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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 Thursday, 12 June 2025 from 7.00 pm - 10.31 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Mike Baldock, Lloyd Bowen, Charles Gibson, Tim Gibson, Angela Harrison, James Hunt, Elliott Jayes, Mark Last, Ben J Martin, Chris Palmer (Substitute for Councillor Kieran Mishchuk), Richard Palmer, Julien Speed, Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster.

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Billy Attaway, Steph Curtis, Lisa Fillery, Robin Harris, Ian Harrison, Joanne Johnson, Jhilmil Kishore, Larissa Reed, Claire Stanbury and Carly Stoddart.

**OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY):** Kirsty-Leigh Parker.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Rich Lehmann and Kieran Mishchuk.

### 49 Election of Chair

Councillor Angela Harrison proposed that Councillor Tim Gibson be elected as Chair for the municipal year 2025/26, and this was seconded by Councillor Mark Last.

**Resolved:**

***(1) That Councillor Tim Gibson be elected as Chair for the municipal year 2025/26.***

### 50 Election of Vice-Chair

Councillor Charles Gibson proposed that Councillor Lloyd Bowen be elected as Vice-Chair for the municipal year 2025/26, and this was seconded by Councillor Julien Speed.

**Resolved:**

***(1) That Councillor Lloyd Bowen be elected as Vice-Chair for the municipal year 2025/26.***

### 51 Emergency Evacuation Procedure

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

### 52 Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 March 2025 (Minute Nos. 760 – 776) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

### 53 Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.

### 54 2024/25 Financial Outturn

The Head of Finance and Procurement introduced the report which headlined the figures of the revenue and capital outturn position for 2024/25. The report highlighted the reprofiling of capital budgets as a result of slippage on projects where the budgets had already been approved.

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

- The fees that were charged for Planning services needed to be strict to prevent the planning department from needing additional funding from the budget;
- was the overspend on planning appeals referred to at paragraph 3.5 of the report, an overspend on the agreed budget, or was there no budget provision made for planning appeals in the last budget?;
- how was the planning income compared to other councils?;
- could the Council not provide a budget for the use of agency staff in the planning department?;
- why had officers not planned the inflation increase on the grounds maintenance contract?;
- what were the potential implications on the budget if the additional Kent County Council (KCC) incentive grants for Revenue and Benefits were not received?;
- could individual budgets be delegated to the relevant service committees so the responsible service committee could monitor the budget?;
- previously, the Council had no planning appeals budget and any appeal would always cost a considerable amount of money;
- did not consider the overspend on planning appeals was unreasonable as even when the Council won planning appeals there was still a cost to the Council;
- the Highsted Park inquiry was due to extend an extra two weeks, that would increase the Council costs so how would that impact the budget?; and
- further consideration was needed to be taken in the recruitment of younger adults to help fill vacancies in the planning department.

The Head of Finance and Procurement responded to the budget for planning appeals and referred Members to page 17 of the report, which showed a small budget for planning appeals. She added that the £139,418 was overspend from the original budget. With regard to other authorities' planning services income, the Head of Finance and Procurement said that other authorities have had similar problems.

The Head of Finance and Procurement responded to the recruitment of new planning officers to prevent an overspend on agency staff and said that work had been ongoing with the potential to temporarily increase the budget for recruitment. She added that no provisions had been made in the 2025/26 budget for agency staff, as officers hoped the vacant posts would be filled.

With regard to the Grounds Maintenance contract, the Head of Finance and Procurement said officers had considered an increase in the budget based on the predicted inflation rate at the time of drafting the budget. However, the inflation was higher than anticipated for this particular contract.

