
COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 11 September 2019 from 7.00pm - 8.18 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Cameron Beart, Monique Bonney, Lloyd Bowen, Derek Carnell, Roger Clark (Deputy Mayor), Simon Clark, Richard Darby, Steve Davey, Mike Dendor, 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, Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin, Ken Pugh, Ken Rowles, Julian Saunders, David Simmons, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen, Bill Tatton, Roger Truelove, Tim Valentine, Ghlin Whelan, Tony Winckless and Corrie Woodford.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Katherine Bescoby, Robin Harris, Chris Lovelock, Sarah Porter, Nick Vickers and Emma Wiggins.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Mark Ellen, Pete Neal, Padmini Nissanga, Eddie Thomas and Mike Whiting.

212 PRAYERS

The Mayor's Chaplain said Prayers.

213 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

214 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 24 July 2019 (Minute Nos. 151 – 161) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record, subject to the following amendment to Minute No. 157 – Question 11 – Supplementary Question and Response: “In response to a comment, the Cabinet Member concurred with the Member that there was too much fake news in Faversham.”

215 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

216 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor advised that since the last Council meeting, the Mayor or Deputy Mayor had represented the Council at 15 functions, none of which were out-of-Borough charity events. Whilst requests for attendance had reduced during the holiday season, this would increase considerably on the run-up to Christmas.

The Mayor drew attention to Remembrance Services on Sunday 10 November 2019, and advised that where possible Members would be asked to represent the Mayor, and to lay a wreath, at services within their own wards but this was not always possible.

The Mayor announced that a Civic Christmas Church Service would be held on Saturday 21 December 2019 at 6.30pm, and further details would follow in due course.

217 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

The Mayor advised that three questions had been received. Mr Palmer and Mr Greenhill were not present at the meeting, and so the Mayor advised that the question and answer would be included in the Minutes.

Mr Randall was present at the meeting and was invited to ask his question and to ask a supplementary question.

The question and response to each question are set out below:

Question 1 – Mr Stephen Palmer

In the planning application for Spirit of Sittingbourne there was a condition to employ in both its construction and operation to employ 80% of its workforce from Kent, of which 30% from Swale.

Can the council provide what the figures actually are for those that have permanent residences in Kent and Swale as opposed to transit workers in temporary accommodation?

Response to Question 1 – Cabinet Member for Planning

There have been three main contractors on site for the Sittingbourne Town Centre scheme to date. Information has been requested from all of those and the data we have received to date indicates that 12% of employees are from Swale, 40% from Kent and 47% from outside of Kent. It should however be noted that these figures do not include all individuals working across the site, as those not directly employed by the main contractors will not have had their home addresses recorded, and contractors were recording data in different ways and required interpreting based on travel time. The question of permanent residence is not one that can be easily captured, in that the available information should be based on individuals home addresses at that point in time, and length of residence would not have been collected.

For the Spirit of Sittingbourne and other schemes the previous administration sought to encourage the use of local labour through Section 106 Agreements that accompany the planning permission. Due to perceived complexities associated with incorporating local labour requirements into these agreements, the relevant clauses are 'reasonable endeavour' obligations, which requires the developer and its contractors to use some endeavours, but they need not act in any way which is against their own commercial interests. This

makes enforcement of the obligation difficult, and it is principally through providing positive encouragement and support to willing developers that more beneficial outcomes can be achieved. This is not an approach that has proved particularly successful, and the new administration will be looking to ensure any future contracts of this nature aim for a far higher level of local labour, with greater avenues for effective enforcement. Large schemes like these should deliver a lot of local jobs, and it is highly regrettable that this opportunity was not taken full advantage of.

The Cinema and restaurants are already engaged with the Council on developing local recruitment campaigns and we anticipate due to the nature of this employment a significant proportion of the workforce will reside in Swale.

Question 2 – Mr Gareth Randall

Members will be aware of the intense heatwaves experienced by Swale during the last few months. Intense heat is not only a hazard to the elderly but risks even more climate change by encouraging people to install air conditioning which uses more energy.

White roof tiles and white walls can reduce the build-up of heat within a house and also reduce the amount of heat generated in the neighbourhood by hot roofs. Most commercial buildings, such as those in the Eurolink Industrial Estate just north of Swale House, have white or light-coloured roofs to reflect heat. Extending this option to residential buildings where used aesthetically could help Swale reduce its climate impact and set an example to be followed by the rest of the country.

