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## SHEPPEY AREA COMMITTEE

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**MINUTES** of the Meeting held at The Criterion Blue Town, 69 High Street, Blue Town, Sheerness ME12 1RW on Tuesday, 3 December 2024 from 7.00 pm - 9.02 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Hayden Brawn, Angela Harrison, Elliott Jayes (Chair), Peter Macdonald, Tara Noe, Tom Nundy (Vice-Chair), Ashley Shiel and Dolley Wooster.

**NOMINATED PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES:** Parish/Town Councillors Ben Pointing and John Nurden (Minster-on-Sea Parish Council (PC)).

**NOMINATED PARISH COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES (VIRTUALLY):** Parish/Town Councillors Linda Brinklow and Chris Reed (Sheerness Town Council (TC)) and Sarah Poole (Eastchurch PC).

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Janet Dart, Zoe Hentschel, Inger Lorraine, Sarah-Jane Radley and Emma Wiggins.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Chief Inspector Vanessa Foster (Kent Police).

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Andy Booth, Peter Marchington, Lee-Anne Moore, Pete Neal, Mark Tucker and Mike Whiting.

### 441 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair read out the emergency evacuation procedure.

### 442 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

### 443 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 September 2024 (Minute Nos 252 – 268) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

### 444 POLICE UPDATE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

Chief Inspector (CI) Vanessa Foster (Kent Police), was in attendance to give an update on policing on the Isle of Sheppey. She covered the following issues:

- The Neighbourhood Unit went live in June 2024;
- the Isle of Sheppey was now fully staffed with 5 Beat Officers and 2 Police Community Support Officers (PCSO). All wards were now covered;
- the Child Centred Policing Team was now fully staffed;
- the Sports Connect Project was introduced in the summer 2024. As it had proved to be so popular it had been duplicated across Swale. Young people

taking part were able to participate in activities such as football, boxing and fishing;

- there had been a 40% reduction in anti-social behaviour;
- shop lifting incidents had increased, this was partly due to issues such as the prisoner early release scheme. The Police were working with businesses to address the issue;
- violent crime was now the lowest it had been in Swale for several years; and
- as Sheerness High Street was classed as a hot-spot, extra funding had been put in place to patrol it 7 days a week. Extra coverage was put in place during school holidays.

The following questions were raised:

- There had been an increase of 37% in incidents of violence against women and girls in Kent. As funding for these services was unclear at the moment, what reassurance could the Police give that the health, safety and wellbeing of women and girls would not suffer due to funding channels being put on hold?;
- teenagers on the Isle of Sheppey were talking positively about the Sports Connect Project, how were the Police reaching rural areas?
- a Member mentioned an incident that occurred a few weeks ago at the Old Borough Hall, Queenborough, where two youths separately smashed some of the double-glazed windows. This was reported to the Police and CCTV footage was provided but the member had not heard back.
- a Member asked what action was being taken to deal with the serious road traffic incidents at Marine Parade, Sheerness, as well as an incident where a minor was assaulted at the MacDonald's premises;
- an issue had been raised at the Swale Cost-of-Living meeting about families resorting to prostitution to make ends meet, this involved parents and teenagers;
- a Member stressed the importance of all incidents being reported to the Police as the data built a picture which the Police could act on;
- would an extra Beat Officer be appointed to the Isle of Sheppey so that Minster Cliffs and Sheppey Central wards could have a dedicated officer each? Thistle Hill, Minster was a particular problem at the moment.

CI Foster responded that the Domestic Violence Strategy had been at the forefront of priorities for Kent Police and would always be a focus. Swale Police ensured that early safeguarding of victims took place and offenders were brought into custody swiftly and action taken. Any changes to funding would not affect this priority. Data on hot-spots for poor behaviour was the main factor on where to target the Sports Connect Project. Rural areas did not have the same issues as more populated areas, but CI Foster acknowledged it wasn't ideal that rural areas did not have the same access to the project. CI Foster would ask the Beat Officer to look into the incident at the Old Borough Hall, Queenborough and get back to the Member. Police officers within Swale had a speed gun and officers intermittently patrolled areas but the night-time behaviour needed to be addressed. There was a team that focussed on anti-social nuisance vehicles in the Marine Parade and Ridham Docks area of Sheerness. Beat Officers were working closely with staff at MacDonald's to support staff and at peak times the Police were in the area to take action if necessary. CI Foster said that the Child Centred Team had been present at the Cost-of-Living meeting and would take action on any information received.

Unfortunately, there was not the capacity to appoint an additional Beat Officer but the Isle of Sheppey staff had the specialist skills to deal with the issues in the area. Thistle Hill had the Sports Connect Project for the next six weeks and the area had been raised for tasking for the whole district so that specialist teams could be defaulted there.

The Community & Partnerships 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 would close on 3 January 2025 and could be accessed via this link:

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

#### **445 EMPOWERING YOU IN SWALE**

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

Community development enabled 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 were:

- 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:

- Lack of public transport on the Isle of Sheppey was a big problem as people without their own transport could not reach activities;
- there was a lack of careers advice and training on the Isle of Sheppey;
- some young people had never left the Isle of Sheppey, the Community Rail Partnership provided train training and took groups of young people by train to Faversham and Canterbury to improve their confidence; and
- the strategy should be used to improve lobbying power.