The Director of Resources responded to points raised and said that the Revenue and Benefits team had already factored into the budget the potential loss of the KCC incentive grants. She added that a new report for the additional costs for the Highsted Park inquiry would need to be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee so that Members could agree how the costs would be funded.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That the reduced take from the budget contingency reserve of £371k to deliver a balanced outturn position be noted.***
- (2) That the level of reserves at 31 March 2025 as detailed in table 3 be noted.***
- (3) That the capital slippage of £14.711m and capital expenditure of £16.827m against the Revised Budget as detailed in table 4 and appendix II be noted.***

**55 2024/25 Performance Management**

The Data Protection Officer & Interim Information Governance Manager introduced the report which set out the quarterly performance management report for the fourth quarter of 2024/2025 (January – March 2025) and year end. The Data Protection Officer & Interim Information Governance Manager informed Members of the following improved amendments on page 26: that the quarter four figure for complaints responded to within 10 days was actually the overall outcome for 2024/25 and should be coloured green. The planning enforcement outcome for informing the complainant within 21 days had risen from 85.83% in 2023/24 to 95.97% in 2024/25.

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

- The short-term working days sickness target of two working days was an unrealistically low target to meet;
- the contamination in bin waste would hopefully be improved by the education residents of Swale were due to receive over the summer months;
- concerned that the residual domestic waste per household had almost doubled;
- what were officers planning on doing to reduce the residual waste?;
- the residual waste indicator was not clear on whether it related to missed bin collections or education on what could go into the bins;
- was there any data on mental health sickness related cases and whether it was work related mental health or other mental health issues?;
- how did officers check the general mental health of the organisation?;
- sickness was often not always properly recorded as when staff worked at home they often worked when they were actually sick;
- a project was being carried out over the summer to work with residents helping them understand what they should put in the waste;
- page 25 of the agenda pack stated that the residual household waste target was 273kgs, however on page 27 of the pack it suggested that the target was 475kgs. Could officers clarify what the actual target was?;
- education could be delivered to residents to improve the residual waste, but the message needed to be consistent across the county and needed to be simple;
- referring to the abandoned calls targets, what was classed as abandoned calls?;
- page 26 of the agenda pack, showed the hard work that officers had put in to improve the percentage of fly-tipping incidents attended to within 10 days; and
- thanked the officers for a detailed and well-presented report that made it easy for Councillors to discuss the indicators with their residents;

Responding to points raised, the Chief Executive said that abandoned calls were when residents phoned early in the morning, or during busier times and were placed on a call waiting system and then put the phone down. Referring to the mental health queries,

she said that there was often more than one trigger that resulted in someone going off sick due to mental health related illness and the council worked with members of staff by conducting regular check-ins. The Council provided staff with welfare and counselling facilities and recently carried out a staff wellbeing survey around mental health and that information gave a lot of insights about how staff were feeling.

In response to the staff sickness targets, the Chief Executive agreed that often staff worked when they were sick at home, but were often encouraged and reminded that they would only get better if they took time out of work.

The Director of Resources said that she would investigate the actual residual household waste target and inform Members of the committee after the meeting.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the Performance Management Report as set out in Appendix I of the report be noted.***

Post Meeting Note: The residual household waste target on page 25 should read 475kgs, and as such the residual waste collected was 54.8kgs over target.

**56 Financial Management System Donation**

The Head of Finance and Procurement introduced the report which sought an agreement on how the annual charitable donation of £10,000 that came with the new contract for the financial management system, be spent.

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

- Could the £10,000 be split across each area committee, or rotate the amount to two area committees at a time?;
- giving the £10,000 to area committees could be useful and be agreed at the first meeting of the area committee;
- Members could agree at the area committee what charities they would like to donate to; and
- a limit could be placed on the area committees to only allocate two charities

Councillor Mike Baldock moved the following motion: That the £10,000 be split across all four area committees, and this was seconded by Councillor Lloyd Bowen.

The Chair invited Members to make comments on the motion, and these included:

- The recommendation was fair, simple and did not require a lot of officer time;
- currently, there was an area committee review so the function of an area committee was unclear;
- paragraph 2.7 of the report stated that if one of the Mayor's Charities was a national charity, then that charity would be excluded from the charitable donation;
- if the Mayor had chosen two national charities, then the £10,000 would not be able to be donated to the Mayors charities; and
- £10,000 to some charities was not a massive amount to receive, whereas there were small charities across the borough that would appreciate the donation more.

