
COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting held in Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 26 February 2020 from 7.00pm - 9.50pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Cameron Beart, Monique Bonney, Lloyd Bowen, Derek Carnell, Roger Clark, Simon Clark, Richard Darby, Steve Davey, Mike Dendor, Mark Ellen, Simon Fowle, Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, Ann Hampshire, Nicholas Hampshire, Angela Harrison, 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, Hannah Perkin, Ken Pugh, Ken Rowles, Julian Saunders, David Simmons, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen, Bill Tatton, Eddie Thomas, Roger Truelove, Tim Valentine, Ghlin Whelan, Mike Whiting, Tony Winckless and Corrie Woodford.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Jayne Bolas, David Clifford, Chris Lovelock, Jo Millard, Nick Vickers and Phil Wilson.

APOLOGIES: Councillors James Hall and Alan Horton.

548 PRAYERS

The Mayor's Chaplain said prayers.

549 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

550 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

551 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 January 2020 (Minute Nos. 411 – 424) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record, subject to the removal of questions and response 8, 9 and 10 as the Members were not in attendance at the meeting.

552 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Mayor declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 19 – Review of Polling Place – Murston Ward as he sat on the board of trustees at Sunnybank Primary School.

During the discussion, Councillor Ben J Martin declared an interest in Item 18 Nomination to Outside Bodies – Faversham Pools as he was a Trustee.

553 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor announced that his Civic Service had been postponed until May 2020 and further details would follow.

The Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing gave an update on information received from Kent Public Health on the Coronavirus. She said that, to date, there were no confirmed cases in Kent and she drew attention to the guidance included with a letter sent to all Kent schools which would be circulated to all Members.

554 NOMINATIONS FOR MAYOR - SPEECHES

Councillor Mike Dendor nominated Councillor Roger Clark for the role of Mayor elect for the 2020/21 civic year and gave a supporting speech. The nomination was seconded by Councillor James Hunt who gave a supporting speech.

Councillor Monique Bonney nominated Councillor Paul Stephen for the role of Mayor elect for the 2020/21 civic year and give a supporting speech. The nomination was seconded by Councillor Mike Baldock who gave a supporting speech.

555 NOMINATIONS FOR DEPUTY MAYOR - SPEECHES

Councillor Ben J Martin nominated Councillor Benjamin A Martin for the role of Deputy Mayor elect for the 2020/21 civic year and gave a supporting speech. The nomination was seconded by Councillor Denise Knights who gave a supporting speech.

556 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

The Mayor advised that four questions had been submitted by the public. Mr Greenhill was not in attendance at the meeting and, at his request, the Mayor read out his question. Details of the questions and responses are set out below. The response to Mr Greenhill was sent directly.

Question 1 – Mr Greenhill

“In the last financial year what was the cost of operating the brown bin collection service, how much revenue was collected by way of charges for the fortnightly collections and how much money was generated from the sale/use of the end product compost?”

Response: The Mayor advised that the response would be sent to Mr Greenhill.

Question 2 – Honorary Alderman Mike Henderson

“Does the Cabinet Member recognise and accept that loss of biodiversity is as important as climate change to the world’s future as he indicated to me at a recent Green Grid meeting?”

Response – Cabinet Member for Environment:

“Thank you for your question. I do agree that it is as important that we take urgent action to address the loss of biodiversity, as it is that we take action to mitigate climate change. On 26 June 2019 the Council declared both a climate and an ecological emergency. The introduction to the motion cited the report from the

Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, which described an unprecedented and accelerating rate of species extinction, with up to one million species threatened with extinction, many within decades. The motion also cited population decline, species extinction and habitat loss locally in Kent.

The progress report which was debated at the Council meeting on 8 January 2020 reported activities planned and already underway that will enhance biodiversity in Swale. For example, this winter the council has planted approximately 2500 trees, with the help of volunteers, at the country parks in the borough. There are projects under development for planting in urban and rural areas. There is a specific project for planting in some of our Air Quality Management Areas. We have invested £15,000 in the Environment Grant Scheme this year, an increase from £5,000 under the last administration. Projects supported include a number of projects for improving biodiversity. For example, the council funded a project by Swale Friends of the Earth to rewild the rec in Faversham, and to create a wild flower meadow in Selling. Funded projects also included initiatives to encourage recycling and to support beach cleans. There is huge enthusiasm amongst community groups to improve their local environment. I'm very pleased that the Council has been able to support local residents' passion and energy to give wildlife a helping hand.

The Climate and Ecological Emergency Action Plan due to be presented to Council in April 2020 will provide a further update on the actions the Council is taking and planning for the future. If you have suggestions for further actions the Council could take to improve biodiversity, I'd be delighted to hear them."

Supplementary question:

"Will the Council look at going further, such as planting tens of thousands of trees, looking at green roofs of all buildings and working with planners to add a biodiversity planning condition in all planning approvals and then ensuring the condition is enforced?"

In response, the Cabinet Member for Environment welcomed any ideas and said the Council would work with partners and within the powers it had. He added that he would be meeting with Kent Wildlife Trust and there might be some changes in legislation on the way.

