
COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 18 October 2017 from 7.00 pm - 8.30 pm.

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

OFFICERS PRESENT: Katherine Bescoby, Emma Larkins, Chris Lovelock, Donna Price, Mark Radford, Gary Rowland and Nick Vickers.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, Roger Clark, June Garrad, James Hall and Bryan Mulhern.

284 PRAYERS

The Mayor's Chaplain said Prayers.

285 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedures.

286 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 September 2017 (Minute Nos. 237 – 247) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

287 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

288 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor drew attention to the tabled paper which gave an update on the engagements he had attended since the last Council meeting. This included the Swale Fusion Festival Light Parade, the Invictus Choir at the Abbeyfield service, and the Faversham Carnival. He stated that he would soon be advising Members of arrangements for the Queen's award for voluntary service. He provided some statistics in terms of the number of transport trips provided by the voluntary sector to elderly and disabled residents (25,483), the number of volunteering hours in befriending (3,456) and 363,158 volunteering hours across Swale.

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance advised that the Council had been awarded the gold medal The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) award in recognition of five years of achieving the gold award. He congratulated Emma Larkins, the Health and Safety Officer, on this achievement, referring to her personal development from trainee in 2008 to Health and Safety Officer. He also acknowledged the contribution made by the Health and Safety Committee and the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive advised that Swale was the only authority to receive this award in 2017 and that this demonstrated that the health and wellbeing of staff was being protected, to enable them to carry out their jobs safely and to make a difference to the community. He congratulated Emma on this achievement and the Mayor presented Emma with the award.

The Mayor reminded Members to respond to the email regarding their availability on Remembrance Day. He also wished Councillor James Hall a speedy recovery, and conveyed best wishes to Councillor Roger Clark and his wife.

289 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

The Mayor advised that one question had been received.

A written answer had been provided, which had been circulated, published on the Council's website, and attached as Appendix I to these Minutes.

The Mayor invited Mr Simon Clark to ask a supplementary question.

Mr Simon Clark asked, given the desperate need for social and affordable housing, did the Leader agree it was odd for the MP to want all social housing to be built in Faversham? What would the authority do to ensure it provided the percentage required in the Local Plan in developments?

The Leader advised that he could not answer on behalf of the MP, and suggested he ask him direct. He also considered it was a nonsense to speculate that additional extra houses would be built, given the lack of finance, materials and skilled labour, and that individual applications were a matter for the Planning Committee to determine.

290 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS

The Mayor advised that nine questions had been submitted by Members, the answers to which had been provided, can be viewed on the Council's website, and are attached as Appendix II to these Minutes.

The Mayor invited Members to ask a supplementary question.

Question One

There was no supplementary question, as the Member who had submitted the question was not present at the meeting.

Question Two

The Mayor drew attention to the revised answer that had been tabled. Councillor Roger Truelove asked if the Cabinet Member was aware that the financial predicament of the NHS Hospital Trust was also caused by the Virgin Healthcare Group going over budget, and that with the break-even position predicted how could there be no impact on local patients during the winter? He referred to the staffing concerns being exacerbated by the departure of European people, and asked did he not agree that whatever the politics, the status of European people in the health service needed to be clarified?

The Cabinet Member agreed that clarification was needed regarding the status of European people, and advised that the answer he had given was as advised by the Swale Clinical Commissioning Group.

Question Three

Councillor Ghlin Whelan asked if the Leader could be more explicit about the role of the local MP? What evidence was there of lobbying and could he have more detail?

The Leader advised that he and Gordon Henderson MP had met with the Secretary of State for Transport to discuss problems of highway infrastructure in Sittingbourne, and they were working closely with him, civil servants and the Treasury.

Question Four

Councillor Ghlin Whelan referred to the £2bn pledge and considered that this was inadequate over five years, as it would result in eight social or affordable properties per authority. He asked what this would equate to for Swale, and how many people were on the housing waiting list?

The Cabinet Member responded by saying he would research and come back to him with a written answer. He welcomed opportunities to work with housing associations to make joint bids to build social and affordable housing.

Question Five

Councillor Roger Truelove asked if more resources should be put to attracting a developer for land of this type, and asked whether a development plan for East Street would help to attract a development partner?

The Cabinet Member did not think there was a problem attracting developers, and said that his concerns may be premature, given that they were working with developers to bring plans forward in the near future.

Question Six

Councillor Harrison asked the Leader a number of questions regarding Universal Credit, referring to the announcement that day regarding a Freephone number for the Department of Work and Pensions; the impact on vulnerable people in Swale; the position regarding council tax arrears; the need to publicise the Freephone

number for emergency payments; and the need to monitor resources and the impact on Swale staff.

The Leader asked for a list of questions so he could consider and respond to each point. He believed in the principle of Universal Credit but it needed to be done properly, and he would support Officers to make it work.

Question Seven

Councillor Tony Winckless asked the Leader what the response had been from Government Ministers?

Councillor Mike Cosgrove advised that he was given to believe that the decision regarding 12A was not set in stone, and representations had been made by many Kent authorities including Kent County Council and Medway as well as local MPs and other stakeholders. Sufficient concern had been raised at every level.

Question Eight

Councillor Tony Winckless advised that he did not have a supplementary question.

