
Council

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 4 December 2024 from 7.00 pm - 9.48 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, Lloyd Bowen, Hayden Brawn, Derek Carnell, Ann Cavanagh, Lloyd Chapman, Shelley Cheesman, Simon Clark, Alex Eyre, Charles Gibson, Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, Angela Harrison, Mark Last, Rich Lehmann, Peter Macdonald, Peter Marchington, Claire Martin, Ben J Martin (Mayor), Charlie Miller, Lee-Anne Moore, Pete Neal, Tara Noe, Tom Nundy, Chris Palmer, Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin, Carried Pollard, Julien Speed, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen, Terry Thompson, Mark Tucker, Karen Watson (Deputy Mayor), Tony Winckless, Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster.

PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Councillors Kieran Golding and Elliott Jayes.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Robin Harris, Jo Millard and Larissa Reed.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Roger Clark, Kieran Golding, James Hunt, Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes and Mike Whiting.

451 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

452 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 October 2024 (Minute Nos. 285 – 302) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor subject to an amendment to Minute No. 294 to remove Councillor Mark Tucker from the recorded vote as he was not in attendance at the meeting.

453 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Dolly Wooster declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of Agenda Item 9 Motion on Breakfast Clubs as her child attended a school within the borough that could benefit if the motion was agreed and was successful.

454 **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor advised that since the previous Full Council meeting on 3 October 2024, he and the Deputy Mayor had attended approximately 30 events, including the historic Sheppey fundraiser for visiting Mayors, and he thanked Eastchurch Aviation Museum, the Criterion Strummers and Criterion Theatre, Bluetown and the Sheppey Carnival Court. The Mayor had also attended various Christmas lights switch-ons. The Mayor welcomed newly-elected Councillor Corrie Pollard.

The Mayor reminded everyone that it was currently the middle of 16 days of action against Women and Girls and, as SATEDA was one of his charities, he was partaking in the Secret Pantsa 2024 and he invited Members to join him in the parlour after the meeting.

Finally, he thanked all those Members that had laid wreaths on Remembrance Sunday and expressed his pride in laying wreaths on Armistice Day.

455 **Questions submitted by the Public**

There were no public questions.

456 **Questions submitted by Members**

The Mayor advised that five questions had been submitted by Members.

Question 1 – Councillor Claire Martin

Following the re-routing of waste collection residents in Watling Ward have suffered a significant decline in their service, with residents being told communal bins at some blocks of flats were not on any of the routes and many residents experiencing delays or missed collections, including on London Road, Kingsmead Estate, Nelson Street, Nelson Gardens and Mutton Lane to name a few. Could the chair of the Environment Committee explain the reasons for the decline in service and outline the actions planned to resolve this on going issue once and for all.

Response – Chair of Environment and Climate Change

The re-routing of waste collections which took place in September was focussed on 9,000 properties with wheeled bin collections rather than those properties which use communal bin stores.

A further piece of work is currently underway to resolve the communal bin store collection issues. The Council has just completed a full cross-party scrutiny of the waste contract mobilisation, and the report of the findings from that process will go to the Environment and Climate Change committee meeting on the 15th January. The report will detail a range of issues that were encountered during the mobilisation process, including issues relating to the data on communal rounds.

The September re-route has led to a vast improvement in collection rates, solving the majority of the persistent issues in many parts of the Borough. However, what often looks right on paper needs to be tested on the ground and during November the contractor acknowledged that a further 1500 day changes would be needed to correct and issue where the balance of properties across each day wasn't quite right.

Those changes were implemented this week (from 2nd Dec) and officers will be monitoring them closely over the next couple of collection cycles.

Question 2

Councillor Jayes, who submitted question two was not in attendance and a written response would be provided.

Question 3 – Councillor Hannah Perkin

What steps can the Council take to reduce pollution in and around the Ospringe Air Quality Monitoring Area (AQMA)?

Response – Chair of Environment and Climate Change

Due to its position on the A2, Ospringe suffers from a very high volume of traffic and HGV movements, and emissions at this particular point on the A2 are exacerbated by the canyon like layout where terraced housing lines the road on both side, as is the case in Teynham and at other AQMA sites across the borough.

