
Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Thursday, 10 July 2025 from 7.00 pm - 9.53 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Lloyd Bowen (Substitute for Councillor Pete Neal), Shelley Cheesman, Alastair Gould (Substitute for Councillor Rich Lehmann), Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes (Vice-Chair), Peter Marchington, Charlie Miller, Kieran Mishchuk, Ashley Shiel, Julien Speed, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen and Dolley Wooster (Chair).

PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Hannah Perkin (Substitute for Councillor Alex Eyre).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Michelle Anderson, Alister Andrews, Andre Bowen, Martyn Cassell, Robin Harris, Duncan Haynes, Robert Lucas, Clare Lydon and Philippa Richardson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Mike Whiting and Tony Winckless.

James Farquhar - Regional Manager for South East (Suez) and James Goodwin – Contract General Manager for Mid Kent (Suez).

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Ashley Wise.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Alex Eyre, Rich Lehmann, Claire Martin and Pete Neal.

164 **Change in membership of Committee**

The Chair advised that Councillor Kieran Mishchuk had replaced Councillor Chris Palmer on the Committee.

165 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

166 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meetings held on 18 March 2025 (Minute Nos. 749 – 755) and 14 May 2025 (Minute Nos. 24 – 25) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct records.

167 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Elliott Jayes declared a disclosable non-pecuniary interest in respect of item 6 Swale Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan as he was a volunteer on the Sheppey Light Railway Greenway (SLRG) Group.

168 **Waste and Street Cleansing Service Annual Report 2024-25**

The Environmental Services Manager introduced James Farquhar - Regional Manager for South East (Suez) and James Goodwin – Contract General Manager for Mid Kent (Suez). He introduced the covering report which included two appendices: the Annual Performance Report for the Waste Collection & Street Cleansing Service; and the Suez

Mid Kent Annual Report.

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

- Welcomed the report;
- it was important to add additional street cleansing coverage for events such as the Hop Festival in Faversham;
- clarification sought on the health and safety data as some figures across the two reports did not add up;
- considered the four-week wait for collection of bulky waste was unacceptable, this needed to be looked into as bulky waste was an income generator;
- some streets were in a poor state; the street cleansing system in place appeared to be very random;
- a better picture should be put on the front of the report;
- the Waste Member Working Group should not be disbanded, but should remain for a further year;
- suggested the colour of the food waste transfer bin on the refuse vehicles be changed so that the public's perception of where the food waste ended up was clearer;
- there were numerous charts within the report and some needed to be given clearer labelling, and the map at Figure 1.12 needed a key to the colours; and
- broken bin lids were abundant and this could contribute to contamination levels.

In response, the Environmental Services Manager said he would look into the health and safety data across both reports and amend prior to publishing the report; conversations were being had with Suez as to how the bulky waste facility could be expanded with some changes already implemented, the residents booking system for bulky waste collection slots was being looked into as some residents were saying that slots were not available and recent changes in legislation meant the Council had to collect some items separately which had caused issues with the service; black transfer bins were primarily used on the vehicles to make the process clearly identifiable. The Head of Leisure and Environment explained that the wording in the joint contract between Ashford and Maidstone Borough Councils was that the transfer bin be clearly marked so that it could be identified as being different from the bins being collected.

Councillor Elliott Jayes moved the following motion: That all food waste transferable bins be any colour apart from blue or green, so that residents were able to see that the food waste was kept separate. This was seconded by Councillor Sarah Stephen.

Members made the following comments on the motion:

- Acknowledged the confusion that food waste being transferred into the vehicle in a blue or green bin could bring, however it was already in the contract that the transfer bin would be visibly different;
- concerned that there could be implications in changing the colour of the bin and was not convinced that this would resolve the issue; and
- suggested the Communications Team promoted information on the food waste journey.

The Head of Leisure and Environment explained that different authorities used different coloured bins and they were shared amongst the depots, however the bins were

replaced regularly given the wear and tear they had from multiple lifts. It was preferable that the contract was not too prescriptive in case the only bins available on a certain day were Swale colours, and often bins returned by residents when they got new ones were used for this process to contribute to the waste principles of re-use.

On being put to the vote, the motion was lost.

Members continued to consider the report and further comments included:

- Overall considered there were many positives and the service had improved;
- fly tipping enforcement should be given more attention as it appeared low compared to incidents;
- considered the previous refuse contractor was better than the new one;
- had heard that residents were not happy with the standard of cleansing on the high streets, more needed to be done;
- thank you to the team who wrote the report;
- clarification sought on the number of vehicles the Council owned/rented;
- some residents had seen green waste going into the same vehicle as green bin refuse waste;
- more information sought on the contamination figures;
- data on street cleansing post public events would be useful going forward;
- were there any additional costs in terms of the transportation of bulky waste?; and
- opportunities for the disposal of particular clinical waste in the borough should be looked into.

