
SITTINGBOURNE AREA COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held at Diversity House, ISP House, Church Street, Sittingbourne, Kent ME10 3EG on Tuesday, 5 September 2023 from 7.00 pm - 8.37 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Shelley Cheesman, Simon Clark, Tim Gibson, James Hall, Mark Last (Chair), Charlie Miller, Angie Valls, Karen Watson, Tony Winckless and Ashley Wise.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Janet Dart and Lisa Fillery.

OFFICER PRESENT (Virtually): Martyn Cassell.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Richard Palmer.
Kent County Councillor Mike Dendor, Divisional Member for Sittingbourne North.
Matthew Arnold, Commercial Director, Stagecoach South East.
Roland Eglinton, Managing Director, Chalkwell Coach Hire Limited.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually): Councillors Mark Tucker and Dolley Wooster.

APOLOGY: Councillor Derek Carnell.

251 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

252 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

253 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 June 2023 (Minute Nos 108 – 118) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair a correct record.

254 BUS SERVICES

Further to concerns about bus services raised at previous meetings, the Chair invited representatives of bus operators to come along to the Sittingbourne Area Committee meeting. Mr Matthew Arnold, the Commercial Director at Stagecoach South East and Mr Roland Eglinton, the Managing Director at Chalkwell Coach Hire Limited, were both in attendance and started the discussion by talking about the current state-of-play with local bus services.

Mr Arnold said that in the 3 years since the Pandemic, passenger numbers had only just recovered to 80%. Bus operating costs had risen by 23%. The Sittingbourne X3 service had seen some growth. Stagecoach were looking at making some adjustments and improvements to services.

Mr Eglinton said that Chalkwell were a third-generation family business. Kent was in a good position with different sized bus services that complemented each other. 97% of services were in the commercial sector with Kent County Council (KCC) bridging the gap. Arriva had been predominant in the area, but since they withdrew, Chalkwell had stepped into provide those services. Chalkwell provided the more local services and Stagecoach did more of the main route services. The result of the KCC review was that they had cut their budget by 25% which had impacted Swale in particular. The bus operators were working with KCC to put back a form of service where there was a need.

A discussion took place and comments included:

- Was it possible to have a circle line in Swale? Mr Eglinton responded that there were challenges with that suggestion as it required a suitable road network to support it, which there was not currently in Swale. The private car was the main competitor, and it would take extra resource to provide a frequent service.
- there were regular complaints about the school bus services arriving an hour early and parking at bus stops, in the winter they kept their engines running. Mr Eglinton responded that there wasn't enough road space or infrastructure for buses. He said that he encouraged the Chalkwell bus drivers to turn their engines off, however, they cut off automatically after 10 minutes.
- could the Number 9 service be reinstated? Mr Eglinton said that was one of the services affected by the KCC cuts.
- The KCC Divisional Member for Sittingbourne North asked how the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding supplied by Central Government would be used? Mr Eglinton said that Kent had received some funding but there were some Department for Transport restrictions, the focus was heavy on infrastructure improvements and there was limited scope for additional services. Mr Arnold said that there was a small amount of money for services and Swale would be competing with other areas for those limited funds.
- The KCC Divisional Member for Sittingbourne North asked if an on-demand service was something that could be considered? Mr Arnold said that no on-demand service in the country had survived without additional funding.
- how much did bus operators receive from bus passes? Mr Arnold said that it was a complicated formula and the law stated that bus operators should not be able to make a profit from bus passes.
- A member of the public commented that the X3 service was frequently overcrowded. Mr Arnold responded that punctuality was a problem due to roadworks. Following the withdrawal of the Arriva 334 service, Stagecoach had agreed with KCC to wait until schools returned after the summer holiday to see what the impact was before deciding what could be done.

The Chair concluded the discussion by thanking Mr Arnold and Mr Eglinton for taking the time to attend the meeting.

255 PARKING POLICY

Councillor Richard Palmer, in his capacity as Chair of the Parking Policy Member Working Group, gave a short presentation about the development of a draft Parking Policy.