Due to reductions in emissions from newer vehicles, we are not seeing pollution concentrations in line with those observed when the Ospringe AQMA was declared in 2011. There has been a significant improvement in air pollution locally, reflecting nationally observed trends.

These air quality improvements are predominantly due to the replacement of older HGVs with newer vehicles that meet strict emissions standards, and more recently, a greater uptake of electric vehicles.

Swale Borough Council (SBC) maintains an Air Quality Action Plan, a new version of which was adopted last year for the period 2023-2028. This plan is available on the SBC website and outlines how the Council will deliver measures to support further compliance with Air Quality Standards within the AQMAs and across the district. The link to the council's action plan can be found by searching online for 'Swale Borough Council AQAP'

Annual reports on air quality are also produced by the council and available to view on the Swale Borough Council website. The latest annual report can be found by searching online for 'Swale borough council Annual Status Report 2024'.

Supplementary question:

Are we measuring particulate matter using the equipment purchased?

Response:

I will look into this and report back.

Question 4 – Councillor Charles Gibson

It has been brought to my group's attention that organisations currently renting space at Swale House are facing huge increases on their annual rent charges from the council. These are not for profits including Citizens Advice, SFM and SATEDA. They are facing increases of 237% at a time when they are facing cuts in funding for their core service. Could the chair of the economy and property committee point out when and where the decision to make this inflation busting hike in rents of over 200% was made, and will they commit to reviewing the proposed increase at committee to ensure the important community work provided by these organisations can continue?

Response – Chair of Economy and Property

Swale Borough Council has a Voluntary and Community Sector Lettings Policy which applies when a VCS organisation is unable to support occupying a Council asset at the full market rent. Appendix III of this Policy lists the properties in scope, and this excludes Swale House. Regeneration and Property (as was) Committee agreed in July 2023 "to

lease the first and parts of the ground floor of Swale House to generate an income and mitigate the Council's costs in relation to provision of services and Business Rates". I do not see a need for, or benefit in, revisiting this decision so soon after it was made.

It is on the basis of this decision that Swale House tenants were advised last year that any historic concessionary arrangements would cease from April 2024. We have offered to work with any tenant who can evidence a struggle to make their rental payments immediately, and we have highlighted the member grants scheme, which some tenants have accessed historically.

The administration hugely values the work of all our tenants, and of the wider Swale voluntary and community sector, and is proud to apply the VCS policy in many instances across the Borough. We do, however, have an obligation to collect full rent from our commercially let premises in order to protect services to the whole community.

Supplementary

At which point in the last 18 months did 200% inflation mean it was on market value then and is still on market value now?

Response:

I believe this is down to VCS policy which does not apply in this building because it is commercially let. A more detailed response can be provided.

Question 5 – Councillor Charles Gibson

Earlier this year the council completed refurbishment works to tennis courts in Sittingbourne and Milton Regis, funded in part by grant funding from the Lawn Tennis Association as a result of a partnership with Sittingbourne Tennis Club. Sittingbourne Tennis club are in need of access to changing and toilet facilities. Could the chair of the committee provide an update on progress towards securing these facilities for the tennis club and provide a timeline of when the club could expect to have access?

Response – Chair of Community and Leisure

Thank you for the question and recognising the great work that we did in upgrading the tennis courts at Milton Rec and at King George's Planning Field. The upgrades to the courts have been very popular, with lots of use and there is more to come in time as part of the project, with free access and coaching sessions at both sites.

Alongside the court improvements, we have been working on a longer-term solution for changing rooms and toilets at Milton. This involves agreement with other building users at the site and some enabling works e.g. electrical work and metering to separate uses. Our officers have been in regular contact with the Club throughout and actually met with the club and LTA again this week on the matter.

We are awaiting quotes for the electrical work, but have agreed to commission some of the refurbishment work by the end of the year. We therefore hope that things will progress in the early part of next year and be ready for use by the Spring, subject to satisfactory property agreements being agreed with the club.

