
Extraordinary Council

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 17 September 2025 from 7.00 pm - 7.30 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, Andy Booth, Lloyd Bowen, Hayden Brawn, Derek Carnell (Deputy Mayor), Ann Cavanagh, Shelley Cheesman, Alex Eyre, Charles Gibson, Tim Gibson, Kieran Golding, Alastair Gould, Angela Harrison, Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Mark Last, Peter MacDonald, Peter Marchington, Claire Martin, Ben J Martin, Charlie Miller, Kieran Mishchuk, Pete Neal, Tara Noe, Tom Nundy, Chris Palmer, Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin, Carrie Pollard, Julien Speed, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen, Terry Thompson, Karen Watson (Mayor), Mike Whiting, Tony Winckless, Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster.

PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Councillor James Hunt.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Billy Attaway, Steph Curtis, Jo Millard and Larissa Reed.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Charlotte Hudson, Claudette Valmond and Emma Wiggins.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Roger Clark, Simon Clark, Rich Lehmann, Lee-Anne Moore and Mark Tucker.

316 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

317 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

318 **Local Government Review**

The Mayor confirmed with Members they had all seen the report and appendices. She referred to the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Member briefing that took place prior to the meeting led by the Chief Executive, at which Members had been able to seek clarification and ask questions.

The Leader introduced the report which set out the progress made to date with the LGR and the options open for Swale Borough Council (SBC) to continue the process. He proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Ashley Wise who reserved his right to speak.

The Leader of the Conservative Group said he was disappointed that option 4C (Swale/Maidstone/Ashford) was not supported by other authorities and highlighted the costs if Swale were to push forward with that option. He said that a single unitary authority would push the public further away and whilst he felt conflicted, he was supportive of the recommendations.

The Leader of the Swale Independents Alliance (SIA) Group, referred to the lack of engagement with residents and said officer time and resource might be wasted if the decision was just 'rubber-stamped' by politicians. He said that whilst he preferred option

4B (Swale/Ashford/Folkestone and Hythe), neither were good options, but pursuing option 4C might leave SBC undermined.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group agreed with other speakers and said the options did not reflect what the residents of Faversham wanted. She said the decision was being forced on SBC.

The Leader of the Reform UK Group agreed that it would be wasted resource pursuing option 4C.

The Leader of the Green Group said there was no point in spending additional resource and SBC had little choice.

Other Members were invited to speak and made comments including:

- Felt strongly that the process was a waste of time, money and resource for all Councils;
- many commercial and business opportunities would be in stalemate whilst the process was being carried out;
- the options were appalling;
- disappointed that SBC had a partnership agreement with an adjoining Council that did not want to work together with SBC going forward;
- if more options were pursued, it was less likely that SBC's favoured option would be agreed;
- nobody wished to spend £80k additional resource;
- thanked those involved in the work to progress;
- it was a confusing process, especially for residents;
- SBC should work with partners that wished to work with them and rule out those that did not;
- had been through this process many years previously, carried out a consultation and SBC's preferred option was not agreed; and
- should be focusing on the recommendation, and on the decision whether to spend £80k to pursue SBC's preferred option.

The Deputy Leader thanked all those involved for their work and thanked Members for their comments. He acknowledged it had not been easy, would have preferred a greater public engagement and said there had been a rush in considering geographies. The Deputy Leader singled out a previous speaker for their common sense comments and said that if SBC did not get behind the process, it would move anyway and SBC would not have a voice.

The Leader thanked the Chief Executive for her hard work and thanked Group Leaders for their involvement.

Resolved:

(1) That the contents of the report and the work undertaken so far by Kent Leaders and the Chief Executive be noted.

(2) That the Council remained part of the Kent Programme which was working with KPMG to produce full business cases for model 3 and model 4b for Local

Government Reorganisation.

Mayor

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