Policy and Resources Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 26 November 2025 from 7.00 pm - 9.33 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Monique Bonney (Substitute for Councillor Mike Baldock), Tim Gibson (Chair), Alastair Gould, James Hunt, Elliott Jayes, Mark Last, Ben J Martin, Lee-Anne Moore (Substitute for Councillor Lloyd Bowen), Chris Palmer (Substitute for Councillor Kieran Mishchuk), Richard Palmer, Julien Speed, Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster.

PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Lloyd Bowen.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Martyn Cassell, Janet Dart, Lisa Fillery, Joanne Johnson, Kellie MacKenzie and Claire Stanbury.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Charlotte Hudson, Philip Sutcliffe and Emma Wiggins.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Peter Marchington, Tom Nundy and Mike Whiting.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Mike Baldock, Lloyd Bowen and Kieran Mishchuk.

498 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

499 **Minutes**

This item was withdrawn from the agenda as the minutes had not been published.

500 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Elliott Jayes declared a disclosable Non-Pecuniary interest in respect of item 9 (Budget 2026-27 and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Forecasts), as he was a Council appointed Trustee of the Citizens Advice Bureau.

501 **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

502 **Recommendations from the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group held on 4 November 2025 - to-follow**

This item was withdrawn from the Agenda, as the minutes had not been published.

503 **Forward Decisions Plan**

Resolved:

(1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.

504 **Financial Management Report – Mid Year 2025/26**

The Head of Finance & Procurement introduced the Financial Management Report – Mid Year 2025/26 as set out in the agenda papers.

In response from a question from a Member, the Head of Finance & Procurement confirmed that the £343,000 projection for the Highsted Park Planning Inquiry, as set out on Appendix I of the report, may have changed slightly but officers were happy with the prediction at the point of publishing the report.

A Member referred to the £30,000 overspend on the rough sleeper initiative. He said that the Government always seemed to be 'lagging-behind' with funding allocations compared to the situation on the ground. He asked that the Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee, in consultation with the Chair of the Housing, Health and Communities Committee, write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government about the steps the Council has taken to tackle rough sleeping but that additional grant funding was needed. The Chair agreed to action this.

Resolved:

(1) That the projected revenue position, which was balanced through a reduction of £26k in the amount to be taken from reserves.
(2) That the capital expenditure of £6.551m against the budget as detailed in Table 2 and Appendix II be noted.

505 **Draft Budget 2026/27**

The Director of Resources introduced the Budget 2026/27 and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Forecasts report as set out in the agenda papers.

The Chair invited comments from Members.

In response to a question from a Member, the Director of Resources reported that consultants had provided a range of assumptions on the Council's Business Rate position, which was £12.1m. The worst case scenario being that the Council may lose £7m, which may or may not be met by government grants.

A visiting Member referred to the Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee (ES&CC) decision at their meeting on 12 November 2025, when the Council imposed parking charges to car parks at: Park Road, Queenborough and the Library car park, Queenborough and Halfway Road, Halfway were unacceptable and the decision should be reversed and he considered it would be: detrimental to small businesses; and increase parking congestion. The Member referred to a petition with 3,622 signatures against the proposals which had been handed in at that meeting. He asked that Members referred the item back to the ES&CC Committee to reconsider.

Members considered the comments of the visiting member, and points raised included:

- Concerned that local residents had not been consulted on the proposed parking charges;
- it did not make sense to remove the Isle of Sheppey car parks from the consultation;
- some of the car parks proposed for charging were not currently up to standard,

and wondered how much it would cost the Council to make the necessary improvements;

- concerned about the impact imposing parking charges would have on local businesses;
- it would be unfair for some areas to pay for parking whilst others did not;
- the ES&CC Committee had helped to reduce the budget deficit with this proposal, and it was important that it remained within the consultation to gauge public opinion;
- had understood that the decision by the ES&CC Committee had been about 'equalisation', and Members had been appointed to sit on that Committee to represent all the residents of Swale;
- the Members of the ES&CC Committee had worked hard and listened to all the evidence before making their decision; and
- Members had a duty to do what was best for the whole of Swale.

Councillor Richard Palmer proposed the following amendment to recommendation (3): That the three car parks within the ward of Queenborough and Halfway be removed from the draft budget proposals for 2026/27. This was seconded by Councillor Elliott Jayes.

Before being put to the vote, the Chief Executive explained that it was not within the remit of the Policy and Resources Committee to reverse the decision of the ES&CC. She reminded Members that they were not being asked to agree the budget, but to approve the draft budget for consultation. Members could not revisit a service committee decision within six months of it being agreed.

The Head of Environment and Leisure reported that the formal off-street parking order consultation would start week commencing 1 December 2025, and car park locations being excluded was not part of the consultation but Policy but whether there were any areas the Committee may want to revisit such as timings etc. The Head of Environment and Leisure clarified that the petition handed in at the ES&CC meeting had been forwarded to Parking Services for inclusion within the off-street parking order consultation.

Following a short adjournment, discussion ensued about the processes for overturning the decision of the Environmental and Climate Change Committee and the best forum in which to do that. In light of this, the proposer and seconder agreed to withdraw their amendment.