In response, the Head of Environment and Leisure said that enforcement work was being carried out on flytipping, which was difficult to pursue sometimes, statistics were being looked at and these figures would be scrutinised. He explained that street areas were zoned subject to their use/level of traffic, and he said that the team would look into the issues on Milton Regis High Street for the Member who had raised the issue.

The Environmental Services Manager said that the Council had purchased a specific amount of vehicles at the start of the new service and that rental vehicles were paid for by the contractor, with no additional cost to the Council; he asked for more detail on the location of garden waste going into refuse waste so the contractor could investigate, and explained that garden waste was collected separately. Approximately 15% of recycling did not get to the recycling facility in 2024 due to excessive contamination and a further 15% - 18% of the recycling that went through the recycling plant was non-recyclable; the Environmental Services Manager stressed the importance of Member support for the teams in tackling the issue of contamination with residents; public event dates could be forwarded to him to see if street cleansing could be carried out after the event; and he noted the feedback on the heat map.

The Head of Environment and Leisure said that fees and charges in terms of bulky waste were being reviewed ahead of being set for 2026/27 and he agreed to follow up with the Member who had raised the issue of clinical waste.

Councillor Carole Jackson proposed recommendation (1) in the report and this was seconded by Councillor Alastair Gould.

Councillor Lloyd Bowen proposed recommendation (2) in the report and this was

seconded by Councillor Ashley Shiel.

Resolved:

- (1) That the contents of the report be noted and the report be published on the Council's website.**
- (2) That the Waste Member Working Group set up for mobilisation of the new service be disbanded.**

169 Swale Local Walking and Cycling Infrastructure Plan

The Active Travel Officer introduced the report which explained the methodology used to create the draft Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and showed the advantages of having all areas of the Borough in one place.

The Chair invited a visiting Member to speak. The visiting Member considered the report did not go far enough. He drew attention to the walking and cycling opportunities in the west of the Isle of Sheppey and considered these should be expanded to the east of the Island in terms of increasing options so that more people could cycle or walk, both to work or for leisure. He considered the SLRG route should be a positive option going forward, as it linked schools and employment sites, as well as being accessible, safe, and deliverable. The visiting Member said that Kent County Council (KCC) had awarded Swale Borough Council (SBC) a ring fenced grant for the SLRG, and he said that even though it was supported by KCC, it was not a proposed route in Swale's LCWIP. He asked the committee that the proposed consultation included an extension of footpath CWR7 to include the SLRG and Leysdown.

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

- Agreed that the consultation included an extension of footpath CWR7 to include the SLRG and Leysdown;
- Parish to Towns connections, as discussed at the Eastern Area Committee should be incorporated into the report; and
- route CR9 in Faversham did not include part of a cycle route already in existence.

The Active Travel Officer said that the main criteria for any routes was deliverability which included permission from landowners along the route. The KCC grant was for the highways element only, not for use on private land. CWR7 had not been included as a route following detailed analysis with the consultant. She confirmed that she would look into the Parish to Towns connections initiative.

The Head of Environment and Leisure explained that the Council would be going against the guidance/methodology of Active Travel England if unsecured routes were added to those already in the Plan.

Councillor Jayes moved the following motion: That, as the consultation already included sections of the SLRG at Queenborough Road, Queenborough and Power Station Road, Minster-on-Sea, it should also include an extension of footpath CWR7 to include the remainder of the route to Leysdown. This was seconded by Councillor Peter Marchington.

Members discussed the motion and the following points were raised:

A Member raised concern that if these additions be included within the consultation and they were not seen as deliverable, that this could then have an impact on grant funding opportunities.

In response, the Active Travel Officer explained that the suggested SLRG route could be added in sections, as permissions were given by landlords. The Head of Environment and Leisure confirmed that any additions would not impact funding as funding was generally achieved for 'sections' of routes rather than whole systems.

On being put to the vote, the motion was agreed.

Members made further comments which included:

- Welcomed the route CR1 on page 79 of the report, but concerned that this followed the Lower Road route (Kemsley to Faversham) which was not a safe route for pedestrians, there was a public footpath that ran from Tonge to Conyer, along the Saxon Shore Way, which was a better route;
- clarification sought on the status of the funding received from KCC; and
- what were the next steps?

The Head of Environment and Leisure said the funding from KCC had only just been received and the intention was to accept it. The LCWIP would be added to the Forward Decisions Plan to report on the feedback following the consultation.

