

COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Virtual Meeting held Via Skype on Wednesday, 6 January 2021 from 7.00 - 9.47 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Cameron Beart, Monique Bonney, Lloyd Bowen, Derek Carnell, Roger Clark, 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, Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Denise Knights, Peter Macdonald, Peter Marchington, Benjamin Martin (Deputy Mayor), Ben J Martin, Pete Neal, Padmini Nissanga, Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin, Ken Pugh, Ken Rowles, Julian Saunders, David Simmons, Paul Stephen (Mayor), Sarah Stephen, Bill Tatton, Roger Truelove, Tim Valentine, Ghlin Whelan, Mike Whiting, Tony Winckless and Corrie Woodford.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Billy Attaway, Jayne Bolas, Martyn Cassell, Grace Couch, Robin Harris, Janet Hill, Chris Lovelock, Jo Millard, Nick Vickers and Emma Wiggins.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Lee McCall and Eddie Thomas.

376 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 Policy 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.

377 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 11 November 2020 (Minute Nos. 224 – 238) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

378 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Alan Horton declared a disclosable non-pecuniary interest in respect of Item 13 – Report from the Standards Hearing Sub-Committee 26 November 2020 as he was the subject Member in the report.

379 WELCOME TO THE NEW CHIEF EXECUTIVE

The Mayor, Leader and Leader of the opposition all welcomed Larissa Reed, the new Chief Executive to the Council. The Leader drew attention to Larissa's outstanding record in Local Government and her enthusiasm for Swale, and he explained that Larissa would be joining Swale Borough Council (SBC) on Monday 11 January 2021. The Leader of the opposition spoke positively about the outstanding team of staff that Larissa would be leading.

In response, Larissa thanked Members for their kind words, acknowledged the difficult times the Covid-19 pandemic had created and spoke enthusiastically about joining SBC. She praised the work of officers and said she looked forward to working with Members, officers and the Swale community and public and to deliver a service to make Swale the best Council in Kent.

380 MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor advised that, due to the Covid-19 pandemic he had not attended any engagements. He wished everyone a Happy New Year.

381 LEADER'S STATEMENT

The Leader began his statement by wishing a Happy New Year to all Members and officers. He said that he hoped this year everyone could meet in person, without people dropping out, or forgetting to mute.

The Leader commented that it was all still about the Covid-19 pandemic and since Council last met there had been two monumental developments; one bad and one good, and that it was now known that a new strain of the virus had led to an alarming increase in infection rates across the country. Health professionals said it was 50-70% more contagious and hospitals were under critical pressure, a pressure that would probably increase in the next week or so as the impact of the partial relaxation at Christmas fed through. He added that, at the same time, there had been progress made on vaccines, and that the sensible conclusion was to rigorously control the first until the latter could change the prospects of beating the virus.

Therefore, the decision to go for a total lockdown was inevitable and correct, and it was not the first abrupt change. Just before Christmas, the Government took Swale and the rest of Kent into Tier 4. The Leader said that this had caught them a little unaware, as the day before a mailshot had been despatched to households once again appealing for public compliance with the Tier 3 regulations and, as the announcement meant there was an error in the letter, further deliveries were withdrawn. He said he had received considerable thanks from recipients, who sensibly understood the provenance of the one error and he had signed a letter from Kent Leaders to the Chancellor of Exchequer, asking for special consideration for retailers who were impacted by this decision.

A side effect of the pandemic was the congestion around Dover over Christmas and the Leader acknowledged the distress caused for people in Dover, Thanet and Ashford and he said he was very aware of the pressure this imposed on people and Councillors in those districts. He said that Swale had also been under pressure. The media coverage of the period when Swale was the most infected borough in the country was inevitable but not always appropriate. He referred to a report in a national newspaper, which had arrived at a pre-conceived notion that the spread of the virus to London was the responsibility of Sheppey, and there was a point where some parts of the local media were fostering the idea that Swale was "pulling down" the rest of Kent.

Drawing attention to recent reports that suggested Swale now had the largest decline in infection rates across the country, the Leader said it was especially good to see the large fall in the rate for Sheppey East and that there had not been a queue of TV journalists asking us how we felt about that.

