
Policy and Resources Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 5 February 2025 from 7.00 pm - 9.44 pm.

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

OFFICERS PRESENT: Steph Curtis, Lisa Fillery, Robin Harris, Zoe Kent, Uche Olufemi, Larissa Reed, Philippa Richardson and Baljinder Sandher.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Martyn Cassell and Joanne Johnson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Tony Winckless.

613 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

614 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 27 November 2024 (Minute Nos. 395 - 418) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

615 **Declarations of Interest**

During consideration of item 11, Public Space CCTV Policy Review, Councillor Dolley Wooster declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest as she was a member of Sheerness Town Council who had a CCTV contract with Swale Borough Council.

During consideration of the Urgent Item, Parking in Market Place and Court Street, Faversham, Councillor Charles Gibson declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest as he was a member of Faversham Town Council and Ward Member for Abbey Ward.

616 **Final Budget 2025/26 and Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Strategy**

The Director of Resources introduced the report which set out the Council's Revenue and Capital budget proposals for 2025/26, the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the Capital Strategy. She highlighted the main changes to the draft budget set out in paragraph 2.3 of the report and said all the appendices had been updated to reflect the changes. The Director of Resources said there were no proposed changes to fees and charges in the draft budget. She explained that there was still some outstanding data to receive from a few parish councils in terms of the parish precepts 2025-26, but these figures would be ready for Full Council on 19 February 2025.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- Considered it was unwise to 'spend, spend, spend' when the Council had the uncertainty of devolution;
- clarification sought on the review of fees and charges;
- what was the impact on the budget in terms of the Highsted Park call-in by the

Secretary of State?;

- were there penalty fees from Suez in relation to the waste contract?;
- suggested pitch fees for children be free/not increased;
- disappointed with the poor response to the online budget consultation;
- in relation to paragraph 3.4 in the report, concerned with the increased National Insurance (NI) contributions and more information sought on the playgrounds reduction;
- not happy that the Policy & Resources Committee were being asked to recommend this budget to Full Council as the Council was in a very different position this year (with a minority administration) and suggested there needed to be changes to the budget to get it agreed by Full Council;
- information in the report said the 'gap' had closed, why had so many important services been impacted;
- the budget needed to be looked at again, with a proper consultation before Full Council in a couple of weeks;
- the Council had agreed its budget in previous years, it should be able to do so again this year;
- suggested the Council engaged with a consultant to carry out any future consultation to achieve a better return;
- Members need to discuss the budget in more detail before the budget Full Council meeting;
- paragraph 3.4 in the report indicated the main savings, but these were not real savings as the Council was using its reserves;
- it would be useful to know where savings had been made across the Council;
- considered having an all group leaders discussion on the budget was sensible;
- suggested the Committee delayed reaching a resolution at this meeting and that an extraordinary Policy & Resources takes place, to consider revised proposals;
- considered there were other options where savings could be made to the budget;
- considered reserves should not be used;
- Councillors had a duty to residents to work together to get the budget agreed at Full Council; and
- it was commonplace that amendments to the budget took place each year.

In response, the Director of Resources gave updates to some of the points raised: she explained that the budget reflected the provision of costs in relation to the Highsted call-in; the Suez penalties would go into the reserve fund; notice of the consultation was given to town and parish councils, the Area Committees and was advertised on social media by the Communications Team; the Government had said that NI public sector costs would be met, but this would not cover the Council's costs. The Director of Resources outlined areas where proposed savings could be made, which had previously been shared with group leaders. She explained that some use of reserves was acceptable in the budget, up to c £500k.

The Chief Executive advised that in the event that the budget was not passed by 11 March 2025, the Council would be required to advise the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government and this would increase the risk the commissioners setting a budget. The Chief Executive advised that there was a requirement to deliver a balanced budget and if the Council did not do this and declared a Section 114 notice, the commissioners would look at everything which was not a statutory service. Heads of Service could have recommended more services to 'stop', but this would mean the end of a lot of fundamental Council services.

There was some discussion on the timeframe of having an additional Policy & Resources Committee before the budget Full Council meeting, and also the need to consider the deadline for issuing Council Tax bills.

Further comments included:

- Acknowledged that not proceeding with this now would impact the timelines of an additional meeting before Full Council;
- there needed to be cross-group discussions to get an agreement in time for Full Council;
- there was an issue with the wording of the recommendations as they currently stood;
- suggested the recommendations within the report be amended, so the matter could be moved forward; and
- did not support additional meetings.

At this point the meeting was paused for an informal discussion on the way forward.