Would the council consider undertaking a review of the currently allowed building materials for housing, to specifically allow white reflective roof tiles and white walls to be used where developers and individual homeowners choose?

Response to Question 2 – Leader

Thank you for your thoughtful question.

The use of white reflective pigments would reduce heat gain and overheating in properties and the impact is significant. They are a common site in Southern Europe and North Africa.

Climate change will lead to greater overheating and so it is reasonable to assume that cool roofs and light colours could reduce the cost and energy levels needed for air conditioning.

For the present at least, the UK climate is not the same as Southern Europe and North Africa and whilst we will need cooling in summer months, we also need heating in the winter. During spring and autumn, the heat gain within materials to residential properties is often a benefit as denser materials, such as masonry, store heat and emit overnight.

Cool roofs have been in place in residential properties for many years, but generally relate to flat roofs.

Our Spatial Planning team are considering setting energy performance standards above Building Regulations in the emerging local plan. The use of white, or light, materials could be part of the mix in achieving improved standards.

I will ask the Cabinet Member for Planning and his Deputy to consider this. I have no doubt they will want to consider the aesthetic and heritage impact, the potential for discolouring and algae and moss growth and the lack of a commercial supply of reflective roofing tiles for pitched roofs.

Lastly it is important to consider other ways of meeting climate change challenges such as encouraging natural ventilation, green roofs and walls, use of shutters and landscaping to keep streets and buildings cool.

You have opened up an interesting area of discussion and it will be considered properly.

Supplementary Question and Answer

A speech was made regarding support for Sittingbourne Christmas Lights, and in response the Leader reminded the questioner that the supplementary question should relate to the original question.

Question 3 – Mr John Greenhill

It is interesting to note that the council is being asked to make a resolution (item 9 on the Agenda) when it would appear that a preponderance of the matter stated is already covered by Common Law and Statute and sanctions are available if there is contravention, Codes of Conduct and matters such as the Nolan Principles. Para. 3(g) is derogatory of the Standards Committee which has clear terms of reference and Para. 3(e) is inappropriate for the allocation of committee membership when experience of life often indicates that attendance at courses is often tokenism and is merely a matter of 'been there, done that, got the T-shirt'. Rather than lip service or the like, would not time be more appropriately spent, say, in pro-actively resolving matters such as the blatant discrimination staring us all in the face in respect of ageism and disability and which are patently obvious in Sittingbourne as a result, for example, of the inherited so-called regeneration and elsewhere in Borough, these matters being obvious to the eye and ear should anyone be interested in the same, beyond those Councillors who have a proven track record in dealing with such matters?

Response to Question 3 – Leader

Thank you for your question. It would be helpful to explain that since the change of administration in May, members have been encouraged to bring forward motions that focus on general issues. This is leading to less monopolising of Council meetings by a minority of members and allows us in open forum to respond to representations brought to us by members of the public.

You will know that over recent times the perception has been fostered from public reporting that not all Council members have the open and enlightened attitude to equality and divergence that is expected of public representatives, whatever their

politics. We have had many representations from people that our approach in the past has not been robust enough. You are right to point out that there are legal and procedural means to deal with transgressions, but the aim of this motion is to try to prevent transgressions occurring. Training of the kind proposed is common to many organisations and it is a striking omission that Swale has not had a training schedule in place that is genuinely inclusive of all members.

The adoption of this motion will not obviate the need to follow due procedures and I would expect this motion, if agreed, to be referred to the General Purposes Committee. As to your reference to other crucial issues such as the Sittingbourne Town Centre, the adoption of the motion will not replace the efforts we are making to deal with these, even if the efforts are not always apparent.

218 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS

The Mayor advised that eight 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 – Councillor David Simmons

What does the Council Leader think the increased cost will be to Swale Borough Council if it leaves the Mid Kent Waste Partnership in 2023, when the current contract ends, and brings the waste contract in "House"?

Response – Leader

Thank you for your question which has topicality given the evidence of widespread public concern about the delays to waste and food bin collection over the recent extremely hot Bank Holiday weekend. That is under the contract which I believe you agreed.