The Leader said that throughout the period of intensive focus on Swale, the new strain was not known about but now it was, the reason for Swale's peak may have been that we had suffered an earlier visitation of the variant than other areas. He said that he had always thought in our culture, it was polite to sympathise with those suffering sicknesses, not to blame. The Leader made the point that if the improvement in Swale continued, we needed to sustain the effort on mask wearing, hand washing and above all, social distancing.

The Leader advised that each week, Kent Leaders met under the Chairmanship of Roger Gough and these meetings were attended by public health directors and the NHS. He said that there were current key questions about asymptomatic testing centres and local vaccinations, which were addressed in agenda item 8 of the Council Agenda. One coherent message to come out of these meetings was the public health view that infection had spread amongst the 11-18 age group, where social distancing had naturally lapsed outside school. The Leader said it was very important that the Government got its decision-making around schools correct and he found it hard to understand why teachers were not yet a priority for vaccinations.

Referring to education, the Leader had written to Nick Gibb, the Schools Minister, to ask for students being assessed at GCSE and A level in Swale to receive consideration for the extra time they had lost. He said that it was appropriate that external examinations were not going to be employed this year.

The Leader said a key NHS officer was present at the leaders' meeting which coincided with the service being much more open and descriptive about the pressures facing hospitals. He said that it was a good thing that they were being more open, as we worked to convince all residents of the need to be compliant with the public health requirements, and he noted that it seemed the voices of those actually fighting the pandemic might be more convincing than Council Leaders, who had largely fulfilled the plaintive role up to now. He added that it was a vivid revelation of where we were, when Covid-19 patients from Kent had been transferred to places like Bristol, Portsmouth, Plymouth and Southampton and it may be even more vivid for some residents when they hear a health professional say that those who break the rules would have "blood on their hands". The Leader said that it was our responsibility to keep re-enforcing the public health message and that, at times, this lead to accusations that we were assigning blame but, it was vital that everyone understood that social distancing kept people safe and protected the NHS.

The Leader stressed that it was going to be a very tough time, which might continue into spring 2021 and he knew that some Members would be interested to know that at a Ministerial briefing the previous day, the favourite question from local councillors was whether the May 2021 elections would still be held. He said that they were advised that there were no plans to delay the elections, but he urged caution that plans could change abruptly.

Finally, the Leader said he had concentrated on the critical matter of the Covid-19 pandemic, and that at future meetings, he hoped he would have more of an opportunity to reflect on future plans, as we withdrew from this difficult time.

In response, the Leader of the opposition thanked the Leader for his update and acknowledged that it was a difficult time for residents, and he spoke of the complexity of vaccinating the population. He said that he hoped the Leader's optimism was justified. The Leader of the opposition gave thanks to the Senior Management Team (SMT) for holding the leadership together during the former Chief Executive's illness and during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Other Members raised points which included:

- Gave thanks to those that provided food and other facilities for the HGV drivers that were stranded in Kent during the recent border closure, but was critical of the Government's lack of support;
- thanked and praised SMT for their support, particularly to newly-elected Members;
- hoped for a sharp decline in Covid-19 cases and gave an example of a local resident's hospital transfer to a hospital nearly 100 miles away, due to lack of space in the local hospitals; and
- supported priority vaccination for educators but suggested consideration of Police officers and staff, and local Prison staff.

In his response, the Leader thanked and supported the appreciation for the hard work of SMT. He praised the support given to HGV drivers by the Sikh community and said that the vaccine provision in Swale had been frustrating. The Leader agreed that Police officers and staff, and local Prison staff should receive priority vaccinations.

382 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY THE PUBLIC

Two questions were received from members of the public, but as the members of the public were not in attendance at the meeting, the Mayor advised that written responses would be circulated to them.

383 QUESTIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS

Question 1 – Councillor David Simmons

Please can the Cabinet Member for the Environment give me the details of the waste contract working party?

Response – Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor Tim Valentine

The current waste and street cleansing contract ends in October 2023. Given the complexity of the service and the massive changes proposed to the waste industry under the Government's Waste and Resources Strategy, we felt it was important to start assessing future options.

