
Council

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 2 April 2025 from 7.00 pm - 9.21 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, Lloyd Bowen, Hayden Brawn, Derek Carnell, Ann Cavanagh, Lloyd Chapman, Shelley Cheesman, Charles Gibson, Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, Angela Harrison, James Hunt, Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Rich Lehmann, Peter MacDonald, Peter Marchington, Ben J Martin (Mayor), Charlie Miller, Lee-Anne Moore, Pete Neal, Tara Noe, Tom Nundy, Chris Palmer, Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin, Carrie Pollard, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen, Terry Thompson, Mark Tucker, Karen Watson (Deputy Mayor), Mike Whiting, Tony Winckless, Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster.

PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Councillors Andy Booth and Kieran Golding.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Jo Millard and Larissa Reed.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Roger Clark, Simon Clark, Alex Eyre, Claire Martin, Ashley Shiel and Julien Speed.

777 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

778 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Extraordinary Full Council Meeting held on 19 February 2025 (Minutes Nos. 661 – 674) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

The Minutes of the Urgent Decisions Committee meetings held on 12 August 2022 (Minute Nos. 241- 244), 20 March 2024 (Minute Nos. 773 – 775), 22 May 2024 (Minute Nos. 41- 43) and 20 December 2024 (Minute Nos. 523 -527) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as correct records.

779 **Declarations of Interest**

During discussion on the Leader's Statement, the Chief Executive declared a non-pecuniary interest as she was the licence holder of the community lottery and Councillor Lloyd Bowen declared a pecuniary interest as he was Chair of the Teynham Village Hall Committee that might benefit financially from the community lottery.

780 **Mayor's Announcements**

As it was the Mayor's final Council meeting before Annual Council, he thanked Members for their support during his mayoral year. He said that since the last Full Council meeting he had attended 13 events, and the Deputy Mayor had also attended a number of events during that time. The Mayor highlighted a recent trip to the Mayor of Bromley's fundraiser at Biggin Hill, Bromley. The Mayor referred to his visit to the International Women's Day event held at Hempstead House in Bapchild, and he thanked the Deputy Mayor and Councillor Sarah Stephen for attending the event.

The Mayor advised there were 20 scheduled events for him to attend up to the end of the civic year in May 2025, and another five scheduled for the Deputy Mayor. He reminded Members of the Brenley Vineyard Tour on 9 April 2025 and the rugby fun day at Sheppey Rugby Club on 19 April 2025, to which all were welcome to attend.

Finally, the Mayor reminded Members of the Mayor's Cycle ride at which the Chief Executive and other staff would be taking part in Sittingbourne's twin town of Ypres, and he encouraged Members to sponsor those taking part.

781 Questions submitted by the Public

There were no questions from the public.

782 Questions submitted by Members

The Mayor advised one question had been submitted by Members, and he invited Councillor Lee-Anne Moore to put her question.

Question 1 – Councillor Lee-Anne Moore:

Eastern Sheppey received £15,274.83 of funding per 1,000 population between 2004 and 2021. This is substantially lower than the amount of funding per 1,000 across the South East (£53,048.96) and again substantially lower than the amount of funding per 1,000 across Swale (£66,024.39).

The figures are even worse for other major funders. The total amount of grants issued from major grant funders per head in Eastern Sheppey was **£2.13** (December 2023). The amount of funding per head across the more generally affluent South East was **£946.85** and across Swale the figure was **£537.97**.

These figures come from the Eastern Sheppey community hub business plan that was provided for by Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion 2024 dealing with left behind neighbourhoods

As these figures show the eastern end of the island is severely lacking in financial grants as well as services, with only one satellite GP surgery for Eastchurch, Leysdown and Warden what does the leader propose this council can do to make sure the residents at the eastern end of the island know longer feel forgotten.

Response – The Leader

The work of the Empowering You in Swale Strategy looks to build resilience and tackle inequalities through a variety of projects and partnerships. These include the continuation of One Swale Roadshows which will be held in the Big Local Sheppey Community Hub (and other locations around the borough), as well as the development of projects through the collaborative efforts of the Community & Partnerships Team with Statutory Health Bodies.