The Chair moved the following addendum/amendments:

- (1) That all group leaders worked together to identify and agree any amendments to the proposed budget.
- (2) That the Policy & Resources Committee recommends to Full Council: to approve the Administration's 2025/26 revenue budget proposals **subject to amendments**.
- (3) That recommendation (3) in the substantial recommendations becomes recommendation (4) and is amended to read: That the Medium Term Financial Plan be approved **subject to amendments**.

These were seconded by Councillor Lloyd Bowen and agreed by Members.

Councillor Ashley Wise proposed the substantive recommendations as set out in the report which were seconded by Councillor Lloyd Bowen and on being put to the vote was agreed by Members.

Recommended:

- (1) That all group leaders work together to identify and agree any amendments to the proposed budget.***

That the Policy & Resources Committee recommends to Council:

- (2) That the Administration's 2025/26 revenue budget proposals be approved subject to amendments.***
- (3) That the proposed Council Tax Band D increase for 2025/26 to £206.64 be approved, or to the maximum allowed should the cash limit be increased.***
- (4) That the Medium Term Financial Plan be approved subject to amendments.***
- (5) That the Capital Strategy be approved.***
- (6) That the capital programme proposals be approved.***
- (7) That the additional amount of Council Tax for Parish Precepts be noted.***
- (8) That the Statement (Appendix III) provided by the Director of Resources be endorsed).***
- (9) That the minimum revenue provision statement be approved.***

(10) That delegated authority be given to the Director of Resources to adjust charge out rates within fees and charges as appropriate, where they are based on costs incurred and where legislation changes are made to centrally set charges in year.

(11) That the use of reserves statement as detailed in Appendix VII to ensure reserves were valid and supported the assumptions in the MTFS be approved.

617 Treasury Management Strategy 2025/26

The Director of Resources introduced the report as set out in the agenda papers.

Councillor Charles Gibson proposed the recommendation as set out in the report and this was seconded by Councillor Angela Harrison.

Recommended:

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

618 Review of the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy

The Head of Revenues and Benefits introduced the report which reviewed the responses to the recent consultation following a review and update to the policy and made recommendations of changes to the draft policy.

Councillor Mike Baldock proposed the recommendations as set out in the report and this was seconded by Councillor Lloyd Bowen.

Recommended:

(1) That the outcome of the discretionary rate relief policy consultation be noted.

(2) That the Discretionary Rate Review policy be adopted.

619 Pay Policy Statement

The Head of HR Shared Service introduced the report which is required to enable the council to satisfy the requirements of section 38 of the Localism Act 2011, which required that authorities must prepare a pay policy statement for the financial year 2012/13 and for each subsequent financial year; this statement must be agreed by full Council.

A Member sought clarification on the information set out in the table on page 175 of the report, compared to that on page 195. The Head of HR Shared Service confirmed that the information shown on page 175 was the Chief Executive's earnings, whilst the information on page 195 included all remuneration as well as pension.

Councillor Mike Baldock proposed the recommendations as set out in the report and this was seconded by Councillor Dolley Wooster.

Recommended:

(1) That the proposed Pay Policy Statement be agreed for publication on the

council's web site.

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

620 Workforce Strategy

The Head of HR Shared Service introduced the report as set out in the agenda papers.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- It was important that the strategy was reviewed, and responded to any changes in the workforce;
- the workforce strategy action plan should be reviewed annually, but not before a budget; and
- it was necessary to review year-on-year and shape the strategy and determine what needed to be changed.

Councillor Monique Bonney moved the following motion: That the Workforce Strategy be reviewed at the Policy & Resources Committee, following the 2026 budget. This was seconded by Councillor Richard Palmer.

Members made comments on the motion and these included:

- Considered that a March 2026 Policy & Review Committee meeting might be too soon after the budget to do a review, suggested a later month;
- welcomed having an annual review; and
- clarification sought on the wording in the recommendation against the wording in paragraph 3.1 of the report.

In response, the Chief Executive explained that the budget did not have a massive impact on the Workforce Strategy.

The Head of HR Shared Service confirmed that the recommendation was to agree the Workforce Strategy, which was still in draft form.

Councillor Mike Baldock moved the following amendments: That the draft Workforce Strategy is agreed, and published on the Council's website. This was seconded by Councillor James Hunt and agreed by Members.

Councillor Mike Baldock moved the substantive motion which was seconded by Councillor Ashley Wise and agreed by Members.

Recommended:

(1) That the draft Workforce Strategy be agreed, and it be published on the Council's website.

(2) That the Workforce Strategy action plan be reviewed at the Policy & Resources Committee meeting following the 2026 budget.