The working group, made up of coalition Cabinet and Deputy Cabinet members, is working with officers to look at how we might improve the service, bringing it in-line with current priorities and to inform changes to the specification that will go out to tender late next year. The working group has the benefit of advice from industry consultants, and through officers are liaising with our partners for the current waste contract in the Mid-Kent Partnership.

The working group has recently launched high level discussions with all Council Members through the Area Committees and will undertake public consultation on a range of topics in 2021.

Supplementary Question:

Are there any plans to consider the future waste contract at Policy Development Review Committee (PDRC)?

Response – Cabinet Member for Environment

A report will be considered at Informal Cabinet next week, setting out the management of the tendering process.

Question 2 – Councillor Mike Whiting

Other Councils have ensured virtual meetings are available to view by members of the public in real time via their YouTube Channels. Recordings are also retained on YouTube for viewing on demand. This approach has huge benefits in making the Council accountable to and accessible by members of the public at very little, if any, cost to the Council Taxpayer.

Will the Leader of the Council agree to adopt a similar practice in Swale in time for the next full Council meeting?

Response – Leader, Councillor Roger Truelove

I thank the Member for his question. Yes, this is something that we hope and expect to be able to achieve fairly shortly. The system was due to be trialled at November's Audit Committee, but in the event this was unable to go ahead. We are now looking to trial it at the General Licensing Committee meeting in a couple of weeks' time. If the trial is successful, we will then look to roll it out more widely. We will need to review the trial properly to understand any issues it raises, so I cannot guarantee that the wider roll-out will be in place for February's Council meeting, but I would certainly support that if it turns out to be achievable. Live streaming meetings is likely to require the attendance of an IT officer, in addition to the two Democratic Services officers, at every meeting. This is a significant commitment, and I would just like to reiterate the thanks I have already expressed to officers in both the IT and Democratic Services teams for their hard work and dedication to enabling our democratic processes to continue and to improve, both during the pandemic and beyond.

Supplementary Question:

There was no supplementary question.

Question 3 – Councillor David Simmons

The Area Committees are currently holding the second cycle of meetings, there is concern about the allocation of their funding before the end of this civic year. Given the current Coronavirus situation in Swale, please can you consider allowing unspent funds to be rolled over into 2021-22?

Response – Leader, Councillor Roger Truelove

The Constitution which we agreed as a Council does not allow for rollovers of what are comparatively small amounts of money. There is a good reason for this. The funds allocated to Area Committees were intended to deliver small immediate projects and not to be stored up for larger projects, for which alternative funding should be available.

I recognise the obvious difficulties facing Area Committees, having not been established for a full year and working in the shadow of a World pandemic but, I have also witnessed the hard work of some Chairmen in getting projects moving forward for finalising in the current financial year.

I don't want us to be trying to change the Constitution for one year and I would be opposed to rollovers in other years, and so I ask that Chairmen do their utmost to allocate funds in this financial year, but that it may be necessary to apply some flexibility in some cases.

Supplementary Question:

Will you make sure that Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Area Committees give proper, full consideration to the allocation of funding?

Response – Leader

I agree that we do not want to see 'end of term' spending and I have stressed the flexibility that can be built in and I trust the four Chairmen of each Committee to ensure that funding is appropriate and of merit.

Question 4 – Councillor Mike Whiting

The Winter 2020 edition of *Inside Swale* states on page 21 that the Council is "making it easier for those in need of social housing."

The article gives three examples of how this is being done;

- 1) Tapering income considerations
- 2) Moving homeless households from Band C to Band B
- 3) And reducing the necessary period of residency from four to two years

Anything that can be done to assist those in need of housing is welcome. However, with a limited stock of housing available, giving advantage to certain households will naturally disadvantage other households, and for them, the *Inside Swale* headline will be nothing more than a false promise.

How many households does the Cabinet Member believe will be advantaged by the three measures mentioned in the article, and how many households will be disadvantaged and pushed further down the waiting list?

Response – Cabinet Member for Housing, Councillor Ben J Martin

Thank you for the question.