The close relationship the Communities Team has with the VCSE will allow us to continue to seek opportunities to be innovative and draw in potential funding opportunities, as well as open community engagement so that we can understand the needs of the area better. Grants and funding opportunities tend to be location specific,

however, projects such as The Marmot Coastal Programme and the Health & Care Partnership, Community Catalyst Program are concentrated on delivering for residents located in areas with the poorest outcomes of which the eastern end of the island features.

Supplementary question

There was no supplementary question.

783 Leader's Statement

The Leader said:

“As Leader of Swale Borough Council, I want to take this opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to serving all of our communities, whether that be in Sittingbourne, Faversham, the Isle of Sheppey, or our rural areas. As a diverse borough, with a strong sense of community, a rich heritage, and an ambitious future our role is to ensure that, regardless of external factors or wider changes, we remain focused on delivering high-quality services, supporting our local economy, caring for our environment, and improving the quality of life for all residents.

At a time when elections will be taking place for Kent County Council, our responsibility remains to support residents by maintaining stability, ensuring public services continue uninterrupted, and facilitating a fair and transparent democratic process. Whilst Swale Borough Council is not directly involved in this cycle of elections, I encourage all residents to stay engaged, be well informed, and take an active role in local democracy. The incentive being that decisions made at county level will have an impact on our borough, from highways and education to social care and public health. Participating in the democratic process ensures that the voices of Swale’s residents are heard at every level of government.

Over the past year, we have faced a range of challenges, from economic pressures and cost-of-living concerns to the increasing demands on local services. Despite these challenges, the council has continued to deliver for our residents. Whether through housing support, waste collection, environmental initiatives, planning services, or community programmes, our teams have worked tirelessly to ensure that key services remain accessible and effective.

The strength of a community is built on its ability to adapt, support one another, and plan for the future. That is why, alongside delivering essential services, we are looking ahead to ensure that Swale is well-placed to improve opportunities for residents and businesses alike. We remain committed to our duty of ensuring the smooth running of local government, including providing factual, impartial information to residents, ensuring transparency in decision-making, and continuing our day-to-day work without disruption.

During this election period, we also recognise the importance of political neutrality. The work of this council must remain above party politics, ensuring that residents receive services without bias and that our resources are used solely for the benefit of the community. I also want to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to our dedicated council officers and staff. Their professionalism, hard work, and commitment ensure that Swale continues to function effectively, whether that’s in frontline services, administrative support, or strategic planning. Their efforts, often behind the scenes,

keeps our borough running smoothly, and I want to personally thank each and every one of them.

I also want to acknowledge the incredible work of our community organisations, businesses, voluntary groups and volunteers. Their role in supporting residents, whether through social initiatives, business development, or environmental projects is vital. It is through collaboration between the council and our local partners that we can continue to strengthen Swale as a place of opportunity and resilience.

Regardless of the political landscape, what remains unchanged, is a shared commitment to Swale and its future. This council will continue to work in the best interests of our borough, ensuring that services remain accessible, that communities are supported, and that Swale remains a great place to live, work, and visit."

In response, the Leader of the Conservative Group said Swale Borough Council (SBC) needed to be a Council for all communities and all Members should make their residents aware of the upcoming Kent County Council (KCC) election and take up their right to vote. He referred to the improvement in waste collection over the past year and he said that SBC were so much richer when Members engaged with and took the advice and guidance from officers. Finally, the Leader of the Conservative Group acknowledged the hard work of all officers, especially those behind the scenes, and of local organisations.

The Leader of the Swale Independent Alliance (SIA) group thanked all staff for their hard work. He referred to the often low turn-out of voters generally but particularly in Swale and called for work to be done to address the issue. The Leader of the SIA group said he had received complaints that non-collection of brown waste bins was not being rolled over their 12 month contract as an assurance was given this would be automatic. He said it was disappointing the Place Strategy had now been paused for a year, as this would have brought community groups and businesses together.

