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## Policy and Resources Committee

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**MINUTES** of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 26 March 2025 from 7.00 pm - 10.29 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Mike Baldock (Vice-Chair), Charles Gibson, Tim Gibson (Chair), Angela Harrison, James Hunt, Elliott Jayes, Rich Lehmann, Peter Marchington (Substitute for Councillor Lloyd Bowen), Chris Palmer (Substitute for Councillor Kieran Mishchuk), Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin (Substitute for Councillor Ben J Martin), Karen Watson (Substitute for Councillor Mark Last), Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster.

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Martyn Cassell, Janet Dart, Lisa Fillery, Mark Goodwin, Robin Harris, Georgia Harvey, Kellie MacKenzie, Larissa Reed and Claire Stanbury.

**OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY):** Steph Curtis, Joanne Johnson and Emma Wiggins.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY):** Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Hayden Brawn and Mark Last.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Mark Last, Ben J Martin, Kieran Mishchuk and Julien Speed.

### 760 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

### 761 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 February 2025 (Minute Nos. 613 – 628) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

### 762 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

### 763 **Annual update on Corporate Plan actions**

The Policy & Engagement Officer introduced the report as set out in the agenda pack, and drew attention to Appendix I which provided an update on the progress of the objectives and actions in the Corporate Plan 2023-2027.

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

- Referring to Priority 1.14 on page 12 of the report, was there anything more the Council could do to encourage schools to engage in the local democracy process?;
- with regard to Priority 1.14 the devolution process was an opportunity to engage with secondary schools about the function of local government and what might change;
- what was the feedback on the project options put forward to schools? Maybe they were just not right for the schools. The Council's Swale Youth Forum meeting had always been well attended;

- needed to liaise with other public bodies in respect of improving Priority 1.14 and whether there was anything the Council could 'hook into' to move things forward?;
- suggested that what Members could offer in respect of Priority 1.14 be explored;
- pleased that most of the community priorities were 'on-track';
- needed to review the Council's Communications Strategy and improve how the Council engaged with the public and also sharing what services the Council's partners offered, particularly the leisure centres;
- welcomed that the provision of solar panels was on-track and considered the Council should be looking to install them at leisure centres;
- welcomed the introduction of the QR codes project on litter bins which would improve reporting of any issues;
- considered the Council needed to improve environmental enforcement; and
- the Council needed to 'think outside the box' and move faster in relation to 'maximizing the rates of income on all commercial council properties' under Priority 5.1.

In response to Priority 1.14, the Chair said that as the Leader of the Council, it was for him in the first instance to engage with the head teachers at local schools regarding the local democracy process. The Community Services Manager outlined the various project options schools were asked to consider, and said that unfortunately officers had not received much feedback from them. With regard to the Swale Youth Forum, the Community Services Manager said that post the Covid-19 Pandemic, engagement with schools was difficult. She said she had noted all suggestions from Members which she would feedback to the team.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the updated Corporate Plan 2023-2027 at Appendix I of the report, be noted.***

**764 Annual Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan**

The Policy & Engagement Officer introduced the report which provided an update on the progress of the objectives and actions in the Corporate Plan 2023-2027.

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

- The communications team needed to liaise with local businesses as they wanted to work with the Council;
- referred to Action 8.5 on page 43 of the report, and said it needed to be actioned as soon as possible and the Council should consider having a Lead Member for Communications;
- referred to Action 7.4 on page 42 of the report, and was surprised there was an underspend of the Apprenticeship Levy with businesses as was aware there was a market for using them and sought assurance that the Council was liaising with local businesses; local schools; and NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) providers;
- the Council should do more to encourage work experience placements with parish and town councils;
- aware that the Faversham Town Council apprenticeship scheme had worked very well and whether that could be shared with other town and council parishes

- across the borough;
- how could Actions 2.1, 2.2 and 2.4 on pages 33 and 34 of the report in respect of shared values be progressed?;
- referred to Action 8.5 on page 43 of the report, and considered it should not be too difficult to factor in the different cultural days, but it needed to be progressed; and
- referred to Action 2.3 on page 33 of the report, and considered that further training was required on neurodivergence.

In response to Action 7.4 and the underspend of the Apprenticeship Levy, the Chief Executive advised that this was due to restrictions on the levy which could only be used for training, not salaries. She explained that Members had agreed the Council would pay any apprentices the living wage, which was a positive but the consequence of that meant that the Council's apprenticeship scheme attracted a lot of graduates so training was not being requested. The Chief Executive said the Council was exploring how to resolve the issue and whether the levy could be used for the salary of any apprentices as well. The Council were also liaising with local businesses to see if the underspend could be used to support training for their apprentices. The Chief Executive reported that officers worked hard to encourage take-up of work experience opportunities at the Council and received many applications.