457 **Leader's Statement**

The Leader said:

Thank you Mr Mayor and good evening one and all. As this is our last full council meeting before Christmas and looking at the evenings packed agenda I thought it appropriate that I give you all a little gift. By way of shortening my statement and giving you all two minutes of your life back.

I will commence my musings this evening by offering my sincere congratulations and a very warm welcome to the newest member of the chamber Councillor Carrie Pollard.

Carrie who lives in, and now serves Murston ward was successful in being elected to replace Cllr James Hall in the recent by-election.

On the day that the election count for Murston took place the ballot boxes were to the fore for a second time as the result of the Faversham Town Neighbourhood plan referendum was announced. Residents were balloted on whether they wanted Swale Borough Council to use the neighbourhood plan for Faversham Town to help it decide planning applications in the neighbourhood area and whilst the turnout was a disappointing 18%, 94% of those who did vote, voted Yes

Moving on it was pleasing that councillors from all parties, as always, joined people from across the borough to take part in Remembrance services on Sunday 10 November whether laying wreaths, actively participating or simply providing a civic presence.

I am personally indebted to our Mayor, Cllr Ben Martin, for giving me the opportunity and privilege of narrating the moving, "Shores of Normandy" poem at the War Memorial in Remembrance Avenue whilst he and others laid wreaths in tribute.

I would also like to place on record my gratitude to our officer Lorraine Burke for her commendable work in organising and managing arrangements for us.

Since our last full Council meeting I have made the odd trip or two up to Westminster to lobby together with colleagues from other local authorities across the Country. In particular I represented us on the Special Interest Group as we continue to lobby to bring about change in the unfair way in which Internal drainage boards are funded and the consequent impact that this approach has on our council's budget. Since the inception of this group we have made real progress in pushing this issue up the agenda for MP's and our SBC Director of Resources has been particularly proactive in writing to Jim McMahon MP Minister of State for MCHLG staking a specific claim for Swale.

I was also invited to attend an event at the House of Lords hosted by Lord Ravensdale an event that was considering the action required to move to building net zero carbon homes in England, and how reforms to national planning policy can help accelerate action on this important agenda.

It became apparent at the event that there is real potential to deliver significant action on climate change, through net zero carbon homes – homes designed to reduce demand on the national grid, provide comfortable and healthy spaces for future residents and a consequent reduction in their energy bills. This of course accords with our own ambitions for better standards in carbon efficient and decent homes for both homeowners and tenants.

Talking of decent properties the Council have fined a landlord £12,000 for failing to comply with an improvement notice that was issued after serious hazards were found at a Sheerness property.

Officers from the council's housing enforcement team carried out an inspection of the property and they found many serious failings including severe and extensive dampness and mould, inadequate heating, and fire safety deficiencies.

We do of course recognise that there are many excellent landlords in our Borough and where issues are found we will always try to work with them to address them, if however, requests for remedial actions go unheeded, we will take robust action to address them.

However in this case despite being served with an Improvement Notice, the landlord failed to take the necessary actions to address these dangerous conditions within the required timeframe.

The failure to comply with the improvement notice doesn't just show a blatant disregard for the law, but of greater concern is the risk at which it places tenants.

The proceeds of the fine are of course ringfenced, to be directly reinvested back into the council's private housing enforcement and support ongoing inspections, investigations and enforcement actions.

On to other matters I am pleased to say that we have now partnered with Gravesham Borough and Folkestone Town Council to monitor their Public Space CCTV cameras, which will bring in additional resources and staff, as well as improving the control centre's facilities.

We also oversee Swale Link, a business crime reduction partnership, which gives local businesses who sign up a radio to communicate with the control centre and the police, allowing for quick coordinated responses whenever any incidents occur and we currently have more than 70 businesses signed up to the scheme.

The benefits of the scheme were seen recently when the control centre supported the arrests of three people who forced their way into a phone store on Sittingbourne High Street to steal thousands of pounds of stock.

Finally at our recent Policy and Resources committee we agreed the final parts of the process that will allow us to launch a new fundraising initiative to support good causes within the borough. Our new community lottery which we expect to launch in early 2025 is a way for us to enable fund raising for causes that offer invaluable services to the people within the borough. It is no secret that councils across the country are struggling to balance their books and with our budget under immense pressure we have to look for other methods to generate funds for the local good causes that we would like to support.

