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## COUNCIL

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**MINUTES** of the Meeting held in the Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 22 October 2014 from 7.00 - 9.04 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Barnicott, Sylvia Bennett, Bobbin (Mayor), Monique Bonney, Andy Booth, Lloyd Bowen, Bowles, Mick Constable, Derek Conway, Mike Cosgrove, John Coulter, Adrian Crowther, Duncan Dewar-Whalley, Mark Ellen, June Garrad, Ed Gent, Sue Gent, Nicholas Hampshire, Harrison, Mike Haywood, Mike Henderson, Lesley Ingham, David Jones, Gerry Lewin, Peter Marchington, Ken Pugh, Gareth Randall, Pat Sandle, David Sargent, Ben Stokes, Adam Tolhurst, Roger Truelove, Anita Walker (Deputy Mayor), Ghlin Whelan, Mike Whiting, Ted Wilcox, Tony Winckless, Steve Worrall and John Wright.

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Joanne Hammond, Chris Lovelock, Donna Price, Mark Radford and Nick Vickers.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Reverend Jean Burrows.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Jackie Constable, Martin McCusker, Bryan Mulhern, Prescott, David Simmons, Nick Williams, Alan Willicombe and Jean Willicombe.

### 294 PRAYERS

The Mayor's Chaplain said prayers and a minutes silence was held in memory of Mrs Lesley Cosgrove and Past Mayoress Mrs Dianne Lewin.

### 295 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 September 2014 (Minute Nos. 243 – 251) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

A Member referred to Minute No. 249 (Leader's Statement) in relation to the Planning Shared Service and advised that the update to Members had not been received within the week, as advised by the Leader.

### 296 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

### 297 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor welcomed Councillor David Jones, newly elected Councillor for Sheppey Central Ward, to the meeting.

The Mayor reminded Members of the Civic Night at the Theatre on Friday 14 November 2014 and the Quiz Night on Saturday 29 November 2014. He announced that Councillors have been contacted regarding Remembrance Day and representing the Mayor at services across the Borough. He thanked those who had replied and reminded Members to contact the Mayor's PA as soon as possible.

Councillor Jones thanked the Mayor and spoke of the honour and privilege of being elected for Sheppey Central Ward, and the diligence with which he would fulfil his role as a Borough Councillor.

**298 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC**

No questions had been submitted from members of the public.

**299 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS**

No questions had been submitted from Members.

**300 LEADER'S STATEMENT**

The Leader introduced his statement and welcomed questions from Members. The following sets out a summary of the questions and answers under the three themes of the Statement.

**District Councils Network Update**

Could the Leader expand on the comments regarding skills, are there any further ideas being put forward by either the Peace Commission or the Leader, and would the Leader agree that working with employers on expanding the apprenticeship scheme is a good place to start?

The Leader agreed that engagement with local employers to encourage apprentices was important, and the Council already had good relationships with local businesses and was the most successful District Council in Kent regarding apprenticeships. He considered there was work to be done to up-skill the existing local workforce and close the education gap. The Leader acknowledged the Member's experience in this field and advised that he would liaise directly with him on these issues.

Could the Leader provide more clarity on the reference to housing numbers?

The Leader explained that the Council's stance had been to keep additional housing numbers as low as possible, and he considered that numbers should be determined at District Council level. He could not elaborate more on the direction of the Peace Commission's review until after the next meeting, but he suspected the focus would be on housing lists and homelessness.

Would the Leader consider that there is a need for more affordable accommodation and that for many residents social housing was their only option?

The Leader explained that this was an issue that he regularly discussed with the Housing Team and social housing providers in the Borough, and it was taken very seriously.

Is there a mechanism to force owners or developers holding land suitable for development to build on the land, rather than using inappropriate small plots of land to meet the housing demand?

The Leader advised that all planning applications were considered by officers based on the Council's policies and legislation. He acknowledged there was an issue with land and he considered that the Council should be able to levy a proportion of Council Tax onto landowners/developers who fail to develop land that is suitable for housing.

**Sittingbourne Town Centre**

Is the Leader happy with the reported £1.1m spent on consultancy fees for Sittingbourne Town Centre?

