
COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 24 July 2019 from 7.00pm - 8.51pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Cameron Beart, Lloyd Bowen, Derek Carnell, Roger Clark, Simon Clark, Richard Darby, Steve Davey, Mike Dendor, Mark Ellen, Simon Fowle, Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, James Hall, Ann Hampshire, Nicholas Hampshire, Angela Harrison, Alan Horton, James Hunt, Ken Ingleton (Mayor), Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Denise Knights, Peter Macdonald, Peter Marchington, Benjamin Martin, Ben J Martin, Lee McCall, Pete Neal, Padmini Nissanga, Richard Palmer, Ken Rowles, Julian Saunders, David Simmons, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen, Bill Tatton, Eddie Thomas, Roger Truelove, Tim Valentine, Ghlin Whelan, Mike Whiting and Tony Winckless.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Billy Attaway, Katherine Bescoby, David Clifford, Gary Rowland, Claudette Valmond, Nick Vickers and Emma Wiggins.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Monique Bonney, Hannah Perkin, Ken Pugh and Corrie Woodford.

151 PRAYERS

The Mayor's Chaplain said prayers.

152 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

153 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 June 2019 (Minute Nos. 85 – 95) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

154 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

155 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor advised that since the last Council meeting, he had attended 12 official functions and a further 20 council or charity meetings.

He drew attention to the following events which he had attended on the behalf of the Council:

- Kent Agricultural Show;
- Sittingbourne Armed Forces Day;
- Battle of Britain Memorial Day at the National Memorial, where he had laid a wreath; and

- Mayor of Faversham's Civic Service.

Many events had been at local schools, where he had seen an enormous amount of academic and dramatic talent, and he thanked teachers and others who went out of their way to help in developing the future community.

The Mayor also drew attention to the additional Council meeting on 11 September 2019.

156 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

The Mayor advised that one question had been received from Mr Greenhill, who could not be present at the meeting. The Leader gave his response.

The question and response are set out below:

Question:

"In June 2017, under the previous administration, Councillor Mike Baldock was 'found guilty' of what was considered to be a breach of the Code of Conduct for Councillors. That finding would not and could not have been made in a court of law as a result of the use in the Standards Committee hearing of the Investigating Officer's report which would have been adjudged to be both biased and inadmissible. The investigating Officer was a former employee and pensioner of Swale Borough Council who, in the circumstances, could not possibly have been regarded as independent and whose appointment as Investigating Officer offended the principles of natural justice.

In any review of the Council's Constitution and rules of procedure will the Council write into the same that in any similar proceedings in the future the Investigating Officer will not be a former employee or pensioner of the Council and, pro. tem., will the Council give such an undertaking?"

Response:

"I note and welcome Mr Greenhill's concern for natural justice. I do not expect these circumstances to be repeated."

157 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS

The Mayor advised that 12 questions had been received from Members. Each Member was invited to put his/her question, which was responded to by the relevant Cabinet Member. The questioner was then invited to ask a supplementary question.

Details of the questions and responses are set out below:

Question 1 – submitted by Councillor Alastair Gould

"Given the evidence that the major determinants of health have little to do with doctors, but are down to the impact of inequality, lack of physical activity and

environmental factors, will the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing tell Council how she sees her role, and inform us of any outline proposals she may have at this stage to tackle these and other issues which affect the health of the residents of Swale?"

Response – Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

"Absolutely, prevention is key and every decision made by this Council can have an impact on the health and wellbeing of our residents. I have been spending the last few months gathering together the pieces of the puzzle of what is (or is not) going on in Swale. I will be working with my Cabinet colleagues to ensure we have the greatest impact and avoid duplication on the services we provide.

We are currently advertising for a Health and Wellbeing Officer and once in post they will be the catalyst for us to make a positive change. We will be focusing on environmental projects to improve air quality, working with external partners to improve the activity offer available for residents (there is no one size fits all) and will work on a number of projects to improve both the physical and mental health of our residents, whether that is through accessing services or through decisions taken through the planning system. This is a developing agenda and once the puzzle has come together, I will bring forward proposals to future Cabinet meetings."

There was no supplementary question.

