
Community Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 27 June 2023 from 7.00 pm - 7.40 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Derek Carnell (substitute for Councillor Tom Nundy), Ann Cavanagh (substitute for Councillor Elliott Jayes), Shelley Cheesman, Mike Henderson (substitute for Councillor Claire Martin), Mark Last, Pete Neal, Tara Noe, Richard Palmer (Chair), Hannah Perkin, Ashley Shiel, Terry Thompson, Mark Tucker and Tony Winckless.

PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Councillors Tim Gibson, Elliot Jayes and Angie Valls.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Martyn Cassell, Steph Curtis, Jo Millard and Emma Wiggins.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Jay Jenkins and Kellie MacKenzie.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Lloyd Chapman, Elliott Jayes, Claire Martin, Lee-Anne Moore and Tom Nundy.

146 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chairman outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

147 **Declarations of Interest**

During the discussion, Councillor Ashley Shiel declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Item 5 – Closed Churches – as he was a church warden for Holy Trinity Church, Queenborough.

148 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2023 (Minute Nos. 744 – 751 and the meeting held on 17 May 2023 (Minute Nos. 19 – 20) were taken as read, agreed and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

149 **Update on Closed Churchyard and War Memorials**

The Leisure and Technical Services Manager introduced the report by giving a background to closed churches and the Council's responsibility to health and safety of the facilities. He advised that risk assessments were reviewed annually, and in 2019 a conditions survey was carried out by an independent company on 21 closed churchyards and 10 war memorials. The Leisure and Technical Services Manager drew attention to the results of the survey and highlighted the eight areas that were looked at as set out in the report. He explained that 12 of the churchyards were deemed to have priority one works relating to safety issues. The Leisure and Technical Services Manager explained the process of reviewing the surveys with officers and liaising with the Diocese.

In reference to the financing of the works, the Leisure and Technical Services Manager said there was an annual memorial budget of approximately £32k and at the start of the works there was a reserve of just under £66k. There was a budget for works to trees within churchyards of £63k although the trees were not included in the surveys. An

additional £80k was provided by the Improvement and Resilience Fund and £9.5k granted by the Western Area Committee for specific works. The Leisure and Technical Services Manager said that whilst the works to the church wall at St. Michael's Church, Sittingbourne were included in the survey, this was funded by a separate funding stream.

The Leisure and Technical Services Manager said that just over £74k had been spent to date and all priority one works were now complete in addition to other works. He said that works to two war memorials had cost just over £26k and an order for some additional war memorial works costing £14.5k had been placed.

As concerns had been expressed relating to the ongoing liabilities falling to local authorities, the Leisure and Technical Services Manager drew attention to paragraph 5.1 in the report which explained that, at the Council's request, Gordon Henderson MP had written to the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Local Government and Building Safety and in his response it was confirmed that there were no proposed changes to the policy that required local authorities to take on responsibilities for churchyards.

The Leisure and Technical Services Manager said the priority two works, which were yet to start, were estimated to cost £217k and priority three works £126.5k.

Finally, the Leisure and Technical Services Manager said the Special Projects Officer had been leading on this project but that role was ending on 1 July 2023.

In response, Members asked questions and raised points including:

- Councils' responsibilities for closed churchyards and War Memorials was unfair, out of date and unsustainable;
- suggested the Committee wrote to the Minister asking for the Government to agree for funding to be set on a fairer and more sustainable, shared basis with churches;
- suggested working with churches for additional funding;
- suggested including how much funding was needed in the letter to the Minister; and
- noted that only Gordon Henderson had responded, the pressure should be kept on both MP's for the Swale area.

The Chair suggested the letter to the Minister should be sent via the MP's.

The Head of Environment and Leisure said priority one works carried the highest health and safety risk so needed action first and priorities two and three needed attention but could be done over a longer period. He confirmed that the Council engaged heavily with churches.

The Head of Environment and Leisure agreed to write to both the Minister and the MP's with the Committee's request to consider a fairer system of funding and responsibility.

POST MEETING NOTE:

The Chair was contacted by MP Helen Whatley after the meeting who advised she had not received the original letter seeking assistance to lobby the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Local Government and Building Safety.

Resolved:

(1) That the works continue to be prioritised based on risk rating utilising remaining agreed budgets.

(2) That all major works outside of remaining agreed budgets be presented to the appropriate committee for consideration.

150 Member Appointments to Swale Community Safety Partnership

The Community Services Manager introduced the report which sought the Committee's agreement on the Council's representation for the municipal year 2023/34 on Swale Community Safety Partnership.

Councillor Mike Henderson proposed and Councillor Tony Winckless seconded Councillor Hannah Perkin to sit on the Swale Community Safety Partnership.

Councillor Ann Cavanagh proposed and Councillor Tony Winckless seconded Councillor Tom Nundy to sit on the Swale Community Safety Partnership.

On being put to the vote, both appointments were agreed.

Resolved:

(1) That Councillors Hannah Perkin and Tom Nundy be appointed to the Swale Community Safety Partnership.

151 Member appointment - Swale Community Leisure Board

The Leisure and Technical Services Manager introduced the report which asked the Committee to agree the Council's Member representations for the municipal year 2023/24 on the Swale Community Leisure Board. He said the nominated Member would represent SBC's interest and he drew attention to the dates of the meetings on page 22 of the report. Finally, he said that the position was not a trustee but a non-executive role.

In response to a Member's question on the status of the role, the Head of Environment and Leisure explained that it was an independent trust and the nominated representative would be invited to attend in a non-voting capacity and for SBC to have a voice.

Councillor Shelley Cheeseman nominated and Councillor Tony Winckless seconded Councillor Mark Last and on being put to the vote, Members agreed.

Resolved:

(1) That Councillor Mark Last be appointed to attend Swale Community Leisure Board meetings.

152 Forward Decisions Plan

The Chair said that he would like a working party set up to discuss parking policy. A Member asked how many would sit on the group and the Chair responded saying that the Members should be from the Committee, one representative from each political group, plus the Chair. In response to a question from a Member to include trading associations in the working party, the Head of Environment and Leisure said the first meeting would only be internal to discuss the scope/ terms of reference and a report would then be presented to the Community Committee in September followed by a public consultation on the key points which would include the trading associations. A draft Policy would then be taken to the Committee in the new year.

The Head of Environment and Leisure drew attention that the Playing Pitch Strategy would be delayed as some national bodies were unable to provide feedback before the deadline.

Resolved:

(1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.

Chair

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