
COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Virtual Council Meeting held on Wednesday, 11 November 2020 from 7.00pm - 10.10pm.

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, James Hall, Ann Hampshire, Nicholas Hampshire, Angela Harrison, Alan Horton, James Hunt, Ken Ingleton, Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Denise Knights, Peter Macdonald, Peter Marchington, Benjamin Martin (Deputy Mayor), Ben J Martin, Lee McCall, Padmini Nissanga, Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin, Ken Pugh, Ken Rowles, Julian Saunders, David Simmons, Paul Stephen (Mayor), Sarah Stephen, Bill Tatton, Eddie Thomas, Roger Truelove, Tim Valentine, Ghlin Whelan, Mike Whiting, Tony Winckless and Corrie Woodford.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Jayne Bolas, Martyn Cassell, David Clifford, Janet Dart, Zoe Kent, Chris Lovelock, Jo Millard, Nick Vickers and Emma Wiggins.

APOLOGY: Councillor Pete Neal.

224 INTRODUCTION

The Mayor explained that the Council meeting would be conducted in accordance with the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panel (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 No 392.

In welcoming all Members and members of the public, the Mayor explained which Swale Borough Council officers were in attendance.

225 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 7 October 2020 (Minute No. 157-178) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

226 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

227 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor thanked those Members who had laid a wreath on Remembrance Day and those that had volunteered but were unable to participate due to the pandemic.

The Mayor said that he and the Mayoress had laid a wreath at the War Memorial in Central Avenue, Sittingbourne and were moved by others attending, socially-distanced, including a local motorcycle club.

The Mayor and Mayoress attended a short service of remembrance at the Sacrificial Cross at Sheerness cemetery that morning where he laid a wreath.

The Mayor and Mayoress had also attended the formal launch of the poppy appeal 2020 by the Royal British Legion in the Forum in Sittingbourne High Street.

Finally, the Mayor said that he had been filmed reciting a poem by the Wisdom Hospice for their Lights of Love Appeal Service which would be broadcast at 6pm on Friday 4 December 2020.

228 MOTION - AREA COMMITTEES

Prior to Councillor Whiting proposing the motion, Councillor Richard Palmer, referring to Part 4.1, paragraph 15 in the Council Procedure Rules raised a point of order that the motion be referred to the Policy Development Review Committee (PDRC) without debate. He explained that the subject of Area Committees had previously been discussed at PDRC and Full Council. In the discussion that followed, the Monitoring Officer said that, in this case PDRC might not be appropriate, the proposer considered it should be discussed and in his view it was reasonable that Council debated the motion. He added that the substantive motion should be proposed and seconded prior to any voting on Councillor Palmer's point. Councillor Palmer clarified that PDRC had looked at this matter previously and the motion could rescind a recent decision.

Councillor Mike Whiting then proposed an alteration to the motion as set out on the Agenda with changes at paragraphs 2 and 4:

(2) That properly nominated Parish Representatives of the Area Committees, with the one exception detailed in (3) below, enjoy the same rights as Borough Members to debate, propose and vote for recommendations made by the Area Committees to Swale's Cabinet.

(4) That Officers be instructed with drafting the necessary changes to the Constitution to allow recommendations 1 to 3 above and to present their report to the General Purposes Committee in accordance with the Constitution.

On being put to the vote Members agreed to allow the alteration.

In proposing the altered motion, Councillor Whiting said that whilst he was still skeptical of Area Committees, in order for them to be successful, Parish and Town Council formal involvement was vital. He referred to the letter sent by the Cabinet Member for Planning to all Parish and Town Councils to increase their participation at the Area Committees and was critical that all Members were not informed of the letter in advance. Councillor Whiting compared the formal role that Parish and Town Councils had at the Swale Joint Transportation Board meetings and he read out representations from Parish Councils that wished to propose, speak and vote at Area Committee meetings. He criticised the current administration and said they preferred to limit the role of Parish and Town Councils in the Area Committees, and concluded by saying that better informed debates led to better informed actions.

The Cabinet Member for Planning said that Councillor Whiting was mis-informed, and every Parish and Town Council had been asked to raise a delegate to sit on their relevant Area Committee.

