
COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 29 July 2015 from 7.00 - 8.30 pm.

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

OFFICERS PRESENT: Katherine Bescoby, Abdool Kara, Chris Lovelock, Jo Millard, John Scarborough and Nick Vickers.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Monique Bonney, Derek Conway, Lesley Ingham and Prescott.

134 PRAYERS

The Mayor's Chaplain said Prayers.

135 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 17 June 2015 (Minute Nos. 67 – 76) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to an amendment to page 64, to replace the word 'polytunnels' with 'holiday homes'.

136 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

137 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor advised Members of the spectacular Waterloo Dispatch Events she had attended on 27 June 2015. The first had been in the morning in Faversham, which she had been invited to by the Mayor and Mayoress of Faversham; the second in the afternoon, in Sittingbourne, which had also been attended by the Lord Lieutenant and his wife. The Mayor had been given a framed copy of the Dispatch which would be displayed in the Civic Suite.

She also advised that on 14 July 2015 she was honoured to have been visited by 14 young people from Japan, some of whom were disabled, who were planning to do a relay swim on 15 July 2015. The Mayor had been presented with a silk banner, crystal paperweight and framed letter which would be on display in the Mayor's Parlour.

138 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

The Mayor advised that one question had been submitted, and invited Mr Richard Palmer to ask his question. A copy of the question, and answer from the Leader, had been circulated. A copy is attached as Appendix I.

The Mayor invited Mr Palmer to ask a supplementary question. Mr Palmer advised that he was disappointed with the answer given, and asked "Should parish and town councils be expected to increase their precept because Swale Borough Council is holding money that the government fully expects to be given to town and parish councils?".

The Leader thanked Mr Palmer for his questions, and advised that any such funding was not made explicit in the revenue support grant, and it was right to stop funding in one hit. The Leader advised that if the Council continued to fund this, it would have to take away money from other services to support that, due to the current capping regime for the Borough Council, which of course town and parish councils were not subject to.

139 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS

The Mayor advised that there were 11 questions, the answers to which had been provided to Members. A copy is attached at Appendix II. The Mayor reminded Members that there was a thirty minute time period for this item, and a three minute time limit for supplementary questions and their answers. The Mayor invited Members to ask a supplementary question.

Question 1

Councillor Alan Horton asked the Cabinet Member if he could outline the latest position regarding the set up of pre-access courses for health and social care students. The Cabinet Member referred to a health conference he had attended where this had been discussed, and that he and the Swale Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) had pushed forward a series of training alongside universities to design a pre-access course for young sixth form students to engage in health care, especially in Sheppey. A workshop was being held next Tuesday to progress this and he would provide Members with further information.

Question 2

Councillor Roger Truelove advised he understood the need for confidentiality, and asked the Cabinet Member if he could let him/other Members know what was happening. The Cabinet Member advised he was happy to arrange a meeting to discuss this, and explained the reasons why it was not possible to produce a confidential report on this.

Question 3

Councillor Ben Stokes asked the Cabinet Member whether the review would be far reaching and fundamental. The Cabinet Member advised that it was for the Policy Development and Review Committee to determine this, but he expected that it would be, and he reminded Members of the ways of asking the Policy Development and Review Committee to undertake policy reviews.

Question 4

Councillor Ghlin Whelan referred to the three large hoardings in the Town Centre, and asked the Cabinet Member whether the flats, multi-storey car park and cinema would all be commenced by 2016. The Cabinet Member advised that the cinema would be the 'turn key project' for development to commence; once the cinema deal was accomplished, it would start a domino effect, and he advised that talks were being held with a national cinema operator.

Question 5

Councillor Ghlin Whelan asked the Cabinet Member when the resident could expect a reply; what was meant by 'as quickly as possible'? The Cabinet Member expressed his anxiety about this issue, and advised that if the Member gave him contact details he would follow this up. He explained on average it took three months from request to installation. There had been an increase in applications this year and there was a modest budget. He had agreed to review this area, and advised that if there were problems, they should be explained to the residents.