Question 2 – submitted by Councillor Ghlin Whelan

"When do you anticipate the Sittingbourne Skate Park coming into use?"

Response – Cabinet Member for Community

"The contractors are on site and making good progress on the construction, the current programme gives a completion date of 29th September 2019, we are therefore looking to make sure the skatepark is open in time for October half-term. It has been a long journey to get here, but over the past few months we have seen significant progress on completing this project."

Supplementary question and response

In response to a question regarding why the sudden impetus to complete the project, the Cabinet Member acknowledged the work undertaken in the past and spoke of the action to complete this following the elections on 2 May 2019.

Question 3 – submitted by Councillor Simon Clark

"Would you agree with me that it is time for a comprehensive review of the working of the Council's residents parking scheme?"

Response – Cabinet Member for Environment

"Thank you for the question, I know this is a topic that is regularly raised with Ward Members and often there is no one solution to fit all.

If there are issues with a specific road/area or an existing 'Controlled Parking Zone', then these can be raised through the Swale Joint Transportation Board where Members receive information about consultations with residents and recommendations from officers.

Kent County Council (KCC), who delegate the on-street parking function to us, are themselves proposing a County Parking Review this year and the work on this project could be used to inform our local decisions. We will also look at surveying those residents signed-up to the resident parking schemes to understand any issues further."

Supplementary Question and response

In response to a question regarding the timescale of the KCC consultation, and the offer of assistance, the Cabinet Member advised that draft parking standards would be considered at the next Local Plan Panel meeting and that he would find out information about the KCC review.

Question 4 – submitted by Councillor James Hunt

"Members were briefed in March 2019 on the preliminary results of high-level traffic modelling work that had been undertaken. It was hoped that this could be presented to the Local Plan Panel in June. As this didn't happen, and the July panel meeting was cancelled when will we be getting full details of the work that has been undertaken?"

Response – Cabinet Member for Planning

"I have been briefed on the recent transport modelling work and given the scale of the work involved and the potential implications for future scenario testing, I have requested further explanation of the work to date to consider how best it can be used and whether further work is required to support the preparation of the emerging Local Plan. I would expect the transport modelling work to be reported by October 2019 at the latest."

Supplementary Question and response

In response to a question regarding the timetable for the Local Development Scheme and potential slippage, the Cabinet Member advised that the new administration had a different approach and so much would be revisited, and that this would require additional time and additional meetings to ensure that the Local Plan was in the interests of residents and not developers.

Question 5 – Submitted by Councillor Lloyd Bowen

"In my ward during the week commencing the 1st July 2019, road works were scheduled to repair the surface to Station Road. KCC placed cones out to stop people from parking and delivered notices to residents in the area asking them to not park during the period of the works.

On the day of the works 2 cars had parked in the area. This made the repairs impossible to complete thus causing more delays to the residents, increased cost to the taxpayer and greater demands on the service as the repair still needs to be made.

In this instance it appears KCC were not able to do anything about the situation despite having a notice saying vehicles could be towed. Swale enforcement officers were powerless and it is not something that is a high priority for the police.

It is absurd that nothing could be done at the time of the incident. This is something that occurs, I presume, periodically across the Borough and I'm sure Members may well relate to.

Will the Leader explore the options for greater joined up working with the various parties to help ensure cases like this are treated with zero tolerance and steps taken to take action against drivers who park illegally in similar cases? If so what would he suggest he / the cabinet does to help the residents of Swale and perhaps look to increase the powers of our enforcement team?"

Response – Leader

"This is a good question in that it both allows a Ward Councillor to express the frustration of his residents but also draws attention to a dilemma that many Council members have experienced over a long period of time. I suppose if there were an easy answer it would have been found before. Councillor Bowen will realise that the key parties in this are the Kent County Council and the police but I will discuss this general problem and the particular instance in Teynham with both agencies and stress the need for more coercive enforcement and less willingness to walk away from the problem."

There was no supplementary question.

Question 6 – submitted by Councillor Mike Whiting

"What has the Cabinet Member done to promote the Oare Gunpowder Works, an outstanding and unique attraction not only in Swale but in Kent and the wider Southeast?"

