
COUNCIL

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 22 February 2023 from 7.00 pm - 10.52 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, Lloyd Bowen, Derek Carnell, Roger Clark, Simon Clark (Mayor), Steve Davey, Mike Dendor, Oliver Eakin, Simon Fowle, Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, Ann Hampshire, Nicholas Hampshire, Angela Harrison, Alan Horton, Ken Ingleton, Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Denise Knights, Peter Macdonald, Peter Marchington, Ben J Martin, Lee McCall, Pete Neal, Padmini Nissanga, Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin, Ken Pugh, Ken Rowles, Julian Saunders, David Simmons, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen (Deputy Mayor), Eddie Thomas, Roger Truelove, Tim Valentine, Ghlin Whelan and Mike Whiting.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Lisa Fillery, Jo Millard, Larissa Reed, Claire Stanbury and Claudette Valmond.

OFFICERS PRESENT (Virtually): Martyn Cassell, Philippa Davies, Charlotte Hudson and Emma Wiggins.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually): Councillor James Hunt.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Richard Darby, James Hall, Tony Winckless and Corrie Woodford.

685 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

686 **Tributes**

Councillor Alan Horton led the tributes to Councillor Cameron Beart who sadly passed away recently. He spoke of his friendship with Councillor Beart, and how hard he worked for his community. Councillor Horton referred to Councillor Beart's recent nomination for Councillor of the Year at which he was highly commended.

The Leader said that Councillor Beart was a possible future leader of the Council or Member of Parliament, and he sent his thoughts to Councillor Beart's family.

Councillor James Hunt spoke of his close friendship with Councillor Beart and how much he would miss him. He said Councillor Beart used social media as a platform to communicate and he cared about the place he lived and worked in, and all people in the community. Councillor Hunt said that Councillor Beart was passionate and dedicated his life to helping residents and fighting for improvements to the Isle of Sheppey.

Councillor Roger Truelove said he was shocked that a young man, who was a promising politician with his life ahead of him had passed away. He said Councillor Beart had an eye for detail, an incredible memory and was incisive and fair.

Councillor Lloyd Bowen said that Councillor Beart made his point factually and was never personal, and always a gentleman.

Councillor Ben J Martin said Councillor Beart had been a noticeable absence at the recent Planning Committee and would be missed from all sides of the chamber. He said he always did the best for the community.

The Mayor read a tribute from Councillor James Hall who was not at the meeting. Councillor Hall said that Councillor Beart had left a hole in the Council, the community and in everyone's hearts.

There was a minute's silence in memory of Councillor Cameron Beart.

687 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Mike Baldock declared a Non-Pecuniary interest in Item 11 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plans, including Fees and Charges, as he sat on Borden Parish Council.

Councillor Mike Henderson declared a Non-Pecuniary interest in Item 11 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plans, including Fees and Charges, as he was a trustee of Faversham Pools and Oare Gunpowder Works.

Councillor Hannah Perkin declared a Non-Pecuniary interest in Item 11 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plans, including Fees and Charges, as she was a Trustee of Swale Community Voluntary Services (CVS).

Councillor Richard Palmer declared a Non-Pecuniary interest in Item 11 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plans, including Fees and Charges, as he sat on Newington Parish Council and the Lower Medway Internal Drainage Board (LMIDB).

Councillor Ben J Martin declared a Non-Pecuniary interest in Item 11 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plans, including Fees and Charges, as he was a trustee of Faversham Pools and sat on the Swale Rainbow Homes Board.

Councillor Ken Pugh declared a Non-Pecuniary interest in Item 11 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plans including, Fees and Charges, as he was a trustee of Swale CVS.

Councillor Monique Bonney declared a Non-Pecuniary interest in Item 11 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plans, including Fees and Charges, as she sat on the LMIDB and Swale Rainbow Homes.

Councillor Sarah Stephen declared a Non-Pecuniary interest in Item 11 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plans, including Fees and Charges, as she was a trustee of Swale CVS.

Councillor Tim Gibson declared a Non-Pecuniary interest in Item 11 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plans, including Fees and Charges, as he was a trustee of Swale CVS.