621 Business Continuity Policy

The Enterprise Risk & Resilience Manager introduced the report as set out in the agenda papers.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- On a practical level, it was important that the document was accessible;
- recognised the important of organisations having a business continuity plan;
- it was important that Members were kept up to date when an incident occurred; and
- it would be beneficial if Members were notified of 'wash-up' information after an emergency response had concluded.

In response, the Enterprise Risk & Resilience Manager explained that there were hard copies of the policy available to view, and she said that de-brief reports could be forwarded to Members.

Councillor Mike Baldock proposed the recommendations as set out in the report and these were seconded by Councillor Derek Carnell.

Resolved:

(1) That the adoption of the Business Continuity policy be agreed.

622 Public Space CCTV Policy Review

The Community Services Manager introduced the report which provided an overview of proposed changes made as part of a refresh of the public space CCTV policy.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- Considered there should be more CCTV coverage in Faversham;
- clarification sought on external contracts, placement of cameras; signage and insurance and whether there was a risk to the Council; and
- it was important to keep the policy as up to date as possible and to regularly review it.

In response, the Community Services Manager said that there were insurance measures in place to cover CCTV use and how it was managed and she would look again at the wording in terms of Town and Parish Councils, and also making the responsibility for signage clearer. She advised that the policy was reviewed every three years.

Members discussed the annual CCTV monitoring report and asked which committee this was shared with. The Community Services Manager advised that this report to date had just been shared with officers, but agreed it would be shared with the Community and Leisure Committee moving forwards annually.

Councillor Richard Palmer proposed the recommendations as set out in the report and this was seconded by Councillor Mike Baldock.

Resolved:

(1) That the refresh of the Public Space CCTV Policy be approved and adopted.

623 Housing Benefits War Pensions Policy

The Head of Revenue and Benefits introduced the report which sought adoption of the Housing Benefits War Pensions Policy.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- Fully supported this;
- wished this went further and included those in the emergency services as well; and
- clarification sought as to whether the person actually needed to be on active duty (for example in a war zone) or whether they could benefit whilst in service generally.

Councillor Richard Palmer said the policy benefitted anyone whilst in service.

Councillor Richard Palmer proposed the recommendation as set out in the report and this was seconded by Councillor Angela Harrison.

Resolved:

(1) That the Housing Benefits War Pensions Policy be adopted.

624 Council Tax Empty Property Policy

The Head of Revenues and Benefits introduced the report which sought approval to introduce changes to the policy when a premium was not charged.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- Welcomed the change in terms of a furnished property;
- concerned with the amount of heritage properties in the Borough which had been neglected, clarification sought on the premium charged to them;
- clarification sought on the difference between an empty home which was furnished and a second home;
- some empty homes become uninhabitable, e.g. when a resident went into a care home;
- referring to section (5) on page 284 of the report, noted that often there was no power of attorney which made the matter more complicated;
- recognised that some properties were genuine second homes; and
- considered holiday site second homes should be charged a premium.

In response, the Head of Revenues and Benefits explained that a 100% premium was charged initially on all properties which had been neglected, and this went up to 200% after five years. Previously, if a property was furnished it was treated as a second home, and they would not pay the premium, now for second homes that were furnished, the premium would start from day one, so if it was empty for a year they would not get a

premium and she said that this meant that residents might remove their furniture. The Head of Revenues and Benefits said there was an exemption when residents moved to a care home and their property became empty, and she added that holiday sites would not be charged a premium.

Councillor Mike Baldock proposed the recommendation as set out in the report and this was seconded by Councillor Ashley Wise.

Resolved:

(1) That the Empty Property policy be adopted.

625 **Recommendations from the Swale Joint Transportation Board meeting held on 2 December 2024**

Resolved:

(1) That Minute No. 432 be approved.

626 **Forward Decisions Plan**

Members spoke on Conservation Areas within the Borough and requested that these be added to the Forward Decisions Plan.

Resolved:

(1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.

627 **Adjournment of Meeting**

The meeting was adjourned from 8.01 pm until 8.21 pm and from 9.00 pm until 9.14 pm.

628 **Urgent Report - Parking in Market Place and Court Street, Faversham**

The Head of Environment & Leisure introduced the report which set out the background to 'Parking in Market Place and Court Street, Faversham' as considered by the Swale Joint Transportation Board (JTB) on 2 December 2024. The decision on this matter needed to be delayed for the reasons set out in paragraph 1.2 of the report.

Councillor Richard Palmer proposed the recommendation as set out in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Charles Gibson.

Resolved:

(1) That the recommendation in Minute No. 433 of the Swale JTB minutes from the meeting held on 2 December 2024 be referred back to the JTB for the Board to be provided with an update and discuss future options.

Chair

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