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## COUNCIL

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**MINUTES** of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 21 January 2015 from 7.00 - 8.21 pm.

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

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

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Jackie Constable, Ed Gent, Gerry Lewin, Prescott, Gareth Randall, David Sargent, Nick Williams, Alan Willicombe, Jean Willicombe and John Wright.

### 437 PRAYERS

The Mayor's Chaplain said prayers.

### 438 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 November 2014 (Minute Nos. 359 – 369) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

### 439 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

### 440 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor thanked everyone who bought tickets for the Meat Hamper raffle and helped to raise £200 in aid of the Mayor's Charities.

The Mayor announced that Swale Borough Council had been presented with a framed copy of the Donald John Dean VC Scroll by his daughter, Mrs Susan Bavin. The scroll was presented to Donald Dean by the District Councils of Sittingbourne Urban, Milton Regis Urban and Milton Rural on the 15 February 1919 and has been given to the Council following the Commemoration Event held on 5 December 2014.

Members were reminded that invitations have gone out for the Civic Dinner, Cabaret and Dance "The Poppy Ball" on Friday 20 February 2015 at Merlins Entertainment Complex. Tickets can be booked via the Mayor's PA.

A Member recalled that a Bard's Chair had been gifted to the Council and asked officers to seek its return to Swale House.

Councillor Mike Haywood advised that after 12 and a half years as a Borough Councillor he was resigning his position to take up a new post at the London Borough of Barking and

Dagenham. Councillor Adam Tolhurst would become the acting Leader of the Labour Group. He wished all Members well for the future.

Councillor Adam Tolhurst thanked Councillor Haywood for his work on the Council and his role as Leader of the Labour Group. He referred to Councillor Haywood's chairmanship of various Committees and his experience, intelligence and political nous.

The Leader, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, and Leader of the Independent Group expressed their disappointment at Councillor Haywood's resignation and the loss this would be to the Council, but offered their congratulations and best wishes to him in his new role.

#### **441 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC**

There were no questions submitted by the public.

#### **442 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS**

The Mayor advised that 17 questions had been submitted by Members. The questions, with responses from the appropriate Cabinet Members, were tabled at the meeting. These are attached as Appendix II to the Minutes.

The Mayor invited Members to ask a supplementary question.

There were no supplementary questions to questions one, two, five, six, fourteen and sixteen.

Supplementary to Question Three

Councillor Walker asked: "What more does the Cabinet Member for Localism think can be done to support cultural organisations?"

The Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Heritage and Culture advised that a new cultural grants scheme was being launched from 22 January 2015 to assist small groups with grants of up to £1k for qualifying applications, and further information would be circulated to Members.

Supplementary to Question Four

Councillor Tolhurst asked: "Can I see a copy of the risk register?"

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration confirmed that it was a public document that was reviewed at the cross-party regeneration meeting, and he would ensure the Member was sent a copy.

Supplementary to Question Seven

Councillor McCusker asked: "Is the Cabinet Member for Localism aware that on 3 February 2014 the General Purposes Committee requested that a letter be sent to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) – was the letter sent, has the Council received a reply and can we see a copy?"

The Cabinet Member for Localism, Sport, Heritage and Culture confirmed that a letter was sent to DCLG and the reply had been circulated to Members. He advised that the Electoral Commission had recently issued a report on Standing for Election in the UK containing a number of recommendations which the Government would consider in due course.

Supplementary to Question Eight

Councillor Winckless asked: "Does the Cabinet Member think that taking nearly a year to purchase a single property with the increasing number of homeless people cuts the ice?"

The Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Health spoke as Lead Member for Housing in the Cabinet Member's absence. He offered to request a more detailed response from the Cabinet Member, but acknowledged that it had taken a long time due to various issues and it was important to concentrate on moving forward now.

Supplementary to Question Nine

Councillor Harrison asked: "Would the Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs give serious consideration to piloting a zero tolerance approach in one of the worst affected areas for street cleanliness, as highlighted by the NI 195 surveys?"

The Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs confirmed that he would consider this.

Supplementary to Question Ten

Councillor Worrall asked: "Only a fifth of residents hit by the Bedroom Tax who have applied to downsize so far have been rehoused, does he think this is fair?"

The Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Health spoke as Lead Member for Housing in the Cabinet Member's absence. He acknowledged that it was not fair, but referred the Member to the response provided in the tabled paper which set out what the Council was doing to address this.

Supplementary to Question Eleven

Councillor Whelan asked: "I would like it noted that the Planning Audit report which was due to be provided in October 2014 is now expected in February 2015 which is most disappointing. Could the Cabinet Member advise who has responsibility for Planning Services in Swale and have they got a grip on the situation?"

The Leader replied that Mr Freeman was Head of Planning Services and Councillor Gerry Lewin was the Cabinet Member for Planning.

Supplementary to Question Twelve

Councillor Whelan asked: "Performance indicators for Planning have not been available for some months and the Cabinet Member for Performance has failed to appear at the last two Scrutiny Committee meetings despite a huge rise in complaints about the Planning Service. Is he not ashamed and embarrassed?"

The Cabinet Member for Performance acknowledged the problems which had occurred with the implementation of the new planning arrangements and the lack of performance data available. He advised that in the long-run it would lead to a better service; the situation was improving significantly and performance figures would be available for the next quarter.

Supplementary for Question Thirteen

Councillor Ellen asked: "Is this the best we can do, a lack of proper jobs, with too many low-paid, insecure jobs? Does the Council really have a long-term plan for Sheppey?"

