
COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 29 March 2017 from 7.00pm - 8.57 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Cameron Beart, Bobbin, Monique Bonney, Tina Booth, Lloyd Bowen, Bowles, Roger Clark, Katy Coleman, Derek Conway, Mike Cosgrove, Adrian Crowther, Richard Darby, Mike Dendor, Duncan Dewar-Whalley, Paul Fleming, June Garrad, Sue Gent, James Hall, Nicholas Hampshire, Harrison, Mike Henderson, Alan Horton, James Hunt, Lesley Ingham (Mayor), Ken Ingleton, Nigel Kay, Samuel Koffie-Williams, Gerry Lewin, Peter Marchington, Padmini Nissanga, Prescott (Deputy Mayor), George Samuel, David Simmons, Ben Stokes, Roger Truelove, Anita Walker, Ghlin Whelan, Mike Whiting, Ted Wilcox and John Wright.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Chris Lovelock, Jo Millard, Donna Price and Mark Radford.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Sarah Aldridge, Andy Booth, Mark Ellen, Mick Galvin, Bryan Mulhern and Ken Pugh.

1271 PRAYERS

The Mayor's Chaplain said prayers.

1272 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Mayor outlined the evacuation procedures.

1273 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 15 February 2017 (Minutes Nos. 1189-1202) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

1274 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

1275 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor had attended the funeral of Mr Chris Ewell from Milton Regis (Sittingbourne's 'tin can man') and said that she had spoken of Mr Ewell at the Volunteer Swale Awards which she attended that evening.

The Mayor had enjoyed her Sparkle Ball and hoped others that attended had also enjoyed the event.

The Mayor accepted a petition, 'Think Again', from Simon Clark.

1276 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

The Mayor advised that three questions had been submitted by members of the public, the answers to which had been provided, can be viewed on the Council's website, and are attached as Appendix 1 to these minutes. The Mayor invited the members of the public to ask a supplementary question.

Question one

Kathleen Carter from Eastchurch Parish Council was disappointed with the response, questioned whether there were resource issues and asked what action would be taken to resolve the outstanding issues?

The Cabinet Member for Planning accepted there had been a long delay in a particular case which relied on a multi-agency approach, and had arranged for officers to meet with the Parish Council again.

Question two

Andrew Cooper asked whether ease of access to the Council's website should be of prime concern to Swale Borough Council (SBC) and what were the Council doing to address this?

In response, the Leader agreed that the Council wanted the website to be accessible to all users and outlined the issues of confirming identification of users. He thanked Mr Cooper for raising the issue and agreed to consider his comments.

Question three

Simon Clark thanked the Leader for his response but considered it unsatisfactory. He advised that over 1,000 signatures had been collected on the 'Think Again' petition and asked the Leader to give consideration to the petition and reconsider the proposal to borrow £28m?

In response, the Leader said that 1,000 signatures was not a wide-spread opinion and advised that many residents were in favour of the proposal. He highlighted the lack of Government funds and the need to invest in the future, and thanked Mr Clark for his efforts, but had not changed his mind.

1277 FIRE DRILL

A fire drill was implemented at 7.15pm. The meeting was reconvened at 7.33pm.

1278 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS

The Mayor advised that two questions had been submitted by Members, the answers to which had been provided, can be viewed on the Council's website and are attached as Appendix II to these minutes.

Question one

Councillor Ben Stokes thanked the Cabinet Member for his response.

Question two

Councillor John Wright thanked the Leader for his response and asked how SBC were addressing air pollution? He highlighted the previously successful Queenborough and Rushenden retrofit project and asked if there were plans for any similar schemes in the future?

The Leader acknowledged the successful Queenborough and Rushenden retrofit project and advised that SBC would be looking at any and all ways to address pollution. He encouraged everyone to lobby Central Government for the public to have more access to electric cars and more re-charging facilities.

1279 LEADER'S STATEMENT

The Leader presented his statement which gave updates on the Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration and the Transformation project. The statement also provided positive news on the Volunteer Awards, the Sunday Times Best 100 Not-for-Profit Organisations and the Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Awards 2017.

Sittingbourne Town Centre Regeneration

The Leader of the UKIP Group raised concerns that SBC were now considering the funding of a scheme that had deviated from the original submission and asked the Leader to consider concerns raised over the design of the retail park and its impact on the town centre, and the viability of the scheme?

In response, the Leader advised that the scheme had been considered many times, the best design would be sought and there were already tenants waiting to occupy the units.

The Leader of the Labour Group was supportive of a retail use on the former Princes Street depot, but highlighted that this site was the only part of the scheme that included retail. He asked what the risk assessment was around the Light Cinema and sought clarification on the latest status of the housing proposed on the car parks?

The Leader advised that it was vital that Swale residents spent their money in Swale including in retail, the cinema and restaurants, and the regeneration had already encouraged Marks and Spencer to Sittingbourne. He added that the Skatepark and the Dolphin Yard Sailing Barge museum were included in the regeneration scheme. The Leader advised that the status of the housing scheme on the car park had not changed.

A Member asked the Leader to join him in thanking the Brogdale CIC who were now running the Skatepark project and the Barge Museum Members, who were working hard to open the facilities by the end of the year. The Leader agreed and thanked all Members involved for their efforts.