Question 3 – Jack O'Connor

"On 3 October 2018 the Swale Youth Forum visited Sittingbourne Town Centre, alongside the Regeneration Officer for Town Centres and council members. This was done to enable the members of the forum to give feedback on their views on improvements that could be made to the Town Centre Public realm as part of the previous administration's plans to smarten up our High Streets.

Is the current administration going to be continuing the work that was being planned by the previous administration and if so when will we see improvements starting to take place?"

Response – Cabinet Member for Economy and Property:

Thank you Mr Connor for your question.

“The new Administration has ambitious plans for Sittingbourne Town Centre and its historic High Street. We want to see a thriving town centre, being a place local people are proud of. Integral to this is cleaning up the public realm – reducing street clutter, improving signage, tackling shop frontages in disrepair and having a thriving group of businesses as well as homes for residents. This goes beyond the previous administration’s plans for the town centre. For years I lobbied for more action for our town centre and for it not to be entirely focused on the Spirit of Sittingbourne. The town centre needs to be considered as a whole. This is something that will take time as it requires the input from our partners: Kent County Council (KCC), private property owners and shops, traders and other interested parties. We are committed to this vision and hope in the coming months and years that these changes will come about. We have already started to engage with some of our partners and will be asking people their views, and would welcome the opportunity to speak to the Swale Youth Forum as part of that process.

We are keen to ensure that the new leisure offer at Bourne Place once it is opened this summer, will link to the High Street. Work will take place to improve a link to the High Street and for new signage around Bourne Place prior to opening.”

Supplementary question

“Does the Cabinet Member think that our town should have car-free zones?”

In response the Cabinet Member for Environment said this would be considered.

Question 4 – Alexander Stennings

“What are the Council doing in combating climate change on a local level, in areas such as reducing air pollution, installing electric charge points and improving energy efficiency in peoples’ homes? “

Response - Cabinet Member for Environment

“The Council declared a climate and ecological emergency in June 2019. We set out clear ambitions around reduction of carbon emissions and restoration of biodiversity by the council’s own operations as well as for the borough more widely.

A strategic air quality action plan was approved by DEFRA in September 2019. This action plan contains several strategic and local actions which aim to improve the air quality in the district. Good progress is being made with many of these actions. Examples of some of the actions already in progress include:

- Publication of the Air Quality & Planning Technical Guidance, to which all developers are being referred. As a result of this guidance, standard conditions are being requested on all planning applications relating to electric vehicle charging points for residential and commercial premises and the

installation of low NOx boilers. Additional mitigation measures will be agreed for major developments.

- To further support air quality mitigation measures for new developments, a revised air quality policy is being developed in conjunction with the Local Plan team.
- A joint bid with Arriva has been made to Defra for funding for an electric bus for use on the route along the A2.
- Work on supporting alternative and sustainable forms of transport, including an assessment of measures to encourage walking and cycling, is underway with internal and external partners.
- More companies have been signed up to the ECO Stars fleet recognition scheme which works with haulage companies to reduce vehicle emissions. This represents over 800 HGVs moving throughout the Borough.
- Work has taken place with a number of local schools via the Clean Air for Schools scheme on initiatives such as anti-idling campaigns, car sharing and smart travel plans.
- A feasibility study by external consultants into the option of a clean air zone along the length of the A2 will be starting shortly.

We are developing a strategy to guide development of infrastructure to encourage use of electric vehicles. Already 8 EV charging points have been provided in Sittingbourne. Four EV charging points will be provided in both Faversham and Sheerness by the summer.

Most of the vehicles in SBC's own fleet will be replaced with electric vehicles later this year.

The Carbon Trust has been commissioned to measure the carbon footprint of the Council's own operations. Recommendations for actions to reduce emissions are expected soon.

The Cabinet have recently agreed to procure a fuel and water poverty outreach service. A local organisation has been contracted to deliver a home visiting service in order to help people in water or fuel poverty reduce their energy and water consumption. As well as improving energy efficiency in homes, and reducing carbon emissions, the service will support people in poverty or at risk of falling into poverty.

SBC are working with KCC to provide a bulk purchasing scheme for residents who want to fit solar PV panels to their homes. The scheme will offer improved value for money and the security of having the installation carried out by a carefully selected contractor.

An action plan of measures to address the climate and ecological emergency will be presented to Council on 1 April 2020. This document will set out our immediate plans for deep cuts in carbon emissions from those areas within our direct control. In addition, we aim to encourage others to take action to reduce their own carbon emissions. The action plan will provide a starting point for engagement, discussion and action.”

Supplementary question:

“Will the Council consider ways of engaging the community?”

In response, the Cabinet Member for Environment said that there was a lot of engagement with community groups and through the Youth Forum and he welcomed suggestions of engaging the community.

557 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS

The Mayor advised 13 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. The Mayor advised that any questions not asked within the thirty minute time limit would receive a written response.

Details of the questions and response are set out below

Question 1 – Councillor Cameron Beart

“Following the decision not to progress with exploring potential options for lorry parking in the borough at the Cabinet meeting in December 2019, the Cabinet Member for Property and Economy claimed that until capacity at M2 J5 and M2 J7 were resolved, this Council would not support any new lorry parks in the area.

