
SITTINGBOURNE AREA COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in The Sapling Room, The Appleyard, Avenue of Remembrance, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 4DE on Thursday, 27 February 2025 from 7.00 - 8.42 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Derek Carnell, Shelley Cheesman, Tim Gibson, Mark Last (Vice-Chair), Kieran Mishchuk, Carrie Pollard, Karen Watson, Tony Winckless and Ashley Wise.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Janet Dart and Larissa Reed.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Inspector Julia Bassindale, Kent Police.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Simon Clark and Charlie Miller.

687 VICE-CHAIR IN-THE-CHAIR

Following the resignation of Councillor Angie Valls, Councillor Mark Last (Vice-Chair) took the chair for this meeting and would be referred to as 'Chair' for the remainder of these minutes.

688 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

689 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Tony Winckless and Derek Carnell declared a non-pecuniary interest as Trustees of Milton Regis Country Park.

Councillors Tony Winckless and Kieren Mishchuk declared a non-pecuniary interest as Members of the Milton Regis High Street Society.

690 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 December 2024 (Minute Nos 498 – 506) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

691 POLICE UPDATE

Inspector Julia Bassindale, Kent Police, gave an update on policing in the Sittingbourne area. She said that she had taken over from Inspector Ryan Chase and had been in the post for 7 weeks. Her update covered the following items:

- Swale Police should soon be fully staffed, there were two Police Constable (PC) positions currently out for recruitment as well as a Child Centred Policing Officer role and it was hoped all positions would soon be filled;
- there had been a focus on two hot-spot areas, one in Sheerness and one in Sittingbourne High Street and this would continue to be the focus for the next

few months. Section 34 notices had been implemented to deal with anti-social behaviour (ASB);

- the Police had booked the gaming bus for one day over the schools' half-term holiday and it had been very effective at reducing ASB. The bus would also be operational during the Easter and summer school holidays;
- there was close working with the Victim Based Crime Team who were able to identify suspects quickly so that action could be taken;
- diversionary tactics were being used to tackle ASB such as the Sports Connect Programme on the Isle of Sheppey. Inspector Bassindale said she would like to get the programme started in Sittingbourne but that was dependant on receiving funding for it;
- there were targeting days of action planned over the next few months aimed at nuisance vehicles;
- Operation Vigilant, which targeted public houses and caravan parks, would continue;
- good officer engagement continued to take place with the Violence Against Women and Girls programme; and
- a week of engagement was planned with the Business Crime Partnership between 17 and 23 March 2025.

The following questions and comments were raised:

- Mr Cooper, from The Bus Shelter Kent, said they had a gaming bus which the Police could use;
- the increase in physical Police presence on Sittingbourne High Street was good;
- had court orders been explored to deal with people hanging around?;
- did Kent Police have a license for live facial recognition software?;
- the illegal use of dirt bikes was an issue;
- the lack of ticket barriers at Sheerness and Kemsley railway stations were access points for ASB perpetrators, could a piece of work take place with British Transport Police and Network Rail to reinstate the barriers?;
- some Borough Councillors and residents would like to set up a Neighbourhood Watch Group and asked for a meeting with Inspector Bassindale to discuss this further;
- catapults and imitation guns were being sold from a shop on Sittingbourne High Street;
- what was the Police policy on pupils wearing school uniforms being observed smoking vapes?; and
- it would be useful for Swale Borough Council (SBC) to put a paper together to inform residents of some Police action taking place in the Borough.

Inspector Bassindale responded that officers were deployed in the focus areas at peak times. Community Protection Warnings had been issued in some cases. Inspector Bassindale stated she was not aware of live facial recognition software being used. A piece of work was planned with British Transport Police and Network Rail to address the lack of barriers at Sheerness and Kemsley Railway Stations. Both Inspector Bassindale and PC Williams would be happy to work with Councillors and residents to set up a Neighbourhood Watch Group. The Police were aware of items such as catapults being sold and were dealing with the issue. A multi-agency approach dealt with under-age vaping. The Sittingbourne Area

Committee Chair agreed to follow up with SBC officers the suggestion to communicate news of Police action taking place in the Borough.

692 DEVOLUTION UPDATE

The Chief Executive 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 within Kent. On 5 February 2025 KCC were told that the Government had decided that 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 comments were raised:

- Some areas were not parished, what process should residents follow to become parished?;
- the timetable to submit proposals was very short;
- would the 2027 borough elections go ahead?;
- the new unitary areas were likely to be geographically big; and
- hopefully devolution would resolve some of the current inefficiencies when supplying services to residents.

The Chief Executive responded that residents should contact her direct to find out about the process for areas to become parished. Although the deadline for submitting final proposals was 28 November 2025, the restructure was not likely to be implemented until 2028. The Government did not like postponing elections, however, they would make the decision about the 2027 elections further down the line.

693 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 had 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.

694 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Members noted the progress on actions.

Swale Local Bus Focus Group – Councillor Karen Watson gave an update following the Local Bus Focus Group meeting which took place on 30 January 2025. Councillor Tony Winckless also attended the meeting. In addition to SBC representatives, Stagecoach and Chalkwell bus companies and KCC attended the meeting. The following issues were discussed:

- Problems with bus shelters;
- buses queuing on Bell Road, Sittingbourne;
- the £2 bus ticket scheme had ended;
- the reduction in the X3 service;
- buses were receiving penalty charge notices;
- KCC had received a Government grant, £12 million for capital projects and £10 million revenue funding for all of Kent. KCC were considering the following capital projects:
 - District bus shelter scheme to repair existing shelters;
 - provision of real-time service information at bus stops;
 - Quick Response (QR) codes at bus stops;
 - ‘tap in/tap out’ facilities on buses;
 - address air quality issues;
 - increased number of electric vehicles; and
 - installation of a system which gave delayed buses priority at traffic lights.

Councillors Watson and Winckless asked at the Bus Focus Group if bus services could be extended to evenings and weekends but were advised it would not be financially viable. They encouraged residents to use the bus services, if they were not used, they could be lost.

The representatives from Stagecoach and Chalkwell bus companies said they would be happy to attend Area Committee meetings.

The following comments were made:

- Buses needed to be accessible;
- bus and train services did not link up; and
- services should be designed to go past key locations in the borough, for example there was no bus service that went past ASDA in Sittingbourne.

695 PUBLIC FORUM

Mr Ken Rowles advised that The Swale Media Arts Centre would be closing on 4 April 2025 and they were looking for an alternative venue.

696 LOCAL ISSUES TO BE RAISED

No issues were raised,

697 MATTERS REFERRED TO SERVICE COMMITTEE CHAIRS FOR CONSIDERATION

No issues were raised.

Chair

Copies of this document are available on the Council website <http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

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