
COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 27 July 2016 from 7.00 - 8.12 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Sarah Aldridge, Mike Baldock, Cameron Beart, Bobbin, Monique Bonney, Andy Booth, Tina Booth, Bowles, Roger Clark, Derek Conway, Mike Cosgrove, Adrian Crowther, Richard Darby, Mike Dendor, Duncan Dewar-Whalley, Mark Ellen, Paul Fleming, Mick Galvin, June Garrad, Sue Gent, Nicholas Hampshire, Harrison, Mike Henderson, Alan Horton, James Hunt, Lesley Ingham, Ken Ingleton, Nigel Kay, Gerry Lewin, Peter Marchington, Padmini Nissanga, Prescott, George Samuel, David Simmons, Ben Stokes, Roger Truelove, Ghlin Whelan, Mike Whiting and Ted Wilcox.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Katherine Bescoby, Abdool Kara, Chris Lovelock, Keith Trowell and Nick Vickers.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Katy Coleman, Samuel Koffie-Williams, Ken Pugh and John Wright.

808 PRAYERS

Councillor Gerry Lewin said Prayers.

809 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

810 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 June 2016 (Minute Nos. 743 – 755) were taken as read, approved, and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to an amendment to Question Five of Minute No. 749 so that the last sentence reads:

“The Cabinet Member advised that, through the hard work of the Safeguarding Team, the levels of referrals were on an upward trend from 58 in the last quarter of **2015**, to 69 in the current quarter.”

811 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

812 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor advised that she had attended the Somme 100 commemorative event on Friday 1 July 2016 at Sittingbourne War Memorial, which had been very moving. On 11 July 2016 she had had the great honour in presenting the French Legion d'Honneur medal to Royal British Legion member Larry Smithers, for his bravery during the D-Day Normandy landings.

The Mayor also drew attention to the cheque presentation made by former Mayor, Councillor Anita Walker, and her Mayoress, Sylvia Lawrence, on 7 July 2016. Cheques to the value of £5,095.81 had been presented to the four carnival organisations in Swale, which Members applauded.

813 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

The Mayor advised that one question had been received from a member of the public. As Mr Greenhill was not present at the meeting, the Mayor drew attention to the question and answer that had been circulated. This is attached as Appendix I to the Minutes.

814 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS

The Mayor advised that three questions had been submitted by Members, the answers to which had been provided and attached as Appendix II. The Mayor reminded Members that there was a three minute time limit for supplementary questions and their answers, and invited relevant Members to ask a supplementary question.

Question One

Councillor Roger Truelove asked what progress was being made, and asked for more communication with the public?

The Cabinet Member responded by saying that the policy had been to not say anything unless there was something active to say. However, from discussions with local people he considered that perhaps there should be more communication, referring to several planning applications that were currently in the pre-application stage, due to be submitted, or soon to be considered by the Planning Committee.

Question Two

Councillor Ghlin Whelan acknowledged that the market did need to move, and asked if the Cabinet would show real commitment to the market and the High Street by providing free parking on market days, even if for a trial period?

The Cabinet Member advised that as this was not within his portfolio, he would take this request back to the Cabinet to consider, and a full answer would be provided by the end of August.

Question Three

Councillor Roger Truelove referred to statements made in the press that the long term sickness of the Regeneration Director had “made no difference”, and so asked if the post was necessary?

The Leader advised that the post was a Strategic Director, who made up a third of the Council’s Strategic Management Team, and had several areas of responsibility, not just regeneration. Steps had been taken to cover the position as it was not sensible to recruit in August, and time would be taken to consider options. This would involve appropriate consultation with Group Leaders.

815 LEADER'S STATEMENT

The Leader presented his Statement, which focused on Brexit implications, and new Central Government Changes; the Local Growth Fund (LGF) bidding process; the Director of Regeneration; and Swale Stars.

Brexit implications and new Central Government Changes

The Leader of the UKIP Group asked the Leader if he could make sure that any new schemes were more responsive to local demands, without a convoluted bidding process? He suggested it would be better if an idea was given of the amount of money available, so that schemes could be constructed around that level before being submitted. The Leader advised that this point would be made.

The Leader of the Labour Group suggested that it was possible that income for local government would reduce following the Brexit decision, as London would no longer be the financial centre of the European market. He asked how will local government fare, given the approach in recent years? The Leader responded by saying this would depend on the ability of local government to negotiate. Whilst funding for local government was not ring-fenced, there would be a larger pot of money available for spending on Britain’s priorities rather than in Europe.

The Leader of the Independent Group asked for the Leader to take up the issue of planning with the Local Government Association, and asked him to fight for the greatest possible independence so that decisions around development in the Borough were taken at a local level, not by the Planning Inspectorate or Central Government. The Leader agreed that decisions on planning should be taken by the Council, and advised that he was pleased that the new Planning Minister of State, Mr Gavin Barwell, was an ex-councillor.

In response to a question as to whether it was realistic to think that there would be additional funding available as a result of the Brexit decision, the Leader advised that more money was sent by Britain to the EU than Britain received back.

LGF bidding process

The Leader of the UKIP Group asked whether there was a realistic figure on how much the scheme to improve the junction between Barton Hill Drive and the Lower Road, Minster would cost, and how much would come from developer contributions and where the contributions would come from? The Leader advised that the latest figure was in the update, but he would keep a close watch.