**446 SHEERNESS REVIVAL PROJECT UPDATE**

The Capital Projects Manager, Inger Lorraine, and the Capital Projects Officer, Zoe Hentschel, were in attendance to give an update on the Sheerness Revival Project.

They advised that the projects were progressing well and were on track with outputs and outcomes. They provided updates on the individual projects:

- **Beachfields and public realm** – finalising RIBA stage 4. The Planning application had been prepared. They were working with partners on temporary relocations and to keep as much of the leisure offer on-site as possible. The appointment of the contractor would go to the December 2024 Committee meeting for consideration. Anticipated completion was Spring 2026.
- **Sheppey College** – planning permission was agreed in September 2024. The car park transfer was complete. East Kent College had a preferred contractor and works were due to commence on site in the coming days. The anticipated completion date was Autumn 2025.
- **Master's House** – planning permission was agreed in September 2024. The tender activity to procure the contractor was complete and would be considered at the December 2024 Committee meeting. Works were due to commence in January 2025 with an anticipated completion date of April 2025.

An update was also given on communications and engagement with details about upcoming consultation events, how to sign up to the newsletter and preparation of operational communications.

The following comments were made:

- A Member expressed disappointment that the allocation of a site for a 50 metre pool was not included;
- a Member asked about TAG Active and Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) as well as the provision of netball on the Isle of Sheppey and facilities being accessible for the disabled. Women and girls should feel safe when using facilities;
- vandalism at Master's House was raised and the need to support the building; and
- a request was made to include a table tennis table in the outdoor gym and there should be improved access to Sheerness Promenade.

Officers responded that there was a specific criteria for the Levelling Up Fund and the pool proposal would not have met that criteria. Swale Borough Council (SBC) were regularly looking at other potential funding schemes with the hope that investment for a pool could be provided in the future. TAG Active was coming forward along with soft play and MUGA was still on plan. The new Leisure Contract would address issues such as disabled access and to ensure women and girls felt safe when using facilities. The team were working closely with Master's House, and the contractor's bid included good social value elements.

**447 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS**

Members noted the progress on actions.

The Chair noted that the Emergency Planning briefing had been put back to 24 April 2025. He requested that the date be brought forward as there was a higher risk of emergency incidents on the Isle of Sheppey over the winter. The Policy & Engagement Officer agreed to pass the request on to the Community Services Manager.

Councillor Tara Noe gave an update on Leysdown Parish Council. The Parish Council was still inquorate, but Councillor Noe and Councillor Lee-Anne Moore were trying to sort out administrative matters in the interim. Once an election had taken place, it was hoped that the vacancies would be filled. They were also looking for someone to fill the position of Clerk.

#### 448 PUBLIC FORUM

Parish Councillor John Nurden, Minster-on-Sea Parish Council, asked the following questions:

What was happening to the lease agreement for Barton's Point Coastal Park which had been vacant for more than two years, except for a temporary arrangement to run a cafe at the Boat House during the summer 2024? Was the original business which was lined up to take over the park still interested?

*Response - the original interested party was undertaking a range of surveys which had been requested as part of their planning application. The surveys were seasonal and as such covered a large part of the calendar year, hence the temporary operator. The surveys go through to spring 2025.*

Could we have an update on plans for parking along the coast road (Marine Parade, Sheerness), especially the shingle bank, which might be at risk from the increased number of heavy vans now parking on it. Could this include an update on plans to turn the grassed area by the White House into a coach park, which were previously discussed by this committee? Could officers explain why there were no car park signs encouraging drivers to park on that side of the road?

*Response - a report would be considered at the Community and Leisure Committee on 11 December 2024.*

What would the Council like to see happen to make the junction with the entrance to Barton's Point Coastal Park safer, especially in light of two recent serious head-on car crashes there?

*Response – this was a question for the Swale Joint Transportation Board.*

Did the Council have any plans to take over the derelict Sheerness water tower which had been put back on the market with a guide price of £500,000 to £800,000?

*Response - the Council had no plans to purchase the site and the Compulsory Purchase Order would take significant time and resource to achieve even if it were*

*deemed possible. This may not be appropriate with an active and engaged purchaser.*

Tourism. How much money (and resources) were SBC spending on promoting the Isle of Sheppey? Was the Visit Sheppey website still part of Visit Kent?

*Response - the Council had a part time social media officer, who worked seven hours a week managing the Visit Swale website and social media accounts. Promotion equally covered all three of the towns and surrounding rural areas. Content focused on Sheppey was very much dependent on individual venues and attractions submitting their events and updated content to the officer and this had been an ongoing challenge. The Visit Sheppey website had been morphed into pages on Visit Swale which was directly linked to and hosted on the Visit Kent website.*

#### **449 LOCAL ISSUES TO BE RAISED**

A Member commented that Leysdown was a popular tourist destination but there had been little investment in the area by SBC. She said that areas such as the playground would benefit from investment going forward. Also, the Sheppey Light Railway Project would bring tourism into the area and across the Isle of Sheppey and SBC needed to do what they could to support it.

Parish Councillor Linda Brinklow advised that the Kent Community Rail Partnership, who promoted the Isle of Sheppey, were taking part in the Faversham Transport Festival which was taking place on 17 and 18 May 2025. If anyone had any brochures promoting tourism on the Isle of Sheppey, please contact Councillor Brinklow.

There were events taking place to celebrate 200 years of rail travel, if anyone had any ideas for celebrations on the Isle of Sheppey or funding, could they please contact Councillor Brinklow.

#### **450 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