Response – Deputy Cabinet Member for Economy and Property

"Oare Gunpowder Works is an excellent attraction and is therefore featured on Visit Swale and Visit Kent, it is also widely publicised on our Social Media channels as well as being promoted at the Tourist Information Centre in Faversham. Successful participation in national campaigns such as Green Flag and Green Heritage Accreditation schemes, Tree Week etc. and their associated promotional activities all increase awareness of the site on a national basis."

There was no supplementary question.

Question 7 – submitted by Councillor Ann Hampshire

“Given the seriousness of a situation whereby Council staff have been advised on how to deal with inappropriate behaviour by a coalition Councillor, can Councillor Baldock advise when members of the cabinet were first made aware of the situation and what safeguarding measures they will be taking to protect members of the public from similar harassment?”

Response – Deputy Leader

“I must firstly correct a misapprehension in the question. Council staff have not been advised on how to deal with inappropriate behaviour by a councillor. Rather, the management team have taken the decision to restrict a councillor’s ability to contact staff pending that councillor attending training. I and the Leader were first made aware of incidents involving the councillor in June, and it was the professional opinion of the Monitoring Officer, supported by the Leader, that widespread discussion, including in Cabinet, would only add to any sensitivity being felt by those involved.

They would not have taken this course if the concerns raised had any conceivable implications for others and in particular the public. The councillor in question is a long-standing member of the local community, and it is not considered that any safeguarding measures are needed for public protection. I can understand why, in the light of press reports and speculation that some members of the public might now have serious concerns. Let me take this opportunity to reassure people - there is absolutely no suggestion that there is any danger to the public.

The councillor has been spoken to by myself and is now more aware of what sort of comments are and are not appropriate in 2019 in a staff / councillor context. Since then no new incidents have been reported to me.”

There was no supplementary question.

Question 8 – submitted by Councillor Steve Davey

“I would like to ask the Cabinet Member for Community if there are any plans to help food banks meet the growing demand for their services?”

Response – Cabinet Member for Community

“Absolutely, over the past few months we have had three meetings with several foodbanks across Swale to look at how we can support them. We are in discussions on how best we can not only support the foodbanks but also look at what wider support we can provide to our residents that need to access foodbanks. I will be bringing forward proposals and updating Cabinet in the near future on the support that we will be putting in place.”

There was no supplementary question.

Question 9 – submitted by Councillor Steve Davey

“Given that the Spirit of Sittingbourne (SOS) is using most of the budget for regeneration do the council have any powers available to compel owners of vacant properties in our High Streets and other significant thoroughfares, to keep their properties in a fit state of repair, with perhaps window graphics or some other form of temporary decoration, to remove the general impression of neglect that many people feel when using these areas?”

Response – Deputy Cabinet Member for Economy and Property

“As Local Planning Authority the Borough Council has a range of powers. These include Section 215 Notices that require the owner or occupier to carry out works to improve the external condition of a building or land where its neglect is adversely affecting the surrounding area and powers that compel urgent works and the repair of listed buildings. Listed buildings offer additional options to tackling the issues of neglect and/or unauthorised works through the development process because of the special weight afforded to the protection of their special interest and historic fabric, and because the scope for enforcement action to tackle unauthorised work is not fettered by time limits. As an example of this, officers have recently been able to require the removal of unauthorised and visually harmful additions to two separate listed buildings in Sittingbourne High Street (Brenchley House and the Red Lion Inn), as part of discussions and negotiations to agree on an acceptable overall package of change in relation to planning and/or listed building consent applications for development/works. The Council also has available the ability to compulsorily purchase properties if other measures fail.

We would of course prefer to work with property owners, not only to secure repairs but also to help enliven the Borough’s High Streets. However, securing their support to take a pro-active approach, has often proved challenging for a variety of reasons. Enforcement action, particularly where the property owners are unresponsive, can require significant time and money, and therefore opportunities to develop a carrot and stick approach are being explored.

The Council has very recently submitted an Expression of Interest to the High Street Heritage Action Zone Fund launched in June by Historic England. Focused on Milton Regis High Street Conservation Area, which is on the Heritage at Risk Register, the proposed programme is aimed at improving the environment within the conservation area and the pedestrian links to it, to encourage greater use by the community. This includes funding support for owners of commercial property to encourage repair and, where possible, reinstatement of shopfronts.”

