
Policy and Resources Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 5 November 2025 from 7.00 pm - 8.41 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Lloyd Bowen (Vice-Chair), Tim Gibson (Chair), Alastair Gould (Substitute) (Substitute for Councillor Rich Lehmann), Angela Harrison, James Hunt, Elliott Jayes, Mark Last, Ben J Martin, Kieran Mishchuk, Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin (Substitute for Councillor Charles Gibson), Julien Speed, Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Andre Bowen, Steph Curtis, Natalie Earl, Lisa Fillery, Robin Harris, Charlotte Hudson, Joanne Johnson, Philippa Richardson, Claire Stanbury, Anna Stonor and Katherine Woodward.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Kirsty-Leigh Parker, Larissa Reed and Jo Thomas.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Mike Whiting.

APOLOGIES: Councillor Charles Gibson and Rich Lehmann.

426 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

427 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 September 2025 (Minute Nos. 284 – 301) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

428 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

429 **Matters arising**

There were no items raised for discussion.

430 **Recommendations from the Swale Joint Transportation Board meeting held on 6 October 2025**

Resolved:

(1) That Minute Nos. 375, 376, 377, 378 and 379 be approved.

431 **Forward Decisions Plan**

Resolved:

(1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.

432 Risk Management Update

The Head of Audit introduced the report which set-out the latest position on the Council's corporate risks, as well as an overview of operational risks, which were reviewed and updated regularly by officers.

The Chair invited Members to make comments and these included:

- The 2023-24 date on page 19 of the agenda pack need to be amended;
- concerned with the increase in homelessness and whether a housing Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) activation could have a potential impact on the Council;
- clarification sought as to what could be done to defend the Council from potential cyber-attacks;
- sought an update as to whether a Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Project Officer had been recruited; and
- the Council had been unable to deliver a five-year housing supply and considered the risk was higher than 'medium'.

In response, the Head of Audit confirmed that she would update the 2023-24 date. The Head of Housing & Communities explained that these were the Corporate Strategic Risks and the housing SWEP was an operational risk, she would review if it needed to be escalated to a corporate risk. The Head of Audit said that work was ongoing with the IT team to look at the cyber-attack risks, and this was being continually assessed and was very high on the agenda. She confirmed that both LGR posts had been filled. The Head of Place explained that it was not the risk of not having a five-year housing supply, it was the risks inherent of not having a five-year supply and what this exposed the Council to. She said this needed to be re-worded to make the assessment of the risk more accurate.

Further comments included:

- Referring to Funding Capital Spend on page 22 of the agenda pack, was disappointed that two of the controls planned (generation of capital receipts through selling assets, and work more closely with commercial tenants) were 0% completed;
- considered the figure for the introduction of the statement of common ground process for major development sites would be greater than 5%; and
- clarification sought on the Council not securing night shelter in terms of homelessness and where this was within the risk register.

In response, the Director of Resources explained that the first figure needed to be updated as at least one asset had been sold this year, and she said going forward, it was important to review how this target was measured. The second figure was part of an ongoing piece of work.

The Head of Place said the second point was in response to an appeal decision which challenged the way the Council had been calculating the five-year housing supply, and the figure was cautious and in reality was probably higher.

The Head of Housing and Communities explained that the lack of night shelters and

increased street homelessness were an emerging issue for this year. This was an operational risk, rather than a strategic risk and she would look into it further.

Councillor Mike Baldock proposed the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Lloyd Bowen.

Resolved:

(1) *The Council's corporate risks and overall risk profile, gaining assurance that key risks were being appropriately managed were considered and noted.*

433 Swale Good Causes Lottery Anti-Money Laundering Policy

The Strategic Policy and Communities Manager introduced the report which set-out the annually reviewed Swale Good Causes Lottery Anti-Money Laundering, Proceeds of Crime and Terrorist Financing Policy.

Councillor Baldock proposed the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Elliott Jayes.

Resolved:

(1) *That the reviewed Swale Good Causes Lottery Anti-Money Laundering, Proceeds of Crime and Terrorist Financing Policy for 2025-26 be approved.*

434 Swale Good Causes Lottery Operators Gambling Policy Review

The Strategic Policy and Communities Manager introduced the report which set-out the annually reviewed Swale Good Causes Lottery Operators licence requirements for management of the Good Causes Lottery.

The Chair invited Members to make comments and these included:

- Welcomed the document; and
- with reference to paragraph 15. 'Failure to comply' in the Policy considered there were some missing elements and that it should also include self-reporting and for people to come forward for training/updates etc. and the whistle blowing policy should also be attached, especially to the online version of the document to ensure the Council followed best practice.

The Strategic Policy and Communities Manager confirmed that she could make these amendments.