As Swale regularly tops the table for the most unofficial and illegal lorry parking in Kent already, is it an acceptable stance to ignore a pre-existing condition for fear of what may or may not happen in the future? And can the Cabinet Member please explain what she is proposing instead to address the large number of lorries having to park illegally on the streets of my Ward every night if she is ruling out providing them a safe place to stop?”

Response – Cabinet Member for Economy and Property

“Thank you Councillor Beart for your question.

The decision not to pursue a lorry park at Brenley Corner at this time was based largely on concerns regarding the identification of a site in proximity to Junction 7 of the M2, when the nature of long-hoped for improvements to the junction itself were not understood. To properly tackle the issue of “Fly” lorry parking it must be dealt with comprehensively, rather than on the current piecemeal approach. We must have a carefully coordinated network of lorry parks throughout Kent and the south-east backed with the requisite enforcement powers on a Kent wide/nationwide basis. The Brenley Corner lorry park would not have solved the fly parking in Councillor Beart’s ward nor for that matter across whole borough because of the set up of the current enforcement regime in the UK. I have written to both the Secretary of State for Transport and the Head of Highways England and KCC on this matter.”

Supplementary question

There was no supplementary question.

Question 2 – Councillor Cameron Beart

“At the Local Plan Panel meeting on the 27th November 2019, following an urgent tabled item and legal letters received by this Council, the impartiality of the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property to make decisions on aspects of the Local Plan was called into question given her chairmanship of the Five Parishes Opposition Group which would be considered a conflict of interest.

At the meeting, it was minuted that "Councillor Monique Bonney stated that she was not the Chairman of the Five Parishes Group and had resigned from the group in May 2019" and the Cabinet Member's register of interests were subsequently updated the following day to reflect this and to remove the earlier declaration she made back in May.

Could the Cabinet Member please confirm that this statement is a true and correct record of what she said and is accurate? As currently she is still listed as chairman on the Five Parishes Opposition Group website which has been recently updated and is now dated 2020.”

Response – Cabinet Member for Economy and Property:

“I am happy to confirm that the statement in the Local Plan Panel minutes is a true and correct record of what I said and is accurate. I have asked the clerk to the Five Parishes Opposition Group to update the relevant details on the website.”

Supplementary question

Councillor Cameron Beart thanked the Cabinet Member for her response but asked why she had continued to declare an interest as Chairman of the Five Parishes Opposition Group in a further four meetings at the Council, after May 2019, if she had resigned?

In response, the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property advised that she had not participated as Chairman of the Group since May 2019 and apologised for providing an incorrect disclosure at those meetings.

Question 3 – Councillor James Hunt:

“Could the Cabinet Member for Environment please give an update on what changes there have been with regards to the restructure to staff in the Cleansing, Environmental Response and Leisure Teams?”

Response – Cabinet Member for Environment:

“Senior Management recently approved a restructure of the Commissioning, Environment and Leisure service. The restructure was implemented fully by mid-January 2020 and is still bedding in. Generally speaking, the service can be split into three broad functions i) to manage the Council's outdoor assets and enforce

against misuse, ii) to manage and deliver the Council's major contracts, and iii) monitor and assist the rest of the Council in commissioning the services they require.

Whilst it is not fair to comment on individual role changes, the aim of the restructure was to replace long term vacancies, move functions that have common practices and skills requirements together, to ensure work is completed at the right levels of responsibility and respond to the changing political priorities. The restructure has resulted in no redundancies and the head count was changed from 49 officers to 50 officers. The restructure has created the following teams:

Environmental Services – this new team picks up the existing environmental response functions and combines it with the Contracts Section managing the waste, recycling and street cleansing contract and public conveniences. The key objective of this team will be the management of the major environmental contracts and the investigation/enforcement of all the statutory and environmental legislation.

Leisure and Technical Services – the function of this team remains broadly the same with the objective of managing our outdoor and built assets in green spaces, cemeteries, seafronts, sport and leisure facilities, playgrounds and highway infrastructure. The biggest change here is that management of the ground's maintenance contract moves back to this team and the operational management of the cemeteries and churchyards moves into the greenspaces team.

Service Delivery - this is a newly formed team that will be responsible for dealing with all customer interaction across the departments, driving workloads and measuring outcomes. They will be supporting each of the teams through provision of administration assistance particularly on high volume areas such as burials, beach huts, disabled bay applications, central tasking and coordination of work for mobile officers, collating responses to Freedom of Information requests, complaints, compliments and comments, purchasing, contracts finance and performance.

Parking services – remains the same in terms of partnership with Maidstone.

Commissioning - this section will remain broadly the same being responsible for monitoring compliance with national procurement legislation and Swale's own internal contract standing orders. The focus however will be on supporting Council departments to adopt the sound principles of commissioning at an early stage helping to deliver high quality tender specifications and ensuring that all possible models of delivery are considered. They will also provide corporate advice to other departments on contract management."

