Economy and Property Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Thursday, 19 March 2026 from 7.00 pm - 8.19 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Monique Bonney (Chair), Ann Cavanagh, Alex Eyre, Mark Last (Substitute for Councillor Ashley Wise), Peter Marchington, Lee-Anne Moore, Chris Palmer, Richard Palmer, Carrie Pollard, Ashley Shiel (Substitute for Councillor Hayden Brawn), Sarah Stephen, Terry Thompson and Mark Tucker.

PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Simon Clark.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Deborah Hardy, Joanne Johnson and Philippa Richardson.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): David Johnson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Dolley Wooster.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Hayden Brawn, Shelley Cheesman, Simon Clark and Ashley Wise.

823 **Change to Committee Membership**

Councillor Richard Palmer confirmed that the Reform UK Group vacancy would be taken up by Councillor Chris Palmer at this meeting.

824 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

825 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting held on 14 January 2026 (Minute Nos. 601 – 607) and the Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 January 2026 (Minute Nos. 674 – 685) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as correct records.

826 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Richard Palmer declared a disclosable non-pecuniary interest in respect of item 8 Swale House – Security and Safety as he worked for a company that provided first aid training.

Councillor Chris Palmer declared a disclosable non-pecuniary interest in respect of item 8 Swale House – Security and Safety as she worked for a company that provided first aid training.

827 **Matters Arising**

The Chair explained that the Barton’s Point Member Working Group had recently met. She invited Councillor Dolley Wooster to give an update. Councillor Wooster explained that the group had discussed various issues, including drainage at the site. Further progress had been made with some innovative ideas and she referred to the Chair’s Briefing within the minutes of the Environmental Services and Climate Change

Committee meeting held on 17 March 2026. She highlighted that the group had met with officers to look at what was possible in terms of the concession contract, plus other contracts that might be offered at Barton's Point to support the overall goal of achieving a Green Flag award and to cement the site's changing identity to a coastal park for the benefit of the local community.

828 **Chairs Briefing**

The Chair invited the Buildings Operation and Maintenance Manager to give an update on the solar panels on the roof of Swale House. The Buildings Operation and Maintenance Manager explained that the installation was now complete and the system was up and running. There were no figures at the moment, but the Chair requested that figures be submitted to the Committee in due course.

829 **Forward Decisions Plan**

The Chair advised that there were some items to add to the Forward Decisions Plan. These were Section 106 Agreements; Queenborough Guildhall asset transfer; and the Newington Village Hall Car Park and associated land.

The Head of Place gave an update and reminded Members that the Committee had agreed, at the meeting held in April 2025, to the asset transfer of the Guildhall to Queenborough Town Council, to be completed within one year. She explained that it was imminently ready to be completed, but it would not be within the year timeframe, and she confirmed it would be completed between three to six months.

Resolved:

(1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.

830 **Swale House - Security and Safety**

The Head of Place introduced the report which summarised the measures put in place at Swale House regarding the safety and security of the building and its users.

The Chair invited Members to make comments and points raised included:

- Referring to paragraph 2.6 in the report, clarification sought on where the walkway was;
- suggested some form of fencing be put up to secure the undercroft car park;
- there should be some investment in the undercroft for security of staff and Members and that it should only be accessible to visitors during working hours or when there were evening meetings;
- referring to paragraph 2.13 in the report, it should be made explicit that access for visitors was through the front entrance of Swale House, not the rear entrance;
- noticed that there was currently a homeless person directly outside the rear entrance of the building, and suggested there should be security in place in that situation;
- it was important to consider people who were in the building by themselves, particularly out of hours and the weekend;
- referring to previous incidents within the undercroft, these could not be allowed to

be repeated, and measures needed to be put in place to make the area more secure and safe;

- suggested costings be sought on gates being installed on the slope to the undercroft, for vehicle and pedestrian access;
- clarification sought on any crossover with the Facilities Officers' role and a security role;
- it was important that any tenants within Swale House felt safe;
- concerned with the use of Heras fencing as it was not secure enough;
- suggested an automated security system be used, which worked via a person's phone;
- sensor flood lighting was a good deterrent;
- permanent secured fencing needed to be installed;
- welcomed the report, but more information was needed on the cost of security measures;
- an automated, fob-controlled gate was needed;
- there was really good CCTV in operation at Swale House and staff and Members could call the security team if needed;
- gates should not be required;
- suggested rough sleepers would move to the other side of the fence if one was erected;
- the Facilities Officers were good at 'standing guard' when staff and Members left the building, but that was not their role, maybe this should be added to their role;
- more security guards were needed; and
- suggested CCTV was not the answer.

The Buildings Operation and Maintenance Manager responded to some of the points raised: the walkway referred to was the access route from the car park to the side of the building; security was not part of the Facilities Officers role; and the CCTV was not monitored all the time during office hours, but was recorded.