Councillor Dolley Wooster proposed the following amendment: That the Council's Whistleblowing Policy be added to the online version of the Policy, with delegation to officers for the precise wording. This was seconded by Councillor Bowen and on being put to the vote was agreed.

Councillor Wooster proposed the substantive recommendation and this was seconded by Councillor Baldock.

Resolved:

(1) *That the reviewed Swale Good Causes Lottery Operator Gambling Policy for*

2025-26 be approved.

(2) That the Council's Whistleblowing Policy be added to the online version of the Policy, and delegated to officers for the precise wording.

435 Draft Statement of Licensing Policy under the Licensing Act 2003

The Chair drew attention to the tabled paper which set out proposed changes to the recommendation.

Councillor Baldock proposed the revised recommendation and this was seconded by Councillor Ashley Wise.

Resolved:

(1) That the Licensing Committee decision to endorse the revised Statement of Licensing Policy under the Licensing Act 2003 be noted and the Policy be recommended to Council for adoption.

436 Local Plan Review - Statement of Community Involvement - Consultation Feedback

The Principal Planning Officer introduced the report which set out the results of the public consultation; the amendments requested by the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group and the responses to that; and the proposed changes to the draft Statement of Community Involvement (SCI).

The Chair invited Members to make comments and these included:

- With regard to the planning application process, considered Ward Members should be informed of pre-applications;
- suggested the wording at paragraph 7.23 of the document be amended;
- considered more needed to be done to address concerns with procedures; and
- it was unlikely that developers would want their pre-application information advertised.

In response, the Principal Planning Officer said that pre-application advice was confidential.

Councillor Baldock moved the following amendment: That the wording of paragraph 7.23 be amended to read: The Council **will**. This was seconded by Councillor Julien Speed and on being put to the vote was agreed.

Further comments included:

- Referring to point 18 on Appendix II, agreed that three minutes to talk at Planning Committee on major applications was not long enough and a balance was needed and that this was a matter for the Constitutional Working Group;
- suggested an amendment to paragraph 3.16 of the document; and
- a change needed to be made at paragraph 7.25iii as sometimes more than one parish was impacted.

Councillor Speed proposed the following amendments: That the word 'currently' be added before the word 'embedded' in paragraph 3.16, and that the following amendment be made to paragraph 7.25iii: of the parish(es). These were seconded by Councillor Bowen. A Member referred to the Constitution where it stated: Parish or Town Council representative of **any** parish affected by the application. Councillor Speed subsequently changed his amendment to reflect this: Town and Parish Councils representatives of the parish in which the application is situated and those who are affected by the proposal. Councillor Bowen seconded the amendment. Members agreed that the second highlighted text also needed to be amended to reflect the above.

Resolved:

(1) That the updated Statement of Community Involvement as set out in Appendix III of the report be recommended to Full Council for adoption, subject to the following changes:

- ***That the wording of paragraph 7.23 be amended to read: The Council will.***
- ***That the word 'currently' be added before the word 'embedded' in paragraph 3.16.***
- ***That paragraph 7.25iii: be amended to read: Town and Parish Councils representatives of the parish in which the application is situated and those who are affected by the application.***

437 Customer Experience Strategy

The Service Improvement & Project Manager introduced the report which set out the details of the full review of the Customer Access Strategy and the formulation of the new strategy.

The Chair invited Members to make comments and these included:

- Appeared to be some missing text in the last paragraph at the bottom of page 171;
- considered the Council's website needed improvements;
- welcomed the report, but there were too many photographs in it taking up space;
- considered lead officer titles be included, not names;
- suggested that residents' names did not need to be included when they reported an issue;
- the report was very extensive and welcomed the community involvement and the voices of residents had been listened to;
- surprised with the figure of 98% of people having access to a computer or phone;
- not everyone needed face-to-face connection and were happy to use their computer or phone to interact;
- referring to the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA), there was 'none' registered on the Relevance to decision column for Sex, but there had been a 66% response from women, and considered this should be reflected as 'medium';
- considered there needed to be a variety of ways that members of the public could report an issue;
- Customer Service Centre (CSC) staff were very knowledgeable;
- considered some of the actions on the Action Plan should already be actioned in any case;
- clarification sought on the dates within the Action Plan;

- amendment needed to the name of the councillor at the bottom of the Foreword section;
- considered the Action Plan to be quite vague and residents probably would want to see in more detail the planned improvements;
- there was no feedback from the Area Committees within the report;
- chatbots should be used to help direct residents;
- suggested a call-back option be offered;
- digital chats so that more people could be dealt with at a time;
- considered two years to achieve 'high priority' was too long;
- the CSC email address needed to be shared;
- residents should be able to book face-to-face appointments with the CSC;
- suggested the introduction of an app; and
- an annual report was important, especially to see how the actions had 'bedded in'.