Question 6

Councillor Mick Galvin asked a supplementary question of the Cabinet Member for Health. The Cabinet Member advised that the supplementary question should be on the same subject as the original question.

Question 7

Councillor Roger Truelove asked the Leader if he envisaged, in view of the government policy, would the Council return to being a Living Wage Council? The Leader advised that it was never a Council policy; as to whether the Council would move to a Living Wage, he advised that staff were all receiving in excess of that without the need for a policy; if he meant contractors/suppliers, if the law required it then of course the Council would comply with national legislation, but it would be a matter for the government and not for the Council to enforce.

Question 8

Councillor Paul Fleming asked the Cabinet Member if the Council had engaged the Area Manager of the Royal British Legion? The Cabinet Member advised that he had contacted County headquarters in the past, but it had not been possible to make contact for various reasons, but agreed to ask officers to follow this up.

Question 9

Councillor Harrison asked the Cabinet Member if the Council no longer took any cognisance of rules to determine planning applications within deadlines? The Cabinet Member responded by saying that in pre-application discussions, it was possible for the developer and planners to jointly agree an extended time period as it was often not possible to meet all requirements within 13 weeks. In respect of the example given, it was regrettable that the agreed deadline had not been met and that the developer had chosen to appeal for non-determination, but the Inspector would have a well-rounded response from the Planning Committee.

Question 10

Councillor Harrison asked the Cabinet Member if Members would receive a briefing note to update them on recycling performance and plans regarding residents who had black sacks and no food waste. The Cabinet Member agreed to arrange for a

briefing note, which would contain information about the service and future plans. He advised that a communication and education campaign was about to start, and that the Kent Recycling Partnership had agreed a target for all councils to recycle at least 50% of household waste by 2020.

Question 11

Councillor Andy Booth asked the Cabinet Member if he would engage further to ensure that this issue was addressed and a comprehensive report was produced. This was necessary for the protection of cyclists in Sheppey, for the benefit of well being and healthy lifestyles, and to attract more visitors. The Cabinet Member advised that there were a number of issues to be addressed; it had been considered by the Swale Joint Transportation Board three times in the last twelve months, and it would be a combined effort to resolve.

140 LEADER'S STATEMENT

The Leader presented his Statement to Members which gave an update on the Local Government Association (LGA) Conference; LGA – General Assembly; LGA – Senior Management Changes; Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) Pilot Update; Swale CCG recruitment of young people to take access courses in social and health care; and Community Safety Unit update.

The Leader advised that since the Statement had been written, the Chairman elect for South East England Councils (SEEC) had been agreed as Councillor Paul Carter, the Leader of Kent County Council (KCC). In respect of senior management changes at the LGA, he advised that Mr Mark Lloyd would replace Caroline Downs.

The Mayor invited Members to ask questions.

The Leader of UKIP advised that he had also attended the LGA Conference, and asked a number of questions: could the Council look at developing the night-time economy? Was the Council ready for change, when another planning application had gone to appeal for non-determination? He welcomed the update regarding the FPN pilot, and asked if it was possible to expand it? In respect of the community safety update, he asked whether the reduction in incidents reported to the police was a case of under-reporting; what could be done to encourage residents to report; and what was meant by renewed focus?

The Leader responded by advising that Councillor Ken Pugh would respond to him direct regarding the Community Safety Update. In respect of the non-determination of planning applications, the Leader advised that this was an historical problem and he was confident that recent applications would be determined within time limits. Regarding the FPN update, he undertook to ask officers to look into this. In respect of the question regarding the night time economy, the Leader advised that this was being dealt with as part of plans for the development of Sittingbourne Town Centre.

The Leader of the Labour Group advised that he had also attended the LGA Conference, where devolution was a key theme. He asked the Leader for his views on the possibility of a Combined Authority for Kent and Medway and a new Kent

and Medway Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP). He also suggested that the Statement should have included an update regarding Operation Stack.