In closing can I take this opportunity to wish each and every one of you and your families a very happy Christmas and a new year full of hope and anticipation that it will be a better one for us all.

In response, the Leader of the Conservative Group welcomed Councillor Pollard. He said he too was honoured to lay a wreath at the Remembrance Day Service. Referring to the action against landlords, he stressed the need to persist to take action. The Leader of the Conservative Group welcomed the news on the CCTV service and suggested that, following reported anti-social events at the Sittingbourne High Street

Christmas Lights switch on, the Police be better informed.

The Leader of the Liberal Democratic group also welcomed and congratulated Councillor Pollard. She thanked the community volunteers for their work on the Faversham Neighbourhood Plan project. The Leader of the Liberal Democratic group said the Remembrance Day Service held in Faversham was very moving and well attended, and she thanked the Chief Executive's PA for coordinating the attendance of Councillors and distribution of wreaths at services. She praised the benefits of the Swale Link initiative, highlighting that it helped vulnerable people get home safely.

Other Members made points including:

- Was the Leader aware of any movement towards much better standards of housing to be set by the Government, rather than the existing building regulations approach?;
- referring to fines to landlords, why were landlords not named?;
- thanked SBC officers for their support in the Remembrance Day parades in Swale;
- highlighted that SBC paid £1million to the Drainage Board but for every £1 collected, only 9p was allocated to Swale and the public needed to be made aware of this;
- services brought back in-house, such as CCTV, could sometimes generate an income and provide a better service; and
- the Council had previously tried to take a proactive approach to improving green credentials in housing but had been knocked back, and improvements should not be made at the price of other infrastructure.

In response, the Leader said there was a big drive to push the Government towards better standards of housing and this was part of the planning reforms. He agreed it was frustrating that landlords who had been fined remained anonymous and said this would be looked into. The Leader said the small percentage of funding that SBC received via Council Tax was well advertised but he encouraged Members to inform their residents. Referring to more implementation of net carbon zero homes, the Leader said the additional cost was in the region of £3k per home and unaffordability should not be an issue for developers.

458 **Motion - School Breakfast Clubs**

In proposing the motion as set out on the Agenda, Councillor Dolley Wooster advised that the new Government had proposed a free breakfast club programme which invited schools to apply for the early adopters scheme to start in April 2025. She said up to 750 participating schools could be funded, and she encouraged the local MPs to support the scheme for both KCC-funded and academy schools.

Councillor Wooster drew attention that many schools in the borough were within one of the most deprived areas in the country and that Rose Street school, Sheerness of which she was a Governor, regularly reported in excess of 60% pupil premium figures. She added that currently the school regularly subsidised funding for the breakfast club, and if successful in joining the breakfast club pilot scheme, that funding could be re-directed to

support other facilities at the school. Finally, Councillor Wooster listed the benefits of breakfast clubs such as reduction in absence of pupils and spending time with peers and she encouraged Members to consider the pupil premium reports of schools in their area that highlighted how significant the issue was.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Karen Watson reserved her right to speak.

The Mayor announced that a minor amendment to the motion had been received, proposed by Councillor Hannah Perkin and seconded by Councillor Charles Gibson, which had been circulated to Members and added to the website and is set out below:

“Swale Council welcomes the Chancellor providing £30m in the Government’s Budget for thousands of schools to set up breakfast clubs. By providing free breakfasts, schools will be ensuring all students start the day fed and ready to learn irrespective of their home situation. Families will additionally benefit from the peace of mind knowing that cost of living pressures will not ever result in their children starting the school day hungry and attendance will not be affected by something so solvable as hunger. Swale Council resolves to ask the Leader of the Council to write to both MPs representing Swale to welcome this new government funding for school breakfast clubs, to seek their support for all schools in Swale to be able to take advantage of it and to ask them to commit to working towards a future where no one is living in food poverty.”

