
Policy and Resources Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 18 October 2023 from 7.00 pm - 9.48 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock (Vice-Chair), Monique Bonney, Lloyd Bowen, Tim Gibson (Chair), Angela Harrison, Mike Henderson, James Hunt, Mark Last, Rich Lehmann, Peter Marchington (Substitute for Councillor Mike Whiting), Richard Palmer, Julien Speed, Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Janet Dart, Lisa Fillery, Joanne Johnson, Zoe Kent, Kellie MacKenzie and Jill Peet.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Steph Curtis, Russell Fitzpatrick, Jhilmil Kishore and Emma Wiggins.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Tony Winckless.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Derek Carnell and Mike Whiting.

356 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

357 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 July 2023 (Minute Nos. 194 – 206) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

358 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

Part A Minutes for Recommendation to Council

359 **Council Tax Reduction Scheme**

The Revenues and Benefits Manager introduced the report as set-out in the agenda.

A Member said it was a good piece of work and fully endorsed the recommendations.

Recommended:

- (1) That the progress of the income banded Council Tax Reduction Scheme be noted.***
- (2) That the Council Tax Reduction Scheme be not changed for 2024/25, except to amend the income bands to align with DWP benefit changes, and that delegation be given to the Director of Resources to make that amendment.***

360 **Constitution amendments: Various**

The Director of Resources introduced the report as set-out in the agenda.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, which included:

- Queried the need for Members to have mandatory training to sit on the Licensing Committee which deals with the discussion and agreement of Policies. When would there be similar mandatory training for the service committees?;
- drew attention to proposed amendment 7 on page 43 of the report and queried whether it was necessary, as all Public Rights of Way (PROW) came under the remit of Kent County Council (KCC);
- concerned that KCC were passing their responsibility of dealing with PROWS to the Council;
- welcomed the amendments which clarified a lot of queries; and
- some parts to be deleted were crossed through, but other parts underlined, which was confusing and asked that in future amended documents be clearly and consistently marked.

With regard to PROWs under amendment 7, the Lawyer (Mid-Kent Legal) explained that KCC could delegate the PROWs functions to the Council. The proposed amendment would assist the Council in delivering its job around PROWs as part of planning applications, and did not mean that the Council would be doing KCC's job.

Recommended:

(1) That the amendments set-out in Appendix I of the report be agreed and incorporated into the constitution.

361 Local Plan Review - Next Steps

The Planning Policy Manager introduced the report as set-out in the agenda.

In response to questions from Members, the Planning Policy Manager confirmed that they were working collaboratively with the relevant partners around infrastructure delivery and stated that the Local Plan was one of the most important documents the Council produced, as it was the mechanism whereby the Council could deliver the spatial objectives of the corporate strategy. The Planning Policy Manager confirmed that the climate change and environmental policies of the Council would be included within the Local Plan, along with all relevant strategies and plans of the Council.

Recommended:

(1) That Council defer a decision as to a timescale for the future stages of the Local Plan Review, until such time as the national planning landscape was clearer, but independent of the process, proceed to develop the evidence base regarding local development need and potential. With this process to be wholly reflective of local circumstance rather than central targets.

Part B Minutes for Information

362 Medway Estuary and Swale Management Plan and Partnership (MEAS)

The Planning Policy Manager introduced the report as set-out in the agenda.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, which included:

- Important that the Council started to push for change and make the point that too much land was being surrendered along the Swale coastline;
- sought clarification on the cost to the Council in joining the Partnership in respect of officer time?;
- hoped that both the Upper and Lower Medway Internal Drainage Boards (LMIDB) were involved and any potential costs to the Council known;
- the Council had representatives on the LMIDB and they should hold the Partnership to account;
- would be good for the Council to have a representative on MEAS;
- the LMIDB were proposing a 5% increase in the cost for their services;
- considered that an officer rather than a Councillor should be the Council's representative on MEAS; and
- important that the partnership reported back to the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group (PTPWG).