There was no supplementary question.

Question 10 – submitted by Councillor Paul Stephen

“Now that KCC are charging to deposit non-household waste at local tips has the Council seen an increase in fly-tipping, and what measures are in place to monitor this should this be the case?”

Response – Cabinet Member for Environment

“The council have been and will continue to monitor the impacts of this decision on fly-tipping statistics. This has included issuing instructions to our Environmental Response Team to keep an eye out when investigating fly-tips and issuing revised instructions to the call centre on how to record incidents involving these types of materials. We are required to report monthly to DEFRA and the categories are set nationally. The materials included in the new policy come under ‘construction and demolition’.

The KCC policy was only implemented in June 2019, so it is still early days to come to a conclusion, but when comparing the latest data with the two months prior to the decision being implemented and the same months from last year, there has been a very small increase in construction waste being fly-tipped in Swale during June and July. This may just be down to our increased concentration on the matter so will continue to be monitored closely. Anyone caught fly-tipping within the Borough will be dealt with accordingly. I also know the Kent Resource Partnership which includes all Boroughs in Kent and KCC are monitoring the statistics.

Finally, I would inform colleagues of the recent news that DEFRA will be launching a review of charges at household waste sites and we will await their findings with interest.”

Question 11 - submitted by Councillor David Simmons

“Would the Cabinet Member for the Environment join me in congratulating Faversham Rugby Club on their most successful season to date? And would he please confirm that the rugby club, along with other users of Faversham Recreation Ground, were invited to take part, at the outset, in the consultation regarding the Lottery Fund bid under the Parks for People Programme?”

Response – Cabinet Member for Environment

“I would indeed join Councillor Simmons in congratulating Faversham Rugby Club on their most successful year to date, winning promotion to Kent 1 and winning the Kent Cup.

I can also confirm the club, other stakeholders and wider community have been part of our journey to try to reinvigorate this important open space in the centre of Faversham.

The project has been ongoing over a number of years and stages as necessitated by the Parks for People Heritage Lottery stream of funding. Consultation, both stakeholder and public was undertaken initially in 2014 to develop the ideas and Masterplan.

Following success and award of development grant from Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) in 2017, further extensive consultation was undertaken with stakeholders, on site, through online surveys, in youth clubs and with schools. This allowed us to refine the Masterplan, develop detailed designs for the buildings and an Activity Plan for future volunteer activity and events, leading to a successful bid to HLF for

£1.6m of funding towards the project. We have continued communicating with the rugby club and other respective groups and individuals as the detail and program for the works has developed and while we have experienced some delay, contractors are now on site and proceeding with the works.”

Supplementary Question and response

In response to a question as to what plans were in place to deal with the slight delay in commencement, the Cabinet Member advised that they had been liaising with the rugby club and various adjustments had been made to charges/rents to reflect this.

Question 12 – submitted by Councillor David Simmons

“Given the need to increase recycling rates in Swale, what plans are in place to complete the distribution of compostable food caddy liners to households in Swale?”

Response – Cabinet Member for Environment

“The project funded by WRAP to try and increase food waste recycling is now complete. 61,000 rolls were distributed along with leaflets helping residents to understand the benefits and what items can and cannot be recycled.

We are aware there are some small pockets of reports of residents not receiving the bags. We have investigated this with the distribution company who have undertaken audits and provided tracking data to show that the job was completed. The specification only included delivery to the boundary of the property as the items were too large for most letterboxes so there may be isolated incidents of theft/loss.

On a positive note, whilst it is too early to evaluate the true impact of the project, we have had a large number of requests from people wanting to start food waste recycling and have issued 955 new food waste caddies since the rollout. There are also 27 requests from people not currently able to have the alternate weekly collections service that we are also facilitating to have food waste collections. This is a great step forward.”

Supplementary Question and Response

In response to a question, the Cabinet Member advised that the distribution of the food liners had already been investigated.