So, as your question rightly implies cost of the contracted service is an important consideration, but so too is efficiency and reliability. It is important too that contractors have a willing workforce. Consequently, it will also matter to us that future contractors take on board our commitment to the real living wage. Agreeing to parsimonious contracts can lead to household waste not being collected and overfilled street waste bins, something the current Cabinet Member and Head of Service are working hard to prevent but within the context of the contract agreed in the past.

However, as you of all people should know the question is a little premature.

The current Mid Kent Waste Partnership contract does not come to an end until 31st March 2023. As with all commissioning of major contracts, a great deal of work goes into looking at the strategic direction we want the service to go in e.g. what outcomes do we want for residents, the best model(s) to use to achieve these outcomes and then who in the market is best placed to deliver these.

Given the size of the waste and street cleansing contract, this work will start in earnest towards the end of this year, with a strategic direction agreed in 2020 and then a formal tender process between 2021 and 2022. So, you will appreciate it would not be possible to state the perceived costs of any type of model at this time, as it will be totally dependent upon the specification we design to meet our strategic direction. I hope we can learn from past mistakes.

Supplementary Question and Response

In response to a question as to the arrangements for involvement of Scrutiny when the contract was renegotiated, the Leader responded by confirming that there would be Scrutiny involvement and that all options available would be considered, in particular quality of service, as well as cost.

Question 2 – Councillor Roger Clark

Would the Cabinet Member for Community detail the action he took to add impetus to and accelerate the delivery of the skatepark which he claimed in his response to the question from Councillor Whelan at the last Council meeting?

Response – Cabinet Member for Community

Thank you for the question Cllr. Clark, however, I did not make any such claim to have personally added to the completion of the skatepark.

Back in June when I reviewed the details of the project, I secured an additional £20k to enhance the project. Once the current contractor has completed the works, we will put this money to good use. I am looking forward to the long awaited skatepark opening in the autumn.

Supplementary Question and Response

In response to a request for details or all emails/texts/calls that the Cabinet Member had made regarding progressing the Skate Park, the Cabinet Member read out the response he had made at the last Council meeting, and suggested that the Member may wish to listen to the audio recording.

Question 3 – Councillor Lloyd Bowen

Can the Cabinet member tell us how much his proposal for providing free WiFi within Faversham, Sheerness and Sittingbourne town centres will cost?

Response – Cabinet Member for Community

The full costings for the proposed town centre wi-fi is continuing to be fully researched. Once this is complete, a tender will be undertaken, and the full cost benefit analysis will be brought forwards for a final decision to progress its implementation.

Supplementary Question and Response

In response to a question as to when other areas in the Borough would be afforded the same free benefits (i.e. free WiFi), the Cabinet Member advised that the costs would be too prohibitive to extend it to the whole of the Borough, but it was proposed that it would be provided in Faversham, the Isle of Sheppey and Sittingbourne Town Centres. Further information would be made available as the project progressed.

Question 4 – Councillor Lloyd Bowen

Would the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property detail the action she has taken since her motion to supersede this Council's support for action to complete improvements to Junctions 5 – 7 of the M2, the A249 and the completion of the Northern and Southern Relief Roads, to practically demonstrate her support and commitment to these key infrastructure projects, which she acknowledged to this Council were crucial?

Response – Cabinet Member for Economy and Property

Given the uncertainty in Government, with the relevant new ministers only taking up their posts on the 24th July 2019, and parliaments summer recess starting on the 25th July 2019, there has been limited opportunity to lobby for the improvements needed on the Strategic Road Network.

As previously stated a response to the most recent consultation on the proposed Junction 5 improvements was submitted through the Leader, making clear this Councils support for the scheme and the urgency with which the improvements are required. I have since also written to the new Secretary of State for Transport to reiterate our support for Junction 5 and make clear the need for Junction 7 to be a priority within the next phase of the Road Investment Strategy, due to be published later this year.

We now understand that it is the Secretary of States intention to hold inquiries into the orders for the proposed Junction 5 improvements, details of which are to follow.

One step forward was also announced on the 30th July 2019, with Transport for the South East (TfSE) submitting a 'top ten' list of priority road improvement schemes across the South East, to government as part of a £3.5bn, five-year investment programme for Major Roads. This included £20m for the M2 Junction 5 scheme and I thank Kent County Council for preparing the bid to TfSE that made this possible.

Supplementary Question and Response

The Cabinet Member was asked for information about what she had or intended to do to relieve pressure for residents (along the A2 from Murston to Faversham) travelling on road networks and further afield? Had any discussion taken place about applying for funding (such as the Challenge Maintenance Fund)?