Councillor Paul Stephen declared a Non-Pecuniary interest in Item 11 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plans, including Fees and Charges, as he was a Board member of Citizens Advice Swale (CAS).

Councillor Carole Jackson declared a Non-Pecuniary interest in Item 11 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plans, including Fees and Charges, as she was a trustee of Swale CVS.

Councillor Derek Carnell declared a Non-Pecuniary interest in Item 11 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plans, including Fees and Charges, as he sat on the LMIDB.

Councillor Lee McCall declared a Non-Pecuniary interest in Item 11 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plans, including Fees and Charges, as he was a trustee on Swale CVS.

Councillor Alan Horton declared a Non-Pecuniary interest in Item 11 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plans, including Fees and Charges, as he sat on Upchurch Parish Council.

Councillor Peter MacDonald declared a Non-Pecuniary interest in Item 11 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plans, including Fees and Charges, as he sat on the LMIDB and was a Trustee of the Dolphin Sailing Barge Museum.

Councillor Tim Valentine declared a Non-Pecuniary interest in Item 11 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plans, including Fees and Charges, as he was a Trustee on Faversham Pools.

Councillor Ken Rowles declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 11 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plans including Fees and Charges as he sat on the Lower Medway Internal Drainage Board and on the Kent Media Centre Board.

Councillor Ken Ingleton declared a Non-Pecuniary interest in Item 11 Final Budget and Medium Term Financial Plans, including Fees and Charges, as he sat on the LMIDB.

688 Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 January 2023 (Minute Nos. 585 – 594) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

689 Mayor's Announcements

The Mayor said mayoral duties had been quiet since the previous meeting but he had attended the crowing of Faversham Carnival Queen and court.

The Mayor advised that Swale Your Way, one of the charities he had chosen to benefit in his Mayoral year, had closed and he had chosen a new charity, Men Talk Health, a mental health charity that met on Tuesday evenings, as a replacement beneficiary. He spoke positively about the impact Men Talk Health had on those that attended its meetings.

690 Leader's Statement

The Leader spoke of the Council's success in being awarded £20million in Levelling-Up funding for Sheerness. He thanked and praised all staff and Councillors involved in putting the bid together, and thanked Gordon Henderson MP for his support. The Leader thanked members of the public for being engaged in the process. He said the funding would

provide good investment on the Isle of Sheppey, and was a true gem which had been overlooked by all tiers of Government for too long.

In response Councillor Alan Horton congratulated all those involved in the inspiration, creativity and leadership of the award and he said it was a team effort. He also praised residents for their support. Councillor Horton said the Sheerness Revival project would create an exciting future and he listed the services and projects planned including education and training which he stated was important since Oasis had recently withdrawn from the Sheppey School.

Other Members shared their excitement and congratulations.

In response to points made by Members', the Leader acknowledged and expressed his sympathy that Medway and Maidstone councils had been unsuccessful in their bids.

691 **Questions submitted by the Public**

The Mayor advised that one question had been submitted by a member of the public.

Question 1

Is the Leader aware that, for some Parish Councils, street lights account for up to 50% of their budget and therefore if the Council reduces, and then removes altogether, the footway lighting grant, as is proposed, this would put those PCs under considerable financial pressure - at a time when electricity costs, including unregulated standing charges, are rocketing? These grants represent just 0.02% of the Council's total budget - so whilst this would be an inconsequential saving to the Council, it would have a disproportionate impact on the Parish Councils affected.

Response

I would like to thank the Councillor for his question.

As a parish councillor myself I am fully aware of the implications of footway lighting costs to Parishes, but I am also aware of the financial constraints that Borough Councils are facing in light of the financial pressures that he mentions, and the fact that whilst Borough Councils face a cap of 3% which is well under the current inflation rate, Parish Councils are not restricted in the same way.

As you will see from the papers for tonight's meeting, like most councils, Swale Borough Council has significant budget pressures. We have had to take some very difficult decisions to ensure we are able to provide vital council services.

Whilst I agree that the figure itself seems small in the context of Swale's overall budget, if we look at all the items we are having to reduce or cut, in isolation they are a small percentage of the budget, but taken as a whole they add up to the savings we have to make this year and which enable us to balance the budget.