As Members are aware, the Council is obliged to have a Housing Allocations Policy which is legally compliant and that takes into account guidelines set within the sector. One of the key elements of the Housing Allocations Policy is to ensure that homes are allocated in a fair and transparent way. The new policy gives increased priority to homeless households, reduces the residency criteria, in line with other Authorities in Kent and Government guidelines and includes a realistic income taper, ensuring that those who are in housing need qualify for the housing register.

The new policy took effect on Monday 30 November. A total of 242 households moved up from Band C to Band B when the policy changed.

Increasing the number of households in Band B will ultimately increase the waiting time for households in Band C, if provision of new affordable rent homes is not increased.

As we operate a choice based lettings system, there will be times when someone in a lower band is housed due to those in higher bands not bidding on a property.

On a paper based analysis approximately 10% of applicants who did not qualify under the previous policy would qualify under the new policy. These applicants will have a later priority date to those who had already applied who are in the same Band. Properties are allocated to the household in the highest band who has the oldest priority date that has bid on the property.

If someone who qualifies under the new policy has a greater banding than someone who is already on the register then they would be housed ahead of the applicant with the lower banding, exactly as would have occurred under the previous policy.

This administration remains committed to increasing and accelerating the provision of new affordable housing to meet the need within the Borough and we expect more affordable housing to be delivered this civic year than last.

Supplementary Question:

Please advise on the number of households that would be disadvantaged?

Response – Cabinet Member for Housing

242 is the net figure of those that increased in band. To my knowledge nobody went down a band as a result of the policy change.

The Housing Register is constantly changing; it is not a fixed entity. As an example, over the Christmas period, there were a number of new properties that were allocated. 37 homes were advertised on the Kent Homes Choice website, of those, 24 went to households in Band B, 8 in Band C and 5 in Band A. Some of the properties that were awarded to those in Band C were awarded to people that have been on the register for less than 6 months. The key for anyone who is on the housing register is to ensure that they bid on a wider variety of properties that meet their needs as possible as this is the quickest way possible to be allocated a new affordable rent property. We operate a choice based lettings system so there is no fixed waiting time for any individual, it is purely based on what they bid on and who else bids on it. Whilst we continue to increase the volume and speed of delivery of new affordable rent homes we can keep the waiting period down.

Question 5 – Councillor Julian Saunders

Would the Leader give us his view of the strategic importance of improvements to Brenley Corner?

Response – Leader, Councillor Roger Truelove

Improvements to Junction 7 of the M2 must be a principal infrastructure priority for this Council, the KCC, and the Government.

This is essential for local, domestic, and international transport and trade at a time of serious transition to new economic norms.

It has been said to be a strategic priority for some time now and is quite as important as the issues around the A249 corridor. Yet progress is glacial.

Planners and politicians have spoken for the last decade about the bifurcation of Kent into two strategic corridors but the delivery of that has clearly been constrained by the inadequacies of the Junction 7 interchange of the M2.

It is currently inadequate because the design mixes strategic and local traffic, causing it to operate below capacity.

It is a major strategic priority, not just for Swale, but to East Kent as a whole, with Dover District Council listing it as one of their key investment priorities.

There needs to be more urgency.

Whilst Brenley Corner was included in the Government's Roads Investment Strategy (RIS2) for a study in the period 2020-2025, that does not in any way guarantee any funding either soon or in the more distant future.

As a Council, we are pressing for an urgent upgrade to Brenley Corner, principally for economic and infrastructure reasons, but there is also a need for clarity and certainty around our revised Local Plan.

There is a stated expectation from Highways England that development locally should make sufficient contributions to meet capacity generated by any new development to enable it to proceed.

This is not good enough. It would not meet the need to serve the growth of strategic National and International traffic flows, or for any future housing which neighbouring districts will have to deliver in response to Government targets.

It is our view that Government must acknowledge this and provide more certainty about improvements at Junction 7. Without this the strategic route, to and from Dover, will remain substandard and the options available to Swale and East Kent of growth severely limited.

Supplementary Question:

Could you outline KCC's position in relation to improvements at Brenley Corner?