The Cabinet Member was aware of the Local Highways Challenge Maintenance Fund, and agreed that it was imperative that upgrades were made to Junction 5 and

7. Discussions had taken place with Highways England and KCC, and she assured Members that the issue was being taken forward, however, it was unlikely that any decisions would come from Government in the current political situation. She assured the Member that the issue had not been forgotten.

Question 5 – Councillor Steve Davey

The block paving in Sittingbourne High Street, laid in 1995, costing approximately £750k, (around £1.5m in today's money) has many sub-standard repairs and trip hazards and will compare poorly with our new leisure quarter once completed. Should we as the Council be taking greater care of such an expensive asset, and monitor more closely the quality of work carried out by contractors engaged by KCC or premises owners?

Response – Cabinet Member for Economy and Property

Cllr Davey is well informed that the original paving in Sittingbourne High street was undertaken in 1995 by the then combined SBC and KCC highways unit.

KCC are ultimately responsible for maintaining the highway network including Sittingbourne High Street roadway and footways. I acknowledge there is some work required especially to the road humps and the block paving on the footways and will review with colleagues from KCC.

As Cabinet Member, myself and the Leader have already undertaken some high street surveys and are looking at the entire high street and its linkages to the new leisure quarter. This will form part of future work being undertaken to find more permanent solutions to keep a vibrant town centre.

Supplementary Question and Response

In response to a question as to whether the Council had any right to veto which contractors were used to carry out repairs, given previous poor work, the Cabinet Member advised that concerns had been raised with KCC and that she would do her best to ensure that KCC only used contractors that were suitably qualified and competent.

Question 6 – Councillor Mark Ellen

This question was not put as the Member was not present.

Question 7 – Councillor Tony Winckless

I have received several complaints from people having to use Mobile Phones to pay for parking, when machines are not working. There's been a case when an elderly lady was fined who does not own a mobile phone. Are there plans to change the policy?

Response – Cabinet Member for Environment

When no machine is available, customers are directed to use RingGo via the mobile phone app or by calling a phone number advertised on the machines.

OFCOM statistics show that between 96 and 100% of 16 and 64 year-olds use a mobile phone. Even 88% of 65 – 74-year olds have a mobile.

It would be unfair of those who pay as usual via the app, if those who found the machine out of order were not required to pay. Unfortunately, the machines and the cashless systems are not linked so we can't block payments for those using cashless.

Clearly the best way to deal with the problem is minimise the times when no working machine is available. Fortunately, we have very few machine breakdowns that last longer than 2 hours. Our contractors attend and fix a high percentage of faults within that period. We also try to have two machines in each car park to allow further resilience. Blue-badge holders are able to park in our car parks without charge. In addition, over 30% of our customers already pay by cashless means and this proportion is increasing every year.

Car parking services are expensive to provide and occupy large areas in our town centres. They do not come free. Therefore, residents should not expect to receive free parking when they are using a space and there is a means to pay that is accessible to most residents. We make reasonable adjustments by not requiring disabled drivers to pay for parking. Ultimately the current policy is reasonable.

I understand that that the 88 year old lady that you mention experienced difficulty paying for her parking. I would encourage her to appeal as we have both an internal review process and then independent Parking Tribunals Panel that oversee this type of thing.

In the future, we will explore the possibility of using new technology to allow card payments in our car parks.

Supplementary Question and Response

In response to a further question about the use of mobile technology by certain age groups, the Cabinet Member reiterated the response he had given and advised that if the 88 year old lady wished to appeal then the full circumstances could be taken into consideration.

Question 8 – Councillor Steve Davey

Can you give me a breakdown of the expenditure so far of the £150,000 received from the Governments Rough Sleeping Initiative Fund, and the Council's plans to support the increasing numbers of homeless people in the Borough, particularly rough sleepers?

Response – Cabinet Member for Housing

The bid to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) comprised of funding a Rough Sleeping Co-ordinator, a complex needs worker (specialising in Mental Health and Substance Misuse) and 1.5 FTE outreach workers, this totals £129,587. The remainder of the funding has been allocated for accommodation. We have already secured a 4 bed property which is providing emergency accommodation for 4 rough sleepers and on 1st September secured

accommodation at the Quays to support more individuals. The team are working with the residents to help them to move to more permanent accommodation

A requirement of this funding is to carry out bi-monthly night street counts. The first count was carried out on 1st August where 8 rough sleepers were verified. Our outreach team will be working with these people and putting plans in place to support and assist them into accommodation.