I opposed this measure last year as there had been no prior notification to Parish Councils that this was being considered, and no time to amend budgets accordingly. However, another year has passed and the 50% reduction proposed tonight has been widely anticipated.

It is for Parish Councils to decide whether they wish to provide services that either the Borough or, in this case as Streetlighting is a KCC issue, Kent County Council do not provide. Indeed, Parish Councils have many powers available to them should they wish to use them, and I would urge them to start looking at those powers so they can demonstrate to unparished areas just why having a Parish Council is such a good thing.

Supplementary question

Could the Leader explain why 16 Parish Councils in Swale had to pay lighting costs whilst the remaining Parish Councils had their costs paid in full by Kent County Council (KCC) or SBC? Parishioners are double taxed by contributing to the rural lighting costs via the Parish Council precept as well as urban lighting costs through Council Tax payments.

Response

The Leader said that the issue of why some Parish Councils paid and others were funded had been looked at previously but the answer was not known and a discussion with KCC was needed to take this forward. The Leader said SBC did not provide street lighting and that rather than Parish Councils being double taxed, unparished areas subsidised Parished areas for street lighting they did not have. He said that Parish Councils should continue to provide services for parishioners.

692 Questions submitted by Members

There were no questions submitted by Members.

693 Nomination of Mayor 2023/24

The Leader, Councillor Mike Baldock, nominated Councillor Sarah Stephen for the role of Mayor elect for the 2023/24 civic year and gave a supporting speech. The nomination was seconded by Councillor Monique Bonney who also gave a supporting speech. On being put to the vote, the nomination was agreed.

Resolved:

(1) That the Mayor elect for the civic year 2023/24 be Councillor Sarah Stephen.

694 Nomination of Deputy Mayor 2023/24

Councillor Roger Truelove nominated Councillor Tim Gibson for the role of Deputy Mayor elect for the 2023/24 civic year and gave a supporting speech. The nomination was seconded by Councillor Angela Harrison who also gave a supporting speech. On being put to the vote, the nomination was agreed.

Resolved:

(1) That the Deputy Mayor elect for the civic year 2023/24 be Councillor Tim Gibson.

The Leader introduced the report which sought Council's approval to agree the Council Tax Requirement, Revenue Budget and Capital Programme, and Council Tax for year 2023/24, as set out in the report to the Policy and Resources Committee on 8 February 2023, subject to any amendments, and to approve the Council Tax Resolutions set out in Appendix I. He said that SBC, along with most other Councils had to make very difficult choices in the current economic climate and he referred to increased inflation and contract costs, a decrease in grants from £10million in 2014 to £110,000 in 2022, an increase in expenditure on temporary accommodation and the large overspend carried forward from the previous year as a result of the unexpected inflation costs.

The Leader referred to the financial issues faced by all Councils, including the threat of Section 114 notices being served and possible bankruptcy. He said that many services were being cut and slashed by local Councils and he was critical of the lack of support from Government.

The Leader said SBC's budget sought to lead the Council through a difficult time and keep it solvent. He said it was focussed on maintaining front facing services such as bin collections. The Leader said that the vital fuel poverty services would continue, along with active travel work and the top quality gold paw print awarding winning dog service. He said it was a prudent budget and by restructuring services, reducing grants to third parties and increasing some fees, £2million of savings had been made.

Finally, the Leader said he welcomed the amendments made from Members which would be discussed fairly, and he encouraged parties from all sides to work together. He proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Monique Bonney who reserved her right to speak.

The Mayor advised that eleven amendments had been received, circulated to Members, and published on the Council's website and in accordance with procedure rule 3.1.14.2, included information from the Section 151 Officer on the impact of implementing the amendments.

Amendment 1 – Parking fees

Councillor Henderson proposed that:

“It is proposed to increase parking charges by 20p rather than 10p as soon as can be achieved. This will increase fees and charges income by £50000 in 2023/2024. This extra funding is proposed to be used

(i) To retain the grant support for Faversham Swimming Pools at £100000 rather than the current proposal to reduce it to £80000

(ii) To provide £30000 further grant to Citizens Advice beyond the currently reduced level in the budget. This, as required, provides a balanced position for 2023/2024. The proposal will also reduce the deficit in future years as the full year saving through parking charges is £75000.”