In seconding the altered motion, Councillor Alan Horton said that the purpose of the motion was to seek Council's support for the work required to make the necessary changes to Area Committees. He discussed the process the forming of Area Committees had taken, and their function, and drew attention that there was no specific provision within the Constitution for the third tier of Local Government, whilst highlighting the high number of parished areas in Swale.

In accordance with Part 4.1 (15) of the Procedure Rules, Councillor Richard Palmer proposed that:

This motion be referred to the Policy Development Review Committee to consider and report back to Full Council.

This was seconded by Councillor Monique Bonney.

On being put to the vote, Members agreed.

Resolved:

That the following amended motion be referred to the Policy Development Review Committee and be reported back to Full Council:

- 1) That the Swale Kent Association of Local Councils be asked on an annual basis to nominate two Parish Representative Members to sit on each of the four Area Committees, with the condition that those representative members are members of a Parish or Town Council within the relevant Area Committee geography.***
- 2) That properly nominated Parish Representatives of the Area Committees, with the one exception detailed in (3) below, enjoy the same rights as Borough Members to debate propose and vote for recommendations made by the Area Committees to Swale's Cabinet.***
- 3) That Parish Representative Members of the Area Committees not be permitted to vote on spending decisions made under delegated powers by the Area Committee.***
- 4) That Officers be instructed with drafting the necessary changes to the Constitution to allow recommendations 1 to 3 above and to present their report to the General Purposes Committee in accordance with the Constitution.***

229 MOTION - COASTAL POLICY

Councillor Peter MacDonald proposed the motion as set out on the Agenda. He said that policies could be changed and described a previous occasion where the Environment Agency (EA) had proposed to abandon sea defences from Leysdown

to Rushenden but changed that policy. He highlighted the increase in coastal erosion.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Ken Ingleton gave a history and technical explanation of the erosion of the Sheppey coastline. He also suggested measures of how to address the erosion and referred to the decision taken by the EA, Medway Estuary and Swale Flood Coastal Management Strategy in September 2019 to take no active intervention to prevent further loss of property. He said that a change in policy to active intervention could start a long term process to protect what would remain of the Isle of Sheppey cliffs.

The Cabinet Member for Environment said there were two approaches that could be taken, to either stop the erosion or to manage the retreat from the cliff edge. He referred to the Shoreline Management Plans from 1996 and 2008 and said that the previous administration chose not to challenge the policy of no active intervention for the Eastchurch area. The Cabinet Member for Environment said that there had been meetings between officers, residents, and Members in March 2020, before the cliff collapse, and in September 2020 and an expert report of the erosion was commissioned. The EA had advised that the policy of no active intervention was founded on good evidence. The Cabinet Member for Environment outlined that in order for the policy to be changed, detailed evidence would have to be submitted via the South East Coastal Group and SBC officers did not have the required expertise. He concluded by saying that the EA had advised that the scheme proposed by Councillor MacDonald would not be successful and that a total of 21 properties were affected by the erosion of the cliffs.

In the debate that followed, Members raised points including:

- Disappointed with the response from the Cabinet Member for Environment;
- the proposal was not about SBC doing the work but for a change in policy;
- residents were victims of a national policy;
- should do the best for the residents and not just accept the policy;
- referred to previous press release from administration expressing opposition to the Shoreline Management Plan;
- should call on support from the Sittingbourne and Sheppey MP;
- welcomed the motion;
- had sympathy, but needed to consider the larger area - if policy was changed to prevent coastal erosion, it would impact elsewhere;
- needed to look at the whole management plan;
- should not be a priority during the current Covid-19 pandemic;
- changes to the Site of Special Scientific Interest were necessary to allow interventions to happen;
- should support the residents;
- erosion over the past 50 years was well known and documented;
- non-intervention by the EA was the correct policy;
- owners in the area were aware of the erosion when properties were purchased and many were un-insurable;
- motion was divorced from reality;
- the former administration were content with a managed retreat;

- should not raise the expectations of residents as nature would take its course;
- the enormous costs of the policy change would fall to the whole Borough;
- the motion was about Sheppey Cliffs, not the impact elsewhere;
- action could be taken within managed retreat but the EA were just letting nature take its course; and
- the situation needed to be managed.