Supplementary Question and Response

In response to a question about what more could be done to provide an immediate response to help rough sleepers, the Cabinet Member advised that there were budget restraints, but he had been in discussion with partners and spoken to many charities to explore options about how the service could be improved.

219 MOTION SUBMITTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH PROCEDURE RULE 15

The Mayor advised that one motion had been submitted, and confirmed that he was happy for the Council to debate it, notwithstanding that it would need to be referred to the General Purposes Committee for further consideration.

The Deputy Monitoring Officer confirmed that the motion, if approved, would set the strategic direction and would act as a guide for Members and officers when considering the motion in more detail at various Committees.

Councillor Hannah Perkin proposed the following motion:

“1. This council notes that:

- a) Women and minority groups face discrimination and disadvantage on a daily basis.
- b) Hate crime across different minority groups has risen by 123% in the last eight years.
- c) Minority groups are underrepresented as councillors both nationally and locally:
 - (i) Fewer than one-third of councillors nationally are female, while in Swale the figure is less than one-fifth.
 - (ii) Nationally fewer than a quarter of councillors are aged between 18 and 49, whereas this same age range makes up approximately half of the general population.
 - (iii) A significantly smaller proportion of councillors nationally have a disability or other long-term health problem than is the case for the whole population, notwithstanding councillors' high average age compared to the general population.
- d) The pace of change in improving the representativeness of elected representatives is negligible.

2. This council believes that:

- a) All forms of hate crime are abhorrent.

- b) We should condemn all forms of discrimination based on personal characteristics.
- c) We should provide all our members with the training and support needed to eradicate discrimination and champion diversity.
- d) We should welcome and support people from underrepresented groups to stand as councillors, because more inclusive councils bringing more diverse perspectives are better equipped to represent the interests of their communities.

3. This council therefore resolves:

- a) To agree that members will work actively with each other to encourage a safe and fair working environment for all members, by advocating robustly and actively for minority groups and by condemning incidences of discrimination in their role as a councillor, whether in the chamber or out in their communities.
- b) To support members and officers in speaking out against and condemning any form of discrimination based on personal characteristics, whether this be racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, maternity/paternity, or faith-based discrimination, or any other form of discrimination.
- c) To encourage greater diversity within our council by working to understand and break down barriers for underrepresented people wanting to stand for election.
- d) To recall its adoption in 2017 of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of anti-Semitism, and to adopt the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims' definition of Islamophobia as follows:

Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.
- e) To implement compulsory training for all members on diversity and equality, including unconscious bias, and to request officers to consider how the allocation of seats on some committees could be restricted to those who have completed the training.
- f) To call on those charged with providing pastoral care to members (including group leaders and senior officers) to be sensitive to diverse members' needs and ready to signpost to sources of help and support.
- g) To call on the Standards Committee to ensure that incidents of harassment and discrimination in any form are dealt with appropriately.
- h) To request officers to produce an action plan for improving equality and diversity among members, to include policies on disability as well as maternity, paternity and adoption.

In proposing the motion, Councillor Hannah Perkin made reference to the following statistics:

- A report by the Fawcett Society acknowledged that less than 1 in 3 councillors were women.
- Swale Borough Council ranked in the bottom ten nationally in terms of representation of women, with just 16% of councillors being female.

- Operation Black Vote, Local Government Audit, raised some important facts about the lack of racial equality that exists, with a third of the 123 councillors surveyed not having a single black minority and ethnic (BME) member.
- Local Government Association statistics show that the proportion of white councillors dropped between 2004 and 2018 from 96.5% to 95.8%.
- Racially motivated hate crime had soared in the past five years and in Kent specifically attacks on children had risen to 6 per week.
- Kent Police had reported a 42% increase in hate crime against the lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender and queer/questioning (LGBTQ) community.
- Over 26% of councillors were over 70 and 10% were under 40, and considerably fewer lived with long term health conditions or disabilities than was representative of communities.

Councillor Hannah Perkin considered that the Council needed to be proactive in recognising the barriers and to improving diversity in the Council, and must outwardly and actively condemn instances of discrimination of any kind both within the Council and in the community. She encouraged Members to support the motion which was a statement of intent to work towards improving diversity and equality and eradicating discrimination.