The Head of Place responded to some of the points raised: the report set out some of the security options; temporary Heras fencing was a possibility, with a more permanent solution being considered with associated costs and considerations, such as access points for personnel and management of deliveries; there were also reputational concerns with regard to problem shunting; the relevant staff were engaging with the rough sleeper and advising on their options; lone working risk assessments were carried out and were reviewed periodically; in terms of protecting staff and Members going forward, staff were working closely with the Police and local off licences on who they provided alcohol to, plus enforcement of the Public Space Protection Order which limited where people were allowed to drink in public spaces; flood lighting was left on and the public WiFi was cut off; the Facilities Officers kept an eye on CCTV hotspots, and wider CCTV could be explored in the undercroft; and the Facilities Officers had no jurisdiction to challenge people's ID. A lot of experience had been gained from the incident that had occurred last year.

Councillor Mark Last moved the following proposal: That officers looked into the options to secure the Swale House undercroft and the footprint of the building, including cost implications, to enable Members to recommend the best way forward at the next meeting of the Committee. This was seconded by the Chair. On being put to the vote the proposal was agreed.

The Chair proposed the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Richard Palmer.

Recommended:

(1) That the report and comments made be noted.
(2) That officers looked into the options to secure the Swale House undercroft and the footprint of the building, including cost implications to enable Members to recommend the best way forward at the next meeting of the Committee.

831 **Swale House security - contract award**

The Buildings Operation and Maintenance Manager introduced the report which summarised the procurement process and its results and sought Committee approval of the recommended supplier/contractor.

The Chair invited Members to make comments and points raised included:

- Referring to paragraph 2.3 in the report, clarification sought on the tender process;
- what would happen to the contract in terms of the changes to the Council as a result of the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)?;
- clarification sought on an ‘in-house’ option;
- suggested that as soon as an issue was identified in the Council Chamber that the person(s) be ejected straight away before the issue escalated; and
- a panic button should be installed for the Chair to use.

The Buildings Operation and Maintenance Manager responded: all the tenders were evaluated separately and then the scores were moderated together; three months’ notice was needed to end the contract, in terms of LGR; the in house option was not taken due to the need for resilience as set out in paragraph 4.2 of the report; and she confirmed that funds for the service had been budgeted for in the Council’s budget.

The Head of Place said that the suggestion of installing a panic button could be looked into. She explained that the Facilities Officers knew who was in the building and they watched the meetings online as well and added that an evacuation process had been worked on to evacuate staff and Members from the Council Chamber.

The Chair proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Terry Thompson.

Recommended:

(1) That the appointment of Company A as supplier for Security Services at Swale House from 1 May 2026 for a period of three years with an option to extend by one year at a value of £114,903.14+VAT be approved.

(2) That delegated authority be given to the Head of Place to award to the next suitable alternative tenderer in the event that a contract cannot be executed with the highest scoring tenderer.

832 **Land at Great East Hall**

The Interim Property Services Consultant introduced the report which recapped the decision taken by the then Regeneration and Property Committee in March 2023, to secure the transfer of land at Great East Hall, Sittingbourne to the Council, with a small proportion of the land intended to support the development of a community shop.

The Chair proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Carrie Pollard.

The two Ward Members were invited to speak and points raised included:

- Had spoken to local residents and they were really keen for a café to be provided on the site;
- residents were frustrated with the delays;
- agreed that residents should have their say on what was done with the site; and
- suggested the timeline be reduced to 12 months, instead of 18 months.

The Interim Property Services Consultant responded and explained that the transaction was complicated, especially in terms of the Section 106 variation, with very little leverage and added that progress had been made in the last few months.

Councillor Mark Last moved the following amendment: That the extension of time be reduced to 12 months, so to the end of the next financial year, March 2027. This was seconded by Councillor Peter Marchington.

Members spoke of their frustration with the lack of progress in securing the site's transfer to the Council. There was some discussion on the Committee receiving a verbal update in six months' time.

The proposer and seconder of the amendment added 'in consultation with the Chair and the two Ward Members', plus a requirement for a verbal update in six months' time. On being put to the vote, the amendment was agreed.

Recommended:

(1) That the Economy and Property Committee notes the ongoing delays in completing the land transfer and agree in principle to a further extension of up to 12 months (the end of the next financial year, March 2027) to resolve outstanding title, Section 106 variation and related matters, with final approval delegated to the Head of Place, in consultation with the Chair and two Ward Members, subject to satisfactory terms and that a verbal update be given to the Committee in six months' time.

(2) That upon completion of the transfer and receipt of the associated commuted sum, the community be engaged to consider future uses of the land that would meet community needs, recognising that the original commitment to reserving a parcel for a community shop may not align with local priorities or funding realities at the point of transfer.

Chair

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