The Leader explained that part of the money had been funding from the Department of Communities and Local Government. Some consultancy fees had been required during the negotiations with Tesco, and the Leader expressed his disappointment that their decision to withdraw their plans had wasted Council Taxpayers money. He advised that the consultancy fees also related to discussions on the proposed redevelopment of Junction 5 of the M2, as well as the regeneration of Sittingbourne Town Centre. As the two projects had a combined value of around £150m he considered that the consultancy fees represented an appropriate proportion of the project costs, to ensure the Council received the right professional expertise and advice, and exercised their duty of due diligence with taxpayers money.

How many of the proposed 220 apartments would be affordable?

The Leader explained that the detail of the apartments would be an issue for the Planning Committee to decide; but it was hoped that the apartments may free up other housing in Swale and they were aimed at the economically active commuter market.

A Member summarised a letter submitted to a recent Design Panel meeting, which raised concerns regarding the Sittingbourne Town Centre proposals. He asked the Leader if the points made need further consideration?

The Leader explained that the cost of Design Panel meetings was charged to the applicant; the design of St Michaels Road would be subject to approval from Kent County Council Highways; the restaurants would be positioned so they faced the square; it was expected that many of the residents of the apartments would use the train, and they were not designed to be family units which is why car parking spaces were lower; there may be opportunity to use some spaces within the multi-storey car park for residential use; the aspect of the ground floor flats would be addressed at the Planning Committee stage; and the comments could all form part of the planning consultation process.

Has a cinema operator signed up, and if so, what have they signed-up to?

The Leader explained that there was interest from three major chains and there was one preferred option but no operator had signed up yet.

Did the Leader agree that the proposals would lead to a severe lack of parking that could not be resolved in future years; residents parking in the multi-storey would reduce spaces for other users; concern that the proposals were leading to an engineered society rather than communities and neighbourhoods; how would the issue of a road next to the main square be addressed; would the Council consider a small grant scheme for improving High Street shops; and the buildings need to be welcoming from all sides and not block off Station Street?

The Leader advised that the proposed plans would address some of the Member's concerns; and the size of the car park had been increased to account for some use by residents.

Could the Leader look again at the loss of two long-stay car parks and the implications for commuters, as Albany Road car park was too far from the station?

The Leader advised that no decision had been made on the use of the multi-storey car park for short- or long-stay parking but occupancy of the current long-stay car parks was below 50 per cent. National Rail were still considering extending their current car park adjacent to the station.

Did the Leader agree that it was the hard work of the Conservative Group that was leading the regeneration in Sittingbourne and that the Labour Group will hamper the plans and the UKIP Group will remain silent?

The Leader agreed that it was disappointing that not all parties were supportive of the regeneration opportunities for Sittingbourne Town Centre. A Labour Group Member responded by explaining that it was important to properly scrutinise the proposals and hold the Cabinet to account; and raised concern that the plans did not address the chronic underuse of land around Sittingbourne.

Could the Leader provide some information about regeneration in Sheppey as a lot had been said about Sittingbourne?

The Leader advised that this item specifically related to Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration and previous Leader's statements had referred to regeneration activities on the Isle of Sheppey.

### **Health update**

Could the Leader ensure that Sheppey Councillors are involved in future discussions regarding Medway Hospital, as it was an increasing concern since the end of the DMC contract at Sheppey Hospital?

The Leader hoped that the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) would attend a future Sheppey Local Engagement Forum meeting to provide an update.

Would the Leader agree that part of the solution at Medway Hospital was a new Board of Governors and that the top-down reorganisation of health services by Canterbury CCG has been disastrous for Faversham residents?

The Leader agreed that the reorganisation of healthcare by Canterbury CCG was ill-conceived and detrimental to residents. With regard to Medway Hospital he advised that he would await the findings of the formal report but it was clear that some re-organisation was needed.

Can I remind the Leader that there are serious issues with Kent and Canterbury and William Harvey Hospitals which affect Faversham residents?

The Leader referred to previous Statements which had commented on healthcare issues in Faversham; he stressed that the eastern end of the Borough was of equal concern and he regularly raised issues at KCC's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Would the Leader join me in hoping that negotiations regarding the re-opening of Lakeside GP Surgery come to a swift and successful conclusion for residents?

The Leader agreed.

Would the Leader acknowledge that Sheppey Hospital was of concern for Sittingbourne residents too, as it covered the out-of-hours service; and what more could be done to improve GP surgeries in Swale which were of a poor standard?