Councillor Henderson highlighted the benefits that the additional income could bring in maintaining the current grants to CAS and Faversham Pools rather than reducing it as set out in the proposed budget.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Eddie Thomas who reserved his right to speak.

Members debated the amendment and made points including:

- It was important to promote healthy living, but the Council were in a constrained financial situation;
- shared the desire to assist outside organisations but could not support an increase in parking fees to achieve it;
- amendment 6, which also assisted voluntary organisations, might be more supportable;
- an increase in parking fees would decrease footfall in town centres;
- SBC had the lowest parking charges in Kent and compared the income other Councils received in parking fees whilst SBC made a loss; and
- it made sense to increase parking fees to discourage car use to address the Climate and Ecological Emergency.

Councillor Eddie Thomas spoke in support of the amendment and set out how it addressed the Council's priorities.

The Mayor read out the response from the Section 151 Officer, as set out on the Agenda.

In addressing the amendment, the Leader said it was a good proposal but was a step too far and reluctantly, he was unable to support it.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(2), a recorded vote was taken, and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Gould, Henderson, Martin, Perkin, Thomas, Valentine. Total equals 6.

Against: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Bowen, Carnell, R Clark, S Clark, Davey, Dendor, Eakin, Fowle, Gibson, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Harrison, Horton, Ingleton, Jackson, Jayes, Knights, MacDonald, Marchington, McCall, Neal, Nissanga, Palmer, Pugh, Rowles, Saunders, Simmons, P Stephen, S Stephen, Truelove, Whelan, Whiting. Total equals 34.

Abstain: Total equals 0.

The Mayor announced that the amendment had been lost.

Amendment 2 Staff pay increase

The Leader proposed the following amendment:

"In response to the ongoing cost-of-living crisis facing our lower paid staff, and in light of a reduction in the estimated forecast overspend for the current financial year. Take £200,000 from the budget contingency reserve to pay staff on grade 5 and below (Top of grade 5 =

£29,766) a one-off payment of £1000.00 pro rata to 1fte. This is equivalent of 4 -5% of Grade 2 -3 salaries and 3-4% of grade 4-5 salaries. This will be made in addition to increments (where they are due) and is in addition to the proposed move to a 34-hour week.”

The Leader explained that in view of the cost-of-living crisis and to acknowledge the good work of SBC staff, it was appropriate to award a £1,000 one-off payment to staff on grade 5 and below.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor Sarah Stephen praised SBC staff for their hard work during and since the Covid-19 pandemic, saying that many staff worked above and beyond their hours in order to meet targets. She thanked staff.

The Mayor read out the response from the Section 151 Officer, as set out on the Agenda.

Members debated the amendment and made points including:

- It was the right thing to do;
- full support;
- sought clarification that the £1k payment to those on grade 5 would not lead to those on grade 6 earning less than those on grade 5;
- highlighted that underspends on salaries were as a result of staff vacancies meaning existing staff must work even harder to achieve targets; and
- praised the Finance Team for identifying the underspend in time for the meeting.

In response to a Member's question, the Leader said that the early indications were that the reduction in the 22/23 forecast overspend would be approximately £300,000. He confirmed that staff on grade 6 would not be earning less than those on grade 5 as a result of the one-off payment.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(2), a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Bowen, Carnell, R Clark, S Clark, Davey, Dendor, Eakin, Fowle, Gibson, Gould, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Harrison, Henderson, Horton, Ingleton, Jackson, Jayes, Knights, MacDonald, Marchington, Martin, McCall, Neal, Nissanga, Palmer, Perkin, Pugh, Rowles, Saunders, Simmons, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan, Whiting. Total equals 40.

Against: Total equals 0.

Abstain: Total equals 0.

The Mayor announced that the amendment had been agreed.