Councillor MacDonald said that building the natural beach up with groynes and beach material would slow down the cliff erosion.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 19 (2) five Members requested a recorded vote, and voting was as follows:

For: Baldock, Beart, Bowen, Carnell, R Clark, Darby, Dendor, Ellen, Fowle, Hall, Horton, Hunt, Ingleton, Jayes, MacDonald, Marchington, McCall, Palmer, Pugh, Simmons, Tatton, Whiting, Woodford. Total equals 23.

Against: Bonney, Gibson, Gould, Harrison, Jackson, Knights, Ben A Martin, Ben J Martin, Perkin, Saunders, S Stephen, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, and Whelan. Total equals 15.

Abstain: S Clark, Davey, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Rowles, P Stephen, and Winckless. Total equals 7.

The Mayor advised that the motion was carried.

Resolved:

(1) That in view of the climate change accelerating the rate of the erosion of the Sheppey cliffs, this Council wishes to change Government policy to prevent further unsustainable erosion, thereby protect the existing, expanding, and future population of Sheppey. Swale Borough Council undertakes to seek the removal of the government coastal policy of non-intervention, with its serious social and commercial implications, and replace that policy with a policy of protection of the coastline.

230 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

The Mayor advised that there were no questions from the public.

231 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS

The Mayor advised that 7 questions had been received from Members. Each Member was invited to put their 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

At a Scrutiny Committee meeting earlier this year the Leader of the Council described the 2013 joint mid Kent waste contract as a bad contract. Please could the cabinet member tell me what is bad about the contract and for whom is it bad?

Response – Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor Tim Valentine

The Mid Kent Waste contract was let in 2013 and saw the forming of a partnership with neighbouring authorities Maidstone and Ashford. There are benefits in this arrangement including economies of scale and a collegiate approach with officers managing the contracts across the boroughs. This did indeed lead to a much-reduced cost of contract at tender stage, but this has meant the contractor has not always had the resources required to deliver the resilience, and therefore quality of service we would like to see.

The length of contract is also a problem. A 10-year contract reduced costs by enabling the cost of vehicles to be written down over a longer period. However, the view within the industry is that the useful life of the vehicles is approximately 8 years. Therefore, we are now experiencing a high level of vehicle breakdowns, including problems with the hydraulic lifting equipment. This lack of reliability has led to the poor level of bin collection service that was suffered over last year. Council officers have worked with the contractor to make improvements in recent months, including a full rescheduling of garden waste collections.

Furthermore, the zoning of the streets which determines their level of cleansing were, in the administration's opinion, lower than we would have liked. This results in complaints from the public about the amount of litter in Swale.

We are working with officers ahead of a new contract to address these issues.

Supplementary Question:

How could the Cabinet Member improve on the contract and still show good value for money and service quality for local residents?

Response – Cabinet Member for Environment

There is a working group looking at the new contract and the arrangements that will be made for that. Things are moving on quickly in the industry, there are changes in the technology available and there is considerable scope to improve the service from the current contract we have.

Question 2 – Councillor Carole Jackson

Would the Cabinet Member for Planning comment on the published view of the MP for Sittingbourne and Sheppey, that in our Local Plan review we should allocate all new housing to the Faversham end of the Borough, and failing that land to the south of Sittingbourne should come first?

Response – Cabinet Member for Planning, Councillor Mike Baldock

I would like to thank the Councillor for her very pertinent question.

It is a shame that we have such seemingly ill-informed and unhelpful contributions from an MP to what is a very serious debate.

Firstly we have to be clear that Swale has faced ever increasing, and ever-unrealistic housing numbers imposed by the Conservative Government for the past decade - a Government which Mr Henderson, and his Faversham & Mid Kent colleague, Helen Whately are supporters of, and numbers which they have consistently failed to challenge in any effective or meaningful way.

I would underline that word effective, because whilst Mr Henderson goes around referring to having-this meeting or written that letter the position remains very clear - over the past decade housing targets in Swale have already doubled and are set to treble. Whatever he has been doing it cannot be said to have been 'effective' in any way in reducing those targets.

His statement, and for context I will quote it, "In my view, Swale Borough Council should now allocate all new developments to the Faversham end of the borough" shows an apparent lack of understanding in how either the Local Plan process or indeed market forces work.