Supplementary question:

Councillor James Hunt asked that when changes are made to staff roles, Members were kept informed.

The Cabinet Member for Environment advised that the changes had only recently been confirmed and Members would be kept informed.

Question 4 – Councillor Roger Clark

“There is a lot of rumour and speculation in my Ward regarding a new garden Village to the West of Bobbing, which is upsetting many people.

Can the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Planning please reassure my residents that planning permission has not been granted to 2,000 homes on the land north of the A2, and that the site will not feature in his new Local Plan?”

Response – Cabinet Member for Planning

“I would like to thank Cllr Clark for asking this question, and I can understand the concerns that have been raised.

First, let me be clear - planning permission has NOT been granted to the site to which he refers.

However, I would also like to remind him that it was his Party which introduced the concept of Garden Villages to Swale, and it was his party that ran on a manifesto of support for Garden Villages last May, when the Garden Village he refers to was very much under consideration.

The rest of us ran on a platform of opposing the concept of Garden Villages, considering them undemocratic and not the best model for addressing Swale’s housing plans. However, as the previous administration had invited submissions for Garden Villages, the current administration have had to keep them under review or face legal challenges.

All 4 Garden Village proposals have been submitted as sites in the Strategic Local Housing Assessment, along with some 200 other sites, and as we go forward with a preferred option for the Local Plan, we will be selecting from these 200+ sites. Obviously at this stage we cannot legally rule anything out and have to treat all 200+ potential sites fairly.

We appreciate the concern local people and local communities have about this process, but it is one required by your Government, and since they introduced compulsory 5 yearly reviews of Local Plans, it is something that unfortunately will from now on be a constant cause of concern to all communities.

I can especially understand the concerns of the residents of his ward, as his party’s continued support for the Housing Infrastructure Funding that will see Grovehurst Roundabout improved, potentially opens that area up to an amount of housing that could make the current Village Green proposals seem like a large hamlet.

He can be assured, however, that the current administration is determined not to allow the Government to force more dormitory estates on our Borough, that we will fight for sustainable developments, that do not rely on commuting many miles to work, but which will provide onsite employment, and which will address our local needs rather than developers’ needs and which will be spread fairly around the Borough. We will fight for a manageable housing number, and not simply roll over to Government diktat, or chase the money simply to agree even more development.

I hope the Councillor can step aside from Party politics on this issue and support us in resisting this kind of top-down over-development as much as possible.”

Supplementary question:

Councillor Roger Clark asked the Cabinet Member to confirm the area had been ruled out of the Local Plan?

In response, the Cabinet Member for Planning drew attention to and repeated the fifth paragraph of his original response.

Question 5 – Councillor Paul Stephen:

“Due to the ever increasing problem of vehicles parking on yellow lines near schools in Swale, does the Council have enough enforcement officers to ensure the problem can be resolved?”

Response – Cabinet Member for Environment

“Unfortunately, inconsiderate and dangerous parking can be seen outside almost every school at the same time each day. With over 50 schools in Swale (where restrictions are placed) patrols place a significant burden on the enforcement team, requiring the team to focus resources on priority locations and move the teams from school to school to help improve levels of driver compliance to the regulations.

Over the last 12 months 1,258 school patrols have taken place and 2,950 vehicles moved from restrictions. This has resulted in 164 Penalty Charge Notices being issued. Our existing enforcement contract provides us with 15,000 deployed hours a year and provides a balanced approach to prevention, education and enforcement.

Civil Parking Enforcement legislation allows enforcement of active yellow line restrictions and school keep clear markings. However, inconsiderate and dangerous parking is also prevalent where drivers obstruct property and place vehicles causing highway and footway obstruction. In such cases, Civil Parking Enforcement teams have no delegated power in law to deal with these offences as highway obstruction remains the responsibility of Kent Police. If a vehicle is causing a significant obstruction to the carriageway or footway, then the police can act through the issue of a fixed penalty (under their highway obstruction powers). However, perhaps understandably, we find that the police consider these cases to be a low priority and have only limited resources to respond to such complaints.”

Supplementary question

Councillor Paul Stephen asked whether Enforcement Officers encountered vehicles that were idling and if so, what action could they take?

In response, the Cabinet Member for Environment advised that currently no action was being taken but the legislation existed to require any vehicle idling for more than a minute to switch their engine off and he advised that a report on anti-idling was due to be considered by Cabinet, in order to enforce the anti-idling legislation.

Question 6 – Councillor Tim Gibson

“Following recent press and social media coverage suggesting that this Council has jeopardised the M2 junction 5 improvements by pulling financial support from the project, could you provide a factual and definitive statement on the Council’s position on this matter please?”

Response – The Leader:

“It is not my view that Borough Councils should be liable for funding a major National infrastructure project. Last June I asked the appropriate Kent County Council Officer to provide me with evidence of a formal offer of funding from this Council to Kent County Council. I received no answer.”

Supplementary question

There was no supplementary question.

Question 7- Councillor Bill Tatton

“What steps are being taken in the review of the Local Plan to ensure that in future more people who live in Swale are able to work in Swale?”