In respect of Operation Stack, the Leader advised that the Council was limited in what it could do. However, the suggestion from Gordon Henderson MP that the Sheerness ferry link be looked at again was a matter he had raised previously with Peel Ports and the KCC Cabinet Member for Transport. This was a national government issue to solve. In respect of the likelihood for revised LEP boundaries, he could not see that this would happen given that the Minister would only go down that route if there was uniformity of support by all authorities and the local MPs. In respect of the likelihood of a Combined Authority for Kent and Medway, again he could not see that this would happen.

The Leader of the Independent Group referred to the LGA update and advised that he had asked for a copy of Councillor Ken Pugh's report. He referred to questions he had asked at the previous Council meeting, and asked the Leader whether anything had been discussed at the LGA regarding local decision-making in planning and the transfer of assets. The Leader advised that there would be discussion in the future regarding transfer of assets, and that localism of planning had been mentioned many times at the conference. He had also had an opportunity to put forward his points directly to the Minister.

A Member asked whether the Leader could give reasons for the fall in unemployment in Swale, and whether the Tiger Fund was contributing to this reduction. The Leader responded by saying that this was due to many reasons: policies locally and nationally; efforts of this authority; the inherent situation of Swale in terms of location and environment/countryside; with the biggest reason being the work of officers in the Economic Development Team. The Leader advised that he had attended the Tiger Board meeting the day before and read out figures of the job creation/jobs saved in Dartford, Gravesham, Thurrock, Medway and Swale. Swale had by far the highest figure of 662 full time equivalent jobs saved/created. Members thanked officers for their efforts to achieve this.

In respect of the FPN update, a Member asked what was the likelihood of the scheme being made permanent; how many enforcement officers were deployed on a daily basis and who decided where they were deployed to; what was the breakdown across the borough of the 600 notices issued; and would the Council recover the costs involved from those who would be taken to court for non-payment of FPNs?

The Leader advised that he would ask officers to respond to the FPN questions. A Member advised that she would also like to see the response to this, in particular a breakdown of the FPNs, and referred to the problem of dog fouling.

In respect of the Community Safety Unit update, a Member suggested that there should be some awareness raising/promotional activity of what constituted anti-social behaviour and how to report it. The Leader responded by acknowledging it was sometimes difficult to get neighbours to make complaints, and agreed that further publicity would be a good idea.

A Member asked for the Leader's view on Elected Mayors. The Leader responded by saying he could see it was a good device for urban places, such as London, but could not see how it would work in two-tier county-district areas, and especially in rural areas.

A Member advised that he would like to see an update on housing, referring to the purchase of one property last year, and asked if an update would be given. The Leader advised that this was at the forefront of deliberations and would be included in a future statement.

Regarding FPNs, the Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs advised that the pilot would be analysed, but his intention based on the information so far would be to make it permanent. A report would be formally considered later this year. In response to questions concerning dog fouling, he asked the Leader whether he was aware that the Council had introduced a scheme of bag dispensers? There were five on trial in the Borough, and it was hoped if the trial was successful this would be increased to 50. The Leader advised that he was aware of the scheme and hoped the trial was successful.

A Member asked what the hours of operation were for FPN, and suggested there should be further work to encourage dog owners to keep dogs under control and on leads. The Leader advised that he would arrange a response. A Member asked if the review could also target public rights of way where there was often dog mess due to irresponsible dog owners.

141 **AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT**

The Cabinet Member for Finance invited the Vice-Chairman of the Audit Committee to present the Audit Committee report.

The Vice-Chairman of the Audit Committee in 2014/15 presented the annual report and thanked Members and Officers for their contributions. In particular, he thanked the Cabinet Member for Finance, the Head of Finance and his team, the Revenues and Benefits Manager (Technical and Financial), the Head of Audit Partnership and his team, and the professional team at Grant Thornton.

A Member made comments on the report, in that he would have liked to have seen more detail about what reviews had been undertaken and the results of each audit. He asked the Cabinet Member for Finance if this information could be provided to Members. The Cabinet Member agreed to look into this.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

Mayor

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