
Extraordinary Policy and Resources Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Monday, 21 July 2025 from 7.00 pm - 7.50 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Monique Bonney (Substitute for Councillor Mike Baldock), Lloyd Bowen (Vice-Chair), Derek Carnell (Substitute for Councillor Elliott Jayes), Charles Gibson, Tim Gibson (Chair), Angela Harrison, James Hunt, Mark Last, Ben J Martin, Kieran Mishchuk, Richard Palmer, Terry Thompson (Substitute for Councillor Rich Lehmann) and Ashley Wise.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Billy Attaway, Natalie Earl, Lisa Fillery, Robin Harris, Joanne Johnson and Larissa Reed.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Steph Curtis, Louise Galloway and Zoe Kent.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Mike Whiting.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Carole Jackson.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Mike Baldock, Elliott Jayes, Rich Lehmann, Julien Speed and Dolley Wooster.

208 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

209 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Monique Bonney declared a non-pecuniary interest with respect to item 5 Community Governance Review, as she was a member of the Five Parishes Group.

The Chief Executive declared a non-pecuniary interest with respect to Item 5 Community Governance Review, as she was a member of Tunstall Parish Council.

210 **Council Tax Reduction Scheme - Permission to consult**

The Head of Revenue and Benefits introduced the report which sought permission to undertake a consultation with both the public and Major Precepting Authorities in respect of proposed changes to the Council's Council Tax Reduction (CTR) Scheme due to take effect from 1 April 2026.

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

- Could the Council claim the cost of administration back from Central Government schemes?
- it was good to see an initiative that gave opportunities to reduce council tax; and
- appendix II needed to be updated so that it was not gender specific.

The Director of Resources responded and said that under the CTR scheme there were set amounts of administration costs that the Council could claim as an authority. She added that her team were working on methods of reducing the costs of running the

scheme as much as possible.

The Head of Revenue and Benefits agreed to review the document before it went to consultation following a question on gender specific wording.

Councillor Richard Palmer proposed that the consultation should give the option for both 90% and 100% increase when reviewing the support for working age claimants. This was seconded by Councillor Charles Gibson and on being put to the vote, was agreed.

Resolved:

- (1) That the report be noted and the consultation to make changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2026/27 be agreed.***
- (2) That the consultation should give options for both a 90% and 100% increase when reviewing whether support for working age claimants should increase.***

Post Meeting Note – The Director of Resources advised that currently legislation was still written as ‘he’, so where officers were using national legislation the wording needed to remain.

211 **Community Governance Review**

The Chief Executive introduced the report which set out the process the Council would need to undertake in order to create additional town and parish councils within the Borough.

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

- Supported the creation of new parishes however, there were some areas in the Borough that did not require a parish;
- the final decision should be led by the ‘will of the people’;
- it was the responsibility of Ward Members to encourage residents to complete the consultation;
- good to see the community review moving forward as it had been worked on for a number of years;
- it was important that the right information about the review was circulated to residents to avoid any confusion;
- it was imperative that the Steering Group considered the wide range of options available to all the areas in the Borough;
- the Steering Group needed to be led by what residents within the individual areas wanted;
- welcomed the opportunity for a review on which areas of the Borough needed to be included in towns or parishes as development had merged the boundary lines between towns and villages;
- the Steering Group should be politically balanced and include all the groups;
- requested that the Steering Group met at times when it was convenient for working Members;
- it was clear that there was no single view on what was right for each area of the Borough, so it was important the document referenced that the decision would be led by what the public wanted; and

- the Steering Group needed to circulate clear and accurate information to the residents of Swale to keep them informed about what was being proposed.

Councillor Angela Harrison commented on the wording of recommendation (1) and proposed that the wording be updated to read '*That a Community Governance Review in Swale be undertaken with the objective to extend Town or Parish Council coverage to all of Swale if that was the wish of the majority of residents within the specific areas.*'

Councillor Richard Palmer seconded the proposal but suggested the removal of majority as it could cause confusion.

Members made further comments, and these included:

- The recommendation needed to simply outline that following a public consultation a decision would be made;
- suggested the word 'objective' be removed from what was already in the recommendation;
- there were plenty of areas where the town or parish council was not working effectively so needed a clear steer from the public;
- the Terms of Reference (TOR) was not clear in setting out what options the Steering Group would be able to review; and
- was there a reason why community councils were not an option?