Amendment 3 – New Bins – Developers

Councillor David Simmons proposed the following amendment:

*“Double the 22/23 cost of new bins (across the entire range) to developers. +£52k/annum
The proposed developer contributions would be: 140ltr bin currently £41.10 increased to £82.20. 180ltr bin currently £46.60 increased to £93.20. 240ltr bin currently £46.60*

increased to £93.20. 1000ltr bin currently £451.80 increased to £903.60. 5ltr kitchen caddy currently £5.40 increased to £10.80. The 140ltr wheeled bin increase alone is estimated to generate £52k additional income.”

Councillor Simmons said that the proposed increase in developer contributions was marginal when set against the large profits that developers made, and the proposal was straight forward. He explained that most new build developments were occupied by out of borough households and the revenue made from the proposal would support existing residents by maintaining Parish Lighting.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Peter Marchington spoke of the profits made by new-build developers and of the cost to the Council.

The Mayor read out the response from the Section 151 Officer as set out on the Agenda.

In the debate that followed, Members made points including:

- Whilst there was a risk that developers could challenge the Section 106 Agreement, it was a small risk worth taking; and
- £52,000 was a conservative estimate and likely the minimum the proposal would raise as this was based on the average number of houses built in the previous eight years, providing two 140 litre bins for each house.

Councillor Mike Baldock welcomed the amendment which he said was well thought out, and was a risk worth taking.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(2), a recorded vote was taken, and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Bowen, Carnell, R Clark, S Clark, Davey, Dendor, Eakin, Fowle, Gibson, Gould, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Harrison, Henderson, Horton, Ingleton, Jackson, Jayes, Knights, MacDonald, Marchington, Martin, McCall, Neal, Nissanga, Palmer, Perkin, Pugh, Rowles, Saunders, Simmons, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan, Whiting. Total equals 40.

Against: Total equals 0.

Abstain: Total equals 0.

The Mayor announced that the amendment had been agreed.

Amendment 4 – Parish Lighting Grant

Councillor Mike Whiting proposed the following:

Maintain Parish Lighting grants for 23/24 £18.5k for 23/24 The funding for this budget amendment, will be drawn from; The revenue generated by an increase in cost to developers of new bins (£52k)

or

From repurposing unused 22/23 reserve funding currently profiled to be spent on Rainbow Homes. This will reduce the total amount currently allocated to be spent on Rainbow Homes by £125k.

or

From repurposing of funding allocated in the 23/24 budget to be spent from reserves on Rainbow Homes. This will reduce the total amount currently allocated to be spent on Rainbow Homes by a further £250k (In addition to the £125k above). The amendment clearly shows a balanced budget as the Rainbow Homes spend from reserves will be less than currently budgeted.

Councillor Whiting said the proposed cut in the grant from SBC was less than 0.1% of the Council's annual budget and could easily be covered by the increase in the income of the cost of new bins to developers, as agreed under amendment four. He said Parish Councils helped keep villages safe by providing hundreds of street and footway lights and the cost accounted for a large proportion of a Parish Council's budget. Councillor Whiting said the cut was unnecessary, unfair and had serious safety implications.

In seconding the motion Councillor Lloyd Bowen reserved his right to speak.

The Mayor read out the response from the Section 151 Officer, as set out on the Agenda.

Councillor Roger Truelove said it was bad financing to use funding that supported a Capital Programme for this proposal. He added that the reserve money from Swale Rainbow Homes could not be used as an undertaking had been made when SBC benefitted from grants, including from the North Kent Housing Growth fund, to use the money for housing growth when it pooled with other local authorities, and the funds had to be used in agreement with the other authorities.

Councillor Alan Horton proposed an addendum to the amendment that the street lighting be funded from the excess of the budget contingency reserve, after the staff pay increase that was agreed under amendment 2. This was seconded by Councillor Dendor. After taking legal advice, the Mayor announced that he would not accept the addendum to the amendment.

Councillor Whiting, as originator of the amendment, withdrew the parts of the motion that referred to using funding from Swale Rainbow Homes. This was seconded by Councillor Dendor.