The Chief Executive said that with regard to Actions 2.1, 2.2 and 2.4, officers had undertaken work around Member and Officer relations, and meetings were being arranged with Members regarding the joint values. Once those meetings had taken place, workshops would be set-up to consider them further.

In response to a question from a Member, the Monitoring Officer said the Standards Committee had paused worked on the Council's arrangements for dealing with standards complaints, due to proposed government changes to the regime. The Committee had responded to the Government consultation on Standards and feedback from the Government was awaited.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the Corporate Plan 2023-2027 update at Appendix I of the report be noted.***

**765 Risk Management Update**

The Auditor and Systems Officer introduced the report which provided an update on the latest position on the Council's corporate risks, as well as an overview of the operational risks, which were reviewed and updated regularly by officers. The update also included details on the progress for implementing planned controls, as well as changes, and additions of, risks which could prevent the achievement of the Council's strategic priorities.

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

- Thanked officers for the report and for the audit briefing held prior to the meeting regarding risk management which had been extremely useful;
- reassured that officers were doing well in maintaining risks;
- acknowledged that the re-writing of the Carbon Ecology Emergency action plan

under risk reference S-SBC0007 on page 58 of the report had now been completed;

- welcomed the report which was straightforward to follow; and
- referred to ref S-SBC0018 on page 63 of the report and what was meant by '....community pressure'?

In response, the Auditor and Systems Officer confirmed that the risk register was regularly updated and would confirm the meaning of '...community pressure' for the Member after speaking with the risk owner..

**Resolved:**

***(1) That it be noted that the Council's corporate risks and overall risk profile, and key risks were being appropriately managed.***

**766 Procurement of financial management system**

The Head of Finance and Procurement introduced the report which set out options that had been considered in respect of upgrading the Council's current financial management system. The report sought approval of the recommended contractor, Company D, as well as backfilling of the Systems Accountant role in order to deliver the project.

The Head of Finance and Procurement reported that if the Council could complete the contract by the end of March 2025, there would be an annual donation of £10,000 by Company D to a local charity of the Council's choice.

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

- Seemed a 'common-sense' approach;
- what had the initial timeframe for the project been and what were the Council choosing not to do by bringing it forward?;
- unaware that there had previously been any conversations with Members about the project and uncomfortable that Members were being asked to agree such a large sum of money or lose £10,000 pa for local charities;
- the donation to charity should be separate from the contract;
- the charity contribution would not sit well with the public;
- supported the recommendations in the report; and
- the impact of not agreeing this would lead to a significant impact on the security of the Council's financial systems.

In response, the Head of Finance and Procurement explained that there had never been a specific timeline, and the donation to charity had not been considered in deciding which option to proceed with.

The Chief Executive reported that officers had discussed the proposed options informally with the administration group. She reported that officers had followed the correct process, and Company D were the best value. It was for Members to agree or not, using the information set out in the report. The Chief Executive added that finance systems were expensive and if it was not safe and secure then residents and local businesses would suffer.

The Chair proposed the recommendations as set out in the report, which were seconded by Councillor Angela Harrison.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That the appointment of Company D to provide the Financial Management System, for a period of three years with a one-year extension, contractual terms agreed by 31 March 2025, at a value of £446,516 be approved.**
- (2) That the Systems Accountant role for up to one year be agreed, and funding by the Finance Systems reserve.**

**767 Changes to the committee structure**

The Chief Executive introduced the report which set out the proposal made by the Constitutional Working Group (CWG) to change the number of Service Committees and reduce the frequency of Area Committees, whilst a review of the effectiveness of Area Committees was undertaken.

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

- Considered that Option 1 at paragraph 3.1 on page 5 of the report should be taken forward;
- not enough consideration had been given to how the Area Committees would operate when they were first set-up;
- would like any review of the Area Committees to be undertaken before the new civic year;
- if the area committees were reduced to three rounds per civic year would it be possible to hold extraordinary meetings if required?;
- the Eastern Area Committee was poorly attended and not productive;
- concerned that reducing the committees in stages could become complicated in respect of splitting the functions of each committee. It would be better to get it done before the next civic year, if that was achievable?;
- the Council did not have a precise vision and was becoming 'stagnant';
- more input from Members and groups was needed, not just comments from the CWG;
- a 'stepped' approach would be better;
- agreed that the number of service committees needed to be reduced but needed to be clear on the implications if they were;
- supported reducing the number of committees if it led to more money being saved to allow the Council to provide services for residents;
- supported any of these decisions being scrutinised so that residents could understand why they were being made;
- supported Option 2 in the report with the caveat that it be reviewed in a years' time;
- drew attention to the breakdown of the Committee information at Appendix 2 of the report, and considered there could be all sorts of reasons why apologies had been given;
- duplication was not stagnation, and the proposals allowed for streamlining and clarifying of the decision-making process important in light of the peer review and the local government reorganisation;
- the review needed to consider other committees such as Audit, Standards and