The Leader of the Reform UK group said the Leader's Statement was well thought out and balanced and agreed there were challenges. He referred to the recent introduction of the community lottery that supported the community and voluntary sector going forward. The Leader of the Reform UK group said one of the best assets of the Council was officers.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat group said that the future of key services were in the hands of voters in the KCC election. She said many people felt abandoned by services run by KCC such as social care and special needs education, and she hoped all residents would vote. The Leader of the Liberal Democrat group highlighted the importance of voluntary or community groups in keeping communities together and supporting residents in need. She thanked officers for their hard work.

The Leader of the Green group thanked all staff for keeping the Council running over the past 12 months.

All Group Leaders commended the Mayor for his successful term and his chairing of Council meetings.

Other Members were invited to speak and made comments including:

- The knock on effect to Council services and impact on children in the borough as funding was reduced;

- the impact on the environment was often forgotten in all the other pressures the Council was under and the focus should also be on the longer term; and
- praised the work carried out around the Active Travel Agenda.

The Leader acknowledged Members' comments and thanked the Mayor for his chairing of the Council meetings over the past year.

784 **Motion - Free Car Parks on the Isle of Sheppey**

The Mayor announced that a late amendment to the motion had been received, proposed by Councillor Rich Lehman and seconded by Councillor Hannah Perkin, and he advised that in accordance with procedure rule 3.1.16.4, he had accepted the amendment as he considered that allowing it would be conducive to enabling the meeting to articulate a common position on the matter under debate. Tabled copies were distributed to Members.

The proposer and seconder of the motion, Councillors Peter MacDonald and Richard Palmer, accepted the amendment without debate.

The Mayor read out the substantive motion as follows:

"It is proposed that Swale Borough Council offer its free car parks across the borough to the relevant Parish and Town Councils through the appropriate committee and council procedures.

Parish and Town councils are best placed to decide what is in the best interests of the people they serve for these car parks going forward.

Council refers this issue to the relevant service committee for exploration and ultimately, decision.

Following devolution, it is likely fewer councillors will be representing the Swale area, and a repeat of the proposal for charging at these car parks will raise its head again and the outcome may not align with the wishes of the people of Swale.

It is hoped that all members can support this motion."

In proposing the motion, Councillor MacDonald said the proposal should be considered by the relevant Committee to be debated and decided, and he was happy that the amendment set that out.

Councillor Richard Palmer seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 3.1.15 (18)(ii), Councillor Mike Baldock proposed and Councillor Monique Bonney seconded a move to the vote but this was not agreed by Members.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 3.1.15 (4), Councillor Elliott Jayes proposed a motion without notice for the motion to be considered at the relevant Committee. This was seconded by Councillor Dolley Wooster. The Mayor did not accept the motion without notice as the proposal in the motion was to consider at the relevant committee, and as the proposal to move to the vote had not been supported by the majority.

Members were invited to speak and made comments including:

- Spoke in favour of the motion;
- after the devolution, it was Parishes and Town Councils that would be the local voice and it was important they looked after assets;
- the subject needed to be dealt with for a final time rather than keep coming back;
- those areas that were not covered by a Parish or Town Council should be carefully considered;
- clarified whether the community asset transfer automatically be considered at a service committee;
- reminded Members that Parish and Town Councils were already considering the implications of taking on land;
- was the intention of the motion to keep car parks free?;
- more discussion was needed at the relevant service committee;
- Parish and Town Councils should be cautious of taking assets on;
- supported parking equity;
- were Parish and Town Councils being offered enough support in the discussions of transfer of parking?;
- questioned whether car parks should be free when other services could not be funded; and
- our communities needed to be as resilient as possible as devolution was ahead, and some Parish and Town Councils already managed their own car parks well.

The seconder of the motion, Councillor Richard Palmer, referred to further debate to take place at the relevant service committee. He said Parish and Town Councils should be given a choice and the opportunity to become more resilient.

The proposer of the motion, Councillor MacDonald, said it should be for the local community to decide how car parks were managed.

On being put to the vote Members voted in favour of the motion.

Resolved:

(1) That Swale Borough Council offer its free car parks across the borough to the relevant Parish and Town Councils through the appropriate committee and council procedures and Council refers this issue to the relevant service committee for exploration and ultimately, decision.

785 Empowering You in Swale - Community Development Strategy 2024-2027

In proposing the recommendation, the Vice-Chair of the Community and Leisure Committee, Councillor Jayes thanked officers for their work on the strategy.