In the debate that followed, Members raised points including:

- Some Parish Councils did not want street lighting;
- concerns over double taxation;
- removing the grant was unfair on residents that lived in parished areas where lighting was provided by the Parish Council;
- KCC would not adopt street lighting attached to telegraph poles and if KCC took responsibility in the future, it would be complex and unfeasible;
- could not support all amendments;
- should not be funding third parties when SBC were making cuts to services and staff;
- Parish Council's could increase their own pre-cepts to fund the lighting;
- some lighting was funded by service charges on residents;
- Parish Councils had been warned for over a year that there might be a reduction in grant from SBC and should have prepared; and
- SBC had to make difficult decisions to balance their budget and the cuts had to come from somewhere.

Councillor Bowen reminded Members that the cost to support the motion was only 0.1% of the Council's budget but was a significant cost to Parish Councils and the impact should not be underestimated. He said it was affordable for SBC to cover the cost and they were turning their back on Parish Councils.

The Leader acknowledged the robust debate. He said there were some Parishes that did not support streetlights. The Leader reminded Members that the approximate £52,000 income from raising the cost of bins to developers could only be spent once and Members had indicated clear support for amendment 6. He said that reluctantly, he could not support the amendment.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(2), a recorded vote was taken, and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Bowen, R Clark, Dendor, Eakin, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Horton, Ingleton, MacDonald, Marchington, Neal, Nissanga, Pugh, Simmons, Whiting. Total equals 15.

Against: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Carnell, S Clark, Davey, Gibson, Gould, Harrison, Henderson, Jackson, Jayes, Knights, Martin, McCall, Palmer, Perkin, Rowles, Saunders, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan. Total equals 24.

Abstain: Total equals 0.

The Mayor announced that the amendment has been lost.

Amendment 5 Discretionary Grants (1)

On behalf of Councillors Dendor and N Hampshire, the proposer and seconder, the main opposition Group leader Councillor Horton withdrew the amendment. This was seconded by Councillor Dendor and on being put to the vote Members agreed for the amendment to be withdrawn.

Amendment 6 Discretionary Grants (2)

Councillor Nicholas Hampshire proposed the following amendment:

Award Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB) and Swale Community Voluntary Services (CVS) same grant as 22/23.

£48.5k for 23/24

The funding for this budget amendment, will be drawn from;

The revenue generated by an increase in cost to developers of new bins (£52k)
or

From repurposing unused 22/23 reserve funding currently profiled to be spent on Rainbow Homes. This will reduce the total amount currently allocated to be spent on Rainbow Homes by £125k.

or

From repurposing of funding allocated in the 23/24 budget to be spent from reserves on Rainbow Homes. This will reduce the total amount currently allocated to be spent on Rainbow Homes by a further £250k (In addition to the £125k above). The amendment clearly shows a balanced budget as the Rainbow Homes spend from reserves will be less than currently budgeted.

In proposing the amendment, Councillor N Hampshire said he considered the Council to be caring and compassionate and the proposal in the budget to cut the funding to the CAB and CVS was at odds with this. He spoke of the valuable help the services gave to residents and urged Members to support the amendment and show that the Council did care.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor Ann Hampshire reminded Members how valuable the services were, particularly to vulnerable residents and urged them to vote with compassion and support the amendment.

The Mayor read out the response from the Section 151 Officer, as set out on the Agenda.

Councillor N Hampshire, as originator of the amendment, withdrew the parts of the motion that referred to using funding from Swale Rainbow Homes. This was seconded by Councillor A Hampshire.

In the debate that followed, Members raised points including:

- Raised concerns that voluntary services would need to fill the gap left by the reduction in staff and hours at SBC, so reduced funding was counterproductive;
- residents in the borough needed support;
- funding could have come from the budget underspend; and
- spoke of the importance of the voluntary services.

The Leader highlighted that the voluntary services were needed more than ever because of the country's financial situation. He welcomed the amendment and acknowledged the funding would be provided from additional income as a result of an amendment agreed earlier in the meeting, but warned that if agreed, there was no more money to fund other amendments.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(2), a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Bowen, Carnell, R Clark, S Clark, Davey, Dendor, Eakin, Gibson, Gould, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Harrison, Henderson, Horton, Ingleton, Jackson, Jayes, Knights, MacDonald, Marchington, Martin, McCall, Neal, Nissanga, Palmer, Perkin, Pugh, Rowles, Saunders, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan, Whiting. Total equals 38.