Let me make this clear. 10,000 houses around Faversham would be neither deliverable nor desirable. The Brenley Roundabout / M2 J7 is already near capacity and there are no commitments as of yet to bring forward any improvements.

In short, Mr Henderson seems to be suggesting that this Council should propose a Local Plan that his own Government would reject. This is hardly a proposal one would expect from anyone who understands how the Local Planning process actually works. At one point he even declared that 10,000 houses could be built in Faversham to pay for a southern link-road from the A2 to the M2 in Sittingbourne. These are the suggestions of someone who would appear to understand nothing about how Planning works and about how infrastructure and development should be linked.

Mr Henderson then goes on to suggest if all the housing target is not allocated to Faversham then the land South of Sittingbourne - I would not like to hazard a guess at which particular site he may or may not have in mind - apparently implying that those communities, unlike those on Sheppey or the north of Sittingbourne, do not suffer from "pressure on an infrastructure that is already overstretched".

The reality is that all our communities suffer from a lack of infrastructure across the whole Borough.

We have a chronic shortage of GPs and general health facilities, educational opportunities, a real lack of affordable housing, and seriously over-congested roads. These are the legacy of a decade of under-investment by both his Conservative Government and the previous Conservative administration on Swale,

both of whom championed mass house-building whilst failing to deliver on the necessary infrastructure.

Rather than allocate housing on this, to my mind, irresponsible 'throw them all here' approach, Swale Borough Council is working on a Local Plan that seeks to deliver regeneration of the Town Centres, provide greater affordable housing numbers, generate more local employment, provides opportunities for local SME builders, and to provide housing for our growing elderly population who have been seriously over-looked in the past.

The Government's housing demands on Swale are unrealistic and wholly damaging to our local communities. This Swale administration is on course to deliver less housing than the numbers the Conservatives intended, but it is still too much. However, we have faced this challenge in a responsible and constructive way that seeks to limit the potential damage.

If Mr Henderson wants to play a sensible role in opposing these government housing targets he should stop trying to play party politics with the issue, stop making apparently ill-informed statements, and start engaging with the Local Council in a constructive and positive way.

Supplementary question:

Has there been any response from Helen Whately MP?

Response – Cabinet Member for Planning Councillor Mike Baldock

No, no response.

Question 3 – Councillor Tony Winckless

What plans are there for the future use of the land at the end of Denbigh Close in Milton Regis. Where the disused play area has been removed?

Response – Cabinet Member for Economy and Property Councillor Monique Bonney

This site was included in a review undertaken by the Property Department of a number of small difficult to develop sites. Optivo confirmed that they did not want to develop the site and advice has been received that the site has limited potential for private development. As such the spaces are being considered for biodiversity and tree planting improvements with the aim of assisting with the response to the Climate & Ecological Emergency Action Plan.

Supplementary:

Why could 3 or 4 units not be built on this land?

Response – Cabinet Member for Economy and Property

It's about profitability of the site. For Optivo, the site might be too small but if an interest is shown by others, it could be considered.

Question 4 – Councillor James Hunt

At the February Full Council the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property, in response to a question by Mr Jack Connor, said that the "new Administration has ambitious plans for Sittingbourne Town Centre and its historic High Street." The question was in relation to work that the Swale Youth Forum had done alongside the Regeneration Officer for Town Centres.

Could the Cabinet Member update me on the work that the Regeneration Officer for Town Centres has done over the last six months please?

Response – Cabinet Member for Economy and Property

The Regeneration Officer for Town Centres role was a fixed-term post and ended on the 14th May 2020. It remains the case that the Council has ambitious plans for Sittingbourne Town Centre, and reflecting this, a wider set of Officers are now working on Sittingbourne, Sheerness and Faversham Town Centres. For much of the past 6 months, this work has been shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the need to balance public health concerns and the reopening of our High Streets. Set against what has been a challenging context, the Council has also been putting in place the officer and financial resource to make significant improvements to the public realm in our town centres, with a view to addressing many of the issues that were identified by the Youth Forum Members who took part in the town centre audit in Sittingbourne. Further audit work will continue to ensure the range of issues that impact on the public realm are picked up and addressed, incorporating not just our own assets, such as bins or improving wayfinding signage, but also those of other organisations, be that KCC or the private sector.