Response – Cabinet Member for Planning

“I would like to thank Councillor Tatton for his question.

He is quite right to highlight this issue. Far too much of the previous Local Plan was of the failed dormitory estate design, which did very little to enable people to live and work locally.

Whilst Swale has seen a growth in overall employment over recent years, this can be largely attributed to the fast growing population resultant from the previous house building strategy, and it remains the case that like most Kent Local Authority areas Swale is a net exporter of labour.

This is not green, it is not sustainable, and it is not good for peoples’ health. Whilst commuting may suit some people, it cannot be the role of a responsible Local Authority to base its entire housing delivery on such a model. We have to start looking at ways we can deliver more good quality jobs locally and enable people to get those jobs.

We also, of course, need to start thinking about how local people can actually afford the housing that is being built and ask ourselves whether having estates where over 50% of the housing is 4 & 5 bedrooms on top quality agricultural land is really the responsible way to approach this issue.

Through the process of the Local Plan the Council will seek to identify new employment land, to help to deliver sustainable growth. We expect new developments to come through with local employment opportunities.

We wish to place a focus on helping local, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) to prosper, whilst also addressing areas of the local economy that are under-developed. This will extend the breadth and quality of jobs available locally and provide a greater choice of opportunities for residents that currently out-commute.

Where larger scale mixed use allocations may be considered within the Local Plan review, the Council will be looking to secure as far as possible a 1 to 1 ratio of households to jobs.”

Supplementary question

There was no supplementary question

Question 8 – Councillor Tony Winckless

“Can the Cabinet Member tell me when the Dog/Litter bins are going to be delivered and installed at various Litter and Dog Fouling Black Spots in Milton Regis? I have been requesting these for some months and residents are rightfully being fined for dropping litter.”

Response – Cabinet Member for Environment

“We currently have 26 litter bins and 6 dog bins in the Milton Regis area, excluding the litter and dog bins in Milton Creek Country Park and Milton Recreation Ground.

Councillor Winckless requested bins in various places in the area which have been monitored by the Cleansing Team as per the litter bin request procedure. One additional bin has been agreed in Attlee Way, which has now been installed. In addition, a bin from a disused play area will be re-sited.

Having undertaken a full audit of the number and quality of our bins in 2019 and replacing them in the high priority areas such as the high streets, the next phase of the litter bin project is underway and the team are using the information gained from the audit to prioritise replacements and identify bins that can be re-sited or removed, and locations where additional bins are needed.

The next bins we are looking to replace are the litter bins on the promenade in Leysdown before the summer season, along with the litter bins in Queenborough as these are all open top admiral bins and in need of repair.”

Supplementary question

Councillor Tony Winckless said that there were a few other blackspots in Milton Regis that needed to be looked at.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Environment ask for more details so that officers could investigate.

Question 9 – Councillor Steve Davey

“What powers does the Council have to put pressure on social housing providers to bring properties that have need of repairs, following evictions, vandalism or other forms of damage, back into their housing stock at the earliest opportunity?”

Response – Cabinet Member for Housing

“Unfortunately, the Council does not have any legal powers in relation to void housing association properties. However, Housing Associations have very stringent targets on voids as obviously void properties affect their income. I am aware of some issues with void turnaround times in the Borough and have followed this up with the relevant Housing Association who are taking steps to improve the situation.”

Supplementary question

Councillor Steve Davey asked what power the Council had to scrutinise temporary housing and gave an example of a poor standard property residents had been moved to out of Borough.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Housing said temporary accommodation was inspected regularly, and was mostly in the Borough. He said all temporary accommodation should be fit for purpose, there were over 200 households in temporary accommodation and he would look into the particular case raised.

558 LEADER'S STATEMENT

The Leader advised that at the end of January 2020, he had several meetings all concentrating on a familiar topic, the tension between Government housing growth targets and Local Government's view of the reality behind those targets. He said that firstly himself, Councillors Bonney and Baldock met the then Housing Minister, Esther McVey, a meeting facilitated by Gordon Henderson MP and attended by him. They spent half an hour, each competing for airtime, rehearsing views that were probably known to this Council including Mr Henderson's view that all 10,000 additional houses should be built in Faversham, a view Members may wish to pass onto residents of Faversham and their MP. The Leader added that as Ms McVey did not survive the reshuffle, the value of the meeting was probably limited.

The Leader said that the following day he attended meetings of the Greater North Kent Leaders and then Kent Leaders and overwhelmingly they took a view that was very similar to Swale Borough Council's; that houses already delivered were suffering a chronic infrastructure deficit and that, with some exceptions, future Government expectations were excessive. The following day the Leader attended South East England Council Leaders, which also included presentations from a London Borough and the Greater London Council. He said that, again, the consensus was that Government expectations of both London and the South East were unrealistic and based on a very speculative analysis of need.

The Leader said that the new Government may want to re-assess this concentration on London and the South East, which made up two thirds of the

overall target and they may be influenced by their declared aim for greater economic growth in the North, the growing doubts about building on areas of potential flooding and the possibility that the construction industry may not be able to deliver due to skills shortages.