Councillor Ben J Martin seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

The Leader congratulated and thanked Councillor Hannah Perkin and Councillor Ben J Martin for the very comprehensive motion, and hoped that Members would accept it as a progressive statement of values and attitudes. He spoke of the need for more comprehensive and inclusive diversity and equality training than had happened previously, which would be a benefit to all Members. He drew attention in particular to part 2(a) of the motion and the abhorrent rise in incidences of hate crime and vile intimidation in politics. He encouraged Members to support the motion which, if agreed, would be referred to the General Purposes Committee and Cabinet.

The Leader of the Conservative Group spoke in support of the meaning of the motion and his support for further consideration of the detail by the appropriate Committees.

A Member referred to instances of previous conversations with Members which could be deemed to be deeply offensive, and expressed her support for the motion.

Councillor Ben J Martin, seconder of the motion, spoke in support of the motion and the need to look at the issues very carefully and to ensure that others were treated as they expected to be treated, regardless of their gender, race, sexual orientation or disability (including learning disabilities). He said the Council should show leadership and set an example of what was expected in society.

In conclusion, Councillor Hannah Perkin thanked Members for their positive feedback and candid responses, referring to her own experiences, and drew attention to part 3(h) of the motion to develop an action plan to improve equality and diversity among Members.

The Mayor put the motion to the vote, which was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:**(1) That this council notes that:**

- a) Women and minority groups face discrimination and disadvantage on a daily basis.**
- b) Hate crime across different minority groups has risen by 123% in the last eight years.**
- c) Minority groups are underrepresented as councillors both nationally and locally:
 - (i) Fewer than one-third of councillors nationally are female, while in Swale the figure is less than one-fifth.**
 - (ii) Nationally fewer than a quarter of councillors are aged between 18 and 49, whereas this same age range makes up approximately half of the general population.**
 - (iii) A significantly smaller proportion of councillors nationally have a disability or other long-term health problem than is the case for the whole population, notwithstanding councillors' high average age compared to the general population.****
- d) The pace of change in improving the representativeness of elected representatives is negligible.**

(2) That this council believes that:

- a) All forms of hate crime are abhorrent.**
- b) We should condemn all forms of discrimination based on personal characteristics.**
- c) We should provide all our members with the training and support needed to eradicate discrimination and champion diversity.**
- d) We should welcome and support people from underrepresented groups to stand as councillors, because more inclusive councils bringing more diverse perspectives are better equipped to represent the interests of their communities.**

(3) That this council therefore resolves:

- a) To agree that members will work actively with each other to encourage a safe and fair working environment for all members, by advocating robustly and actively for minority groups and by condemning incidences of discrimination in their role as a councillor, whether in the chamber or out in their communities.**
- b) To support members and officers in speaking out against and condemning any form of discrimination based on personal characteristics, whether this be racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, misogyny, maternity/paternity- or faith-based discrimination, or any other form of discrimination.**

- c) ***To encourage greater diversity within our council by working to understand and break down barriers for underrepresented people wanting to stand for election.***
- d) ***To recall its adoption in 2017 of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's definition of anti-Semitism, and to adopt the All-Party Parliamentary Group on British Muslims' definition of Islamophobia as follows:***
 - Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness or perceived Muslimness.***
- e) ***To implement compulsory training for all members on diversity and equality, including unconscious bias, and to request officers to consider how the allocation of seats on some committees could be restricted to those who have completed the training.***
- f) ***To call on those charged with providing pastoral care to members (including group leaders and senior officers) to be sensitive to diverse members' needs and ready to signpost to sources of help and support.***
- g) ***To call on the Standards Committee to ensure that incidents of harassment and discrimination in any form are dealt with appropriately.***
- h) ***To request officers to produce an action plan for improving equality and diversity among members, to include policies on disability as well as maternity, paternity and adoption.***

220 LEADER'S STATEMENT

The Leader gave an update on some permanent issues of concern, namely (a) Planning (b) the Sittingbourne Town project and (c) general progress on the Coalition agenda.

(a) Planning

Since the last Council meeting, the Council has had to account to the Secretary of State for the shortfall in meeting Government housing targets. He wished to dispel any illusion that they had an anarchic approach to these targets, by emphasising that there were three key areas to consider: policy, infrastructure and the state of the housing market.