The proposer and seconder of the motion accepted the minor amendment, and the substantive motion continued to be debated. Points made included:

- Support for the motion;
- was a laudable motion but the devil was in the detail and hoped schools did not end up funding it;
- there was a reason it was a pilot scheme;
- there was an impact on families that ate together and shared morning time;
- could those not attending breakfast club miss out?;
- would activities start early?;
- needed to know how it worked, what the outcomes were and whether it needed to be improved;
- writing to MPs now was premature;
- referred to the use of foodbanks and said that breakfast clubs were an extension of foodbanks;
- there had been an increase in schools using core funding to provide for unexpected extras;
- hoped the Government got it right and hoped it was successful;
- welcomed the motion and spoke positively;
- hunger affected concentration, and long term academic and personal development;
- all students, regardless of home circumstances deserved a fair start to the day;
- parents could choose not to use breakfast clubs if family time was impacted;
- it was crucial that £30million was not just symbolic, and the funding was distributed fairly;
- single issue announcements like this were not enough to address the systematic issues that left families struggling; and
- welcomed funding but urged continuance to address the root issues of pressures on schools.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Watson stressed the importance of education and the negative impact of not eating breakfast. She highlighted the benefits of breakfast clubs, including improved attendance and she encouraged primary schools to put themselves forward for the pilot.

On being put to the vote, Members voted in support of the motion.

Resolved:

(1) That the Leader of the Council writes to both MPs representing Swale to welcome this new government funding for school breakfast clubs, to seek their support for all schools in Swale to be able to take advantage of it and to ask them to commit to working towards a future where no one is living in food poverty.

459 **Urgent Motion - White Ribbon Day 2024**

The Mayor announced that an urgent motion concerning White Ribbon Day 2024, proposed by Councillor Tom Nundy and seconded by Councillor Watson was received outside of the deadline but he had used his discretion and allowed it to be debated. He went on to advise that a minor amendment had been received, proposed by Councillor Perkin and seconded by Councillor Charles Gibson, and this had been published on the website and circulated to Members. The proposer and seconder of the motion had accepted the amendment, and the substantive motion is set out below:

“Swale Borough Council Notes that White Ribbon Day 2024 was observed on 25th November and coincides with the United Nation’s Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Council acknowledges the significance of this day in raising awareness about men’s violence against women and girls, and the importance of prioritising Primary Prevention to stop violence from happening in the first place. The council acknowledges the work of the community safety team in Swale and the use of safer streets funding to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of women and girls in Sittingbourne and Sheppey Highstreets, particularly those who are victims of domestic abuse, and would welcome the opportunity to support similar targeted work in other areas of the Borough. Council also acknowledges the incredibly hard work of the voluntary sector in Swale, in particular SATEDA, Clarion and New Leaf who continue to provide high quality services to some of Swale’s most vulnerable women who have fled the most horrific circumstances.

The council recognises that the Autumn budget failed to recognise the need for funding to tackle Violence Against Women and Girls and expresses concerns that funding streams from the Police and Crime Commissioner are coming to an end. The council recognise the ongoing need to address and prevent violence against women and girls, and the need to engage men and boys throughout society. This includes in education, in workplaces, communities and online. The council acknowledges the critical role that we play in shaping and implementing policies that prioritise preventing violence against women and girls and helping to create a more equal society where all individuals, regardless of gender, can live freely without the fear of violence.

Council calls upon all Members to:

- *Include the Primary Prevention of violence against women and girls within all policy and strategies across all the council’s departments, alongside responses to*

gender based violence.

- *Continue to develop effective relationships with partner organisations that are developing and delivering primary prevention strategies involving and across all sectors of society, online and offline, including education, health care, the criminal justice system, transport industry, the third sector and private businesses*
- *Reaffirm the councils commitment to implement Chapter 3 of the Istanbul Convention, which focuses on prevention measures, especially focusing on engaging men and boys through education, workplaces and leisure and sport organisations.*
- *To call on the Government to increase investment and statutory sources of funding for specialist organisations working on Primary Prevention initiatives aimed at addressing the underlying factors contributing to violence against women. Council requests the following: The leader of the council, along with all group leaders, the mayor and chief executive write to central government requesting further funding to tackle VAWG in Swale.”*

In proposing the motion, Councillor Nundy spoke in support of the amendment but drew attention that much of the funding criteria had been Sittingbourne-led. He said that the Community Safety Unit had carried out some excellent work and should be thanked. Councillor Nundy said there were many wonderful charities in the borough that supported victims of domestic abuse and violence against women and girls, from the beginning of reporting incidents to the end of legal proceedings and beyond. He referred to the 37% increase in domestic abuse over the past five years, drew attention that two women a week were killed by their current or former partner and said that 32% of every suicide in the UK was related to domestic abuse.