Officers responded to some of the points raised. The Service Improvement & Project Officer confirmed that he would update the EIA to reflect women as 'medium'. The Director of Resources referring to the Action Plan said that any transformation work had a long lead in time and took up a lot of resource and could not be achieved quickly. The Service Improvement & Project Officer said that the Council was doing as much as it could within its resources. The Head of Housing & Community Services added that there was a programmed approach and some might be achieved earlier than the dates outlined, with some already being completed, and it was a work in progress.

Councillor Jayes moved the following motion: That there be an annual progress report on the Action Plan. This was seconded by Councillor Baldock and on being put to the vote the motion was agreed.

Further comments included:

- Referring to the responses document (Appendix IV), considered some of the sample responses captured the customer experience quite well;
- it was important to reduce the amount of follow-up to an issue by supplying more feedback/updates;
- it was important that online forms were user-friendly so they were used;
- the Council website was not necessarily poor, but the search engines often gave outdated information;
- referring to the LGR and the changing status of the Council, it was still important to have an up to date policy, for both the present and to carry forward; and
- suggested the customer responses be condensed to fewer pages.

Councillor Hannah Perkin proposed the recommendations and these were seconded by Councillor Baldock.

Resolved:

- (1) That a new Customer Experience Strategy be introduced in place of the former Customer Access Strategy to match service delivery with trends in customer demands and resources.***
- (2) That the proposed action plan be noted.***
- (3) That delegated authority be given to the Director of Resources and the***

Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods, to take relevant actions to facilitate the required transformation activities.

(4) That there be an annual progress report on the Action Plan.

438 Community Governance Review Terms of Reference

The Strategic Policy and Communities Manager introduced the report which set out the process by which the Council had drafted the proposed Terms of Reference for the Community Governance Review (CGR) for Swale.

Members spoke in support of the report and considered the Terms of Reference were fit for purpose.

Councillor Baldock proposed the recommendation and this was seconded by Councillor Wise.

Resolved:

(1) That the Terms of Reference for the Community Governance Review in Swale be agreed for adoption by Council.

439 Performance Monitoring Report - 2025/2026 Quarter 2

The Information Governance Manager and Data Protection Officer introduced the report which presented the quarterly performance management report for the second quarter of 2025/2026.

The Chair invited Members to make comments and these included:

- Missed bins were skewing the data, suggested new data be sought from when the contract had settled down;
- clarification sought on why housing benefit claims were showing as a red indicator;
- disappointed with Planning Enforcement on page 225 with its red indicator and concerned that this appeared to be a constant issue and considered it should be relatively easy to keep people informed and this often caused extra work; and
- clarification sought on the 'expected' sick days in January and March 2026.

In response, the Director of Resources said that the missed bin query would be sent to the team who owned the indicator. She highlighted the information on page 225 which explained the reason for the red indicators for housing benefit claims and she confirmed that the situation was improving, with September 2025 showing as green. The sickness data was last year's data which had been left in for comparison from last year.

Further comments included:

- Referring to Appendix II: Proposed Amendments to 2026/27 Performance Indicators, considered it very useful to know the percentage of refused planning applications;
- the refused planning applications indicator should be retained and suggested also adding the third one, so there could be two measures;

- suggested the housing/council tax benefit was split to achieve a more realistic result for both; and
- clarification sought on the figures of 0% and 100% in quarter 2, 2023/24 and quarter 4 2024/25.

The Director of Resources explained that the refused planning applications indicator was not bringing any value and the indicator was case specific, and refusals were not considered to be a good way to measure performance. Applications granted were sent to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The reporting could be changed so that it was the same as what was reported to the MHCLG so things were not done differently/twice. The Director of Resources said she would take away the suggestion that the housing/council tax benefits claims be split to the relevant streams. She added that working groups thoroughly reviewed all the performance indicators last year. The 0% and 100% figures would be looked into and more information would be added to the next report.

Councillor Baldock moved the following amendment: That the refused planning applications indicator be retained in its current form, whether it be presented in percentages granted or percentages refused and add a measure to record refusals contrary to officer advice. This was seconded by Councillor Jayes and on being put to the vote was agreed.

Councillor Baldock proposed the substantive recommendations and these were seconded by Councillor Bowen.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Performance Management Report at Appendix I of the report be noted.***
- (2) That the Percentage of Delegated Decisions by Officers be deleted.***
- (3) That the Refused Planning Applications indicator be retained in its current form whether it be presented in percentages granted or percentages refused.***
- (4) That refusals contrary to officer advice be recorded.***
- (5) That a Major Applications with Extension of Time indicator be added.***

Chair

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