158 MOTION SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULE 15

The Mayor advised that two motions had been submitted:

Motion A – Free Car Parking

Councillor Nicholas Hampshire proposed the following motion:

“This festive season, we the undersigned, call upon this Council to introduce free parking in all short-stay Council owned car parks on the following days:

- Friday 29 November 2019
- Saturday 30 November 2019
- Sunday 1 December 2019
- Friday 6 December 2019
- Saturday 7 December 2019
- Sunday 8 December 2019
- Friday 13 December 2019
- Saturday 14 December 2019
- Sunday 15 December 2019
- Friday 20 December 2019
- Saturday 21 December 2019
- Sunday 22 December 2019
- Friday 27 December 2019
- Saturday 28 December 2019
- Sunday 29 December 2019

Additionally, we call upon the Council to provide a free shuttle bus service between our major towns of Sheerness, Sittingbourne and Faversham on Small Business Saturday (30 November 2019).”

In proposing the motion, he encouraged Members to support it to help money to be spent locally for the benefit of local businesses and market traders.

Councillor Simon Fowle seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

The Leader spoke in support of the principle of the motion, however, advised that it was too prescriptive and would have serious financial implications on the revenue budget. There was no mention of how it would be funded.

The Leader of the Conservative Group acknowledged the point made that the Cabinet would be looking at this in the future, but at the time the motion had been submitted the next Council meeting was scheduled for October.

Discussion ensued on the motion on the following points:

- The need to consider timing;
- A suggestion to include free parking on Remembrance Sunday;
- That there was no evidence that free parking increased footfall;
- The potential for commuters to benefit from free parking on Fridays;
- The need to consider financial implications;
- An analysis of the scheme provided previously, which had been well received by residents, showed no evidence of increased footfall and benefits to traders; those who took advantage of the scheme were going to visit the town anyway;
- Costs had been looked at from the last scheme, which equated to £63 per person for park and ride, and £35 per person who used the shuttle bus; and
- The need to support people who did not have a car and consider more imaginative ways of encouraging additional trade, such as by late night opening.

Councillor Elliott Jayes proposed an amendment to add the word 'consider' to the motion so that it was not so prescriptive. This was seconded by Councillor Bill Tatton.

Further discussion ensued on the amendment, which centred on the following themes:

- The need to discuss ideas with retailers and consider other forms of transport, such as the train;
- That the amendment would make the motion less prescriptive, but financial implications needed to be considered;
- Whether the amendment negated the original motion and whether the decision was for the Council or Cabinet to make; and
- Additional information was needed regarding the definition of short stay.

At this point in the meeting, the proposer and seconder of the amendment agreed to a further change to make it clear that it was for the Cabinet to consider and not the Council.

The mover of the original motion was invited to speak on the amendment; Councillor Nicholas Hampshire advised that he could not support the amendment.

The Monitoring Officer read out the amendment proposed, before the Mayor put the amendment to the vote, which was agreed.

The substantive motion was then put to the vote, which was agreed.

Resolved:

(1) This festive season, we the undersigned, call upon the Cabinet to consider introducing free parking in all short-stay Council owned car parks on the

following days:

- ***Friday 29 November 2019***
- ***Saturday 30 November 2019***
- ***Sunday 1 December 2019***
- ***Friday 6 December 2019***
- ***Saturday 7 December 2019***
- ***Sunday 8 December 2019***
- ***Friday 13 December 2019***
- ***Saturday 14 December 2019***
- ***Sunday 15 December 2019***
- ***Friday 20 December 2019***
- ***Saturday 21 December 2019***
- ***Sunday 22 December 2019***
- ***Friday 27 December 2019***
- ***Saturday 28 December 2019***
- ***Sunday 29 December 2019***

Additionally, we call upon the Cabinet to consider providing a free shuttle bus service between our major towns of Sheerness, Sittingbourne and Faversham on Small Business Saturday (30 November 2019).

Motion B – White Ribbon

Councillor Alan Horton proposed the following motion:

“This Council following the change in administration, confirm our position as a White Ribbon Borough, renewing our commitment to the ‘Pledge’ namely to;

Never commit, excuse or remain silent about male violence against women
We do so in the clear understanding that in this context, violence includes any gender-based act that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women.