Councillor Nundy said the Autumn budget had closed funding streams to domestic violence charities, with a predicted funding loss of £250k. He said that as Chair of the Community Safety Unit Partnership, he had already written to the borough's two MPs and to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, but in order to show a united front, a cross-party letter was needed to stress how important the funding was, and for funding streams to be re-opened for use. Finally, Councillor Nundy said the other parts of the motion were to reaffirm previous commitments to provide preventative strategies and he encouraged everyone to take the White Ribbon promise to protect women and girls.

The Mayor clarified that the word 'instruct' had been replaced with 'request' in the original motion.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Watson reserved her right to speak.

The Mayor opened up the debate to Members who made points including:

- Supported the motion which was a declaration of shared commitment that safety, respect and equality was a right;
- White Ribbon Day served as a critical reminder of violence against women;
- commended the work of the Community Safety team in their support of women and girls in Swale;
- referred to the lack of funding;
- men were also victims of domestic violence;
- spoke of the Council's role in prevention by integrating the prevention of violence in policies;

- this was not just about funding but about providing safety and dignity of women and girls;
- SBC played a crucial role and should integrate policies for the prevention of domestic violence;
- highlighted that coercive and controlling behaviour often led to domestic violence;
- spoke of the importance of victim support through the court process;
- reminded Members that White Ribbon was specifically about male violence, toxic masculinity, rape culture, coercive control and misogynistic comments to women and girls and that should be the focus;
- raised concern that there could still be a culture of men who were outwardly supportive of the White Ribbon campaign but were inwardly part of the problem; and
- thanked domestic abuse charities.

A Member gave an emotional speech on her personal experience of domestic violence. She applauded domestic charities and said that the good work carried out by them needed continued financial support. She said that prevention was better than cure and White Ribbon Day should be remembered every day.

In summing up, Councillor Nundy gave the history of White Ribbon Day and urged Members to support the motion.

On being put to the vote, Members voted in support.

Resolved:

Council calls upon all Members to:

- ***Include the Primary Prevention of violence against women and girls within all policy and strategies across all the council's departments, alongside responses to gender-based violence.***
- ***Continue to develop effective relationships with partner organisations that are developing and delivering primary prevention strategies involving and across all sectors of society, online and offline, including education, health care, the criminal justice system, transport industry, the third sector and private businesses***
- ***Reaffirm the Council's commitment to implement Chapter 3 of the Istanbul Convention, which focuses on prevention measures, especially focusing on engaging men and boys through education, workplaces and leisure and sport organisations.***
- ***To call on the Government to increase investment and statutory sources of funding for specialist organisations working on Primary Prevention initiatives aimed at addressing the underlying factors contributing to violence against women.***
- ***Council requests the following: The leader of the council, along with all group leaders, the mayor and chief executive write to central government requesting further funding to tackle VAWG in Swale.***

460 Urgent Motion - Letter to MP

The Mayor advised that a motion concerning sending a letter to Sittingbourne and Sheppey MP Kevin McKenna, proposed by Councillor Monique Bonney and seconded by Councillor Mike Baldock was received outside of the deadline but he had used his discretion and allowed it to be debated.

Councillor Bonney read out the motion, as set out on the Agenda, with a replacement of the word 'instructs' to 'requests' in the final paragraph. She advised that Councillor Baldock had circulated a copy of the newspaper article referred to in the motion that afternoon for Members to read. Councillor Bonney said that the article underlined that whilst Mr McKenna was newly-elected, he did not understand the system, economics or the area's local problems. She said he needed to get to know the area and she had requested to meet him but that had not yet materialised. Councillor Bonney said his comments did not correlate with Labour's plans for the devolution of power away from Central Government, were naïve and demonstrated a lack of understanding about the planning system.

