
COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 23 September 2015 from 7.00 - 8.45 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Sarah Aldridge, Mike Baldock, Cameron Beart, Bobbin, Monique Bonney, Andy Booth, Tina Booth, Lloyd Bowen, Bowles, Roger Clark, Katy Coleman, Derek Conway, Mike Cosgrove, Adrian Crowther, 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, Lesley Ingham (Deputy Mayor), Ken Ingleton, Nigel Kay, Samuel Koffie-Williams, Gerry Lewin, Peter Marchington, Bryan Mulhern, Padmini Nissanga, Prescott, 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, Donna Price, Mark Radford and Nick Vickers.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Richard Darby.

230 PRAYERS

The Mayor's Chaplain's Curate said Prayers.

231 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 July 2015 (Minute Nos. 135 – 141) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record. Councillor Harrison advised the Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs that she had not yet received the briefing note referred to in the answer to Supplementary Question 10 (Minute No.139).

232 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

233 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor advised Members of future events. She encouraged Members to attend the Macmillan Coffee morning in the Staff Room on Friday 25 September 2015 from 10am to 12 noon. She advised Members she would be attending a presentation ceremony by the Lord-Lieutenant of Kent of the Queen's Award for Enterprise for International Trade to be presented to a local company, AbBaltis Ltd, on 30 September 2015, and the Swale Business Awards Gala Dinner at The Barnyard, Upchurch on 9 October 2015. The Mayor announced that the date of the Swale Civic Ball at the West Faversham Community Centre would be 11 March 2016, and the Faversham Mayor's Ball at the Alexander Centre, would be on 18 March 2016.

234 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from Members of the Public.

235 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS

The Mayor advised there were 12 questions, the answers to which have been provided to Members and a copy is attached at Appendix 1 to these Minutes. The Mayor reminded Members that there was a three minute time limit for supplementary questions and their answers, and invited Members to ask a supplementary question.

Question 1

Councillor Roger Truelove clarified the location of the site and asked the Cabinet Member for Regeneration what type of development he would he like to see at the site? The Cabinet Member advised he would like to see sustainable development.

Question 2

Councillor Ghlin Whelan asked when any development on site would commence? The Cabinet Member for Regeneration reiterated his original response that the date would be dependent on the outcome of the planning application to be discussed at Planning Committee on 24 September 2015.

Question 3

Councillor Ghlin Whelan referred to the Minutes of the last Council meeting that advised that the identity of the Cinema Operator would be revealed at the end of August, and asked when there would be more progress? The Cabinet Member for Regeneration advised that communications were on-going and the Cinema Operator would be releasing a Public Relations statement shortly.

Question 4

Councillor Roger Truelove asked what the cost implications were and whether it was viable to adopt such a drainage scheme? The Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs advised that it was a Kent County Council scheme. He acknowledged there was a drainage problem in Sittingbourne High Street, and sustainable underground drainage with planting and urban design features would enhance the Town Centre. He did not yet know the costs.

Question 5

Councillor Alan Horton raised his concern that the United Reform Church in Sittingbourne High Street could fall into decay if left empty, and that this would have a negative impact in the Conservation Area. He asked if the building would be brought into the Heritage Centre of the Town? The Cabinet Member for Regeneration agreed that there were some very interesting buildings in Sittingbourne, some hidden, including the United Reform Church. He compared any possible refurbishment with the pleasing refurbishment of the Magistrates Court, and agreed that the Church should be incorporated into phase 2.

Councillor Roger Truelove corrected the Cabinet Member's reference to not being approached by the Diocese in his written response, to Synod, and was advised by the Cabinet Member that an approach had not been made by anybody.

Question 6

Councillor Mike Baldock questioned the accuracy of the Conservation Area Management Strategies and their usefulness in decision making, as he considered the plans were out of date. The Cabinet Member for Planning stated that the plans were a valued resource and gave examples where they had been used in recent development. He agreed that they had not been updated for some time and should be considered as part of the service plan after the examination and adoption of the Local Plan.

Question 7

Councillor Mick Galvin thanked the Cabinet Member for Planning for his response.

Question 8

Councillor Andy Booth sought reassurances from the Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs for a joint meeting with the Sheppey Boat and Angling Club and other agencies to consider improvements to the slipway to encourage recreational fishing. The Cabinet Member for Environmental and Rural Affairs agreed to meet and consider what funding was available.

