
WESTERN AREA COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in Rodmersham Village Hall, Green Lane, Sittingbourne ME9 0PS on Thursday, 13 February 2025 from 7.00 pm - 7.37 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, Ann Cavanagh, Lloyd Chapman, Chris Palmer (Vice-Chair), Richard Palmer, Paul Stephen (Chair) and Sarah Stephen.

NOMINATED PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES: Parish/Town Councillors Sarah Poole and Ross Richardson (Bobbing Parish Council (PC)), Brian Clarke (Bredgar PC), Duncan Burnett (Rodmersham PC) and Vivien Rich (Tunstall PC).

NOMINATED PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES (Virtually) : Parish/Town Councillor Nicola Butlin (Borden PC).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Janet Dart and Kieren Mansfield.

OFFICERS PRESENT (Virtually): Larissa Reed and Emma Wiggins.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually): Councillor James Hunt.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Roger Clark and James Hunt.

647 **EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

648 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No interests were declared.

649 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 November 2024 (Minute Nos. 419 – 427) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

650 **DEVOLUTION UPDATE**

The Chief Executive was in attendance and gave a presentation on Devolution. She summarised the Government's Devolution White Paper and its proposals for Local Government reorganisation in the form of Strategic Mayoral Authorities.

In December 2024 Kent County Council (KCC) and Medway Council formally applied to be included in the Government's Devolution Priority Programme (DPP), this was in agreement with the 12 district and borough councils in Kent. On 5 February 2025 KCC were told that the Government had decided Kent and Medway would not be part of the DPP and that the KCC elections would go ahead as planned in May 2025. The Government requested that initial Local Government

Reorganisation (LGR) proposals be submitted by 21 March 2025 with final proposals to be submitted by 28 November 2025.

The following questions and comments were raised:

- The Local Government Boundary Review would be continuing until Swale Borough Council (SBC) were told otherwise. A Community Governance Review could not take place while this was in progress which was worrying as it was important for all areas to have representation under any new structure;
- would SBC be consulted on the proposals or would it be up to KCC? and
- would Swale get a say on which authorities would be part of a new unitary council?

The Chief Executive responded that all districts would carry the same weight when proposals were discussed. The Government preferred for there to be one proposal from Kent but alternative proposals could be submitted if a district strongly disagreed with the Kent proposal. All 47 SBC Councillors and residents would be consulted and the Leader was working to find what would work best for Swale.

651 WASTE & STREET CLEANSING SCRUTINY REVIEW UPDATE

The Policy & Engagement Officer gave an update on the Waste and Street Cleansing Scrutiny Review.

The Environment & Climate Change Committee agreed that a scrutiny review should be carried out so that the root causes of the problems at the start of the new waste contract could be identified as well as any learning that should be carried forward.

A cross-party Member Panel was set up and they carried out their investigations between August and November 2024. In January 2025 the panel took a report of their findings to the Environment & Climate Change Committee where their conclusions and recommendations were agreed.

The report was available to read on the SBC website via this link: <https://news.swale.gov.uk/campaigns/new-waste-contract-campaign/waste-scrutiny>

There was also a summarised version of the recommendations available on the website.

652 PUBLIC FORUM

No issues were raised.

653 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Members noted progress on actions.

Sittingbourne High Street – Councillor Richard Palmer said that Police in Swale had made Sittingbourne High Street a priority area to tackle anti-social behaviour.

Local Heritage List – Councillor Mike Baldock said that the Local Heritage List would be updated again this year and encouraged Parish Councils to consider what they may wish to be submitted. Councillor Monique Bonney commented that it was not easy to find the Local Heritage Listings on the website, the Policy and Engagement Officer agreed to feed this back to the Communications Team.

Bexon (Bredgar) Conservation Area Review – Parish Councillor Brian Clarke reported that the first site meeting had taken place and had gone well.

Councillor Ann Cavanagh requested that venues for future Western Area Committee meetings be booked across the whole of the Western area. The Policy & Engagement Officer confirmed that she did attempt to spread the bookings evenly across the area, but it was dependent on availability of venues.

654 LOCAL ISSUES TO BE RAISED

Councillor Mike Baldock requested that the roll-out of the Loneliness Project come to the next Western Area Committee meeting, should it be agreed at Budget Council. This request was agreed by Members.

Councillor Sarah Stephen said that the Baby Memorial in Sittingbourne had been a success and 26 names were currently listed. Councillors were now looking at using their SBC Member Grants to provide a bench and planting.

655 MATTERS REFERRED TO SERVICE COMMITTEE CHAIRS FOR CONSIDERATION

No issues were raised.

Chair

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