Councillor Jayes proposed recommendation (1) and this was seconded by Councillor Ashley Shiel, and on being put to the vote it was agreed.

The Chair encouraged Members to share the consultation with everyone in the community.

Resolved:

(1) That it be agreed to proceed with the public consultation for the Swale Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP).

(2) That, as the consultation already included sections of the SLRG at Queenborough Road, Queenborough and Power Station Road, Minster-on-Sea, it should also include an extension of footpath CWR7 to include the remainder of the route to Leysdown.

170 Revocation of Air Quality Management Areas in East Street (AQMA 3) and Teynham (AQMA 5) due to air quality improvements and recommendations from Defra

The Team Leader (Environmental Protection – Swale) introduced the report which reviewed the Council's air quality data and advice provided by Defra in the last three Annual Status Reports and data prepared for the 2025 ASR relating to Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) 3 (East Street) and 5 (Teynham).

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

- The AQMAs should not be revoked;
- the additional potential houses in the Teynham area had not been taken into

account;

- caution should be exercised;
- the report did not contain up to date 2025 data;
- the pollutants figure already for half of 2025 was on the edge of the 10% margin of error and pollution would only get worse;
- clarification sought on whether further AQMAs could be added if these ones were not revoked;
- would the revoked AQMAs continue to be monitored?; and
- noted paragraphs 1.11 and 2.8 in the report and considered the AQMAs should be revoked.

The Team Leader (Environmental Protection – Swale) said that the Council had followed the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs guidelines and that the AQMAs should be revoked. The Highsted applications had not been included in the modelled report. Data references needed to be taken from a complete year, and so could not yet include the whole of 2025 data. Figures were taken on an annual average, not monthly average. She confirmed that any further areas could not become AQMAs if these two areas were not revoked and she added that when an AQMA was revoked, the area would still be monitored.

Councillor Jayes proposed the recommendation as set out in the report and this was seconded by Councillor Carole Jackson.

Resolved:

(1) That the revocation of AQMA 3 and AQMA 5 be approved.

171 Open Spaces Strategy Update Report

The Head of Environment and Leisure introduced the report which provided an update on the current position regarding the Open Spaces Strategy and the different typologies. The initial audit phase had been completed and showed a reduction in the hectares per 1000 population since the last audit in 2017. The pending planning inquiry needed to be considered before finalizing the strategy section of the project, so it was proposed to come back to committee when that had been resolved.

Members welcomed the report.

Councillor Jayes proposed the recommendation as set out in the report and this was seconded by Councillor Carole Jackson.

Resolved:

(1) That the update report be noted.

172 Grounds Maintenance Savings Report

The Greenspace Technical Officer introduced the report which set out the proposals after the Grounds Maintenance Contract was identified for sustained reduction to annual costs over the remaining contract period. Whilst this would require a reduction in activity taken by the contractor across the Borough, it needed to be tolerated for the required

savings. In order to deliver the savings, a two-year extension was required but this benefitted the Council as it would take it beyond the proposed local government reorganisation timeframes.

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

- Suggested that instead of being mowed, road side verges be planted with wild seeds;
- clarification as to whether memorial sites would be cleared of leaves, prior to commemoration events;
- suggested savings could be made to concessions that were rented out where the Council still cut the grass;
- happy to see the contract extended;
- there were other areas where the grass could not be cut;
- clarification sort on terms such as 'amenity cuts'; and
- noted that some areas were being taken over by community groups and this would further reduce costs.

The Greenspace Technical Officer responded to the points raised: he acknowledged that road verges could be given over to wild flowers, however he said there were still maintenance costs involved with this; memorial sites would still be cleared of leaves prior to any commemorative events; and amenity cuts were cuts on open spaces used by members of the public.

The Head of Environment and Leisure advised that a monitoring officer was employed who was looking at sites where circumstances had changed and therefore sites no longer requiring grounds maintenance were being removed from the contract. However, it was a constant flow with new sites coming on board from time to time as well.

Following discussion of the financial information in private session, the meeting returned to open session for consideration of the recommendation.

Councillor Stephen proposed the recommendation as set out in the report and this was seconded by Councillor Shelly Cheesman.

Resolved:

(1) That the proposed savings and extension of the current Grounds Maintenance Contract between 14 January 2027 and 14 January 2029 be approved.

173 Public Conveniences Review - Business Case and Consultation Launch

The Service Improvement & Project Officer introduced the report which set out the details of a full review and the formulation of the recommendations.

