were heavily focused on the digital approach, what actions were being looked at to reach residents that did not have a digital presence?;
- encouraged to see inclusiveness and recognition of diversity within the community;
- the communications policy was based on the priorities as a Council and it was important to stick to those priorities; and
- it was important that officers did not sign the Council up to every social media platform and only use those that were already established sites.

The Communications & Policy Manager responded and said the core principles of the communications strategy was based on additional work being done on social media sites and agreed that linking other policies and documents to the strategy would be helpful.

The Communications & Policy Manager agreed that there were many issues with the Council website, but it was a resource intensive piece of work that officers were working on. He agreed to add Parish Councils to the list of external audiences.

The Vice-Chair proposed the recommendation and this was seconded by Councillor Richard Palmer.

Resolved:

(1) That the Communications Strategy 2024-2027 be adopted.

348 **Swale Planning Enforcement Strategy**

The Team Leader (Planning Investigations) introduced the report.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, which included;

- Good piece of work and hoped it would have a positive effect; and
- reporting of breaches through letters took too long, could officers incorporate a method of recording conversations with individuals over the telephone to help the reporting of breaches?

The Team Leader (Planning Investigations) advised Members that there were no measures in place to take recorded calls from the public. However, members of the public could contact Customer Services in the first instance, and then enforcement officers could follow-up with the report of a breach.

The Vice-Chair proposed the recommendation and this was seconded by Councillor Ashley Wise.

Resolved:

(1) That the Planning Enforcement Strategy be adopted and published to come into effect on 4 November 2024.

349 Solar Panels - Swale House

The Building Operations and Maintenance Manager introduced the report.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, which included:

- This was a good report and what reserves should be used for; and
- could other Council-owned buildings be looked at for the installation of solar panels?

The Building Operations and Maintenance Manager said that officers were considering other buildings that were owned by the Council to see if they could have solar panels installed on them.

Councillor Monique Bonney proposed the recommendation and this was seconded by Councillor Rich Lehmann.

Resolved:

- (1) That delegated authority be given to the Director of Resources to use reserves up to £100,000 on an invest to save basis to provide solar panel coverage at Swale House with a payback of no longer than five years.***
- (2) That delegated authority be given to the Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods for the preparation and award of a contract for the delivery of solar panels on Swale House.***

350 Forward Decisions Plan

The Vice-Chair proposed the following: That the Cellar Hill and Greenstreet Conservation Area Appraisal be considered at the 27 November 2024 Policy and Resources Committee meeting, and a site visit be arranged for Members to meet with officers before it was considered. This was seconded by Councillor Lloyd Bowen and on being put to the vote, agreed.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.***
- (2) That the Cellar Hill and Greenstreet Conservation Area Appraisal be considered at the 27 November 2024 Policy and Resources Committee meeting and a site visit be conducted before the report was considered.***

351 Recommendations from the Swale Joint Transportation Board meeting held on 7 October 2024

This item was withdrawn from the agenda and would be considered at the next Policy and Resources Committee meeting.

352 Recommendations from the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group held on 17 September 2024***Resolved:***

- (1) That Minute Nos. 250 and 251 be approved.***

353 Beach Hut Phase 1 Tender Award

The Leisure & Technical Services Manager introduced the report.

The Vice-Chair proposed the recommendation and this was seconded by Councillor Richard Palmer.

Resolved:

(1) That the amended capital programme beach hut allocation be recommended to Full Council.

354 Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no need to pass this resolution as the meeting did not go into confidential session.

355 Beach Hut Phase I Tender Award - Appendix I - Exempt Appendix

This item was not discussed.

Chair

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