The Leader of the Labour Group welcomed the project, but considered it did not go far enough and should include the expansion of the Lower Road, Minster. He asked the Leader how that could be funded? The Leader considered it was important to take the first step in the right direction.

Questions were asked by other Members, in terms of what could be done now to stop the traffic queues which crippled the Island's economy, and what Kent County Council (KCC) were doing about this; and whether the traffic lights at the junction could be switched off, as it appeared to improve traffic flow. The Leader responded by saying that KCC were considering options, and that it was not as simple as turning off the traffic lights.

In response to a question as to whether the Leader would write to the Secretary of State to support the LGF bid, the Leader advised that this had already been acted on. He agreed it was dangerous for traffic to back up on the A249, and advised lobbying would continue for improvements to be made. A Member acknowledged that the congestion not only affected tourism, but people who lived there and worked off the Island.

Director of Regeneration

The Leader advised that since the Statement had been prepared, there was additional news to report. Two planning applications had been submitted that day by the Spirit of Sittingbourne; one for two retail units and a drive-thru restaurant with associated parking on the Princes Street Depot site; the other for the inclusion of a hotel on the site of the cinema and restaurants. Whilst he did not wish to pre-judge the outcome of the Planning Committee, subject to planning approval and negotiations regarding the Section 106 Agreement, he could not see why work could not start in around 13 to 16 weeks.

The Leader of the UKIP Group asked why it was, when groups such as the Kent Community Rail Partnership had been told there was no money, that £4,000 had been allocated from the Regeneration Fund for the Faversham Hop Festival? He also asked about the highway works due to start in St. Michaels Way, Sittingbourne, and asked for assurance that it would not clash with the run up to Christmas, given the impact this would have on retailers. The Leader advised that he could not respond on matters that were not part of his Leader's Statement.

The Leader of the Labour Group advised that Major Works funding was available, and that a priority was for works at Brenley Corner, Faversham and asked the Leader if he agreed that this was good? The Leader responded by agreeing that this was good as, given the new Thames Crossing, there was a need for

improvements to divide the traffic flow between the A2/M2 and M20 corridor. Junction 5 of the M2 was already in the programme. He also referred to a Kent Association of Local Councils meeting where improvements to Junction 7 had been discussed, and the Chairman had agreed to support efforts to ensure this remained a priority for large scale funding.

The Leader of the Independent Group referred to the post of Director of Regeneration, and asked, given that the post was strategic and also responsible for planning, economic development, tourism, community safety and housing, how much spare time there was to be a Strategic Director for Regeneration? The Leader considered that leadership of regeneration, planning and housing should be joined up. However, there was time for options on the way forward to be considered, and he welcomed input from Members.

Other Members then asked questions. In response to a question concerning the Council's communication strategy for reporting the news about the Regeneration Director to Members, the Leader apologised for any part he had played in Members not receiving notification about the Regeneration Director, as he believed that all Members received copies of press releases.

Discussion then ensued regarding regeneration updates for Members; and the scheduled meetings for opposition Members to meet with the Regeneration Director. The Chief Executive clarified that regular meetings would be reinstated, and in response to a question concerning the resignation of the Head of Legal Services, he emphasised that the postholder's decision was in no way connected with this, and that he had been coveted by a London Authority. During the discussion on this item, Members conveyed their best wishes to the former Director of Regeneration and wished her well.

Swale Stars

The Leader reported that he had received a thank-you note from Tony Henley, which he would display in the Members' Room.

The Leader of the UKIP Group considered it was nice to see staff recognised in this way, but suggested that more councillors would like to have been invited to also show their appreciation. The Leader agreed to think about this suggestion, but emphasised it was a night for Council staff.

The Leader of the Labour Group referred to the recognition of those outside the Council, and referred to the passing of Mr John Clancy and suggested he should be recognised for his work.

The Leader of the Independent Group considered that the scheme was a good idea, and he congratulated the winners.

A discussion ensued during which Vicky Sedgewick was congratulated on her achievement of being employee of the year, as were the Local Plans Team for winning Team of the Year.

816 SWALE BOROUGH COUNCIL CORPORATE EQUALITIES SCHEME 2016 - 2020

The Leader advised that the Corporate Equalities Scheme had been out to consultation, details of which were set out in the report, and thanked the Policy and Performance Officer for his work on this. He proposed, and the Deputy Leader seconded, that the Corporate Equalities Scheme 2016 – 2020 be approved.

Resolved:

(1) That the Corporate Equalities Scheme 2016 – 2020 be approved.

817 APPOINTMENT TO THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

The Leader referred to the need to recruit one more person to the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel, and advised that provisional arrangements had been made for the Panel to meet in September as a full review was due. He proposed and the Deputy Leader seconded the recommendations within the report. There was no discussion on the exempt appendix. The Leader of the Independent Group asked for mileage rates to be looked at by the Panel.

Resolved:

(1) That the appointment of Mr Lionel Robbins as the Local Independent Member for Swale to the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel for a three year term be agreed.

(2) That Independent Members on the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel be restricted to two consecutive three year terms of office to maintain their independence.

818 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPROVAL

Council was asked to note the recommendation from the Cabinet Meeting held on 13 July 2016 (Minute No. 784) which had been the subject of a report already considered and agreed by the Council that evening.

Resolved:

(1) That the recommendation in Minute No. 784 be noted.

Chairman

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