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

Councillor Elliott Jayes moved the following motion: That the £10,000 be given to the youth services across the whole borough and this was seconded by Councillor Mike Baldock.

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

- This would be difficult to administer;
- it was not as simple as giving the money to charities because some charities could be chosen by the Mayor every year and receive the same donation every year, there needed to be controls in place;
- having a procedural document to follow would aid Members and officers with how to allocate the donation; and
- the report was clear that the Mayor could decide whether the money went to a national charity or not.

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

Councillor James Hunt proposed that the report be deferred to a task and finish group to look at creating a policy on how the Council could properly allocate the funding in the future. This was seconded by Councillor Mike Baldock and on being put to the vote, the proposal was lost.

***Resolved:***

- (1) That the financial system provider's annual social value donation of £10,000 be given to the locally based Mayor's charity/charities each year.***
- (2) That the Mayor receiving the donation is the Mayor of Swale at the start of each contract year from March 2025.***

## **57 New and Amended Fees for Applications made to the Planning Service**

The Planning Consultant introduced the report which set out the introduction of charges for amendments to undetermined applications in accordance with the fee schedule as set out in Appendix I, the revised pre-application and post-decision advice fee schedule as set out in Tables 1, 2 and 3 of the Appendix II, the fee schedule for Planning Performance Agreements as set out in Table 5 of Appendix III, the Member Protocol for pre-application and pre-decision developer engagement as set out in Appendix IV, and the fees for monitoring biodiversity net gain in accordance with the fee schedule as set out in Appendix V of the report.

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

- It was important the Council charged the correct amounts, however did not understand why the Council were only accepting one round of amendments;
- there needed to be a different approach to the pre-application advice pricing as anything above 50 houses was the same price and considered that applications that were significantly above 50 homes should be charged more;
- the Member protocol needed to be considered properly by the Planning and

Transportation Policy Working Group (PTPWG);

- Appendix I showed the strategic developments with a proposed fee of £1,000, the Highsted Park application was submitted four times, what fee would the applicant be charged?;
- £1,000 was too low for large developments when they made an amendment as this did not cover the officers time in processing the amendments;
- larger applications should be charged more, however for some residents having to pay extra for such small amendments could make it difficult for them;
- concerned with householder applications and some of the honest mistakes people made when making an application;
- the strategic major fee on page 45 could be increased to £2,500 and the three householders fee be reduced to £50 each;
- the planning working group needed to work together and discuss improvements to the planning committee and the way it worked to improve it for the borough;
- concerned that parish councils in the Local Government Review were potentially looking at the fees and charges set out in this report and would be deterred from taking on community assets that needed work;
- section 5 of the report did not mention any consultation with Members;
- a task and finish group was needed for the report to be properly discussed;
- Members did not have advanced notice of the report coming forward; and
- it was clear that it needed further discussion.

The Planning Consultant responded to points raised explaining that one round of amendments was an attempt to try and encourage applicants to go through the pre-application advice route first to get better developments from the start. Officers were aware that some consultee responses took a while, so they had included a caveat to allow for further amendments beyond the recommended amount, as set within the process, should the Council consider it was in its best interest to do so. She pointed Members to table 4, on page 55-58, and said the column on the left hand side was the current fees and the right hand side was the proposed fees.

In response to the Highsted Park application fees, the Planning Consultant said that under the proposed charging scheme set out in the report, the four rounds of amendments would be charged at £1,000 per round of amendments.

The Chair proposed that a task and finish group be set up within the Policy and Resources Committee to discuss and agree the amended planning fees and charges. This was seconded by Councillor Ben J Martin, and on being put to the vote was agreed.

Councillor Angela Harrison proposed that one person from each political party be placed on the task and finish group. This was seconded by Councillor Julien Speed, and on being put to the vote was agreed.

Councillor Ben J Martin proposed that the report be referred to the PTPWG to be discussed in detail. This was seconded by Councillor Charles Gibson, and on being put to the vote was agreed.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That a task and finish group be set up with one Member from each political party to agree the proposed amendments to the planning fees and charges.***

**58 Local Heritage Listing - Protocol for Urgent Listings**

The Principal Heritage Officer introduced the report which set out the review of the Local Heritage List in line with the Heritage Strategy Action Plan.