Response – Leader

This has been discussed for many years. KCC support Highways England and are working on design work with them, but there's an acceptability of a serious funding delay, because we won't know until after 2024 and might not even know then. This is not a Swale issue; it is a Kent issue, particularly for East Kent. Politically, we have all been sucked into infrastructure developments elsewhere – such as Junction 5, A249 and the issue needs to be raised up the political agenda.

Question 6 – Councillor Steve Davey

What, if any, are the obstacles preventing a community hub centre being built on the site of Phoenix House?

Response – Cabinet Member for Community, Councillor Richard Palmer

As Members will be aware Swale Community Centres Trust made the difficult decision to close Phoenix House, which is a KCC owned building.

We have kept in regular touch with Swale Community Centres Trust and KCC who have been providing support to the individual organisations in these transition arrangements.

With the impact of Covid-19 on how charities operate and how people access services, the main requirement will be to look at what the future need is and how this can be best addressed to ensure that any future provision is sustainable and fit for purpose.

That said the main barrier will be to raise funding which could be substantial (in excess of £1m) and an operating model that has a regular income stream to ensure that the building can be operated effectively.

Supplementary Question:

There was no supplementary question.

Question 7 – Councillor Ghlin Whelan

In the current restrictive circumstances is the Cabinet member considering any extension of parking concessions?

Response – Cabinet Member for Community, Councillor Richard Palmer

The current concession offering an additional 30 mins to pay and display tickets, agreed by Full Council, expires on 10th January 2021. I believe this approach is consistent with the Government's aims and objectives of tackling the pandemic.

Supplementary Question:

There was no supplementary question.

Question 8 – Councillor Steve Davey

Could the Leader explain the predicted expansion of Track and Trace testing and vaccine dispensing facilities over the coming months?

Response – Leader, Councillor Roger Truelove

Before going into the substance of the question, I wish to clarify a few points because any understandable public anxiety, especially around Sittingbourne, about the slow introduction both of an asymptomatic testing centre and a centre for the sensitive Pfizer vaccine.

The provision of the first is a matter for KCC, as the public health authority, to finalise and manage and the latter is a matter for the NHS, through the Kent and Medway CCG and the Primary Care Network.

As a Council, we endeavour to stay involved and informed, especially helping to find suitable local sites. However, an early settling of a site does not lead to immediate operation. These organisations work in very sensitive public services and I understand why they ask us to allow them to decide the timing and substance of public announcements, but extended delays are unreasonable.

KCC made Swale and Thanet priorities for the first asymptomatic testing sites and the one at Sheppey is said be working well. This will reduce the spread of the virus. KCC also made it clear to us that there would be a second testing site in the Sittingbourne area and with our help a site was agreed and is due to open tomorrow in Kemsley. KCC has now made it possible for members of the public to apply to any centre and I hope that helps with access for people living in Faversham.

We also continue to have testing at mobile testing units deployed in Sittingbourne and Sheppey for those showing symptoms.

Pfizer vaccinations are being delivered in Faversham and Sheppey. We expressed our concerns some time ago about the gap in Sittingbourne. When it transpired that delay was due to the fragility of the Pfizer vaccine, the consequent need for a single site and the non-identification of such a site, this Council helped the health authorities to find and agree a site.

Knowing how people in Sittingbourne were both anxious and frustrated, and with justification, about not just the lack of vaccination so far but also any information to reassure them, we have pressed the NHS to at least give some indication of the plans for Sittingbourne.

The Kent and Medway CCG has confirmed that they plan to open a site in Sittingbourne next week between 11-15 January 2021, in the Age Concern building in Avenue of Remembrance, a careful warning that things can change, and we know very much that things do change. All Members have had the information about that and it should be on their website by now and we are asked to direct our citizens towards the website. I think we have a result unless it's turned around in the following week.

The Oxford Astra Zeneca vaccine, which can be used at various sites, has now been approved. The delivery of the vaccine will be organised centrally by the NHS and should be available at a range of places in the Borough of Swale.

Supplementary Question:

Why did the NHS wait to allay fears? Please confirm which website the links are on? Which surgeries in Swale will be giving the Oxford vaccination?

