

---

## Environment Committee

---

**MINUTES** of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Thursday, 29 June 2023 from 7.00 pm - 9.01 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Derek Carnell (Substitute for Councillor Sarah Stephen), Mike Henderson, Carole Jackson, Rich Lehmann (Chair), Charlie Miller, Chris Palmer, Hannah Perkin (Substitute for Councillor Chris Williams), Ashley Shiel, Julien Speed, Paul Stephen, Angie Valls, Mike Whiting and Dolley White (Vice-Chair).

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Alister Andrews, Tracey Beattie, Martyn Cassell, Philippa Davies, Vickie Hewson, Janet Hill and Clare Lydon.

**OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY):** Kieren Mansfield and Jo Millard.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY):** Councillors Tim Gibson, Angela Harrison, Elliott Jayes and Tony Winckless.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Pete Neal, Sarah Stephen and Chris Williams.

### 157 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

### 158 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Mike Henderson declared a disclosable non pecuniary interest in respect of item 6, Air Quality Action Plan as a member of his family lived in Teynham. He said that this would not prevent him from making a sensible decision on that item.

Councillor Rich Lehmann declared an interest during consideration of item 7, Use of remaining I & R funds allocated to the Climate and Ecological Emergency as Teynham was within his County Division.

### 159 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 March 2023 (Minute Nos. 757 – 764) and 17 May 2023 (Minute Nos. 21 – 22) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct records.

## **Part B Minutes for Information**

### 160 **The provision of minor maintenance and cleansing of public conveniences - procurement of new contract**

The Environment Services Manager introduced the report as set out in the agenda papers. The paper asked the Committee their views on the public toilet contract specification. He drew attention to recommendation (2) in the report and explained that there were busier cemeteries in the Borough which did not have toilet facilities. A public toilet usage survey carried out in 2018 had not included the Halfway cemetery, but some analysis since the committee report was written had concluded that the water usage at that location was 5-6 times less than the least used facilities recorded in the 2018 survey, and he concluded that public use at Halfway was very low.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- Welcomed the report;
- did not agree with recommendation (2), public opinion was that this needed to be re-considered;
- suggested the nearby area, which was an ‘eyesore’, could be improved;
- Halfway cemetery was still being used and visited;
- this was an opportunity, due to underspend, to carry out a review and make the facilities at Halfway fit for purpose;
- supported both recommendations and considered officers had looked carefully as to whether toilet facilities were needed at Halfway cemetery;
- there were other cemeteries in the Borough with no facilities;
- suggested altering opening times for toilet facilities so that disabled users were able to access them as when closed, other venues with facilities were often not accessible to all;
- improved signage was needed for dementia sufferers;
- considered that in order to be more inclusive there should be more unisex toilets in the Borough;
- it would make more sense to have the toilets in an area of higher footfall;
- needed to consider the budget, this facility was not viable;
- there were very few visitors to Halfway cemetery and thought it would be a closed burial site soon;
- suggested keeping the Halfway facilities open for a year and review the running costs;
- that the times of opening and closing the facilities needed to be considered in the wider review and therefore to keep the one-year contract the same; and
- the recommendations should be voted on separately.

In response, the Head of Environment and Leisure explained that the Halfway cemetery was closed for new burial plots, but some plots had been purchased and had not been fully utilised. He said that the savings on not having the toilet facilities at Halfway could go towards the upkeep of the cemetery as a whole; and explained that the running costs would only increase when the new contract was let.

Councillor Mike Henderson proposed recommendation (1) and this was seconded by Councillor Mike Whiting.

Councillor Mike Henderson proposed recommendation (2) and this was seconded by Councillor Derek Carnell.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That a tender exercise to provide minor maintenance and cleansing of public conveniences for 1 year with a 1-year extension option from 1 April 2024 be undertaken.***

***(2) That the temporary toilet block at Halfway cemetery be removed.***

**161 Air Quality Action Plan**

The Mid Kent Manager introduced the report, and the Senior Scientific Officer noted the changes made as a result of the public consultation as set out in the agenda papers.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- Welcomed the report;
- it was important to ensure that disabilities were kept in mind in the Plan to be more inclusive, with for example, adaptable cars and hand peddle bicycles;
- welcomed that schools had been involved;
- concerned that the report did not adequately address the issues, and wanted a more radical approach, especially with some areas of Swale exceeding World Health Organisation air quality guidelines, with multiple harmful effects;
- the volume of traffic needed to be decreased;
- considered some NOx measurements were inaccurate;
- the report was not informative enough;
- the response rate to the consultation from businesses was poor;
- the 20 mph schemes in Sittingbourne should be included within the report; and
- considered many of the measures in the report would have little effect.