Councillor James Hunt moved the following amendment: That the PTPWG and the Policy and Resources Committee receive half yearly reports from the MEAS. This was seconded by Councillor Lloyd Bowen. On being put to the vote the amendment was agreed.

The Director of Resources said that the Council needed to meet with the LMIDB to understand the impact of the increase in their fees.

Resolved:

- (1) That the proposed approach regarding partnership working on the Medway Estuary and Swale Coastal Flood Risk Management (MEAS) Programme be noted.***
- (2) That the Council joins the Partnership.***
- (3) That the PTPWG and the Policy and Resources Committee receive half yearly reports from the MEAS.***

363 **KCC Enhanced Bus Partnership**

The Head of Regeneration, Economic Development and Property and Interim Head of Planning introduced the report as set-out in the agenda.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, and points raised included:

- Why did KCC want to do this when they don't usually want to attend meetings?
- what would KCC be getting rid of to be able to provide officer support for this?;
- concerned that it could just be meetings for meetings sake and a waste of time;
- Faversham Town Council (FTC) were going to start a bus route so they may be interested in attending;
- local residents were extremely unhappy with KCC's approach to bus services in their area. The removal of bus routes by them had an adverse impact on the elderly accessing GPs and young people accessing schools and this partnership would not address that;
- KCC should not be "shirking" their responsibilities, this was their remit;
- had some knowledge of the bus partnership which was good and allowed ward

- members to raise local issues with bus companies;
- the Council would be foolish not to be represented at these meetings;
- frustrated that the bus services to some of the villages in the East Downs ward had been axed;
- KCC have not said what funding they have available, so we should clarify before committing to this partnership; and
- surely KCC should already be having dialogue with bus companies and local members, they do not need a specific partnership for this.

In response the Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods said the Partnership would meet twice a year as a forum for discussion to allow dialogue between the bus companies and KCC. If the Council were not represented at the Partnership, they would not be able to influence any of the funding KCC received from Government for bus services.

Councillor Monique Bonney moved the following amendment: That members of the partnership travel via bus in Rodmersham Village Hall for the first meeting. This was seconded by Councillor Ashley Wise. No vote was taken on this amendment.

Councillor Mike Baldock proposed the following amendment to recommendation (2): To agree that the LFG reports to the PTPWG and **the agreed representatives of the PTPWG** attend the LFG, and representatives from each of the four Area Committees. This was seconded by Councillor James Hunt. On being put to the vote the amendment was agreed.

Resolved:

- (1) That the setting up of a LFG as part of KCC's Enhanced Partnership hierarchy be agreed.***
- (2) That the LFG reports to the PTPWG and the agreed nominated PTPWG representatives attend the LFG, and representatives from each of the four Area Committees.***

364 **Bredgar Conservation Area Review**

The Senior Conservation & Design Officer (Projects) introduced the report as set-out in the agenda.

The Chair invited comments and the following points were made:

- An excellent piece of work and aware that the Council were looking in the future at designating another area of Bredgar (Bexon – to include properties along Hawks Hill Lane and cluster of properties on Bexon Lane to the northeast of Hawks Hill Lane) as a conservation area; and
- thanked the officer, Consultant, the Parish Council and local residents for their input and fully supported the recommendation.

Resolved:

- (1) That the changes to the Bredgar Conservation Area review document be agreed.***

365 Hartlip Conservation Area Review

The Senior Conservation and Design Officer (Projects) introduced the report as set-out in the agenda.

The Chair invited Members to make comments and points raised included:

- Aware that the Parish Council had not been able to respond to the consultation, but they supported the extension of the Conservation Area;
- thanked the officer for a good report;
- supported the proposal;
- did any properties that sat either side of the new boundary changes part included within the extended conservation area?; and
- requested that the new boundary be replicated on the back page of the document, so it was easy to find.