The Leader explained that Swale Borough Council wanted to deliver housing growth on their own terms, meeting local need, with developments that were environmentally sustainable and conscious of the need to build communities not dormitories. He added that there was not a vacuum.

Referring to the difficulties with bin collections last year and recent press interest, the Leader had requested a personal meeting with senior managers at Biffa and met the national Director of Operations the previous week to seek assurances on performance. The Director of Operations apologised for the level of service received and outlined the steps they had taken and were taking in order to avoid this in future. These included changes to operational management in Swale and improvements in the work ethic. The Leader said that whilst this would be monitored closely, he was persuaded that they recognised the issues and were bringing in more resource and vehicles in order to avoid future problems at peak periods of the year.

On 10 February 2020, along with officers of the Council and Cabinet Members, the Leader met with the Chief Executive and Chairman of Swale Community Leisure (SCL). He said that the meeting had added focus due to the damage inflicted on the Swallows roof the previous day. The Leader advised that this was the trust that managed the Swallows and Sheppey Leisure Centres on SBC's behalf. He said that the Administration was building a positive working relationship with them and were keen to hear about their plans to create 'better leisure for local people'. He went on to say that their facilities and programmes had seen real improvement over recent years with the refurbishments and this was reflected in increased visits from a more diverse range of people. He said that an exemplar project was the new health studio at Sheppey. The Leader said that it now had 208 users from deprived communities and with chronic health needs, and really did address SBC's priorities of tackling social exclusion and improving the health and wellbeing of those most in need. He added that feedback from users had been impressive. The Leader said that SBC would continue to talk to SCL about future provision, bearing in mind the Administration's priorities, which included inclusivity in the use of the centres.

The Leader said that delivery of the Spirit leisure scheme continued apace and he was delighted to announce that the Travelodge and Loungers agreed practical completion last Wednesday 19 February 2020. He said that the Light cinema was fitting out and would be open by July ready for Top Gun, Ghostbusters and the Minions premieres. He said that it was anticipated that Nando's and Pizza Express would be ready for the cinema and it was exciting to think that Bourne Place would be animated by all this activity by early summer 2020.

The Leader said that there had been some robust debate recently around an infrastructure issue. He said that he welcomed robust debate and recognised an essential tool of any capable politician is to interpret situations to their own point of view. However, the Leader said he recoiled from people calling each other liars. The Leader said that this week there had been further ill-informed Parliamentary

interest in SBC's affairs and he thought that the Sittingbourne and Sheppey MP should take greater care over what he said. He said that the Conservative Group on SBC behaved entirely properly but to Mr Henderson, quoting Prime Minister Clement Attlee "A period of silence on your part would be most welcome."

In concluding his Leader's Statement, the Leader said that the investigation into a current Member had concluded that there had not been a breach of the code of conduct, and that restrictions on the Member's access to staff had now been lifted.

The Deputy Leader of the Conservative Group acknowledged the Leader's concern about housing numbers and said he would ask Mr Henderson about his comments. He was pleased that the waste collection service was improving, supported the importance of active lives highlighting the new outdoor gym at Faversham Recreation Ground and welcomed the progress in the leisure facilities at Bourne Place.

The Leader referred to Government housing numbers and also acknowledged that Mr Henderson's comments may have been made during excitable debate but suggested that in such cases an apology would be appropriate.

559 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2020/21

The Leader introduced the report by saying that Swale was the second most deprived Borough in Kent and under the current scheme, along with the Folkestone and Hythe District, claimants paid at least 25% of their liability, the highest percentage payment from those in need of Council Tax support. He said that this led to payment collection difficulties and he was critical of the scheme.

The Leader reflected that whilst SBC were reducing the maximum liability to 20%, SBC's tax rise would only have a small impact on Council Tax payers, other precepting Authorities were making increases that might take out any benefit in reducing the liability to 20%.

The Leader proposed the recommendations in the report and asked Members to approve the Council Tax Support Scheme 2020/21.

This was seconded by the Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance.

The Deputy Leader of the Conservative Group recognised the struggles faced by some members of the community in paying their Council Tax. He said that the administration had ignored the consultation results for options 2 and 3. In response, the Leader said consultations were important but that very few people had responded to the consultation and that the administration's view was to not introduce options 2 and 3 as this would increase hardship, which was more important.

In accordance with SI 2014 No.165, a recorded vote was taken, and voting was as follows:

For: Bonney, Carnell, S Clark, Darby, Davey, Ellen, Gibson, Gould, Harrison, Jackson, Jayes, Knights, MacDonald, Marchington, Benjamin A Martin, Ben J

Martin, McCall, Nissanga, Palmer, Perkin, Rowles, Saunders, P Stephen, S Stephen, Tatton, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan, Winckless, Woodford Total= 31.

Against: Beart, R Clark, Dendor, Hunt, Pugh, Simmons, Whiting. Total = 7.

Abstain: Bowen, Fowle, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Ingleton (Mayor) Neal. Total = 6.

Resolved:

(1) That the outcome of the public consultation, having taking consideration of the potential impact of the proposed changes on working age claimants with the protected characteristics of disability, age and sex under the Equalities Act 2010, be noted.