We pledge to continue to provide support for White Ribbon Initiatives and to provide the administrative and support role to White Ribbon Ambassadors in the same way we did in the financial year before the 2019 election.

We recognise the value of White Ribbon Ambassadors across the Private, Public and Voluntary Sectors and will continue to seek opportunities to recruit more and encourage local leaders, including Ward Councillors and Cabinet Members to publicly take the ‘Pledge’ and speak out on this important topic.”

In proposing the motion, Councillor Alan Horton outlined the White Ribbon Campaign which focussed on eliminating male violence against women. He gave the history and background to the campaign, and how in 2018 Swale had become the first accredited local authority. He spoke about the White Ribbon Mission and global movement, and encouraged Members to become ambassadors to call out against abusive behaviour and to promote a culture of respect.

This was seconded by Councillor James Hunt, who spoke in support of the White Ribbon campaign and gave statistics on domestic violence and sexual abuse. He spoke about White Ribbon Day on 25 November 2019 which promoted 16 days of action and encouraged Members to support the motion.

The Leader spoke in support of the Campaign, advising that reports in domestic violence increased year-on-year, and considered that more should be done to help those organisations/agencies who supported the victims, such as SATEDA. He questioned the link with poverty, inequality, isolation, impact of austerity, the tensions of modern life, and changes in social values etc.

A debate ensued, during which the following comments were made:

- That Members could sign up to the White Ribbon Campaign this evening and donate if they wished to;
- That violence was not just physical but included mental and emotional violence, and the need to speak out against this; and
- That Members could choose to donate from their Member Grant fund towards organisations who supported the victims of violence.

In summing up, the Leader of the Conservative Group spoke in support of the motion and encouraged Members to vote to support the campaign.

Resolved:

(1) That this Council following the change in administration, confirm our position as a White Ribbon Borough, renewing our commitment to the 'Pledge' namely to;

***Never commit, excuse or remain silent about male violence against women
We do so in the clear understanding that in this context, violence includes any gender-based act that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women.***

We pledge to continue to provide support for White Ribbon Initiatives and to provide the administrative and support role to White Ribbon Ambassadors in the same way we did in the financial year before the 2019 election.

We recognise the value of White Ribbon Ambassadors across the Private, Public and Voluntary Sectors and will continue to seek opportunities to recruit more and encourage local leaders, including ward councillors and Cabinet members to publicly take the 'Pledge' and speak out on this important topic.

159 LEADER'S STATEMENT

The Leader updated Members regarding a meeting he had attended on Tuesday, 16 July 2019, with the Director of Regeneration and Councillor Bonney at Ebbsfleet on "Good Growth" in the Thames Corridor. He advised that the Thames Corridor embraced a line from Bexley to Thanet on the Kent side and Barking to Clacton over in Essex, and that this was the latest initiative from Government. There was more anxiety from some of colleagues in local government about governance rather than delivery. Most projects on the horizon, such as Crossrail, were focussed on the London area, or the parts of Kent and Essex nearest to London.

The Leader said that as a Borough with too much poverty and inequality, it was important to welcome any opportunities that might come from creating a productive economy in the Thames Corridor but it had to be "good growth", i.e. it had to be sustainable. He advised that the Corridor was due to be included in government Cabinet responsibilities, and they would be appointing a Government approved "envoy" and creating a Board of 9, plus a Chair, with three representatives each from Kent, London and Essex.

The Minister for Local Government James Brokenshire had made a speech which both him and Councillor Bonney had responded robustly stressing that "good growth" was impossible without investment in infrastructure, and especially in health and education.

The Leader acknowledged that Swale had the worst GP-to-patient ratio in the land, and they were also facing a crisis in finding places for Secondary School pupils. They had been told that the viability of a Further Education college was constrained by the retention of so many 16-year olds in Swale Secondary schools. He questioned this information, given that schools had not had the capacity for 11-year olds but could accommodate extra post-16 students who could be in further

education. He questioned how, if Swale could not find school places for young people now, how was Swale expected to do so after the building of thousands more houses? The mirage of a new school at Grovehurst was not an immediate answer.