Councillor Bonney questioned why £30million of tax-payers' money had been paid out on levelling-up Queenborough and Rushenden, and on infrastructure works yet little housing had been delivered as Government had not delivered on its own sites. Finally Councillor Bonney requested Members' support for the motion.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Baldock reserved his right to speak.

The Mayor announced that an amendment had been received, proposed by Councillor Perkin and seconded by Councillor Charles Gibson and this had been published on the Council's website and circulated to Members. He invited Councillor Perkin to propose the amendment.

Councillor Perkin explained that the amendment changed the intention of the motion and, with support from the seconder, she withdrew the amendment.

Members were invited to debate the motion and made points including:

- Was appalled by the article, considered it patronising and gave examples of inaccuracies within it;
- referred to the call-in of the Highsted Park planning applications and said it was not clear why the applications were called in or who had drawn attention to them;
- quoted from the MP's election pledge and said his comments on Highsted Park went against his pledge;
- although agreed with the sentiment of the motion, it did not get to the point of the issue;
- it was not the Council's business to character assassinate an MP;
- wanted to see a motion on the call-in and this was an assault on democracy;
- there was a lack of association with local Labour;
- the MP's comments were inaccurate;
- should not be attacking an individual;
- there should be a grown up debate;
- would support but considered the motion had lost sight of what motions should be about;

- the motion was disrespectful and expected better from Members;
- could not support;
- reflected on a Member not part of SBC;
- Members should be reminded of the need for inclusivity, respect and dignity and freedom of speech;
- housing was needed and the reason for challenge was an out of date Local Plan;
- motions were a vehicle for bringing about change and this motion would not achieve that;
- this was not the place for mudslinging;
- had support for what the motion was trying to do, but this was not the forum for what needed to be said and the MP was not at the meeting to respond;
- the MP had not acted against the process;
- needed to be respectful;
- the MP was not determining the application but expressing a view; and
- the MP was new and needed to listen to his community rather than developers.

Councillor Baldock said it was common to write to MPs with SBC's views and it was respectful to listen. He said many hours had been spent on the application by professional officers who had put forward many solid planning grounds for refusal, and he did not believe the MP had the knowledge to brush this aside. Councillor Baldock said it needed to be explained to the MP the reasons the application should not be supported and ask why he was not fighting for housing for local people. Finally, Councillor Baldock said the MP should be challenging why democracy was not being returned to local people and local Councillors to make good choices.

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

For: Baldock, Bonney, Bowen, Carnell, Chapman, Lehmann, MacDonald, Marchington, Nundy, C Palmer, R Palmer, Pollard, Speed, P Stephen, S Stephen Thompson and Tucker. Total equals 17.

Against: Brawn, Cavanagh, Cheeseman, S Clark, Eyre, C Gibson, T Gibson, Harrison, Last, B Martin, C Martin, Miller, Perkin, Watson, Wooster, Winckless and Wise. Total equals 17.

Abstain: Gould, Moore, Neal and Noe. Total equals 4.

As the vote was tied, the Mayor used his casting vote and voted against the motion. The mayor announced the motion had fallen.

461 **Audit Committee Annual Report - 2023/24**

The Chair of the Audit Committee, Councillor Simon Clark, introduced the report and in proposing the recommendation, thanked officers that attended Audit Committee including the Council's internal audit partners. He drew attention to the importance of the Committee and expressed concern around the increased frequency of apologies of Committee members, suggesting that if the commitment to attend could not be met, a permanent replacement be sought. The Vice-Chair, Councillor Derek Carnell, seconded the recommendation and supported the Chair's comments.

Other Members spoke to thank staff involved, and to urge all Members to attend.

Resolved:

(1) That the Audit Committee Annual Report for 2023/24 be noted.

462 Faversham Neighbourhood Plan Referendum

The Leader introduced the report and proposed the recommendation. The Chair of the Planning and Transportation Working Group, Councillor Gould, seconded the recommendation.

