
WESTERN AREA COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in Rodmersham Village Hall, Green Lane, Sittingbourne ME9 0PS on Thursday, 28 November 2024 from 7.00 pm - 8.30 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Monique Bonney, Lloyd Chapman, Chris Palmer (Vice-Chair), Richard Palmer, Paul Stephen (Chair) and Sarah Stephen.

NOMINATED PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES: Parish/Town Councillors Duncan Barnett (Rodmersham Parish Council (PC)), Brian Clarke (Bredgar PC), Vivien Rich (Tunstall PC) and Steve Tolhurst (Iwade PC).

NOMINATED PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES (Virtually) Parish/Town Councillor Sarah Poole (Bobbing PC).

OFFICERS PRESENT: Steph Curtis, Janet Dart and Larissa Reed.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Ann Cavanagh and Dolley Wooster.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Mike Baldock, Roger Clark and James Hunt.

419 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

420 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

421 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 5 September 2024 (Minute Nos 205 – 216) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

422 EMPOWERING YOU IN SWALE

The Community Services Manager gave a presentation on Empowering You in Swale, the focus of which was community development.

Community development enables people to work collectively to bring about a positive change. The aim was to work collectively promoting positive social change within the borough, connecting with communities and partners to understand the key issues and improve lives.

The four Empowering You in Swale priorities are:

- Creating skilled, educated and working communities.
- Growing healthy communities.
- Empowering stronger, more sustainable communities.

- Developing strong partnerships for our communities.

The meeting considered the following questions:

1. Do you think these are the correct priorities?
2. Are there any other localised issues that you feel should be included?
3. Are you aware of any specific projects/services that we can collaborate with through the strategy?:

Below is a summary of comments:

- Provide support to families where there are problems with school placements;
- the reduction in youth services by Kent County Council (KCC) resulted in more anti-social behaviour (ASB);
- some activities were too expensive for young people;
- there was little or no public transport in rural areas;
- villages with community halls could work with young people to provide youth activities and services;
- the Challenger Troop was a good resource in the Western area;
- SBC should use the sort of social media young people use such as TikTok;
- another engagement method was needed to replace the SBC Youth Forum;
- in addition to older people, young mothers and teenagers with anxiety and depression experienced loneliness;
- the potential closure of children's centres may have a negative impact on communities;
- look at promoting existing organisations more; and
- engaged with young people to find out what they want. The piece of work Brogdale CIC (Community Interest Company) carried out for Western Area Committee engaging with young people may be a useful reference for this project.

423 COMMUNITY SAFETY

The Community Safety Manager gave an update on the Swale Community Safety Partnership Plan which was created each year and set out the priorities for the Partnership, based upon data and consultation with partners and the public.

The Partnership were keen to undertake a consultation with Elected Members at County/Borough/Parish Level to contribute to the review of these priorities.

The survey closes on 3 January 2025 and could be accessed via this link:

<https://forms.office.com/e/qTwncsZGi1>

Below is a summary of comments:

- Some people found High Street, West Street and East Street Sittingbourne intimidating to visit. The Police response was that CCTV covered the area, however, a more visible Police presence might help people feel safer;

- some rural villages now had allocated Police officers but not all villages had this resource yet;
- there was a perception by young people that there were no consequences to crime; and
- members spoke about the lack of action by Kent Police to reported crime.

424 PUBLIC FORUM

No issues were raised.

425 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Members noted the progress on actions.

Local Heritage List – a Member noted that it was agreed to repeat the process next year and suggested that Members and parish councils may wish to consider which assets should be included.

426 LOCAL ISSUES TO BE RAISED

Highest Park Development – a Parish Councillor spoke about the development being taken away from the democratic process and asked what action SBC would undertake to defend the Planning Committee’s decision to oppose the development. The Chief Executive explained that officer’s role was to implement Planning law and legislation and as the proposed development did not comply with Planning law and legislation, they would be defending their opposition to it. The hard work of Planning officers was acknowledged by parish councils.

Devolution – at the request of a Parish Councillor, the Chief Executive explained the process involved should a move to devolution be agreed for Kent.

427 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