Licensing and whether they could be reduced in number;

- Members 'time' was important for local residents and considered that currently something 'had to give' in terms of the amount of meetings Members currently attended, particularly with the pending local government reorganisation;
- disappointed that Options 2, 3 and 4 all had very 'circular' reasoning contained within them as to why they should not be progressed;
- considered Option 2 was the way forward and it would allow time for collaborative working with other authorities to be undertaken with regard to local government reorganisation;
- supported an increase of membership on the service committees;
- each service committee would have more work but a smaller pool of Members to draw membership for any working groups;
- Option 1 was too much too soon and not sensible at this time;
- some working groups were cross-committees; and
- recommendation (1) in the report would allow Members to be more radical in their approach and would not leave to a deficit, and delaying for one year could reduce the possibility of being radical.

In response, the Chief Executive explained that Members could consider and agree to any reduction of Service Committees and review of the Area Committees prior to Annual Council 2025. Following advice from the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Executive confirmed that if the timetable of meetings for the 2025-26 Municipal Year was agreed by Annual Council, but that following the review of committees, Members were overwhelmingly in support that there should be a change: in nature; number; or existence of any of the committees the Policy & Resources (P&R) Committee could recommend to Full Council to amend any decision made previously at Annual Council.

The Chief Executive explained that any review needed to be meaningful and thorough and truly understand the views of both parished and unparished areas. She reported that option 3.1 was achievable and that the Health and Housing Committee and the Community and Leisure Committee would be amalgamated, so that functions were not separated for the first year. The proposal would also significantly reduce overlapping of functions.

Councillor Angela Harrison moved the following amendment: That recommendation (1) be amended to Option 1 as set out in the report. This was seconded by Councillor Ashley Wise.

Following a point of order, Councillor Angela Harrison confirmed that her proposal was for the P&R Committee and three service committees, followed the next year by a reduction in P&R Committee meetings and two service committees.

The Chief Executive read out Option 1 for Members.

There was a vote on the amendment, and as the vote was tied the Chair used his casting vote. The amendment was agreed.

The Chair referred to recommendation (3) of the report and invited questions and comments from Members which included:

- Supported the area committees which provided the unparished areas with 'a

voice’;

- supported a ‘full’ review of the area committees, including a breakdown of the associated costs;
- did not consider the relevant data was contained within the report to make a decision;
- would like to see data regarding the proposed need to remove the Special Responsibility Allowance for chairs of the area committees;
- concerned that Members were being put in a position by the CWG without the relevant reports and debates being provided;
- accepted some area committees were more active than others but considered all area committees could be utilised more and consider upcoming council policies;
- the area committees were a chance for Members to gain experience at chairing meetings;
- unsure why the council proposed reducing the area committees when there was no issue with them;
- the scheduled area committee meetings could always be cancelled if there were no items;
- no data had been provided on public or parish council attendance at the area committees;
- perhaps the area committees could decide at their first meeting how often they wished to meet;
- supported not having the Eastern Area Committee as it was poorly attended;
- considered that as chair of the Eastern Area Committee the public purse was not well represented by the hours spent chairing those meetings;
- recommendations (3) and (4) of the report pre-determined recommendation (5);
- supported a review which needed to be undertaken as soon as possible and needed to consider what an effective fora could look like;
- the area committees should focus more on residents needs and liaising with stakeholders such as the police. Suggested that all the area committee chairs should meet to discuss what they should be considering;
- referred to paragraph 2.8 on page 4 of the report which listed the concerns raised in relation to area committees and said that attendance by some parish councillors had let to them becoming borough councillors;
- collaborative working at the area committee had led to solutions;
- the shingle bank consultation had received over 1,000 responses because it was raised at the Sheppey Area Committee;
- Kent County Council (KCC) had taken several consultations including the family hub model and Seashells Children Centre, Sheerness to the area committees;
- Parish Councils should be able to feedback items for agendas;
- the regular reports from Kent Police were a good example of a repetitive agenda item working well; and
- referred to the loneliness and the Seashell Childrens centre projects which were well received by the public and parish councils at the respective area committees;
- fundamentally disagreed with the recommendations contained within the report;
- the Council needed a scrutiny committee as it did not currently work within the current committee system;
- the proposals were about using Member and officer time more efficiently; and
- the Housing and Health Committee had been complimented on their scrutiny of items considered at that committee.