Response – Leader

The delay would not have been so damaging if the public could have been told. It was a 2-week delay, a lot of care had to go in, it was a major health risk and checks had to be

made by the Care Quality Commission so the delay was not so critical, the information vacuum led to great local concern and many rumours. GP's were unfairly criticised by people. The Local NHS insisted that we should say nothing. After finding sites we were keen for it to become public knowledge but they were insistent that we should not say anything so there was nothing public until today. The problem was not with the Kent and Medway NHS, it goes further up the line in terms of decision-making and they are simply ordered not to say anything until all plans are properly in place. Even today, we were told that the information could not be shared publicly, only with Members, which was nonsense. Kent MP's agreed it was nonsense and it was only at lunchtime, they agreed it could go on the website.

The public need to go to the NHS website for vaccinations and the KCC website is for testing. The information was circulated to Members this afternoon.

384 MOTION - FIREWORKS

Councillor Hannah Perkin proposed the motion as set out on the Agenda. She highlighted the damage that unexpected fireworks could cause to animals and vulnerable people. She referred to responsibilities to animals under the UK Animal Welfare Act 2019/2020 and she said that millions of animals were affected by unplanned fireworks every year, and she gave examples. Councillor Perkin spoke about the air quality impact of fireworks and the effect on those suffering with mental health issues.

In seconding the proposal, Councillor Mike Baldock reserved his right to speak.

The Leader of the opposition thanked Councillor Perkin for bringing the motion forward. He explained that a similar motion was drafted for a previous Council meeting from his group, but under advice it was withdrawn as it was submitted during the pre-election period for the General Election in December 2019. Councillor James Hunt, who submitted the previous motion in 2019, proposed amendments to the motion as set out on the Agenda with changes that reflected the standard wording put forward by the RSPCA. Councillor Baldock commented that Councillor Perkin's original motion was as suggested by the RSPCA but that advice had been received from the Monitoring Officer to make amendments to it. The Principal Solicitor clarified that the advice given to Councillor Perkin to change the original motion was given because requiring public displays within the local authority boundary to be advertised in advance could not be enforced by the Council, and the suggestion was that the Safety Advisory Group (SAG) process would be a way in which the Council could condition and encourage this. She added that to encourage local suppliers of fireworks to stock quieter fireworks could be more effectively enforced by Kent Trading Standards who were responsible for relevant Regulations.

In the discussion that followed, Councillor Hunt withdrew his amendment and put forward an alternative amendment which was seconded by Councillor Baldock:

This Council resolves:

To require all public firework displays notified through the Council's Safety Advisory Group process and within the local authority boundaries to be advertised in advance of the event, allowing residents to take precautions for their animals and vulnerable people

To actively promote a public awareness campaign about the impact of fireworks on animal welfare and vulnerable people – including the precautions that can be taken to mitigate risks

To write to the UK government urging them to introduce legislation to limit the maximum noise level of fireworks to 90dB for those sold to the public for private displays

To encourage local suppliers of fireworks to stock ‘quieter’ fireworks for public display.

Members raised points including:

- The intention should not be to ban fireworks but to properly manage them so that residents knew in advance and could take precautions;
- the Council needed to get the balance of safety and control without spoiling enjoyment;
- SBC events should ban fireworks;
- did not support a ban on fireworks at SBC events as provided joy to many, but should consider quieter fireworks or alternatives such as drones;
- SBC previously agreed to ban sky lanterns on SBC licenced land;
- support for original motion; and
- support for amended motion.

Councillor Perkin, the proposer of the original motion said that she would like to see a commitment from SBC to not using fireworks at their events. She said that she accepted that residents had choices, but SBC should be discouraging the use of fireworks.

On being put the vote, the amended motion was agreed.

Members then voted on the amended motion which was agreed unanimously.

Resolved:

That this Council:

(1) Requires all public firework displays notified through the Council's Safety Advisory Group process and within the local authority boundaries to be advertised in advance of the event, allowing residents to take precautions for their animals and vulnerable people.

(2) Actively promote a public awareness campaign about the impact of fireworks on animal welfare and vulnerable people – including the precautions that can be taken to mitigate risks.