Question 9

Councillor Mike Henderson asked what progress had been made in developing a policy and action plan for Swale Borough Council to assist Syrian refugees/asylum seekers, and asked for a clear commitment to provide some homes for Syrian families? He gave an example that if each of the 324 district/borough/unitary authorities in England took four families, 13,000 could be homed within 12 months. The Cabinet Member for Housing advised that the issue was being taken very seriously, and referred to action that had been taken previously with Afghan refugees.

Question 10

Councillor Mike Henderson asked what action was being taken to stop the Conservation Officer leaving his post, and what improvements would be made to assist his replacement? The Cabinet Member for Planning advised that individual employees were not to be discussed in Council meetings, and that potential candidates would have to meet the job requirements. Interviews for a replacement had already been undertaken.

Question 11

Councillor Monique Bonney referred to the impact of the Planning Shared service on staff, officers, householders and businesses in Swale, and asked whether the shared service would continue with just Swale and Maidstone? The Cabinet

Member for Planning advised that the service was close to achieving performance targets, with just a small backlog of cases, and that the disaggregation of Tunbridge Wells would be effective from April 2016. He also advised that Swale was currently undertaking its own investigations into whether to continue as a shared service, and the results would be available in two months.

Question 12

Councillor Monique Bonney compared the unattractive empty shops in Sittingbourne High Street, within the Conservation Area, with other shopping areas and asked what would be done to improve the situation? The Cabinet Member for Regeneration advised that Sittingbourne had the longest High Street in Kent, some empty shops were about to be filled, and 163 shops were full. He advised that 80% of residents currently shopped out of town but he encouraged the growth of the High Street and considered that after the regeneration, shoppers would be encouraged to return.

236 LEADER'S STATEMENT

The Leader presented his Statement to Members which gave updates on the Migrant Situation, Police Reform, Medway NHS Foundation Trust and the Local Plan.

Migrant Update

The Leader advised that he had attended a meeting that afternoon and the situation was being constantly updated. He invited Members to ask questions.

The Leader of the UKIP Group raised an issue about the help being given to genuine Yazidi refugees, and asked for his concerns to be raised to the Prime Minister. The Leader agreed that it was Yazidi refugees that had the greatest need, and highlighted migrants moving from one EU area to another. He also spoke of the major issues with unaccompanied minors and those economic migrants from outside of the EU.

The Leader of the Independent Group asked that when the issue was raised with Ministers, the focus should be on Christian refugees not in camps, and asked for the Leader's views on the numbers of refugees being offered housing? The Leader agreed and advised that the Government would be concentrating on those authorities with housing stock to assist. To house 100 individuals (30/40 households) equated to three or four per Borough. He advised that since there were approximately 12 million residents at risk in Syria, it would not be logistically possible to move them all, and so assistance should be given to restore order and make lives sustainable in Syria. Many refugees were unaccompanied young males who would be needed to rebuild their own countries.

The Cabinet Member for Housing suggested that correct resources should be put in place to support those that had suffered from their traumatic experience.

A Member raised the issue that the Government was only taking 20,000 refugees, much less than other countries. The Leader advised that the situation was

constantly changing and that the UK had given more in overseas aid than any other nation.

A Member advised that Kent already had approximately 1,100 young people that needed to be housed, and who would need to be looked after until they were 25, so emphasised that Kent were already assisting. The Leader confirmed Councillor Harrison's statement that there were 1,141 young people, 741 below the age of 18 and the remainder between 18 to 25. He also spoke of the extra pressure put on services, such as social workers visiting the children that were placed outside of Kent.

A Member agreed that the best solution was to keep potential refugees in their own country, but also highlighted that equal consideration should be given to all refugees from around the world, not just those currently in the media. The Leader agreed that he would relay this concern back to Government Ministers.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration spoke of historical refugee situations, how the United Kingdom had always been open to refugees, and how the Government's response should be humane and sustainable. The Leader agreed.

Police Reform

The Leader's Statement updated Members on the latest Police reform which proposed refining their Local Policing Model to pair Swale with Canterbury instead of Maidstone.

A Member commented that the proposed changes might work for the Faversham area but not for Sheppey because of the limited transport links. The Leader advised that the changes were based on travel patterns of Police Officers and maps of crime. The Police would be giving a briefing to Members in the future.