The Senior Conservation & Design Officer (Projects) said that usually when recommending a boundary change, they would try to include the whole curtilage rather than part of a property.

Resolved:

(1) *That the changes to the Hartlip Conservation Area review document be agreed.*

366 Staff Domestic Abuse Policy

The Community Services Manager introduced the report as set-out in the agenda.

The Chair invited comments from Members which included:

- Welcomed the policy, but what about Councillors and contract staff; and
- this was an excellent policy.

In response, the Community Services Manager explained that in terms of contract staff the Council had a Safeguarding Contract Monitoring Framework which included the domestic abuse element. Officers would be providing some safeguarding training for Councillors which would pick-up domestic abuse and what support was available.

Resolved:

(1) *That the staff domestic abuse policy be approved.*

367 Good Causes Community Lottery Funding

The Community Services Manager introduced the report as set-out in the agenda.

Councillor Richard Palmer moved the following amendment to recommendation (2): That point b) All Members to allocate a portion of their Members Grant be removed from the recommendation. This was seconded by Councillor Monique Bonney. On being put

to the vote the amendment was agreed.

The Chair invited comments and points raised included:

- Concerned what the public perception would be with the Council encourage gambling during a cost-of-living crises;
- considered there were more important items that the Council should be working on;
- thought it was a good idea and the finances would come from general reserves;
- residents would not be forced to take part and it was a way of supporting local community groups;
- concerned that it would encourage gambling;
- would not generate that much money for community groups;
- understood the motivation for setting this up, but was not sustainable;
- aware that similar lotteries had worked well for other councils;
- would also help community groups to get publicity;
- not sure it would be successful particularly during a cost-of-living crises;
- supported schemes that would generate money for the Council, but what was the mechanism to ensure the scheme funded itself?;
- the money raised by this project would make a huge difference to the borough's community groups particularly the smaller scale ones;
- suggested that the scheme was administered by the Area Committees;
- did not think it would be a risk to those with gambling addiction as it was being operated remotely;
- would be happy to support the scheme by using my member grant money;
- the council's role was to provide public service, and with the current budget issues it would not be right to use money to set this up;
- the financing would be covered by ticket sales; and
- this would be a sensible use of the Council's reserves.

In response, the Community Services Manager explained that it was in the Council's gift to determine how the scheme was progressed and which community groups were involved. It was expected that the scheme would cover its own costs. The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods said that they had looked at other business models and some had given criteria to allocate. The Council would need to find a way to agree which charities benefitted and how the money was allocated.

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

For: Councillors Baldock, Bonney, Lehmann, Marchington, Palmer, Speed. Total equals 6.

Against: Councillors Bowen, Gibson, Harrison, Hunt, Last, Wise and Wooster. Total equals 7.

Abstain: Total equals 0.

The Chair advised that the motion to agree the recommendations in the report, as amended, was lost.

368 LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan

The Policy and Engagement Officer introduced the report as set-out in the agenda.

A Member hoped that there would be some progress in respect of the reduction of council meetings by March 2024, when the Peer Group returned to look at progress made.

Resolved:

(1) That the Swale Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan be agreed and published on the Swale Borough Council website.

369 Revenue and Benefits Shared Service Progress Report

The Revenues and Benefits Manager introduced the report which was tabled for Members.

A Member said she was pleased with progress on this and how the Council's staff had worked. She noted that a lot of people on the Isle of Sheppey still had problems with accessing benefits online.

Resolved:

(1) That the proposed shared service timetable be noted.

370 Forward Decisions Plan***Resolved:***

(1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.

371 Recommendations from the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group meeting held on 19 September 2023

Resolved: That Minute Nos. 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303 and 304 be approved.

372 Recommendations from the Swale Joint Transportation Board meeting held on 2 October 2023

The Chair drew attention to the recommendations which were tabled for Members.

Resolved: That Minute Nos. 335, 336 and 337 be approved.

Chair

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