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

- The proposal was a brilliant idea and a good solution;
- a protocol needed to be in place so that Members could check progress;
- there was a process for getting sites and buildings put onto the local heritage list, but it was a long process and items were often missed; and
- hoped that the new procedure could be implemented to make the process work more efficiently.

Councillor Mike Baldock moved the following amendment to the recommendations: That the Policy and Resources Committee be given updates to note at future meetings to see the additions made to the Local Heritage List. This was seconded by Councillor Julien Speed, and on being put to the vote agreed by Members.

***Resolved:***

- (1) That the protocol at Appendix II of the report to allow the urgent designation of assets to the Local Heritage List be agreed and for update reports to be noted at future Policy and Resources Committees.***
- (2) That delegated authority be given to the Head of Place to enact the protocol.***

**59 Postal Goods and Services - Contract Award**

The Head of Place introduced the report which sought Committee approval for the recommended contractor for postal goods and services.

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

- Members and officers needed to cut down the amount of information sent in the post to residents and parish councils;
- communications to parish councils should be by use of emails and AI;
- was the value of the contract the total price for the five years?;
- suggest that next time officers went out to procurement for the postal contract, that they looked for companies that could offer training and guidance on how to reduce the carbon footprint of sending information in the post.

The Head of Place confirmed to Members that the price set out was for the five year contract period.

***Resolved:***

- (1) That Company B be appointed as the contractor for the collection and delivery of second-class postal goods from 1 August 2025 for a period of five years at a total maximum value of £1,100,850.***

**60 Membership of Sub-Committees*****Resolved:***

- (1) That the membership of Appointments Sub-Committee, Disciplinary Sub-Committee and Statutory Officers Disciplinary Appeals Sub-Committee be agreed as per Appendix I attached to these minutes.***

**61 Membership of the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group**

Councillor Charles Gibson proposed that the membership of the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group (PTPWG) be agreed as shown in Appendix I of the report, subject to the Green Party's nomination.

Councillor Angela Harrison proposed that Councillor Charles Gibson be elected as Chair for the first meeting of the PTPWG. This was seconded by Councillor Ben J Martin.

Councillor Charles Gibson proposed that Councillor Hayden Brawn be elected as Vice-Chair for the first meeting of the PTPWG. This was seconded by Councillor Angela Harrison.

***Resolved:***

- (1) That the membership of the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group be agreed as shown in the appendix to these minutes.***  
***(2) That Councillor Charles Gibson be elected as Chair for the first meeting.***  
***(3) That Councillor Hayden Brawn be elected as Vice-Chair for the first meeting.***

**62 Member Appointments to Joint Arrangements*****Resolved:***

- (1) That Councillor Tim Gibson and Alex Eyre be appointed to the Mid Kent Services board.***  
***(2) That Councillor Tim Gibson and Councillor Claire Martin be appointed to the South Thames Gateway Building Control Joint Committee.***

**63 Forward Decisions Plan*****Resolved:***

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

**64 Control Room Growth Business Case**

The Strategic Policy and Communities Manager introduced the report which outlined the business case requirement for growth of the existing CCTV Control Centre footprint, in order to increase the number of external monitoring contracts the service was able to accommodate.

***Resolved:***

- (1) That the addition of the Control Centre Growth project to the Capital Programme for 2025/26 be agreed and the revenue costs of the proposal are met within the current budget framework.***

**65 Exclusion of the Press and Public**

***Resolved:***

***That under Section 100 (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 involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of the Schedule 12A of the Act:***

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

**66 Exempt Appendix I - Control Room Business Case**

This item was discussed in confidential session.

**67 Adjournment of Meeting**

The meeting was adjourned from 8.04 pm until 8.15 pm and 10.19 pm until 10.25 pm.

**68 Extension of Standing Orders**

At 10 pm and 10.30 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