The Leader gave an update on a meeting he had held with Gordon Henderson MP, where the discussion had focussed on the high levels of poverty in the local area. The Leader advised that Swale was the second most deprived borough in Kent and if Sheppey were its own Council, it would be the second most deprived in the country. The Leader had also visited Sea Shells in Sheerness and the Stanford Hill prison. He had also asked for a meeting with the MP for Faversham.

The Leader then spoke about the National Planning Policy Framework, the Council's current Local Plan, and the restraints that it placed upon the Council by Viability assessments and the funding restrictions placed on housing providers. This all combined to leave Swale woefully short of the affordable and social housing needed for local people. The Coalition was determined to intervene to re-balance the impact of the market and, the Leader advised two exploratory meetings had been held with major housing associations, with more to follow.

The Leader advised that much of his time was being spent, along with the Deputy Leader, the Cabinet Member for Economy and a small cohort of officers, to sort out the chaos that had been bequeathed to them in the Sittingbourne Town Centre project. He said that the situation was worse than they had anticipated, and it had begun with a decision made several years ago to embrace a developer consortium in a comprehensive and very long-term agreement.

The Leader advised that the chaos extended across the piece but immediately it manifested itself around the Council's own multi storey car park. He referred to a conversation with the previous Cabinet Member about what a good deal had been made with the company involved, using words such as specialists, state of the art, outstanding design and at such a good price, which he did not agree were words to describe the project. The Leader spoke of the delay that had been caused by a dispute that had its roots in confusion at the start about what was expected and what it was worth. However, he was pleased to update Members regarding a high-level meeting with the contractor, where many issues had been resolved. He now had high hopes that the car park would finally open in September 2019.

The Leader said that as imperfect though much of the Sittingbourne Town Centre project was, the Council had been committed by the previous administration to a considerable financial investment. With that in mind, the whole of the project had to be completed as soon as possible so that the Council could start to get some returns on that investment. He added that the financial viability of the investment had to be a matter of continual concern to all members of this Council. Whilst they were limited in what could be done by a Development Agreement entered into several years ago. He hoped that they could take back control to ensure the town of Sittingbourne developed economically as soon as possible, and in the interests of local residents.

The Leader of the Conservative Group responded to the Statement. He spoke about the difficulties regarding private sector contracts and suggested that it might be best to enlist the help of private sector negotiators in the future to assist with

this. He also expressed his concern about the shortage of medical provision in Swale, and that the NHS often responded to planning applications saying that no additional surgeries were required. He hoped that Members could work together to prove that this was not the case.

The Leader responded by saying that they would look at ways, such as developing more partners, to avoid any similar situation. In respect of the medical provision, the Leader advised that the NHS could not attract GPs to the area and this problem was well acknowledged and was due to insufficient funding for training of new GPs, and insufficient funding to provide the services required.

160 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee introduced the Annual Report, summarising the work that had been undertaken in holding the Cabinet to account. He drew attention to the Budget Scrutiny Committee meeting which all Cabinet and Deputy Cabinet Members would be invited to attend. He thanked Members for their contributions to the reviews and advised that all Members were welcome to attend their meetings, acknowledging the change in membership following the local elections in May.

The Chairman also thanked officers for their support, in particular the Director of Regeneration, the Chief Financial Officer, Democratic Services and the Policy and Performance Officer.

The Leader added his thanks to the Scrutiny Committee and commended them for their good work, particularly around Sittingbourne Town Centre regeneration. He also praised the support provided by the Policy and Performance Officer. He considered it was right for opposition Members to be Chairman and Vice-Chairman, and wished the Committee well in its work in the year ahead.

The Leader of the Conservative Group echoed his thanks to all involved, acknowledging that scrutiny played an important role which should continue in the future. He also echoed the sentiments regarding the Chairman and Vice-Chairman positions.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

161 POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND REVIEW COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT

The former Vice-Chairman of the Policy Development and Review Committee presented the report, and echoed the sentiments expressed in the previous item regarding contributions from Members and the support provided by the Policy and Performance Officer.

These sentiments were echoed by the Leader and the Leader of the Conservative Group. Members spoke in support of the forward thinking approach of the Committee and the positive impact it had on the development of policies.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

Mayor

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