Councillor Richard Palmer seconded the recommendation and reserved his right to speak.

The Leader said the strategy document was an excellent piece of work and congratulated officers.

Referring to the strategy's vision of putting power back into the hands of local

communities, the leader of the Conservative group said Swale's needs were known best by the people who lived there. He said some of the details in the strategy needed to be expanded on and decision making should remain democratic and reflective of the diverse perspectives within Swale. The leader of the Conservative group said the strategy was a step in the right direction, but needed more clarity and structure and he thanked Members and officers for the report.

The leader of the Liberal Democrat group was pleased to see the commitment to so many important aspects of reducing health inequality within the strategy and said community engagement was key. She said the strategy was a really good piece of work and thanked officers for putting it together.

The leader of the Green group spoke in support of the strategy.

The seconder of the motion, Councillor Richard Palmer, said he agreed that there needed to be more engagement with residents and Members should take some responsibility for this by engaging with and informing residents of policies and strategies. He thanked the working group and officers for their work on the strategy.

On being put to the vote, Members voted in support of the recommendation.

Resolved:

(1) That Council approve the adoption of the Empowering You in Swale Strategy.

786 **Constitution update**

The Leader introduced the report and proposed the recommendation.

The Deputy Leader seconded the recommendation.

The leader of the Conservative group spoke in support of the changes and stressed the importance of the Constitution. He said it was a live document and there would be continual changes.

The leader of the SIA group, who was also the Chair of the Constitution Working Group, sought confirmation on the wording to be removed and taken out as set out on the appendix.

The leader of the Liberal Democrat group spoke in support.

The leader of the Reform UK group supported the recommendation.

The leader of the Green group clarified that changes on the appendix were made at the Policy and Resources Committee the previous week. He also asked that going forward the group agreed whether the title of the working group should be 'Constitution' or 'Constitutional' as the report referred to both titles.

On being put to the vote, Members agreed the recommendation.

Resolved:

(1) That the amendments at Appendix 1 be approved and the Monitoring Officer be authorised to incorporate the amendments into the Constitution.

787 Changes to the Committee Structure

The Leader introduced the report and proposed the recommendations.

In seconding the recommendations, the Deputy Leader reserved his right to speak.

The leader of the Conservative group said there were pros and cons on the proposals but on balance, as demands on Members' time was increasing and the peer review proposed a reduction in committees, he would support the recommendations. He welcomed the review of area committees. He said the decrease in the number of committees should not lead to more sub-committees that excluded more Members, but there should be working group which all Members could become a part of, whether they sat on the committee or not.

The leader of the SIA group was critical that more discussion had not taken place before the report came to Full Council. He said the recommendations would lead to increased power to the few and he was disappointed that the main opposition group was in support of it as it showed a lack of being involved in decision making. The leader of the SIA group said that committees often disagreed with recommendations made by working groups and not all Members would be able to sit on a committee. He said the Council should be working its best for its communities and building up a resilience as it headed towards devolution but the proposals reduced participation.

The leader of the Reform UK group questioned the two-staged approach and said if committees were not needed, they should be dissolved in one stage, not in a trial and error approach. He said the decision was being rushed without full engagement.

The leader of the Liberal Democrat group said she was broadly in agreement but did not understand the need for a two-staged approach. She said less committees could lead to more efficiency of officer time and would reduce overlaps of work into different committees. The leader of the Liberal Democrat group said it was important going forward to look at the accessibility of working groups at different times of the day for Members.

The leader of the Green group referred to the report that went to the Policy and Resources Committee meeting the previous week and the options that were agreed. He said that more consideration was needed and he questioned what the process would look like if it were to be slowed down and carried out properly.