Against: Total equals 0.

Abstain: Councillor Simmons. Total equals 1.

The Mayor announced that the amendment had been agreed.

Amendments 7, 8, 9 Car Parking and Amendment 10 Garden Waste

On behalf of all the proposer and seconders, the main opposition Group leader Councillor Horton withdrew amendments 7, 8, 9 and 10. This was seconded by Councillor N Hampshire and on being put to the vote Members agreed for the amendments to be withdrawn.

The Leader advised that a full review on parking was planned, and all Members would be involved in the discussion.

Amendment 11 – Pitch Fees

Councillor Oliver Eakin proposed the following amendment:

Freeze pitch fees for all Under 18s and U16s & mini bookings and offset the loss in proposed income by increasing adult pitch fee cost.

In proposing the amendment, Councillor Eakin said agreement of the amendment would not cost the Council in lost revenue and would encourage healthy living in young people. He said the increase in fees of adults, who had a more stable income, would offset the cost. Councillor Eakin raised concern that the current economic climate meant children were missing out on sporting opportunities.

Councillor Ken Ingleton seconded the amendment and reserved his right to speak.

The Mayor read out the response from the Section 151 Officer, as set out on the Agenda.

In the debate that followed, Members raised points including:

- Clarified the timing and whether there would be a gap in setting fees, due to the consultation period;
- did not see the benefit, and a consultation would impact on staff resource;
- if young people started healthy living early, it would encourage them as they got older;
- the amendment supported youth in Swale;
- the impact should be looked at over the next 12 months and then changed in next budget if necessary; and
- making a quick decision now was not the right thing.

After taking advice from the Section 151 Officer, the Leader said that the amount of money to freeze all sports pitch booking fees was less than £3,500 and could be funded from the remaining income left from increasing the bin costs to developers as agreed amendments 3 and 6. He proposed an addendum to the amendment:

The Freeze of all sport pitch fees to be offset from income raised by increasing the cost to developers of new bins.

This was seconded by Councillor Horton.

The Mayor used his discretion and allowed the addendum to the amendment. Members then voted to accept the addendum to the amendment.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(2), a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Bowen, Carnell, R Clark, S Clark, Davey, Dendor, Eakin, Gibson, Gould, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Harrison, Henderson, Horton, Ingleton, Jackson, Jayes, Knights, MacDonald, Marchington, Martin, McCall, Neal, Nissanga, Palmer, Perkin, Pugh, Rowles, Saunders, Simmons, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan, Whiting. Total equals 39.

Against: Total equals 0.

Abstain: Total equals 0.

Members then voted on the addendum to the amendment.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(2), a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Bowen, Carnell, R Clark, S Clark, Davey, Dendor, Eakin, Gibson, Gould, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Harrison, Henderson, Horton, Ingleton, Jackson, Jayes, Knights, MacDonald, Marchington, Martin, McCall, Neal, Nissanga, Palmer, Perkin, Pugh, Rowles, Saunders, Simmons, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan, Whiting. Total equals 39.

Against: Total equals 0.

Abstain: Total equals 0.

The Mayor announced that the addendum had been agreed.

After discussing all the amendments, Members debated the substantive motion.

Councillor Horton, the leader of the main opposition group, congratulated and supported the Mayor-elect and Deputy Mayor-elect on their positions which he fully supported. Turning to the Budget and Council Tax, he said the debate had been a worthwhile and constructive process and he was pleased amendments to the budget had been agreed. Councillor Horton said all parties worked stronger together to do the best for their residents. He referred to the financial position the Council were in, some of which had been caused by previous decisions made in the previous four years. Councillor Horton said that the proposal to reduce full time staff working hours to 34 hours per week instead of offering a cost of living pay rise might suit some staff but not all, and he suggested staff be given the choice to accept this.