(3) Writes to the UK government urging them to introduce legislation to limit the maximum noise level of fireworks to 90dB for those sold to the public for private displays.

(4) Encourages local suppliers of fireworks to stock ‘quieter’ fireworks for public display.

Councillor Tim Gibson proposed the motion as set out on the Agenda. He detailed the financial struggles faced by families in Swale if the £20 temporary increase to the basic rate of Universal Credit as part of the Covid-19 pandemic response discontinued, and he drew attention to the high numbers of families that now relied on food banks as a direct result of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. In seconding the motion, Councillor Steve Davey reserved his right to speak.

The Leader of the opposition said that whilst he was in support of the Council doing everything it could to help those in need, the motion was too political, and he did not agree with all the resolutions proposed.

In the debate that followed, Members raised points including:

- Was in support of the motion and said that the temporary increase should be made permanent;
- gave praise for and stressed the importance of carers, highlighting that Carer's Allowance was the lowest financial benefit, and had not received the additional increase;
- gave support to the promotion of Young Carers Action Day on 16 March 2021 and encouraged lobbying of Government to raise Carer's Allowance by £20 a week;
- there were other ways that SBC could actively seek to assist;
- if sufficient people lobbied, Central Government might listen;
- young carers were not recognised for the roles they carried out;
- not supporting the motion to keep the increase, could put pressure on food banks, housing, and voluntary and community services;
- should still take action, even if political, if it is for a good cause;
- the country was entering the worse phase of the covid-19 pandemic so far and the temporary increase should not be taken away now;
- should support a national drive to support those experiencing the harsh impact of the covid-19 pandemic;
- was in support of lobbying, but had concerns over the lack of detail on forming a coalition to put pressure on Government;
- should consider what was best for Swale;
- was a good motion, but not well written;
- the increase should be permanent and more than £20; and
- supported the principle, but not the wording of the motion.

Councillor Alan Horton proposed an amendment to the wording of the motion, changing bullet points 1 and 2. This was seconded by Councillor Mike Dendor:

- Write to the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak and to the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson requesting that the £20 increase to Universal Credit is made permanent and extended to claimants on legacy benefits.
- Work with other local government organisations to pressure the Government to make the £20 increase to Universal Credit permanent.

The proposer of the original motion, Councillor Gibson, agreed with the amendments to the wording of the motion as did the seconder.

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

For: Councillors Baldock, Beart, Bonney, Bowen, Carnell, R Clark, S Clark, Darby, Davey, Dendor, Fowle, Gibson, Gould, Hall, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Harrison, Horton, Hunt, Ingleton, Jackson, Jayes, Knights, Macdonald, Marchington, Benjamin A Martin, Ben J Martin, Palmer, Perkin, Pugh, Rowles, Saunders, Simmons, P Stephen, S Stephen, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan, Whiting, Winckless, Woodford. Total equals 41.

The Mayor advised that the motion was carried.

Resolved:

- (1) *Write to the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak and to the Prime Minister, Boris Johnson requesting that the £20 increase to Universal Credit is made permanent and extended to claimants on legacy benefits.*
- (2) *Work with other local government organisations to pressure the Government to make the £20 increase to Universal Credit permanent.*
- (3) *Write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions urging them to raise Carer's Allowance by £20 a week immediately, in line with the increase in Universal Credit, and copy in our local MP(S), asking for their support*
- (4) *Promote Young Carers Action day on 16 March 2021 as widely as possible and on an annual basis, particularly to young carers and their families.*

386 CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY ANNUAL REPORT

The Cabinet Member for Environment introduced the report which provided an annual update to progress on targets set in June 2019, to achieve net zero carbon for the Council by 2025 and net zero carbon across the Borough by 2030. Referring to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Cabinet Member for Environment said that some actions could not currently be addressed, whilst others had been implemented early, such as using technology to work from home to reduce business travel. He drew Members' attention to the Carbon Trust's Climate Action Plan included in the report on page 33 of the Agenda.