(2) That options 1-6 as changes to the current scheme, as set out in table 3, paragraph 3.6, be approved.

560 BUDGETS AND COUNCIL TAX FOR 2020/21

The Leader gave a short history of previous budgets at SBC and praised the first budget from the coalition. He praised the efficiency and good management from the Chief Financial Officer, the Financial Services Manager, the Finance Team and the Management Team.

The Leader spoke of the restraints in the current economic environment and reduction in levels of Government support and looking forward, the limitations in tax revenue and the loss of the New Homes Bonus. He said that SBC needed to be cautious about its own finances with uncertainty of income from the Sittingbourne Town Centre project and there might be financial pressures from waste and other services contracts which needed to be improved. The Leader spoke of the increase in levy from the Lower Medway Internal Drainage Board and his belief and support of other authorities who considered that the charge should be set as a separate precept.

The Leader was critical of the increased reserves managed by the previous administration and he drew attention to paragraph 3.13 on page 60 of the report. He said that the base budget was balanced without making a transfer from the General Fund and said it was necessary to increase the Swale part of the Council Tax by £4.95 per year for a Band D property to avoid making cuts to services and would endanger the viability of the budget for future years without the increase.

In referring to the detailed budget proposals in Appendix II on page 63, the Leader highlighted some significant and beneficial changes to the budget which included £30k on security services to ensure the safety of staff; £26k for hire of an electric vehicle/hybrid vehicle for the Mayor, £90k for the reinstatement of free car parking to two leisure centres; £26k running costs for new toilets at Milton Regis and Minster; £50k savings on the CCTV contract; £40k on a new health promotion post; £74k for staff to tackle homelessness; and £68k for the Real Living Wage. The

Leader said that the changes reflected some of the administration's priorities without too much burden on the budget.

The Leader said that the budget needed to be as realistic as possible and that previous budgets had led to significant variances over the course of a financial year. He said that a realistic level of funding had now been set to tackle homelessness for this year. The Leader said that other administration priorities would be met by one-off funding from reserves. He outlined the projects that had already been allocated funding, said that grant funding would be available for each of the next three years and he encouraged Councillors to promote bids in the interests of their communities.

The Leader said he had welcomed the Scrutiny Committee's recommendation to increase the funding to tackle the climate emergency and said that £50k would be allocated for two years from the Special Projects Fund. He said he would also be recommending to Cabinet that a one-off £20k grant be allocated from the Communities Fund to the Citizens Advice Service Swale, in addition to their customary grant, and he hoped they would consider a service to assist long-term European citizens seeking to be settled in the UK.

In concluding, the Leader said that the Council were required to have a clear Capital Strategy and could not borrow to deliver the base budget. He said that some Councils had risked borrowing to invest in commercial property, hoping to provide an income stream that compensated for cuts in Government funding. He said that the next priority for the administration was to borrow for identifiable improvements for local people, in particular to kick-start more affordable housing provision within the Borough. The Leader stressed that borrowing would be cautious and as low-risk as possible, as set out paragraph 2.13, and unlike the previous administration, the current administration would not make a provision to borrow money or purchase land without a specific purpose.

The Leader said that the current administration would endeavour to deliver good services to local people and where finance allowed, improve their facilities and environment, and he hoped to encourage local people to have a positive view of the Borough.

The Leader proposed the recommendations and encouraged Members to support the budget.

This was seconded by the Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance.

In response, the Deputy Leader of the Conservative group highlighted that the previous Cabinet Member for Finance was prudent which enabled a freeze on Council Tax. He thanked the Chief Financial Officer, the Financial Services Manager and the Financial Services Team and thanked the Leader and Cabinet for attending the Scrutiny Committee meeting to discuss the budget proposals. The Deputy Leader of the Conservative group praised the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee for his effective chairing of the meeting.

In the debate that followed Members made points including:

- Priorities had been reordered but Council Tax had increased;
- how much input into the budget setting had individual groups in the coalition had?;
- residents were not properly being consulted;
- supported £250k for the Heritage Strategy;
- needed long-term stability;
- spending not efficient - £100k for Murston Church was not a priority;
- budget was built on growth in Council Tax and Business rates, but there was a lack of infrastructure to assist the business community;
- if SBC were promoting sustainable communities, what was happening with the Bell Centre, Sittingbourne and why were the artisan markets being discontinued?;
- funding to subsidise car parking at the leisure centres was not 'green' and did not promote health and well-being if users drove to the facility; and
- acknowledged the previous administration's prudence.

In response, the Leader said that the previous administration were wrong to keep such high reserves and the coalition had achieved much more than the previous administration who had still not put forward ideas or policies.

In accordance with SI 2014 No.165, a recorded vote was taken, and voting was as follows:

For: Bonney, Carnell, S Clark, Darby, Davey, Ellen, Gibson, Gould, Harrison, Jackson, Jayes, Knights, MacDonald, Benjamin A Martin, Ben J Martin, McCall, Palmer, Perkin, Rowles, Saunders, P Stephen, S Stephen, Tatton, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan, Winckless, Woodford. Total= 29.