A Member spoke of the levels of policing on Sheppey and sought reassurance from the Leader that no demonstrable harm would be impacted on the Isle of Sheppey from the proposed changes. The Leader advised that as a result of the comprehensive spending review due on 25 November 2015 in which the worse case scenario would be a 40% reduction in funding, he had sought and received reassurance that Police Officers would be maintained on the front line.

A Member asked if the impact of the loss of Sittingbourne Magistrates Court had lead to a decrease in the recording of crime and delays to hearings now that cases were heard in Maidstone and Sevenoaks? The Leader advised that although the extra travel by any accused and witnesses could be an issue, he had no evidence to support the Member's question but would be happy to listen to any evidence.

The Cabinet Member for Planning asked that equal consideration of policing levels be given to the rural area west of the A249 that was given to the Isle of Sheppey. The Leader spoke of the importance of community rural policing and advised that the Police and Crime Panel would be held to account.

Medway NHS Foundation Trust Update

The Leader's Statement set out the contingency plans implemented to relieve the pressure on Medway Maritime Hospital.

The Leader of the Labour Group discussed the issues, including the discharge of patients from hospital to adult care and the problem of bed blocking. He also spoke of the importance of using Sheppey Hospital. The Leader also referred to the ongoing financial challenges for social services.

A Member added that the Memorial Hospital in Sittingbourne was just as important as the Sheppey Hospital, and also spoke of the District Nurse service and how important that service was in Swale.

A Member asked how long the second ward that had recently opened temporarily at Sheppey Hospital would be open for and how it was funded? The Leader advised it would be open until it was not needed. The Cabinet Member for Health advised that the ward had been opened to alleviate bed blocking at Maidstone Hospital and had been staffed by rapid response (via KCHT from Kent Science Park) and the ward remained active. He felt it was the logical solution to relieve pressure on Accident and Emergency.

A Member stated that the Medway Hospital had been built for 45,000 patients but actually served in excess of 100,000 patients. She felt the Hospital should improve processes and procedures to free beds, and that a lack of communication caused further problems.

Local Plan Update

The Leader's Statement updated Members on the Local Plan Inspector's concerns regarding the housing target set within the Plan, and at the Inspector's suggestion officers had been reassessing the figures.

The Leader of the UKIP Group asked if 40% more housing was required, what was planned? He also commented that Sittingbourne and Sheppey had more housing allocated in the Plan than Faversham and asked if a nil requirement for affordable housing in Sheppey was justified? The Leader advised that nobody had stated that 40% more housing would be required, and the information had been provided to the Planning Inspectorate as requested.

The Leader of the Independent Group raised concerns over the housing target and pointed out that it had already been raised by 236 houses per annum and that other potential sites had been omitted.

The Leader advised that any site could be developed but those sites had been rejected for good reason, and the Planning Inspectorate's request had to be complied with.

The Leader of the UKIP Group asked if the target of 540 dwellings per annum would be defended? The Leader confirmed that officers would defend the 540 dwellings at the Local Plan examination.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee introduced the report and invited all Members to attend future Scrutiny Committee meetings. He thanked everyone for their work on the report, particularly Bob Pullen and David Clifford. The Leader thanked the Chairman and all Members of the Scrutiny Committee for their work.

A Member spoke of the problems with the Planning Support shared service but also of the success of the Audit shared service. The Leader stated that the shared service approach in Swale worked well in all services apart from Planning Support and questioned what the alternative may be as funding for services had been reduced.

RESOLVED:

(i) That the report be noted.

238 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE

The Chairman of the Policy Development and Review Committee introduced the report. He thanked Members of the Committee and members of staff, particularly Democratic Services and Bob Pullen.

The Leader of the Independent Group advised that, whilst not a Member of the Committee, he did attend regularly and congratulated the Chairman on a well-run, open and fair Committee. He did, however, consider that the Committee should operate as a scrutiny committee.

The Leader responded that he considered that the Policy Development and Review Committee worked well and there was no need for two scrutiny committees.

RESOLVED:

(i) The report was noted.

239 FORMALISATION OF ADOPTION OF THE SWALE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME (APRIL 2015) PURSUANT TO THE SWALE LOCAL PLAN EXAMINATION IN PUBLIC

The Cabinet Member for Planning introduced the report and moved the recommendation. This was seconded by the Leader, and upon being put to the vote was agreed.

RESOLVED:

(i) That the Council adopts the Swale Borough Council Local Development Scheme April 2015 and it be confirmed that the date it had come into effect was 1 April 2015.

The 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