

Leader's Statement to Full Council – Wednesday 3 April 2019

Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping 2019 – 2023 Consultation

I am pleased to advise members that Swale Borough Council has published a consultation on our Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping 2019 – 2023 strategy. This comprehensive, integrated strategy comes at a time where the country is in a national housing crisis with demand outstripping supply, making it difficult for some members of our communities to find and afford the right place to live.

This strategy which has been to the Policy Development and Review Committee and was written in consultation with our partners, will steer our resources and response to housing, homelessness and rough sleeping across the borough. We will (in partnership with housing providers, private landlords, developers and all the other public services) focus on the issues that will have the greatest impact for our residents, whilst continuing to lobby the government on key policy issues that we believe need to be addressed.

Swale has been set ambitious housing targets by Government intended to address the shortage in the market, not just across Swale but the wider South East. Our Local Plan – Bearing Fruits, sets out our planning policy approach to delivering our contribution to this national response. The current review being led by the Cabinet Member for Planning through the Local Plan Panel will seek to identify how this step change in housing numbers can be achieved and more importantly how the necessary infrastructure required to make it possible is identified and delivered.

Housing, however, is about a great deal more than bricks and mortar and this strategy looks to address the local issues and needs of the most vulnerable members of our communities.

The Cabinet Member responsible for housing, has published the consultation inviting residents and those with an interest in this important issue to provide their views, strengthening our strategy to ensure that we will tackle this issue at all levels, by:

- Preventing homelessness
- Reducing the need for emergency and temporary accommodation
- Delivering the right homes in the right places; and
- Improving conditions in existing homes.

This strategy and the detailed delivery plan is ambitious, and at its heart represents Swale Borough Council's commitment to ensure that our residents have the best opportunity to secure the right housing for them. We can't deliver this in isolation and we will be calling on our partners from Registered Providers, Kent County Council, other public organisations in Kent, Commissioned services and working with our excellent voluntary

organisations in the borough to deliver this plan and make a real difference for our residents.

In his recent budget the Cabinet Member for Finance made £100,000 available as a one-off payment to pump prime this strategy. The pump priming will be used to deliver best practice in the operation of the Housing Reduction Act, introduced last April and to tackle the disturbing increase in rough sleeping across the borough this winter. I am delighted to confirm that the Council has received a further £150,000 from the rough sleeping initiative to further support us in these challenges.

Housing Infrastructure Fund

After many months of work by officers from both Kent County Council and Swale Borough Council officers the £39m bid to the Housing Infrastructure Fund was submitted on the 22nd March. The bid for improvements to the Key Street and Grovehurst Junctions on the A249 will now be assessed alongside other shortlisted bids, in what will be a competitive process. The initial meetings with the assessment team from Homes England, MHCLG and the DfT are already booked in for April and we hope to hear the outcome of the bid in around three months' time.

Future High Street Fund

The 22nd March was also the submission deadline for Expressions of Interest (EOI) for the Future High Street Fund. This £675m fund aims to support capital investment for town centres to create substantial change. Local Authorities were invited to submit an EOI for one town centre in their areas for a first round of funding, aimed at helping areas develop their business plans for larger capital projects. Whilst it is anticipated that much of the money may well head North, based on the criteria set and advice from MHCLG provided through regional events, it was felt Sittingbourne would be the best option for what is the first of at least two funding rounds. With relatively short notice, the existing programmes of work around Sittingbourne Town Centre provided the clearest opportunity for the Council to present a case which incorporated potential projects of the type and scale that Government has indicated it is looking for. An announcement of those authorities that will move forward to phase 2, for development of the full business case, is anticipated in the summer.

Rural Policing update

Last week together with Cabinet and officer colleagues I had our quarterly meeting with Kent Police and the local National Farmers Union Branch to discuss policing in rural areas. As well as the rural Police Sergeant Darren Walshaw, it was also the first such meeting to be attended by our new Area Police Commander Chief Inspector Alan Rogers.

Since the rural team was doubled in number there have been some noticeable successes locally. A Section 18 PACE (Police and Criminal Evidence) search in Dunkirk following a theft in Ashford, during the search a second vehicle was discovered and seized having been used in crime due to its boot containing thousands of pounds worth of stolen

property. Further vehicle seizures took place in the Faversham area including one in Bysing Wood. Another vehicle seized in the Sittingbourne area as abandoned was found to have false plates which related to a vehicle of a totally different colour. This vehicle was also seized. Another vehicle stopped in relation to suspected poaching on the Isle of Sheppey was seized. The driver was found to have no insurance and only a provisional driving license.

There have been reports of sheep worrying in the Swale area and of some sheep who had to be euthanised after a vehicle had entered their field in the course of illegal hare coursing. There have been further cases of livestock worrying by dogs in Eastling where the dog's owner was convicted at court and at Eastchurch.

There was also the successful stopping of a vehicle carrying trade waste. The company name on the vehicle was false, a real company but one this vehicle was not linked to. The driver did not have a waste license and Swale Borough Council are taking action. A further vehicle involved in carrying waste was also seized when after it had been stopped it was found the driver was not the owner and did not have any insurance or a license to drive the vehicle concerned.

A French vehicle was stopped whilst carrying waste. Following checks it was ascertained the driver had a court case pending for driving with no insurance and still had no insurance, consequently the vehicle was seized and the driver was issued with a fixed penalty license for not having a waste carrier license.

Cllr Andrew Bowles
Council Leader