In response to a Member who advised that there had been further delays in opening the Skatepark, the Leader agreed to find out more detail and update him.

A Member highlighted the traffic around the retail park and referred to planned infrastructure works in the summer which gave little time for businesses to plan. The Leader advised that the matter was in the hands of Kent County Council (KCC), and whilst there had been a delay in agreeing the Section106 Agreement, KCC were now progressing the matter. He added that whilst there had already been two sequence changes, he would raise the issue of changing the sequence of the traffic lights again.

A Member asked that Members be included in updates from the SBC Communications team. The Leader replied that all press releases were sent to Members first.

A Member added that cleanliness of the Borough was an important part of the regeneration and praised both staff and public in their efforts.

Transformation update

The Leader of the UKIP Group suggested that Members be included in the Transformation Project and asked that the public be consulted.

The Leader of the Independent Group reminded Members that there had been a Member Briefing on the Transformation Project when it was in its early stages, and advised that there would be another update briefing which all Members should attend.

The Leader reminded Members that the project was externally funded and that the Chief Executive would be taking over leadership of the project from the Head of Commissioning and Customer Contact who was retiring.

A Member spoke about the effective KCC reporting system which was particularly useful for reporting flytipping. She added that some residents did not have landlines and others may not be able to afford new technology. The Leader praised SBC's Customer Service Centre.

A Member highlighted the benefits of using apps on mobile phones, and Members recommended downloading the free 'country eye' app to report fly tipping in Kent.

Volunteer Awards/The Sunday Best 100 Not-For-Profit organisations/Local Government chronicle (LGC) Awards 2017

The Leader of the UKIP Group said that the Volunteer Awards were moving and inspiring and he thanked all volunteers across the Borough. He added his congratulations to the Economy and Community Services Project Officers for organising the event.

The Leader agreed and added his congratulations to Councillor Roger Clark who had received an award for his involvement in Milton Country Park. The Leader

highlighted the successful apprenticeship scheme and the promotion of young people within the SBC scheme.

The Leader of the Independent Group added his praise of volunteers and asked the Leader what position SBC had achieved in the Sunday Times Best 100 Not-For-Profit organisations, and how many Councils were above SBC in the list? In response, the Leader advised that SBC had achieved 85th place and only one Council were above SBC in the list.

A Member thanked all volunteers but gave particular praise to the Upchurch litter pick volunteers and the SBC staff who assist in organising such events.

1280 PAY POLICY REPORT

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance introduced the report and highlighted the key changes to the Pay Policy Statement at 3.4 and Section 4 of the document which were due to changes in Government legislation. He advised that the figures provided at 3.5 were as at December 2016 and would be updated to March 2017 before being published on the website. He proposed the recommendations which were seconded.

The Leader of the UKIP Group welcomed the information on page 9 that the Council does not have a bonus system for staff, but was disappointed that there was a low level of trade union activity.

The Leader of the Independent Group suggested that the document could be written in clearer English in the future, and compared the small difference in pay scales from the top of some scales to the bottom of others. He further suggested that a target figure should be provided when calculating the multiple of the Chief Executive's salary compared to the median earning of all other employees. He highlighted that the Chief Executive's salary was seven times greater than median salaries.

In response, the Leader said that the Council should recruit the best person for the right salary and would pay whatever the going rate was. The Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance added that the small difference in some pay scales was because pay scales used to overlap but no longer did.

A Member said members of the public in her ward had stated that Senior Officers' pay was too high and this should be addressed. In response, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance disagreed and said that Officers deserved and earned their pay.

Resolved:

- (1) That the proposed Pay Policy Statement be agreed for publication on the Council's website.***
- (2) That the information within the Pay Policy Statement be updated with actual year-end figures before final publication.***

1281 MOTION SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS

Councillor Roger Truelove proposed the following motion:

“The Council resolves to apologise for the manner in which members of the public were excluded from the Extraordinary Scrutiny meeting on November 29 2016.”

Councillor Truelove gave an account of events at the Extraordinary Scrutiny Committee meeting on 29 November 2016, which had resulted in the public not being given access, and said that the treatment of the public that night was disrespectful and he hoped lessons would be learned and it would never happen again.

Councillor Mike Baldock seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

The Leader proposed an amendment to the motion:

“The Council accepts that due to some confusion in communication members of the public were not enabled to attend the first part of the Extraordinary Scrutiny meeting on November 29 2016. Lessons needed to be and have been learnt.”

The Leader said that he fully accepted that the situation could and should have been managed better, but the events had been investigated twice and a line needed to be drawn under it.

Councillor Gerry Lewin seconded the amendment.

Councillor Mike Baldock was disappointed that there was no apology in the amendment and asked how lessons had been learned?

In the debate that followed, the following points were made:

- the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee should apologise;
- the situation could have been avoided but there was no significant injustice to the public to warrant investigation;
- the situation should not have arisen;
- disagreed with the amended motion as the public were not confused;
- process was not followed properly; and
- disagreed with the numbering of confidential papers.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was agreed. There was no further debate.

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

Resolved:

- (1) *The Council accepts that due to some confusion in communication members of the public were not enabled to attend the first part of the Extraordinary Scrutiny meeting on November 29 2016. Lessons needed to be and have been learnt.***

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