A visiting Member was invited to speak. He spoke on the public conveniences (PCs) on Milton Regis High Street, asking how usage was determined and why they were currently closed. Officers responded to the points that were raised. The PCs at this location had been closed due to maintenance works resulting from vandalism and officers were awaiting the outcome of this meeting's discussion to consider reopening;

usage of the PCs was carried out by electronic counters and water usage data was also used; and if Members decided that the toilets were to be permanently closed at this location, discussions would be held with the owner of the building on its use going forward.

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

- Clarification sought on how much 'appetite' there was from parish councils to take on the PCs;
- how would it be determined which PCs would close?; and
- the PCs which were transferred to parish/town councils needed to be free at point of use.

In response, the Service Improvement & Project Officer explained that an initial survey had been carried out with parishes and officers were now seeking Member support to further explore the opportunities of transferring the PCs to parish/town councils. It was hoped that public response to the consultation would indicate which PCs should be closed. The Head of Environment and Leisure confirmed that contrary to the reports in the press, it was not the intention to close both toilets in Sittingbourne, just one or the other. Members welcomed that clarification.

Councillor Lloyd Bowen moved the following motion: That the transferred public conveniences be retained as toilets and free at the point of use. This was seconded by Councillor Ashley Shiel.

In response to a question, the Monitoring Officer explained that whether the facility would remain free after transferring would be subject to negotiation and that restrictions like this might deter parishes from considering them.

Councillor Bowen made an amendment to his proposal: That for as long as the transferred building was being used as a public convenience, it remained free at the point of use. Councillor Shiel, as seconder, was happy with the amendment and on being put to the vote it was agreed.

Members continued to speak on the substantive motions and the following points were raised:

- It was important to have accessible for all toilets;
- this seemed as though a decision was being made before it was known whether any parish/town councils wanted to take these assets on;
- it was important to consider the equality impact assessment and it was difficult to capture how impacted the most vulnerable people would be;
- clarification sought on the Community Toilet Scheme;
- suggested question (2) in the consultation needed to be looked at again;
- some toilets had showers attached and so could be difficult to separate out the water usage of the toilets; and
- clarification sought on how the improvement project would be funded.

Some Members commented on which facilities they considered should be closed over others and a Member raised a comment about the water usage at Queenborough.

The Service Improvement & Project Officer spoke on the Community Toilet Scheme and said officers had contacted a few businesses and some had expressed an interest, this was only intended to be rolled out in areas where closures were agreed; question (6) in the public consultation was directed towards those who could be affected by any closures; and the improvement project would be funded by the UK Prosperity Fund. Officers would pick up the changes to the consultation about regularity of use.

The Head of Environment and Leisure confirmed that some parish/town councils had already agreed in principle to look at taking on the PCs but the next stage of negotiation would determine how many were transferred; it was important that the committee gave the go-ahead so the consultation and whole process could begin; and separately, the three closures were about duplication of facilities or where they had less usage and were in need of repair. He said that he understood the impacts on those with protected characteristics and they would look to target specific groups that represented those groups in the consultation.

Councillor Jayes proposed the recommendations as set out in the report and these were seconded by Councillor Jackson.

Resolved:

(1) That residents be consulted on matching the service with the resources in the medium-term financial plan by:

a) The closure of 3 public conveniences

b) Exploring and then as appropriate undertaking formal negotiations to transfer 7 public conveniences to Town and Parish Councils or other appropriate local organisations;

- ***Oare Gunpowder Works Visitors Centre***
- ***Central Car Park***
- ***Rose Street***
- ***Beachfields***
- ***Leysdown Beach Services***
- ***The Spinney***
- ***Queenborough Park***

c) Introducing a Community Toilet Scheme.

(2) That it be retendered for 2026/27 onwards for the remaining 6 public conveniences with the ability to add additional sites subject the scenarios in 2.7.

(3) That officers consider opportunities to improve the condition of the remaining public conveniences, while improving energy and water efficiency where applicable.

(4) That for as long as the transferred building was being used as a public convenience, it remained free at the point of use.

174 Items for Noting

There were no items for noting.

175 Forward Decisions Plan

The Head of Environment and Leisure explained that the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan consultation outcome would be added to the Forward Decisions Plan. He added that the Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan Annual Report would now be submitted to the Committee at the January 2026 meeting, rather than the November 2025 meeting.

Resolved:

(1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.

176 Exclusion of the Press and Public***Resolved:***

(1) That under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3.

3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

177 Grounds Maintenance Contract Savings - Exempt Appendix 1 Implications - Financial, Resources and Property

The Greenspace Technical Officer responded to Members' questions.

178 Public Conveniences Review - Business Case and Consultation Launch - Exempt Appendix I & Appendix IV

This agenda item was not discussed.

179 Adjournment of meeting

The meeting was adjourned from 8.19 pm until 8.26 pm.

Chair

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