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## Environment Committee

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**MINUTES** of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 17 January 2024 from 7.00 pm - 8.31 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Charles Gibson (Substitute for Councillor Mike Henderson), Carole Jackson, Rich Lehmann (Chair), Charlie Miller, Chris Palmer, Ashley Shiel, Julien Speed, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen, Angie Valls, Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster (Vice-Chair).

**PRESENT (VIRTUALLY):** Councillor Roger Clark.

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Alister Andrews, Martyn Cassell, Philippa Davies and Janet Hill.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY):** Councillor Elliott Jayes.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Mike Henderson and Pete Neal.

559 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

560 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 7 September 2023 (Minute Nos. 270 – 274) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

561 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

562 **Procurement of minor maintenance and cleansing of public conveniences service**

The Environmental Services Manager introduced the report as set-out in the agenda papers.

A Member spoke to confirm the Council requirements in relation to public toilets (the Council had the power to provide public toilets, but did not have a statutory duty to do so), and said whilst we wanted to provide them, it was important that the constraints of the Council's budget allowed for other services to continue as well. She highlighted the issue of vandalism to toilet facilities within the Borough.

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the appointment of Company X be approved for the provision of minor maintenance and cleansing of public conveniences from 1 April 2024 for an initial period of one-year (plus an option of a one-year extension).**

**(2) That the matter be referred to the Policy and Resources Committee for consideration of the budget implications.**

563 **Annual Climate and Ecological Emergency Progress Report**

The Climate Change Officer introduced the report as set-out in the agenda papers.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- This was an excellent report;
- it was important that all the committees within the Council worked together to combat climate change issues;
- there were cases where a Section 106 Agreement from a planning application meant that funding was allocated to a school to take overspill from a development, but this could mean that children were driven further to get there, rather than attending their local school which had no spaces, and this was not good for the environment;
- clarification sought on who was on the steering group;
- there were high carbon emissions from Swale's industries;
- more information sought on off-setting;
- what was the survival rate of the trees that were being planted?;
- needed to ensure that Swale's Emerging Local Plan timeframe fitted in with this progress report;
- why were the figures in the report out of date (2021)?;
- the climate emergency targets needed to be embedded within the Council's policies, and should be the Council's main driver, not just an addition;
- a bigger climate change team was needed at Swale;
- it could be beneficial to have a tool to direct residents to recycling points nearest to them, such as supermarkets and pharmacies, for recycled batteries and pill packets;
- schools needed to update their Active Travel Plans; and
- the Council needed to reduce the amount of paper it used for printing agendas and minutes.

Councillor Ashley Shiel moved the following motion: That moving forward, the Environment Committee goes paperless, with no agendas and minutes, unless a paper copy was requested by a Member, and it be recommended to the Policy and Resources Committee that other committees within the Council did the same. This was seconded by the Chair and on being put to the vote the motion was agreed.

Further comments included:

- More environmentally friendly conditions needed to be added to planning applications, for the installation of solar panels etc.;
- there was a lot of vandalism of young trees, how did the Council decide where they were planted?;
- it could be beneficial to have more communications on 'signposting' in place so that residents knew where they could take recyclable items;
- what was being done to target specific households who abused the system and did not put the correct waste in the correct bin?; and
- it was important that recycling was particularly focussed on in schools and be part of children's education.

Officers responded to the points raised, as below:

- Officers met with Kent County Council (KCC) regularly and this gave an opportunity to network and share thoughts of the Environment Committee;
- the steering group was made up from one Member from each political group, plus

- officers from across the Council's departments;
- there was a real desire to reduce Swale's carbon-intensive industries carbon footprint;
  - offsetting carbon emissions was really important, and it was easier to track this on a local scale, but the topic was constantly evolving, and it was difficult to track impact;
  - the review of the Action Plan would look further into offsetting carbon emissions;
  - the survival rate of newly planted trees varied, with small whips sometimes being vandalised and damaged due to hot summers when watering was limited, but officers were still optimistic this was making an impact;
  - in terms of linking the progress report with the emerging Local Plan, this would take place going forward, with the next action plan looking at longer term timescales;
  - the report showed the currently available figures. These were provided by Central Government and there was always a three-year time lag;
  - recognised the importance of talking with developers through the planning process to achieve more sustainable homes and reduce carbon impact;
  - the tree planting programme had been built by a mix of officer and Ward Members' requests on suitable locations. There would be further opportunities over the next few years for Members to input;
  - the upcoming new waste contract was an opportunity to review the way recycling was promoted and signposted;
  - specific locations for recycling batteries and pill packets often changed and this made it difficult for the Council to keep the information up to date and signpost to these locations themselves, however national databases did exist and could be promoted on the Council's website; and
  - bins were regularly checked to ensure correct waste was in the correct bin and a more robust approach to not collecting contaminated bins would be taken when the new waste contract commenced in March 2024.

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the report be noted, and it be referred to Full Council on 31 January 2024.**

**(2) That the reallocation of £11,000 Improvement and Resilience funds towards the Carbon Footprint recalculation project to provide the evidence for revising the Action Plan be approved.**

**(3) That moving forward, the Environment Committee goes paperless, with no agendas and minutes, unless a paper copy was requested by a Member, and it be recommended to the Policy and Resources Committee that other committees within the Council did the same.**

**564 Barbeques in Public Spaces - Review**

The Head of Environment and Leisure introduced the report as set-out in the agenda papers.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- Had the Council looked at actively encouraging more responsible use of disposable barbeques, such as a permanent dedicated space in parks or on

- beaches to encourage good behaviour, including disposal of the barbeques?;
- considered disposable barbeques to be a serious fire hazard and disappointed with the recommendations;
  - the situation needed to be monitored very closely and re-evaluated at the end of the summer;
  - there was more damage done by fireworks – and the resolution needed to be relative to the data received;
  - supported the recommendations;
  - did not think that Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) were effective within the Borough;
  - there should be pressure on retailers not to sell disposable barbeques; and
  - the Government should take action.

In response, the Head of Environment and Leisure said that officers had looked at how other Council's dealt with the issue of disposable barbeques, including dedicated areas set aside for them. He said the Council had not gone ahead with this approach yet as it required allocation of further budget to undertake.

Councillor Julien Speed moved the following motion: That any fire incidents caused by disposable barbeques be monitored during the summer of 2024 and reported back to the Environment Committee in Autumn/Winter 2024. This was seconded by the Chair and on being put to the vote was agreed.

Councillor Ashley Wise moved the following motion: That the Chair of the Environment Committee writes to Central Government to re-iterate the Council's opinion that there should be a national ban on the sale of disposable barbeques. This was seconded by the Chair and on being put to the vote was agreed.

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the report be noted and a specific PSPO ban on the use of disposable barbeques in Council open spaces not be proceeded at this time.**

**(2) That officers continued to work with the Community Safety Partnership to monitor statistics of barbeque related fires within Swale and monitored the impacts of other Council's bans (including Canterbury's) and the effectiveness of PSPO enforcement.**

**(3) That any fire incidents caused by disposable barbeques be monitored during the summer of 2024 and reported back to the Environment Committee in Autumn/Winter 2024.**

**(4) That the Chair of the Environment Committee writes to Central Government to re-iterate the Council's opinion that there should be a national ban on the sale of disposable barbeques.**

**565 Forward Decisions Plan**

**Resolved:**

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

Chair

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