In the debate that followed, Members raised points including:

- Funding from Government had fallen substantially in the last few years and the expectations of services provided increased, whilst inflation had also increased;
- there was still a period of consultation on the 34hr week proposal;
- Government needed to get Local Authority funding right soon;
- SBC had managed the budget better than many other local authorities;
- the budget was as good as it could be in the circumstances;
- praised the finance team;

- was a productive discussion;
- concerned about car parking charges but pleased there would be a review;
- concerned that the increase in charges for brown bins would impact on subscription renewals;
- suggested more opportunities to scrutinise the budget in advance of the meeting in future; and
- an increase of 5p on parking was ridiculous.

In seconding the recommendations, Councillor Monique Bonney said she felt proud of the agreement and proper discussion across the chamber that evening, and the opposition had given valuable input. She said it was important that when car parking was reviewed, user impact was considered. Councillor Bonney said the Council had a difficult role in maintaining the current bin contract and predicted there would likely be issues in moving from the old to the new contract. She said it was important that the 'cupboard was not left empty' for next year and urged Members to vote in favour of the budget.

In summing up, the Leader said it had been a constructive and productive evening of discussion. The Leader said he was sad an incorrect report that the Council had spent millions of pounds on 'Vanity projects' had appeared in the newspaper. He said that money had been spent on maintaining the Council's assets that had been left to deteriorate by the previous administration. He referred to the article's claim of wasted money at planning appeals and said the most costly appeal had been for the planning application at Barton Hill Drive, Minster which had been largely rejected by the opposition.

Finally, the Leader highlighted the necessary 3% increase in Council Tax and said that even with the 3% increase, SBC's Council Tax remained one of the lowest in Kent. He praised everyone for a good job.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 3.1.19(2), a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Carnell, S Clark, Davey, Gibson, Gould, Harrison, Henderson, Jackson, Jayes, Knights, MacDonald, Martin, McCall, Nissanga, Palmer, Perkin, Rowles, Saunders, P Stephen, S Stephen, Thomas, Truelove, Valentine, Whelan. Total equals 26.

Against: Councillors Bowen, R Clark, Dendor, Eakin, A Hampshire, N Hampshire, Simmons, Whiting. Total equals 8.

Abstain: Councillors Horton, Ingleton, Marchington, Neal, Pugh. Total equals 5.

Resolved:

(1) That members note the Director of Resources opinion on the robustness of the budget estimates and the adequacy of reserves.

(2) That minute number 632 of the Policy and Resources committee, on 8 February 2023 on the report on the Medium Term Financial Plan and the 2023/24 revenue and capital budgets be approved.

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

(4) That in accordance with the proposals contained within SI 2014 No. 165 that a recorded vote be taken on the 2023/24 Budget and Council Tax and, the Budget be approved including the agreed amendments.

696 **Treasury Management Strategy**

The Leader introduced the report which set out and sought approval of the Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24 and the Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators. He proposed the recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Bonney.

Resolved:

(1) That the Treasury Management Strategy 2023/24 and the Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators be approved.

697 **Pay Policy Statement**

The Leader introduced the report, advising that it had already been considered by the Policy and Resource Committee, and proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Bonney.

Resolved:

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

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

698 **Adoption of the New Code of Conduct**

Councillor Hannah Perkin introduced the report which sought Council's agreement to adopt the Local Government Association (LGA) model code of conduct with modifications, to replace SBC's current Swale code of conduct. She proposed the recommendation which was seconded by the Leader.

Councillor Horton thanked the Chief Executive for the Code of Conduct briefing on the content of the document prior to Full Council, and for undertaking to deliver a training programme after the May election. He said the new code of conduct was an improvement and easier to understand.

Councillor Martin thanked Councillor Perkin, chair of the Standards Committee, the Monitoring Officer and the Chief Executive.

Resolved:

(1) That the LGA model code of conduct with the modifications set out in Section 5, be adopted as a replacement for the current Swale code of conduct.

699 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

It was not necessary to exclude the Press and Public as Item 16 was withdrawn from the Agenda.

700 **Senior Management Restructure**

Item 16 was withdrawn from the Agenda.

701 **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned from 7.13pm until 7.17pm and from 8.46 pm until 9.08pm.

702 **Standing Orders**

Members agreed to extend Standing orders at 10pm and 10.30pm in order that Council could complete its business.

Chair

Copies of this document are available on the Council website <http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

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