In response, Members were advised that it was difficult to reduce traffic levels, but there was a traffic management plan within the document; the World Health Organisation's levels of particulates were aspirational, but the Council had to adhere to Government Standards in the first instance; and there were cost implications for continuous monitoring.

Councillor Carole Jackson proposed the recommendation, and this was seconded by Councillor Mike Henderson.

**Resolved:**

***(1) That the draft Action Plan in Appendix 1 to the report be approved to enable the plan to be submitted to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs as Swale's Air Quality Action Plan (2023 – 2028).***

**162 Use of Remaining I & R funds allocated to the Climate and Ecological Emergency**

The Climate Change Officer introduced the report as set out in the agenda papers.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- Welcomed the three projects chosen for the reallocation of funds;
- considered there needed to be more engagement with local businesses in terms of the Swale Cycle re-Cycle Project;
- the public response to the installation of Electric Vehicle (EV) charge points for car clubs was low;
- thought there were better projects than the Carbon Footprint and Progress Review project to allocate funds to, and this review could be carried out in-house;
- the cycle project could benefit a lot of families; and
- supported the further option set out in paragraph 3.3 of the report, for particulate monitoring equipment, especially in Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) 5.

In response, the Head of Environment & Leisure explained that the Green Grid forum had facilitated engagement with businesses; in terms of the car club, the Council had a role in educating and changing behaviour; and the carbon footprint progress review was an important piece of work as it would guide the Council on the projects it should

undertake over the next four years in order to meet its targets.

Councillor Julien Speed moved the following amendment: That £16,000 be diverted from the proposed funding for the Carbon Footprint and Progress Review, to go to particulate monitoring in AQMA 5 and this was seconded by Councillor Mike Whiting.

There was some discussion as to whether the particulate monitoring should be extended to all six AQMAs in the Borough. Councillor Hannah Perkin moved an amendment to the amendment: That the £16,000 be used for particulate monitoring across the Borough. This was accepted by the proposer and seconder of the first amendment and on being put to the vote the amendment was agreed.

Councillor Mike Whiting proposed the recommendations, with the above amendment, and these were seconded by Councillor Julien Speed

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the remaining Improvement & Resilience funds for climate projects as detailed in the report be reallocated to:***

- ***Swale Cycle re-Cycle Project - £5,000***
- ***Dedicated EV charge point for Sittingbourne Car Club - £7,000***
- ***Carbon Footprint and Progress Review - £9,000***
- ***Particulate monitoring equipment for use across the Borough - £16,000***

***(2) That it be delegated to officers to make any further adjustments in spending of climate funding to the Head of Environment and Leisure and Director of Resources in consultation with the Chair.***

**163 Public Health Funerals Policy**

The Mid Kent Environmental Health Manager introduced the report as set out in the agenda papers.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- Welcomed the report;
- supported the proposals;
- why was Bobbing Crematorium more expensive than Vinters Park Crematorium?; and
- in terms of equality and diversity, were there other options, apart from cremation?

In response, the Mid Kent Environmental Health Admin Team Leader explained that Bobbing was a privately owned business and Vinters was publicly owned; alternative options to cremation had not been requested so far, and it was necessary to consider that there was a lack of burial plots within the Borough; and more research (with parishes) needed to be carried out on this going forward. The Head of Environment and Leisure said they had engaged with a range of religious groups when opening the new cemetery at Iwade and should the situation arise, a burial was possible as an option.

Councillor Hannah Perkin proposed the recommendation and this was seconded by

Councillor Mike Whiting.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the policy for managing public health funerals within Swale be approved.***

164 **Forward Decisions Plan**

The Head of Environment and Leisure introduced the Forward Decisions Plan as set out in the agenda papers.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions and make comments and these included:

- The Environment Committee needed to look into improving bio-diversity;
- there should be more engagement about bio-diversity with schools; and
- something needed to be done to tackle the fly-tipping at Eastchurch.

The Head of Environment and Leisure responded and said that in terms of bio-diversity, the Environment Committee had previously considered the Open Space Strategy, and an interim paper could come back to the Committee. He explained that the Council were an active part of a multi-agency strategy to combat the fly-tipping at Eastchurch.

The Chair sought the Committee's agreement to write to Kent County Council's Cabinet Member for Environment regarding the proposed closure of the Faversham Household Waste Recycling Centre, and this was agreed by Members.

Members could request, via the Chair, items for consideration at future meetings that could be added to the Forward Decisions Plan.

***Resolved:***

***(1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.***

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