He said that there was no formal Parking Policy, and was something the Community Committee would like to be developed. They agreed that a Parking Policy Member Working Group should be set up to work with officers to develop a draft policy.

The membership of the Working Group had been drawn up from the Community Committee with one representative from each political group plus the Chair.

The Working Group had met twice to discuss the main themes that should be included in the scope of the policy. Councillor Palmer went through the proposed scope of the policy and asked if the Area Committee thought if the proposed scope was right and if anything was missing.

The following comments were made:

- When looking at Controlled Parking Zones (CPZ), include commuters as they park in residential areas;
- we don't have the resource for the level of enforcement that was required, and schools were an issue;
- timing of CPZ should be 6 am to 12 midnight, 7 days a week;
- some decisions taken could result in making things worse for residents, and careful consideration was required before making decisions such as yellow lines requests etc;
- a Member said he would not support charging to park at Milton Creek Country Park;
- it was not fair that residents had to pay to park outside the front of their house when there was only room for one car;
- residents must accept that children needed to attend school and there would be some disruption for a short time;
- a member of the public did not believe it was necessary or appropriate to compare with other local authorities,
- a suggestion was made to look at parking permit rule K; and
- when considering yellow line requests, displacement parking in other areas should be considered.

256 CORPORATE PLAN UPDATE

The Council Leader, Councillor Tim Gibson, gave an update on the development of the SBC Corporate Plan. He went through the proposed priorities and asked for comments. The priorities were discussed and the following amendments were suggested:

Community:

Supporting and enabling our communities by enabling our residents to live, work and enjoy their leisure time safely in our Borough.

Economy:

Working with our businesses and charitable organisations to improve the local economy.

Environment:

To prepare our Borough for the challenges ahead by providing a cleaner healthier more enjoyable environment. *(It was suggested the climate change element should be strengthened in this statement.)*

Health & Housing:

Everyone to have access to a decent home and improved health and wellbeing

Running the Council:

To engage with communities and outside bodies to deliver our priorities in an open and efficient way, working within our resources.

257 PUBLIC FORUM

Mr Daniel Thomas submitted the following questions in advance of the meeting. Officers were consulted and responses were given as follows:

The bin on the small green between Pond Drive and Peregrine Drive, Sittingbourne had been removed – will it be re-instated, if not, will the dog waste bin next to it be emptied more regularly, as it's often very full?

Response – The Environment Contracts Manager said that the team had not removed the bin, so they were unsure what had happened to it. They would replace the dog bin that was still in place with a larger multi-use bin which could accept dog waste and litter and monitor the emptying of the bin.

Could an update be provided on the path to be installed at the top of Highsted Road, joining onto Swanstree Avenue?

KCC advised that a detailed scheme proposal was taken to the Swale Joint Transportation Board (JTB) meeting on 7 September 2020 proposing to make part of Highsted Road one-way to allow for the installation of a footway. This was not approved at the JTB meeting. Instead, they asked for KCC and SBC to investigate acquiring land from the school. KCC have done no further work on this and The Leader, Councillor Tim Gibson, added that he was aware a development had been awarded planning permission and the Section 106 agreement included provision of a footpath in that area. Councillor Gibson said he would check the details and feed the information back to Mr Thomas via the Policy & Engagement Officer.

258 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Members noted progress on actions.

Coombe Drive, Sittingbourne – a Member advised that the gates recently installed had been vandalised and the contractor was back on site to make them higher.

A Member said he was pleased that a Police representative would be attending the Sittingbourne Area Committee December 2023 meeting and suggested Area Committee Members encouraged residents in their Wards to come along to the meeting to address problems in the area.

259 LOCAL ISSUES TO BE RAISED

KCC Divisional Member Mike Dendor advised that he had been in discussions with Jackson Civil Engineering about the Grovehurst roundabout works to try to minimise the disruption to residents in the surrounding area.

260 MATTERS REFERRED TO AREA COMMITTEE BY SERVICE COMMITTEES

No issues were raised.

261 MATTERS REFERRED TO SERVICE COMMITTEE CHAIRS FOR CONSIDERATION

No issues were raised.

Chair

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