Members made comments including:

- Thanked the community who were involved in the plan;
- referred to the high response from residents on the Regulation 14 consultation and the helpful comments made;
- was a good example of how community collaboration could come together and benefit residents;
- had been a pleasure to be involved; and
- the people of Faversham had spoken, and the Council needed to listen.

A point of order was raised on whether those Members not in the room at the beginning of the debate could vote on the item but Constitution rule 3.1.19 (7) did not apply to items being discussed in Full Council.

Resolved:

(1) That the Faversham Neighbourhood Plan be made.

463 Local Plan Review - Local Plan Employment Sites

The Leader proposed the recommendation which was seconded by the Chair of the Planning and Transportation Working Group, Councillor Gould, who said that this and the following three items all interacted and were very complex. He explained it was a requirement of the Local Plan to find areas of employment land and he sought Members' agreement to note the potential employment sites available for allocation through the Local Plan, to be included in the consultation through the Regulation 18 Local Plan.

Members made points including:

- Sites SBC/17/094 and CFS50 in Faversham which were both mixed use and had been opposed by residents, with site CFS50 being undeliverable;
- raised concern of traffic, access and poor public transport links to sites CFS47 and REG3197 on the Isle of Sheppey but recognised that more employment opportunities were needed;
- hoped that the former Abbots site in Queenborough would be identified as an employment site, not housing; and
- had concerns over access to site SBC/17/008, north of Key Street roundabout, Sittingbourne.

Resolved:

(1) That the potential employment sites available for allocation through the Local Plan be noted.

(2) That the employment sites recommended by the Policy and Resources Committee on 11 September 2024 for consultation through the Regulation 18 Local Plan be agreed.

464 Vision, Objectives and Growth Options - deferred

The Mayor announced that following the Policy and Resources Committee held on 27 November 2024, this item had been deferred for further evidence gathering before a recommendation was made.

465 Local Development Scheme

The Leader proposed the recommendations which were seconded by the Chair of the Planning Transportation and Working Group, Councillor Gould. Councillor Gould said the Local Development Scheme was essentially the timetable for the Local Plan. He gave a background and reasons for changes to the timetable highlighting the recent Highsted Park application call-in impacting the timetable further. Councillor Gould said that as the Highsted Park Inquiry would take place from next Spring 2025, there was a new proposed timetable as set out in the Agenda pack for Regulation 18 to go forward in quarter four of 2025.

Members made comments including:

- Drew attention to letter received from Campaign to Protect Rural England that day stating a previous Secretary of State call-in took four years to determine;
- feared more speculative development without progressing the Local Plan which could preclude infrastructure;
- concerned with the impacts the Government's house building agenda would have without a Local Plan;
- urged not to pause the timetable again;
- the draft Local Plan was bad for Faversham and was certain Faversham residents would reject at Regulation 18; and
- delaying increased risks of development for all residents.

Resolved:

(1) That recommendation 1 of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 27 November 2024 be agreed.

(2) That the amended revised timetable for Regulation 18 draft Plan consultation commencing in quarter 4 of 2025 and a Regulation 19 pre-submission plan consultation commencing in quarter 2 of 2026 be agreed.

(3) That the accompanying Local Development Scheme that formally sets out the consultation timetable at Appendix III be agreed.

466 Late report - Housing Historic Delivery and Local Plan Review Housing Target

The Mayor advised that following recommendations made at the Policy and Resources Committee on 27 November 2024, he had accepted this late report.

The Leader proposed the recommendation which was seconded by the Chair of the Planning and Transportation Working Group, Councillor Gould.

As some Members had not viewed the late report that was sent via email and was published on the website, and on agreement with Members at the meeting, the item was deferred to the January 2025 Full Council meeting.

A Member raised the issue of late papers for meetings and the Chief Executive explained that on this occasion, there was a timing issue as the Policy and Resources Committee meeting had been held just a week before. The Mayor suggested more consideration of the Timetable of Meetings agreement at Annual Council.

467 Adjournment

There was an adjournment from 9.02 pm until 9.12 pm.

Mayor

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