Councillor Elliott Jayes moved the following amendment: That recommendations (3) and (4) in the report, be deleted. This was seconded by Councillor Mike Baldock. On being put to the vote the amendment was agreed.

In response, the Chief Executive explained that not all the area committees were the same, and Members needed to be mindful that there was only half an officer post administering the area committees. The full review of the area committees would include liaising with parish and town councils to explore what was possible moving forward, and how the meetings could be resourced. The Chief Executive reported that data in respect of costs was available and the detail would be shared with Members.

Following a point of order there was some discussion regarding the detail of the amendment in respect of Option 1. Councillor Ashley Wise moved the following amendment: That recommendation (2) of the report be amended to read that the Housing and Health Committee and the Community and Leisure Committee be amalgamated. This was seconded by Councillor Angela Harrison. On being put to the vote as the voting was tied, the Chair used his casting vote and the amendment was agreed.

The Chair then asked Members to vote on recommendation (1) as amended.

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

**For: Councillors C Gibson, T Gibson, Harrison, Perkin, Watson, Wise and Wooster. Total equals 7.**

**Against: Councillors Baldock, Hunt, Jayes, Lehmann, Marchington, C Palmer and R Palmer. Total equals 7.**

**Abstain: None. Total equals 0.**

**As the vote was tied the Chair used his casting vote and voted for the recommendation.**

The Chair then asked Members to vote on recommendation (2) as amended.

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

**For: Councillors C Gibson, T Gibson, Harrison, Lehmann, Marchington, Perkin, Watson, Wise and Wooster. Total equals 9.**

**Against: Councillors Baldock, Hunt, Jayes, Lehmann, C Palmer and R Palmer. Total equals 6.**

**Abstain: Councillor Hunt. Total equals 1.**

The Chair then asked Members to vote on recommendation (5) of the report, which he read out for Members. This would now become Recommendation (3) as Members had already agreed that recommendations (3) and (4) as set out in the report be deleted.



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

**For: Councillors Baldock, C Gibson, T Gibson, Harrison, Hunt, Jayes, Lehmann, Marchington, C Palmer, R Palmer, Perkin, Watson, Wise and Wooster. Total equals 14.**

**Against: None. Total equals 0.**

**Against: None. Total equals 0.**

***Recommendations to Council:***

- (1) That a two-stage approach be taken to reduce the service committees from the Policy and Resources Committee and four service committees to the Policy and Resources Committee and two service committees by reducing the service committees by one in the municipal year 2025/26 and by a further reduction of one in the municipal year 2026/27***
- (2) That the Housing and Health Committee and the Community and Leisure Committee be amalgamated;***
- (3) That the Chief Executive undertakes a full review of the effectiveness of the Area Committees, working with Area Committees, Parish Councils and the public and report back to the Policy and Resources Committee in the Municipal Year 2025/2026.***

**768 Constitution Update**

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report which set out a number of changes to the Constitution to correct errors, provide clarity and generally improve the document and made it more efficient. Members were asked to recommend the amendments to Council for adoption.

The Head of Place referred to Amendment 1 as set-out at Appendix I of the report which set out the Economy and Property Committees proposed additions in red text, and proposed deletions which were struck through. The Head of Place reported that the CWG additions were highlighted in blue.

Councillor Elliott Jayes moved the following amendment to the CWG amendment at delegation 2.8.19.13 on page eight of the report: 'Following engagement with ward members, **and Parish and Town Councils** to deal...'. This was seconded by Councillor Hannah Perkin. On being put to the vote the amendment was agreed.

A Member referred to a typographical error on delegation 2.8.19.11 on page eight of the report, that it should read 'To enter into....' and not 'in to' as stated.

In response to a question from a Member about the wording for delegation 2.8.19.18 on page nine of the report and whether additional wording was required in respect of the financial constraints. The Director of Resources explained that the budget framework was the overarching principle which this would fall under, regardless of the delegation.

A Member referred to delegation 2.8.19.22 on page 10 of the report, and asked that if a parish council sold one of their assets whether they would need to consult the Council?

Plus, a timescale should be included for receipt of an appropriate response? The Monitoring Officer reported that parishes would only need to consult with the Council regarding sale of their assets if there was something included within their Standing Orders. With regard to timescales that would be included within the procedure notes, that sat underneath the delegations.

The Monitoring Officer referred Members to Amendment 2 of Appendix I which set-out an amendment to paragraph 3.1.18 of the Constitution.