The Leader reminded Members that they could observe the Swale Health and Wellbeing Board Meetings which would address some of the questions being raised.

Could the Leader advise when we are going to move to 48 hour waiting times for GPs?

Could the Leader request a Member Briefing from the CCGs to address some of the issues raised?

The Leader acknowledged the issues regarding lack of GPs and waiting times and asked Democratic Services to make arrangements for a Member Briefing on Health.

### **301 REPORT OF THE RETURNING OFFICER**

The Mayor referred Members to the report of the Returning Officer, which set out the results of the Sheppey Central Borough Ward by-election on Thursday 16 October 2014.

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the report be noted.**

### **302 POLITICAL BALANCE AND APPOINTMENT TO COMMITTEES 2014/15**

The Corporate Services Director introduced the report which set out the revised political balance calculations following the by-election, as required by Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

The Leader of the Labour Group advised that he would be gifting a seat on Audit Committee to the Conservative Group.

The Leader of the Independent Group and the Leader of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) Group advised that, in accordance with the adjustments needed to achieve overall political balance, they had allocated the following seats:

Independent Group: Scrutiny Committee and Policy Development and Review Committee.  
UKIP Group: General Licensing Committee and Standards Committee.

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the political balance calculation as set out in Appendix I be agreed.**

### **303 POLLING DISTRICTS AND PLACES**

The Leader introduced the report which set out the results of the consultation undertaken of all polling districts and places in Swale and the recommendations of the Returning Officer. He also drew Members' attention to the recommendations from the General Purposes Committee which had considered the report at their meeting on 6 October 2014.

The Corporate Services Director gave the following updates:

Vincent Gardens, Sheerness - officers had undertaken a site visit which had identified that the green was unsuitable for a mobile polling station. However, an area of hardstanding adjacent to the gardens may be suitable and this was being followed up with KCC's Highways Department, as the owners of the land.

Great Easthall Estate – officers had undertaken a site visit and no suitable area had been identified which would be suitable for a mobile polling station, and would meet the criteria required.

A Member referred to Borden and Grove Park Ward, and asked officers to reconsider using Westlands Primary School for voters from the New Zealand Estate, due to the issues set out in the report. He queried whether it was a material consideration that the polling station was located within the same Ward and requested that this decision be deferred for further review.

The Leader proposed that it be delegated to the Director of Corporate Services in consultation with the four Group Leaders to review the proposals for Borden and Grove Park Ward.

A Member referred to Murston Ward and requested that officers continue searching for an appropriate location within the Great Easthall Estate for a polling station.

A Member suggested Borden Village Hall as an alternative polling station for residents of the New Zealand Estate.

The Leader proposed that it be delegated to the Director of Corporate Services in consultation with the four Group Leaders to review the proposals for Murston Ward, specifically the Great Easthall Estate.

**Resolved:**

***(1) That, with the exception of Borden and Grove Ward and Murston Ward, the polling districts and places as set out in Appendices I and II be approved, as recommended by the General Purposes Committee.***

***(2) That delegation be given to the Director of Corporate Services, in consultation with the four Group Leaders, to review the proposals for Borden and Grove Ward and Murston Ward, specifically the Great Easthall Estate.***

**304 CHANGES TO CONTRACT STANDING ORDERS**

The Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report which set out proposed amendments to Contract Standing Orders (CSO) to assist local Small and Medium Enterprises in bidding for lower value Council procurements, up to the value of £15,000. The report had also been considered by the General Purposes Committee at their meeting on 6 October 2014, and they recommended approval.

The Cabinet Member for Localism welcomed the proposal but sought assurance that the Local First Policy was foremost in officers' thinking when awarding contracts, as it was not specifically mentioned in the CSOs?

A Member asked that the changes were well publicised to local businesses so they were fully aware that they were now in a better position to tender for works.

The Cabinet Member for Finance gave assurances to both requests.

**Resolved:**

***(1) That the amendments to Contract Standing Orders as set out in the report be approved.***

**305 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPROVAL**

Members noted the recommendations from the General Purposes Committee on 6 October 2014, which were the subject of separate reports on the Council agenda.

Chairman

Copies of this document are available on the Council website <http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

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