The Chief Executive responded to points raised and said that it was clear there was no single view as to the specific areas that needed the review. However, the consultation was an opportunity for a review to take place and for the Steering Group to view all available options for the specific areas. She added that the TOR were created as a starting point and that at the first meeting of the Steering Group there would be a list of options to review and then decide what areas were currently operating effectively and what areas needed a further review. One of the options would be to explore the possibility of community councils in certain areas.

With regard to when the Steering Group would meet, the Chief Executive said that she had spoken to the Local Government Reform Project Officer and agreed that the meetings would be held in the evening, but would be led by the Steering Group as to the times and dates that suited them.

In response to the change of wording for recommendation (1), the Chief Executive suggested that the recommendation be changed to '*That the Policy and Resources Committee recommends to Full Council that a Community Governance Review be undertaken.*'

Councillor Angela Harrison agreed to the change of wording as set out by the Chief Executive and this was seconded by Councillor Richard Palmer. On being put to the vote, it was agreed.

Councillor Ben J Martin proposed that the Steering Group be politically balanced with two members from Labour, Conservatives and SIA, one member each from Liberal Democrats, Reform and Green, plus the unaligned Independent Member. This was seconded by Councillor Charles Gibson and on being put to the vote, it was agreed.

Recommended:

- (1) That the Policy and Resources Committee recommends to Full Council that a Community Governance Review be undertaken.**
- (2) That the political configuration of the Steering Group be two members from Labour, Conservative and SIA groups, one member each from Liberal Democrats, Reform and Green group, plus the unaligned Independent Member.**
- (3) That the draft Terms of Reference as shown in appendix B of the report be noted and these not go to Full Council until the areas covered by the Community Governance Review had been agreed by the Steering Group.**

212 Local Plan Review - Timetabling and Way Forward - Report To-Follow

The Planning Manager (Policy) introduced the report which set out the barriers to progressing the Local Plan in line with the current Local Development Scheme (LDS) and the recommendation made by the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group (PTPWG) at its meeting on 15 July 2025.

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

- The result of the Highsted Park (HP) inquiry might be later than estimated in the report so it was important work was carried out whilst the Council was waiting for the result;
- thanked officers for their hard work in finding possible options so that the Council could progress with their work on the Local Plan;
- the discussion at PTPWG was helpful and the Council found itself in a challenging situation whilst the HP inquiry was continuing;
- the average time for the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and Deputy Prime Minister to make a decision similar to HP was 64 weeks, which was much longer than the estimated March 2026 date within the report;
- the lack of a Local Plan was impacting the Council as policies that had been drawn up by parishes and communities for neighborhood plans could not be used when deciding applications;
- the viability session of the HP inquiry had originally been scheduled for one day but was still continuing after 10 days, so there was a real danger of the inquiry being further extended;
- the Council had a lack of 5-year housing supply because there were land owners 'sitting' on potential developments that would help the Council meet the 5-year housing targets;
- the Council had to move forward with the Local Plan work; and
- noted the two resolutions made at Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group.

Councillor Charles Gibson proposed the recommendation and this was seconded by Councillor Derek Carnell. On being put to the vote, it was agreed.

The Planning Manager (Policy) said that officers' best assumption from past experience and taking into account the accelerated pace the government was seeking to apply to housing delivery was that the planning inspectorate would have a decision ready in two/three months after the inquiry had finished, then it would be down to the Secretary of State (SoS) for Housing, Communities and Local Government and Deputy Prime

Minister to make the final decision. Officers hoped that due to the high profile that HP had, the SoS for Housing, Communities and Local Government and Deputy Prime Minister would make her decision expediently, but acknowledged that this was a risk out of the Council's control.

The Head of Place acknowledged the two resolutions made, and confirmed that as these were Member steers rather than decisions, they did not need to be recommended to the Policy and Resources Committee, and would be noted as resolutions under the PTPWG minutes at the next Policy and Resources Committee.

Recommended:

- (1) That the updated Local Development Scheme as set out under Option 1 in the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group report be agreed.***

Chair

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