As we work to complete the current regeneration scheme in Sittingbourne Town Centre, we have also been working to develop a broader vision and policy framework. We are identifying a range of opportunities, and speaking with landowners to bring a more comprehensive package of improvement and the necessary, positive change across all of Sittingbourne Town Centre.

Supplementary question

It's good to hear that work is continuing but would you agree that losing an experienced officer was a real shame?

Response

There was a reorganisation and reallocation of positions and posts so we had to affect that to move forward.

Question 5 – Councillor James Hunt

Does the Cabinet Member agree with me that the council should do what it can to support local businesses and have the local economy as a high priority when making decisions, and that when this council awards contracts being a local company should be given equal consideration to that of quality, rather than greater weighting being given to quality.

Response – Cabinet Member for Property and Economy Councillor Monique Bonney

The Council does have supporting local businesses as a high priority and the administration has set this out in its recently adopted Economic Improvement Plan.

Whilst I would very much welcome as much of the Council's spend going to local businesses as possible (and the current Procurement Strategy encourages this), the Council does need to follow the Public Procurement Regulations. The regulations cover 'spend' above a certain threshold and do not allow us to favour local companies as all public procurement is subject to a number of principles including non-discrimination and equality of treatment.

For purchases under the regulation thresholds, low level spend only requires quotes to be obtained and officers can go direct to local companies. For tenders, whilst we cannot add a direct priority by location, the tender process includes a Social Value question which makes up 20% of the quality evaluation. This asks tenderers to list the social value measures applicable to their tender. This can include allow local companies to gain points such as the number of local jobs created and sustained, carbon footprint etc.

The administration is currently reviewing the Commissioning Framework and Procurement Strategy and will be amending our Contract Standing Orders shortly. This will increase the tender threshold meaning more opportunities go out using the quotes system which is less onerous and therefore favours smaller local companies more than a full tender process.

I actively encourage officers and Members to identify potential local suppliers and make them aware of opportunities as they come forward. Our procurement teams have attended past business events and held specific 'tender training' to advise local businesses about our procurement processes and how opportunities are advertised. By providing this and additional business advice, we can help businesses bid more effectively for work, not just from Swale Borough Council but also from other public bodies, bound by similar rules to our own.

There was no supplementary question.

Question 6 – Councillor Mini Nissanga

Can the leader explain why a figure of £27,000 was allocated to the Leysdown village hall but in fact that is untrue, this concerns me as I have for the last 2 years attempted to get funds for the kitchen. Can the leader show evidence of this transaction and explain why such a high figure was placed for such a tiny kitchen.

If you tell me this was a mistake as I am expecting you to say this, then tell me why such a serious financial mistake was made, please a full explanation.

Response – Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance Councillor Roger Truelove

Thank you for your question.

You approached Cllr Palmer before lockdown in March about this project and he saw it as a good project for the Special Project Fund to support and it was submitted into the approval process. Leysdown Village Hall were looking to replace the kitchen which was felt not to be fit for purpose and was becoming quite dangerous for the people that volunteer. Initial discussions were for works totalling around the £27,000 although Cllr Palmer was passed detailed quotations for a higher figure in June. Cllr Palmer did offer to meet you on site but he did not receive a reply

The Special Project Fund then had a provisional estimate of £27,000 committed but no money was paid.

Cllr Palmer was contacted by Cllr Tatton in September and the works required have been substantially reduced and now total £3,843. The Special Project Fund commitment will now be reduced to this sum.

There was no supplementary question.

Question 7 – Councillor Elliott Jayes

Given today's important anniversary of remembrance, could the Leader please update the Council on the funding for the important improvements to Sheppey's War Memorial as referred to the Cabinet by the Sheppey Area Committee?

Response – Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance Councillor Roger Truelove

Thank you for your question. It is very appropriate on a day when we remember the loss of life in war, and especially in this question the loss of life on the Isle of Sheppey. I am assured by the Chair of the Area Committee that this project will be much appreciated on the Island.

We are establishing a Sheppey improvement fund, for small capital projects on Sheppey. The fund will be for £250,000 and I would ask the Area Committee through its Chair to bid against that fund for the Memorial.

This will enable the project to proceed without Island members having recourse to either their members grant or the Special Projects funding for the Area Committee.