The Cabinet Member for Environment highlighted some of the progress made which included the Council's vehicle fleet had been replaced with 9 new electric vehicles (EV) and 8 new EV charging points had been installed in Council car parks. He advised that the Air Quality Action Plan had been approved by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the reduction of single use plastic was progressing and biodegradable tree guards had been sourced. The Cabinet Member for Environment added that there was now a policy in saving 50% carbon emissions in new housing development. In seconding the recommendation, Councillor Alister Gould reserved his right to speak.

The Leader congratulated the Cabinet and Deputy Cabinet Member, the Chief Financial Officer, and the Climate Change Officer for their work.

Other Members thanked the Cabinet Member for the update and made points including:

- Some parts of the report were very technical – could training be given to Members on the technical aspects?;

- questioned whether not renewing the drinks and vending machine contract would then encourage staff to purchase at other venues, away from Swale House?;
- clarification on what the Council's estate was (paragraph 3.3 on page 8 of the Agenda), and what control SBC had over long leased properties?;
- report lacked progress as much was already underway in June 2020;
- sought further detail on the costs of the 9 EV's;
- sought more up-to-date figures on information;
- was cautious on the use of bio-degradable tree guards as paper guards deteriorated, suggested wire guards as an alternative;
- questioned the cladding of Swale House;
- highlighted that 50% saving in carbon emissions from new development in planning applications had been challenged; and
- was there any feedback on performance of EV cars?

Councillor Gould said whilst it was recognised that the requested levels of savings in carbon emissions in new development did not have the full backing of legislation, many developers had accepted it, and it was a good signal to push developers in the right direction. He also reminded members of the hierarchy 'reduce, reuse, recycle' in reference to the removal of vending machines containing single use plastics. The comments made referring to the Council's estate were addressed with the recognition that 'operations' may be the better term to be used.

The Cabinet Member for Environment said that training could be considered. He said that it was early days for EV drivers but so far, the feedback was positive. Referring to the comments made on the limited progress, he reminded Members of the little progress the previous administration had made compared to the current administration.

Resolved:

(1) That the progress in the Annual Climate and Ecological Emergency progress report be noted.

387 TREASURY MANAGEMENT HALF YEAR REPORT 2020/21

The Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report and said that it had already been considered by the Audit Committee on 30 November 2020. He highlighted that SBC's external borrowing had been reduced by £5million to £15million since the end of September 2020 and that cash flow was resilient. The Leader said that apart from the CCLA Property Fund, money markets were mostly negligible and this was unlikely to improve in the current circumstances. He praised the Chief Financial Officer, Financial Services Manager and Management Accountant. In seconding the recommendations, the Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance reserved his right to speak.

The Leader of the opposition gave his thanks to the work of the Financial Services team. He said that the CCLA Property Fund consistently paid out, enabling SBC to offer better services to the public and he encouraged continued investment in this.

A Member referred to possible investment in the 'No Use Empty' scheme which brought disused properties back into use and he agreed to speak to the Chief Financial Officer about this.

The Deputy Cabinet Member for Finance thanked the Financial Services team for their hard work.

Resolved:

- (1) That the performance information in the report be noted.***
- (2) That the prudential and treasury management indicators within the report be approved.***

388 REPORT FROM STANDARDS HEARING SUB-COMMITTEE 26 NOVEMBER 2020

Councillor Hannah Perkin, who chaired the Standards sub-committee meeting held on 26 November 2020, introduced the report and proposed the recommendation. The recommendation was seconded by panel member Councillor Ken Ingleton.

A Member drew attention that the decision notice should be dated 2020 not 2021.

The Leader said that he had received an email from a member of the public who joined the meeting online and had complimented the well-run meeting. The Leader praised the Chairman and Monitoring Officer.

Resolved:

- (1) That Council note the findings of the Standards sub-committee held on 26 November 2020.***

389 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR APPROVAL

The Council was asked to note the recommendations from the General Purposes Committee meeting (Minute Nos. 344-345) and from the Cabinet meeting (Minute No. 349), both held on 16 December 2020.

Resolved:

- (1) That Minute Nos 344-345 from the General Purposes Committee meeting held on 16 December 2020 be noted.***
- (2) That Minute No. 349 from the Cabinet Meeting held on 16 December 2020 be noted.***

390 ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8.35pm and reconvened at 8.40pm.

Chairman

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