Against: Beart, Bowen, R Clark, Dendor, Fowle, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Hunt, Neal, Nissanga, Simmons, Whiting. Total = 12.

Abstain: Ingleton (Mayor), Marchington, Pugh. Total = 3.

Resolved:

(1) That Members note the Chief Financial Officer's opinion on the robustness of the budget estimates and the adequacy of reserves.

(2) That Minute Number 515/02/20 approved by the Cabinet on 12 February 2020 on the report on the Medium Term Financial Plan and the 2020/21 Revenue and Capital Budgets be approved.

(3) That the resolutions contained in Appendix I be approved.

(4) That in accordance with the proposals contained within SI 2014 No. 165 that a recorded vote be taken on the 2020/21 Budget and Council Tax.

561 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2020/21

The Leader introduced the report which sought to approve the Treasury Management Strategy 2020/21 and the Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators and to approve the Treasury Management Policy in Appendix II. He drew attention to paragraphs 2.5 to 27 on page 93 of the report, which set out the sources of borrowing and said that currently it was considered that investments in the money market rather than retail properties were advisable. The Leader said that SBC were not currently investing in equities but if in the future it did, ethical expectations would be considered. He praised the Finance Team for their work and professionalism.

In seconding the recommendations, the Chairman of the Audit Committee said that the Audit Committee received regular reports and there were no areas of concern.

The Deputy Leader of the Conservative Group thanked the Chief Financial Officer, the Financial Services Manager and the Finance Team.

Resolved:

(1) That the Treasury Management Strategy 2020/21 and the Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators be approved.

(2) That the Treasury Management Policy in Appendix II be approved.

562 PAY POLICY REPORT

The Leader introduced the report and said that the administration had inherited a good Pay Policy and encouraged all Members to read the policy carefully. He highlighted the changes in the Real Living Wage at section 3.1 on pages 108 – 109 and drew attention to the impact of the long term sickness of the Chief Executive at Appendix I(H).

The Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance seconded the recommendations.

Resolved:

(1) That the proposed Pay Policy Statement be agreed for publication on the Council's web site.

(2) That the information within the Pay Policy Statement is updated with actual year-end figures before final publication.

563 ELECTION OF MAYOR ELECT AND DEPUTY MAYOR ELECT

The Mayor announced that Councillor Paul Stephen had been appointed Mayor elect for the 2020/21 civic year, and Councillor Benjamin A Martin had been appointed Deputy Mayor for the 2020/21 civic year.

Resolved:

(1) That the Mayor elect for the civic year 2020/21 be Councillor Paul Stephen.

(2) That the Deputy Mayor elect for the civic year 2020/21 be Councillor Benjamin A Martin.

564 APPOINTMENT TO OUTSIDE BODIES - QUEENBOROUGH FISHERIES TRUST

This item was withdrawn from the Agenda.

565 APPOINTMENT TO OUTSIDE BODIES - FAVERSHAM POOLS

The Leader introduced the report which sought to nominate a Member to sit as a trustee on the Board of Faversham Pools Trustees.

The Leader proposed, and Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing seconded the proposal, that Councillor Tim Valentine be nominated to sit as a trustee on the Board of Faversham Pools Trustees.

Councillor Lloyd Bowen proposed and Councillor Cameron Beart seconded the proposal, that Councillor David Simmons be nominated to sit as a trustee on the Board of Faversham Pools.

In the debate that followed, a Member raised an issue about the status of a trustee within an organisation and raised concern about whether there was a conflict of interests if a Cabinet Member with responsibility for a particular function was appointed to an outside body with the same function.

In response, the Leader explained that there had been a high level discussion with the Senior Management Team, the Leader of the Conservative Group and himself, about concerns raised in nominating Members to Outside Bodies and it was reiterated that so long as Members understood their responsibilities, then any conflicts of interest could be managed.

Resolved:

(1) That Councillor Tim Valentine be nominated to sit as a trustee on the Board of Faversham Pools.

566 REVIEW OF POLLING PLACE - MURSTON WARD

The Leader introduced the report and proposed the recommendation which was seconded by the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing.

Resolved:

(1) That Council agrees to change the polling place for the Murston ward from Sunnybank Primary School to Woodcombe Sports and Social Club.

567 TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS 2020/21

The Leader proposed and the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing seconded the timetable of meetings, as set out within the report.

Resolved:

(1) That the programme of meetings set out in Appendix I to the report be agreed.

568 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPROVAL***Resolved:***

(1) That Minute no. 460 from the Standards Committee meeting held on 16 January 2020 be noted.

(2) That Minute no. 466 from the Audit Committee Meeting held on 21 January 2020 be noted.

(3) That Minute No. 509 from the General Purposes Committee held on 12 February 2020 be noted

(4) That Minute Nos. 515, 516 and 517 from the Cabinet Meeting held on 12 February 2020 be noted.

569 ADJOURNMENT OF MEETING

The meeting was adjourned from 19: 17 to 19:27 and from 20:45 until 20:55.

Chairman

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