Apart from the Sheppey Improvement fund, further funding will be allocated to Sheerness Town Centre improvements and the administration is planning other larger capital investments on the Island.

We are confident that this is the right thing to do considering our determination overall to improve the public realm in Swale, the need to equalise for Sheppey on the funding we have recently devoted to other areas of Swale and because Sheppey is acknowledged to have areas of deprivation in need of more public investment, not just from Swale Borough Council.

There was no supplementary question.

232 LEADER'S STATEMENT

The Leader began his statement by saying he would concentrate on the Covid situation. He advised that he had sent a message out to Members last Thursday and would endeavour to keep Members up to date, as much as he could.

He referred to the reasons why the Government had introduced the 28-day emergency measures saying that it was not about absolute numbers, because they varied so much across the country. The Leader said it had become necessary because of the sharp rise in infection rates through October 2000 which, unless a break was applied, would lead to serious consequences, for public health, the NHS and the economy if large numbers of people became infected. He said that during this restrictive period, it was important that a more efficient track and trace system was put in place and we needed to wait to see what part local government might play in this.

The Leader said that these measures were in many ways different to the spring lockdown and might better be described as Tier 3 plus for all. He said the economy, though severely restricted, was more open, and there was support for business that would have to be managed and the extension of the furlough scheme.

Referring to the end of the emergency measures, the Leader said that what might happen after December 2nd 2000 was uncertain, but it would be unwise not to anticipate a continuation of restrictions of some kind throughout the winter, and until a vaccine was available for all.

The Leader said that Ministerial responses suggested a probable resumption of the tier system but with the probability that an assessment of where each council lies within that system being based on the data towards the end of this emergency break.

In highlighting the situation in Swale, the Leader said that at the end of September 2000 we had comfortably low levels of infection and now we were at a rate of 271 per 100K. He added that the reality was that the day before the present measures were introduced, Public Health England and KCC were pressing for Swale, along with two other districts in Kent, to go into tier 2, the discussions around this being abandoned once the nationwide measures were announced. The Leader said that data since would suggest that if Swale were to be put into Tier 2 then so should other districts of Kent, and plausibly the whole of Kent.

The Leader said that we had a very powerful incentive over these weeks to demonstrate a levelling off of the rate of growth in Swale, to slow down the momentum. He added that the virus spread virulently through close personal

contact and the measures introduced by the Government were to reduce considerably that contact. The Leader said that we could only tackle the issue here in Swale if we all complied and it was our duty to encourage and exhort that compliance and in particular to monitor compliance in the business community.

The Leader said that he hoped all members would help to spread that message and to discourage any members of the community who wished to glory in their non-compliance. He said that once again, as a Council we would work to support vulnerable people in the community. The Community Support project had been revived to support those who were clinically extremely vulnerable to stay at home as much as possible, though exercise and health appointments were exempt. The Leader said there were 6,200 such people in Swale and we would help them to stay safe by working with voluntary groups and individual volunteers to ensure they had priority supermarket deliveries and also providing advice for accessing medicines, and guidance on mental health matters and loneliness. Whilst falling short of April's "everyone in" directive, the Government had made it very clear its expectations of local government in keeping the optimum number of people off the streets.

The Leader said that it was impossible to pinpoint scientifically why infection rates varied from place to place but when it was noted that Swale and Thanet were the highest in Kent, and in considering the towns in the north west and north east, it was reasonable to assume a link between infection rates and social and economic deprivation.

The Leader questioned what could be done to reduce poverty levels in Swale? He said there was no immediate and easy answer but there were three critical areas of policy. Firstly, too many people in Swale existed on low and unreliable incomes and Swale did not attract the kind of investment that produced higher paid jobs because it suffered from a skills deficit. He added that, as a Council, we did not have a skills and education role to play but did have influence. The Leader said that we were clear that change was needed in Swale and we would strongly support any plans to diversify the secondary school offer and to add more vocational education to the curriculum and further education provision for the post 16 age group, which he highlighted as a matter of urgency.

The Leader said that the second critical area was the provision of more decent homes for those on average and low incomes in Swale, adding that the administration had made it clear from the start that we wanted the market and the planning system to provide more but that we would intervene where it was deficient. He referred to the setting up of SBC's own Local Housing Company being so vital and why it would need to grow in the years ahead, whoever had political control of the Council.