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration explained that the Isle of Sheppey would continue to benefit from the increasing prosperity of the Borough, and the wind turbine application was very important to the area. The Kent and Medway Partnership were putting a lot of resources into Swale to create further opportunities and he outlined some of the new and expanding businesses on the Isle of Sheppey.

Supplementary to Question Fifteen

Councillor Worrall asked: "Does the Leader feel guilty that his area is living off my area with no money from the land sales coming into Sheerness?"

The Leader replied that the reason for larger numbers of land sales in Sheerness was because the Council had originally purchased more land there. He explained that the Isle of Sheppey, and Sheerness particularly, continued to benefit from significant Council funding and support for regeneration projects.

Supplementary to Question Seventeen

Councillor Henderson asked: "Over what timescale were the 63 one and two bed affordable rented homes built in the Borough, as I doubt they were built in response to the bedroom tax?"

The Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Health spoke as Lead Member for Housing in the Cabinet Member's absence. He advised that he would request a response to this question from the Cabinet Member for Housing.

#### **443 LEADER'S STATEMENT**

The Leader introduced his statement and welcomed questions from Members.

The Leader of the Labour Group made the following comments: the Council was making an enormous amount of money from distribution centres and supermarkets, and whilst the increase in jobs was welcome, they were often low-paid, insecure and temporary, and there were no plans to improve the jobs available to local people; I would urge the Leader to change the terms of engagement with acute trusts; the work of the Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs, and all Members who have been involved in the waste contract process, is commendable, and it is due to the success of the collaborative effort shown by Members over many years; and he challenged the Leader on the lack of ambition regarding housing, with people being pushed into private sector accommodation and a poorer standard of properties.

The Leader advised that housing issues remained a personal priority and he would never lack ambition to improve housing. He spoke of the excellent work of the Housing Team and Cabinet Member for Housing with 48 families prevented from becoming homeless in December 2014. With regard to jobs, he advised that he was meeting with the Director of Regeneration and the Leader of Kent County Council (KCC) to discuss how Swale Borough Council could work closer with KCC to improve skills, education and job opportunities in the Borough. He explained that Swale had seen 800 new jobs over the past year, the largest growth in manufacturing industry in Kent, and the highest number of apprentices in Kent.

The Leader of the Independent Group made the following comments: nationally and locally there was the same issue of income tax receipts declining due to an increase in low-paid

and part-time jobs and zero hours contracts, the Council needed the find ways to bring quality jobs into Swale; no mention was made in the statement of the Council's involvement with Canterbury and Coastal Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and whether we are seeking improvements in health for the eastern end of the Borough; and it was over a year since the Council had agreed to purchase a property for use as temporary emergency accommodation and a similar property was urgently required in Faversham and the Isle of Sheppey and a quick answer was needed.

The Leader explained that the purchase of the property for temporary emergency accommodation had taken a while due to legal issues and the project would be evaluated and reviewed before making further decisions. He undertook to include further information on the regular meetings held with Canterbury and Costal CCG in the next statement. He congratulated the business sector for the growth in jobs and the success of businesses in Swale over the past year.

A Member welcomed the increased recycling figure and asked for a breakdown of the recycling between food waste and dry recycling at year end.

The Leader confirmed that these figures would be made available, and he hoped that the recycling rate would continue to increase.

A Member considered that the Council had been offered good advice by an external consultant during the Local Plan process regarding employment, which had included suggestions on how to improve the number of higher-earning and knowledge-based jobs through the creation of hubs around the Borough. She suggested that the Council should resolve to use this advice in the future.

The Leader advised that the efforts made in meeting with businesses had been equal across the Borough and the job growth at Kent Science Park was important to the area. He considered it was important to support existing scientific and knowledge-based businesses at Kent Science Park as alternative options for the site could be much worse for local residents.

#### **444 RESOLUTIONS FOR CALCULATING COUNCIL TAX BASE**

The Cabinet Member for Finance introduced this report which sought approval for the Tax Base for 2015/16 and proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by the Cabinet Member for Performance.

The Leader of the Labour Group expressed regret that those parishes which were subject to higher numbers of new homes were also receiving less services.

A Member commended the work of officers and their tremendous efforts which results in a high collection rate.

#### **RESOLVED:**

**(1) That the report of the Head of Finance for the calculation of the Council Tax Base for the year 2015/16 be approved.**

**(2) That pursuant to the Head of Finance's report and in accordance with the Regulations made under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (The Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) Regulations 1992 (as amended)) and the Local Authorities (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012 (SI 2012:2914), and the Local Government Act 2003, the amount**

*calculated by Swale Borough Council as its Council Tax Base for the whole area for the year 2015/16 shall be 42,869.49. The Council Tax Base for the individual Town and Parish Councils within the borough area shall be itemised in Appendix II to this report.*

#### 445 TREASURY MANAGEMENT HALF YEAR REPORT

The Chairman of the Audit Committee introduced the report which reviewed the mid-year outturn position on treasury management transactions for 2014/15, including compliance with treasury limits and Prudential Performance Indicators. Councillor Pat Sandle proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by the Leader.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the performance information in the report be noted.**
- (2) That the possible reduction in our minimum acceptable credit returns for bank deposits be noted.**

#### 446 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPROVAL

- (i) Cabinet – 3 December 2014

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the recommendations in Minute No. 384 (Medium Term Financial Plan and 2015/16 Budget) be approved.**

- (ii) Audit Committee – 10 December 2014

Members noted the recommendations from the Audit Committee which were the subject of a separate report on the Council agenda.

Chairman

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