Much as the Coalition would like to make rapid progress on reviewing the Local Plan, the Leader advised that they must rely on the adopted Plan, which many of them opposed, for policy guidance. So, it was proper for the Planning Committee to refuse applications that clearly breached the Local Plan by annexing significant areas of countryside land onto allocated sites. If that led to appeals then the Council had to fight them robustly.

He considered that the Council must respond to Government pressure on targets by pointing out the major infrastructure deficits faced either through lack of Government investment or through the parsimony of ambitious developers. The reality was that the numbers imposed by the Government were simply unrealistic and whatever the Council did as planning authority, the Leader did not see that the market would be able to deliver.

He emphasised that they were not anarchic and they could work towards targets. Whilst the Council could be threatened with dire consequences for non-compliance, he could not see the Government carrying out such threats.

b) Sittingbourne Town Centre

The Leader referred to the last Council meeting where he had hinted at a range of past flawed decisions made around the Sittingbourne Town Centre project. He explained that the delay to the Multi Storey Car Park was not reflected in the miraculous rumours circulated in public discourse, but was due to misunderstandings and disputes that had their origins in initial agreements with the construction company. The difficulties had been resolved and the car park was now in operation.

Likewise, as the Scrutiny Committee had heard at its meeting on Wednesday 4 September 2019, progress was being made on the Spirit of Sittingbourne Leisure element. However, there was a little local difficulty and that was that the building did not fully comply with the planning permission granted in 2015 and, as with the car park, there was a little inconsistency between planning permission and contract. He advised that the Council could expect to have to determine a variation to the original permission. The breach clearly happened at the early stages of the development.

He questioned how and why this had happened, and referred to the Planning Committee meeting in March 2015 when planning permission had been granted. He considered that very little evidence had been presented in favour of the application, whilst Member and public objections were ignored. At the break of dawn, the town was full of intrusive billboards telling us all "It's Here", so, it was hard not to think that there was something pre-determined about the decision.

The Leader said that he had no doubt that in those early days there was too much of a cavalier approach and too little real scrutiny. Too often opposition questions were met with a dismissive claim that the project was a matter for the Consortium, which of course, it was not, especially once this Council had become the principal funder and now sustained the greatest risk.

Whilst he had no wish to apportion blame, the Leader wished that at the development agreement stage there had been someone to rein in the cavalier spirit.

On a positive side, the Leader advised that they anticipated an income to the revenue budget of about £250K from the Princes Street Retail Park and he hoped that in a year's time to be reporting income from the Leisure area.

c) General progress on the Coalition agenda

It had been just over 4 months since the local elections, and the Leader referred to the many changes that had occurred in housing, health and community involvement, and he did not wish to debate whether those changes were continuity from before May 2019 or new initiatives. Amongst other things, the Project Fund would soon produce discernible improvements to the public realm and the environment. He then spoke about capacity issues, referring in particular to a funding gap for next year of over £1.2 million, and so the delivery of an ambitious programme asked much of our staff. He praised the work of the Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance, Councillor Derek Carnell, for the work and organisation of the

Customer Contact and Revenues and Benefits staff and his appreciation to staff in general for their adaptability to change.

The Leader of the Conservative Group responded to the statement by acknowledging the recognition of staff, and the way they had conducted themselves in an exemplary manner, following the transition period since the local elections in May 2019. The Leader thanked the Leader of the Conservative Group for his comments.

221 **AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT**

Councillor Simon Clark, Chairman of the Audit Committee, introduced the item and proposed the recommendation to agree the report, commenting on the excellent work of the committee and the positive feedback from the external auditor regarding the quality and submission of the accounts. The proposal was seconded by Councillor Peter Marchington, who had been a member of the Committee in the year 2018/19.

The Leader of the Conservative Group congratulated the Chairman on his first meeting of the Audit Committee and spoke highly of the internal audit team and staff, commenting in particular on the quality of papers, their work on internal audit and risk management and their relationship with the external auditor. These sentiments were echoed by other Members who spoke highly of the work of the Committee and the important role it played.

During the discussion, all Members were encouraged to attend the Audit Committee Training which was scheduled to take place on Tuesday 17 September 2019.

A Member commented on the alternative options section of the report and considered that there should always be alternative options.

Resolved:

(1) That the Audit Committee Annual Report for 2018/19 be agreed.

Chairman

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