Thirdly, the Leader said there were too many health inequalities in Swale, which were not just an issue of NHS provision but of healthy living and opportunities for fulfilling recreational pastimes. The Leader said that SBC could play a role in this but also had to work closely with the NHS, KCC and with parliamentary colleagues. He said it was also fundamentally a question around a clean environment and if we had some fear that health pandemics were linked to poverty and Swale had a poverty problem, we had to have a strategy and it needed to be based on the

common ground just set out and needed to involve politicians and administrators in Swale, regardless of political parties.

In response, the Leader of the opposition thanked the Leader for his thought-provoking and passionate statement and said he was in full support, adding that the clear way out of poverty was to be in employment. He said that his group would continue to support the coalition when they were doing the right thing, and explain why if they were not in support, adding that they would work constructively and with friendliness with the administration to rid Swale of the virus. The Leader of the opposition referred to daily increases in cases and media footage of public breaching social-distance guidance. Finally, he spoke positively on working with the Cabinet Member for Economy and Property in considering the additional restrictions on grants.

In the debate that followed, Members raised points including:

- Were Swale likely to have mass testing and what could be done to assist?;
- adult gym equipment had closed but children's play areas remained open;
- drew attention to adults gathering in groups when collecting children from school;
- did the Leader agree with Gordon Henderson MP voting against the second lockdown?
- sought more detail on the age groups and sectors the virus was growing in;
- needed to get the virus under control as quickly as possible;
- everyone needed to comply with the guidance;
- support for vocational education as this was currently undervalued;
- tackling deprivation was vital in the long term;
- everyone had a part to play;
- disappointed at lack of information from Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing and SBC needed to work closer with other bodies;
- thanked the opposition for their assistance in reviewing the criteria and data on grants and asked Members to publicise the grants available to all communities;
- concerned about the implications of an extended or additional lockdown on businesses;
- highlighted that many public did not wear masks and highlighted the pressure Police were experiencing in trying to enforce this;
- congratulated the Communications team for keeping the public informed;
- schools should be asked to encourage parents and children to keep safe distances outside schools;
- thanked and praised the Licensing Team for working with businesses in helping them to continue trading safely; and
- highlighted the problems of loneliness through the pandemic and encouraged everyone to volunteer with the Community Voluntary Service to assist with their befriending service or other practical help such as shopping.

In his response, the Leader supported all parties working together. He said that any mass testing was likely to be announced suddenly and it would be difficult to arrange this in rural areas. He agreed that there were inconsistencies in Government advice on different play equipment and this could encourage public

confusion and ignorance. The Leader said that the MP made up his own mind. He said that constant communication was vital in order to avoid Swale going into Tier 3 and stressed the importance of compliance with guidance in the next few weeks. He drew attention to cases in care homes, spikes and spread of the virus in households and said that in Swale there was a higher proportion of cases in over 60's, and, in the working population, the 25-35 age group. The Leader acknowledged that some public were non-compliant but also highlighted the positive community support, and he thanked the staff working on administering grants. He said there was a limit to Police resources and stressed that, contrary to the comment made, the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing and the whole Council were working very hard with other bodies in tackling the pandemic.

233 AUDIT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2019/20

The Chairman of the Audit Committee, Councillor Simon Clark, introduced the report, proposed the recommendation to agree the report and thanked the Chief Financial Officer, the Chief Accountant, Head of Audit Partnership and the external Auditors Grant Thornton. The proposal was seconded by Councillor James Hall, the Vice-Chairman of the Audit Committee.

The Leader joined the Audit Committee Chairman in his thanks and stressed the importance of the Audit Committee in ensuring that the Council were not taking risks and had a clear idea of resources when delivering policies.

The Leader of the opposition drew attention to page 14 of the report, and spoke positively that the Council had received an unqualified Annual Opinion from the Head of Audit Partnership and that the External Auditors presented an unqualified opinion for the Council's financial statements and value for money conclusion for 2018/19. He praised the Chairman of the Audit Committee for his chairing of the meetings and also praised the Audit partners, the Chief Financial Officer and the Chief Accountant. He said it was an outstanding year of Audit.