Question Nine

Councillor Mike Henderson asked about the timing of the 100 homes for temporary accommodation; was the Crimean Hospital the only other option being considered; and what action had been taken regarding housing for refugees following the Council motion on that issue?

The Cabinet Member responded by saying that they were working hard to progress this and there were currently 50/60 temporary accommodation homes on the statute books and more were expected to be used; the prison service were keen to assist; the Crimean Hospital was being looked at seriously and a decision would be made by the end of December 2017; and that housing refugees was part of the plan.

291 LEADER'S STATEMENT

The Leader introduced his Statement which gave an update on Infrastructure Bids; and the increase in housing allocations – Planning for the Right Homes in the Right Places: Consultation proposals.

Referring to the earlier presentation of the ROSPA award, the Leader referred to examples of achievements of apprentices being trained and developed by Swale Borough Council and the high quality service they provided. He referred in particular to the ROSPA award (Emma Larkins), the recent Fusion Festival (Brooke Buttfield) and work undertaken by Vicky Sedgwick. He added that there were many others who had done well. During discussion on the Leader's Statement, other Group Leaders added their commendation of the calibre and development of staff.

The Mayor invited Members to ask questions on the Statement.

Infrastructure Bids

The Leader of the Labour Group asked if there was any prioritisation of the bids, and what they were most likely to get?

The Leader hoped that all bids would be successful but that the smaller bids had a good chance of being successful. The Council was quick to identify sources of funding and to apply, and he hoped that the results would be announced soon.

The Leader of the Independent Group asked the Leader not to forget that Brenley Corner needed to be a high priority for any future bids.

The Leader confirmed that this was on the list and referred to the lobbying by the MP for Faversham and Mid Kent to bring Brenley Corner higher up on the agenda; other stakeholders needed to do the same, but there was support from East Kent Leaders and they would continue to keep pressure on. He also explained the reasons why the top priority for Swale at present was Junction 5 of the M2.

Other Members then asked questions regarding the bids. A Member welcomed the bids in particular on Lower Road, Isle of Sheppey, but asked whether the Ward Members for Queenborough and Rushenden should have been consulted regarding the bid for that area; and whether there would be an opportunity for joint bids for the 'softer' infrastructure on the Isle of Sheppey before any new development, referring to recent examples of homes having no water?

The Leader advised that he would investigate the water issues and respond direct to the Member. He apologised that Ward Members had not been involved, however, referred to the tight timescale and that the Council was a partner. He offered to meet with the three Ward Members.

Another Member referred to severe congestion and highway issues, referring to the area of the Sittingbourne Memorial Hospital, Highsted Road, Bell Road, Brenchley Road and the link to Kent Science Park, and asked if further infrastructure bids would be made, to support access to services such as water, education and health.

The Leader advised that they were always looking for bidding opportunities for the Council and to encourage other stakeholders, but it was important that the Council did not subsidise other organisations' statutory services such as water etc.

Increase in housing allocations – Planning for the Right Homes in the Right Places: Consultation proposals

The Leader of the Independent Group asked what the Leader was doing to make the Government see common sense, and what more could be done to persuade the Government that they had got it wrong.

The Leader advised that they had written and taken opportunities to discuss with Ministers, and that there was a united approach and they were encouraging all Kent and South East England authorities to make the same representations, and MPs.

A Member referred to a national issue whereby agricultural buildings were being converted into dwellings, with new agriculture buildings being built, and asked the Leader if he agreed this was Right Homes in Right Places?

The Leader advised that he was sure officers would monitor this and that decisions on specific sites would be taken by the Planning Committee, however, in general terms he did not consider that this approach appeared to be Right Homes in Right Places.

A Member asked if the Leader agreed that low cost housing units should be part of the equation, to which the Leader responded 'yes'.

Another Member referred to the problem of land banking, referring to brownfield land at Rushenden which the Government had owned for 12 years, which forced development to be built on greenfield sites. The Leader agreed that there needed to be a way to unlock this land and that the same point had been made to Ministers.

A Member asked the Leader if he agreed that the HS2 was needed to balance the economy and that other urban centres should be looked at, such as Paris, to use space more efficiently which would result in a lesser need to build housing in green spaces? The Leader agreed that London Authorities could do more.

292 ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT

The Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance introduced the item and proposed the recommendations, before handing over to the Chairman of the Audit Committee.

The Chairman of the Audit Committee referred to the Audit Committee's consideration of the report, drawing attention to the average cash balance of £38m and investment income of £258k. This required careful and prudent management and was in good hands. The Audit Committee had no concerns with the report, and he seconded the recommendations.

Thanks were given to the Chief Financial Officer and his team for their excellent work.

Resolved:

(1) That the Treasury Management Stewardship report for 2016/17 be approved.

(2) That the prudential and treasury management indicators within the report be approved.

293 ADOPTION OF THE INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE ALLIANCE DEFINITION OF ANTISEMITISM

The Leader introduced the item and proposed the recommendation in the report. This was seconded by the Deputy Leader.

Resolved:

(1) That the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism cited at paragraph 3.1 be adopted.

294 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPROVAL

Resolved:

(1) That the recommendations contained in Minute Nos. 221 and 253 be noted, as they have been subject to separate reports approved earlier in the meeting.

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