Councillor Elliott Jayes moved the following amendment: That the speaking time for ordinary Members on the Leader's Statement at Full Council be increased from two minutes to three minutes. This was not seconded.

The Monitoring Officer referred to Amendment 3 of Appendix I. A Member asked that group leaders looked to ensure the proposals were included within any training for new members so that they were aware of the process.

Councillor Angela Harrison proposed the recommendation as set out in the report, and as amended, which was seconded by Councillor Elliott Jayes.

***Recommended:***

***(1) That Full Council agreed the amendments at Appendix I of the report, and the additional amendment to Amendment 1, as minuted, be incorporated into the Constitution.***

**769 Overnight Parking on the Isle of Sheppey**

The Head of Environment and Leisure introduced the report which set out issues arising from overnight parking at various locations on the Isle of Sheppey discussed at the Community and Leisure Committee (C&L) meetings on 11 December 2024 and 5 March 2025, including the outcome of a public consultation.

The C&L Committee had approved the implementation of an overnight charge at the Shingle Bank (including the areas of green opposite), Minster and Shellness Road, Leysdown. The report set-out the estimated expenditure to set the scheme up for the first year and sought approval of funding. The report also set out the C&L Committee's proposal for setting the £15 charge per night and requested referral to Full Council for approval.

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

- A Member raised concern that none of the recommendations proposed funds needed to assist with the welfare of any residents that needed to be 'moved on';
- considered that the £15 overnight charge would cause more displacement; and
- thanked officers for their hard work on the proposal.

In response, the Head of Environment and Leisure said it had been clearly minuted at the C&L Committee meeting that Members had wanted officers to take due regard to the welfare of those that would be moved on. This report was dealing with the operational aspect of the scheme.

Councillor Richard Palmer moved the following amendment: That the £15 overnight charge be reduced to £5. This was seconded by Councillor Chris Palmer. On being put to the vote the amendment was lost.

Councilor Elliott Jayes proposed the recommendations as set out in the report, which were seconded by Councillor Charles Gibson.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That the use of the Civil Enforcement reserve to fund the initial works and enforcement activity for year 1 be approved.***
- (2) That delegated authority be given to the Head of Environment and Leisure to progress the required traffic orders to protect the areas and any displacement issues and implement the overnight charging.***

**Recommended:**

- (1) That Full Council agree to charge £15 per vehicle per night at Shingle Bank (including the areas of green opposite), Minster, and Shellness Road, Leysdown, as per the Community and Leisure Committee's recommendation.***

**770 Empowering You (Community Development Strategy) sign off**

The Community Services Manager introduced the report which summarised the amendments that had been recommended to be made to the Safeguarding Policy and agreed by the Housing and Health Committee.

Councillor Charles Gibson proposed the recommendations as set out in the report, which were seconded by Councillor Elliott Jayes.

A Member thanked officers for the report which he considered was a 'great' resource for the Council. A Member reported that she had previously asked that information on a breastfeeding initiative and sustainability be included but it had not. In order that the document could be promptly published she asked that both items be focused on moving forward.

In response to a question from a Member, the Community Services Manager reported that once adopted by Full Council the document would be promoted and shared with key partners.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That it be noted that the Empowering You in Swale Strategy had been ratified by the Community & Leisure Committee.***

**Recommended:**

- (1) That the Empowering You in Swale Strategy be adopted by Full Council.***

**771 Safeguarding Policy sign off**

The Community Services Manager introduced the report which summarised the

amendments that had been recommended to the Safeguarding Policy, set out at Appendix I of the report, and agreed by the Housing and Health Committee.

Councillor Angela Harrison proposed the recommendation as set out in the report, which was seconded by Councillor Ashley Wise.

The Chair and some other Members thanked the officer and the team for their work and the report.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the refreshed Safeguarding Policy be noted, reviewed bi-annually and adopted.***

**772 Recommendations from the Swale Joint Transportation Board meeting held on 3 March 2025**

The Chair drew attention to the recommendations from the Swale Joint Transportation Board meeting held on 3 March 2025, which were tabled for Members.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That Minute Nos. 702, 703, 704 and 705 be approved.***

**773 Recommendations from the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group held on 13 March 2025**

The Chair drew attention to the recommendations from the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group meeting held on 13 March 2025, which were tabled for Members.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That Minute Nos. 746, 747 and 748 be approved.***

**774 Forward Decisions Plan**

***Resolved:***

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

**775 Adjournment of Meeting**

The meeting was adjourned from 8.16 pm until 8.30 pm.

**776 Extension of Standing Orders**

At 10 pm Members agreed to the suspension of Standing Orders in order that the Committee could complete its business.

Chair

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