Members noted the report.

Resolved:

(1) That the Audit Committee Annual Report for 2019/20 (Appendix I) be noted.

234 ANNUAL TREASURY MANAGEMENT REPORT 2019/20

The Leader introduced the report which had been considered by the Audit Committee on 30 September 2020. He reported that borrowing rates remained low, as were returns on investment, and the 6 month review would be reported to the next Audit Committee on 25 November 2020 and subsequently to Full Council on 6 January 2021. He thanked the Chief Financial Officer and Chief Accountant and proposed the recommendations in the report. This was seconded by the Deputy Leader.

The Leader of the opposition spoke positively on the additional income of £214k received as outlined at paragraph 2.6 on page 19 of the report and endorsed the

praise of the financial team including the Chief Financial Officer, Chief Accountant and Management Accountant.

On being put to the vote, Members agreed the recommendations.

Resolved:

(1) That the Treasury Management stewardship report for 2019/20 be approved.

(2) That the Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators within the report be approved.

235 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2021/22

The Leader introduced the report and advised that 2020/21 Council Tax support rose from 75% to 80% and the proposal was to keep the same rate for 2021/22 in order to assist those in hardship whilst also protecting the Council's finances. He proposed the recommendations which were seconded by the Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance.

The Leader of the opposition gave his full support.

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

For: Baldock, Beart, Bonney, Bowen, Carnell, R Clark, S Clark, Darby, Davey, Dendor, Ellen, Fowle, Gibson, Gould, Hall, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Harrison, Horton, Hunt, Ingleton, Jackson, Jayes, Knights, MacDonald, Marchington, Ben J Martin, McCall, Palmer, Perkin, Rowles, Saunders, Simmons, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan, Whiting, Winckless and Woodford. Total equals = 42.

Against: 0

Abstain: 0

Resolved:

(1) That the Council Tax Support scheme for 2021/22 is kept the same as 2020/21 and the Council Tax support continues as a maximum award of 80%

236 POLLING DISTRICT REVIEW FOR TEYNHAM & LYNSTED WARD (TONGE PARISH AREA)

The Leader introduced the report, drawing attention to the benefits of a new polling district for local residents. He proposed the recommendation which was seconded by the Deputy Leader.

Councillor Lloyd Bowen, Ward Member, welcomed and gave his full support for the proposal.

Councillor James Hall thanked the Electoral Services Officer for his work on progressing the proposal.

On being put to the vote, the recommendation was agreed.

Resolved:

(1) That a new polling district is set up in the Teynham & Lynsted ward (Tonge Parish area) to allow electors to vote at Lakeview Village Hall on the Great Easthall Estate, Marston.

237 ALLOCATION OF COMMITTEE SEATS AND COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

Members confirmed they had all received copies of updated Appendices III and IV, circulated earlier in the evening and added to the website.

The Leader introduced the report and gave an update, advising that Councillor Denise Knights would replace Councillor Lee McCall on the Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Ben A Martin would replace Councillor Lee McCall on the Swale Joint Transportation Board and Councillor Elliott Jayes would replace Councillor Ben A Martin as Vice-Chairman on Planning Committee as set out in Appendix IV. He proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Monique Bonney.

The Monitoring Officer clarified the gifting of seats to ensure political balance.

The Chairman of the Planning Committee recorded his thanks to the former Vice-Chairman of the Planning Committee, Councillor Ben A Martin.

On being put to the vote the recommendations were agreed.

Resolved:

(1) That the political balance be agreed as set out in Appendix II, as amended to allocate the unallocated seats on Audit, Emergency and General Licensing Committee.

(2) That the allocation of seats and appointment of Members to those Committees, in accordance with the wishes of Group Leaders, as set out in Appendix I to these minutes be agreed.

(3) That the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of those Committees be agreed, as set out in Appendix IV.

238 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPROVAL

The Council was asked to note the recommendations from the General Purposes Committee meeting and Cabinet meetings, both held on 28 October 2020, as separate reports on the items had been considered earlier in the meeting.

Resolved:

(1) That Minute No. 206 from the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 28 October 2020 be noted.

(2) That Minute Nos. 209 and 210 from the Cabinet meeting held on 28 October 2020 be noted.

Chairman

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