Other Members made comments including:

- The move from a Cabinet to Committee system was carried out to involve more Members and reducing committees was the wrong way to go;
- working groups that took place behind closed doors was not transparent and was the wrong way to do business;
- the committee system was more democratic and transparent, and reducing committees was a step backwards;
- the efficiency of different committees was a reflection on the Members who sat on them;

- there would be less opportunity to scrutinise important issues of the Council with less committees;
- the corporate peer review recommended to conduct a review of committee meetings including the number and capacity to support their frequency, not just to cut the number of meetings;
- some committees were better attended than others;
- not all Members would have a seat on a service committee if reduced;
- length of committees would increase;
- should consider the committees more in line with heads of services for a better split;
- requested that the recommendations taken separately;
- suggested a further review, ahead of the municipal year, took place;
- there had already been a lot of discussion on the topic at the Policy and Resources Committee meeting the previous week, and further discussion during this Full Council meeting;
- hoped Members would support a motion for a scrutiny committee in the future;
- peer review said very little scrutiny was taking place across some of the five committees; and
- for all Members to take part in committee meetings, the reports needed to be read in advance of the meeting which did not always happen.

Councillor Alastair Gould proposed an amendment to recommendation one that the Policy and Resources Committee reconsidered the proposal for there to be three service committees in addition to the Policy and Resources Committee, and that the breakdown of the committees be reconsidered. The Mayor advised that should the recommendation fall, the Policy and Resources Committee would be able to debate the matter further via the Constitution Working Group and the late amendment was not accepted.

The Deputy Leader said there was currently duplication across committees. He reminded Members that as the local government reorganisation was looming, officer and member time and attention would be needed for all 47 Members to contribute to the process. The Deputy Leader said the peer review did raise the issue of effectiveness and efficiency in committees. He said the two-staged approach would give time to consider what the two additional service committees would look like and which services sat beneath them. Finally, the Deputy Leader said less evening meetings would allow more working groups to sit in the evening, allowing more Members the opportunity to be involved.

In accordance with Council Procedure rule 3.1.19(2), a recorded vote was taken, on recommendation one, and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Bowen, Brawn, Cavanagh, Cheesman, C Gibson, T Gibson, Harrison, Hunt, Jackson, Marchington, B Martin, Miller, Moore, Neal, Noe, Perkin, Tucker, Watson, Wooster, Winckless and Wise. Total equals 21.

Against: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Carnell, Chapman, Gould, Jayes, Lehmann, MacDonald, Mischuk, Nundy, C Palmer, R Palmer, Pollard, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thompson and Whiting. Total equals 17.

Abstain: None. Total equals 0.

In accordance with Council Procedure rule 3.1.19(2), a recorded vote was taken, on recommendation two, and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Bowen, Brawn, Cavanagh, Cheesman, C Gibson, T Gibson, Harrison, Hunt, Jackson, MacDonald, B Martin, Miller, Moore, Neal, Noe, Perkin, Tucker, Watson, Wooster, Winckless and Wise. Total equals 21.

Against: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Carnell, Chapman, Gould, Jayes, Lehmann, Marchington, Mischuk, Nundy, C Palmer, R Palmer, Pollard, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thompson and Whiting. Total equals 17.

Abstain: None. Total equals 0.

In accordance with Council Procedure rule 3.1.19(2), a recorded vote was taken, on recommendation three, and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Bowen, Brawn, Carnell, Cavanagh, Chapman, Cheesman, C Gibson, T Gibson, Gould, Harrison, Hunt, Jackson, MacDonald, Marchington, B Martin, Miller, Mischuk, Moore, Neal, Noe, C Palmer, R Palmer, Perkin, Pollard, Tucker, Watson, Wooster, Winckless and Wise. Total equals 31.

Against: Councillors Nundy, P Stephen and Whiting. Total equals 3.

Abstain: Councillors Jayes, Lehmann, S Stephen and Thompson. Total equals 4.

Resolved:

That Council:

(1) Take a two stage approach to reduce the service committees from Policy and Resources Committee and four service committees to Policy and Resource and two service committees by reducing the service committees by one in the municipal year 2025/2026 and by a further reduction of one in the municipal year 2026/2027.

(2) Achieves this by the amalgamation of the Health and Housing Committee and the Community and Leisure Committee from the Municipal year 2025/2026.

(3) Agrees that the Chief Executive undertakes a full review of the effectiveness of Area Committees, working with Area Committees, Parish Councils and the public and reports back to the Policy and Resources Committee in the Municipal Year 2025/2026.

788 Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned from 8.20pm until 8.30pm.

Mayor

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