The following further points were made:

- Thanked officers and Members of the Budget Working Group for the 'reasonable' budget;
- the cross-party budget working group had been a success and hoped it would continue;
- referred to Appendix III (Budget Change Summary 2026/27) and 'Non achievement of savings of £100,000, and clarified whether that was the Grounds Maintenance Contract? If so, suggested it could be reduced as there were areas across Swale where grass did not need to be cut;
- referred to Appendix III, Postage cost increases, the Council should be reducing the amount of post sent;

- needed to convey to the Lower Medway Internal Drainage Board SBC's concerns regarding their increase in costs;
- concerned that some of the licensing fees had not been increased in 23 years and the Council were subsidising this for the Government;
- sought clarification on the fixed evening fee for parking at The Swallows Leisure Centre, Sittingbourne;
- Beach Hut Charges on page 67 of Appendix V, 'Locations now at Minster Leas and Leysdown' the word 'now' should be removed;
- would like to see the memorial bench scheme extended;
- the Council needed to provide more slots for the collection of bulky waste before increasing the charge; and
- sought further clarification on the bin repair charge.

Following a request from a Member, the Chair agreed to write to the relevant government minster regarding increasing licensing fees.

In response to questions raised, the Head of Environment and Leisure stated that with regard to the Grounds Maintenance Contract it was a pre-agreed savings target of £175,000 and Members had originally agreed there would not be any extensions to the contract or any savings but then when officers were asked to renegotiate the contract again there had been major changes to employment legislation which the Council had to pay in order to get the extension agreed. The Head of Environment and Leisure explained there were lots of variables within the Grounds Maintenance Contract and how the specification and regimes would change had been agreed through the service committee process. With regard to grass cutting, he advised there were areas they would look to cut less, however they had also taken on responsibility for extra pieces of land such as Stones Farm, Bapchild. The Head of Environment and Leisure stated that parking fees, would be £5.70 if you arrived at 5.55 pm and paid for the hourly rates and the evening charge. The process for bin repair had not been agreed yet, but remained on the work programme for officers.

Councillor Ashley Wise proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Ben J Martin.

Resolved:

(1) That the draft 2026/27 revenue and capital budget forecasts be noted.
(2) That the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) projections be noted.
(3) That the proposals for the fees and charges increases be noted.
(4) That the proposed budget consultation be approved.
(5) That the cessation of the Kent Business Rates Pool for 2026/27 be noted.

506 **Area Committees Review**

The Policy & Engagement Officer introduced the Area Committees Review report as set out in the agenda papers.

The Chief Executive reported that the Policy & Engagement Officer and Members of the working group had worked hard to produce the consultation and report. She said it was disappointing to note that there had been such a poor response from Members to the consultation. She stated that if Members wanted the Area Committees to be a success, it was incumbent on Members to engage.

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

- Welcomed the report and asked that, 'Chair's Update' be added as an agenda item;
- supported using the Committee Room, Swale House as a permanent venue for the Sittingbourne and the Western Area Committee meeting as moving venues could be disruptive;
- it was not about the venue but what was on the agenda;
- welcomed the name change as it made it clearer for local residents;
- it was incumbent on borough councillors to attend the meetings;
- the meetings could undertake collaborative working with local businesses etc;
- there may be less attendance at the Western Committee if Committee Room, Swale House, was the venue;
- some of the village halls did not have very good wifi;
- welcomed the removal of the December round of meetings;
- fully supported proposal 3.6;
- could residents be invited to add potential agenda items?;
- it made sense to hold the Sittingbourne and the Western Area Committees at the same venue;
- important to share the information/minutes of the meetings with local Parish and Town Councils; and
- thanked officers and Members for their hard work on the report.

Councillor Wise proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Martin.

Resolved:

(1) That the recommendations proposed by the Area Committees Review Member Working Group be agreed.
(2) That recommendation 3.9 on voting arrangements be referred to the Constitution Working Group.

Recommendation to Council:

(1) That the recommendations proposed by the Area Committees Review Member Working Group be agreed.

507 South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership - Draft Business Plan 2026 - 2029

The Head of Place introduced the draft South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership (STGBC) Business Plan 2026 – 2029 report as set out in the agenda papers.

The Chair invited comments from Members, and these included:

- Fully supported the report and business plan 2026 – 2029;
- aware there would be an increase, but the service provided by the STGBC was

well worth it; and

- the STGBC should promote their services better, as many residents were not aware of them.

In response to questions from a Member, the Chair reported that he was aware that significant incomes would be generated by the STGBC in the near future. He clarified that there had been major issues flagged by local residents which had resulted in a lot more enforcement in one borough compared to others.

Councillor Angela Harrison proposed the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Richard Palmer.

Resolved:

(1) That the draft South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership Business Plan 2026 – 2029 be noted.

508 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

There was no need to pass this resolution as the meeting did not go into confidential session.

509 **Exempt Appendix I - South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership Business Plan 2026 - 2029**

This item was not discussed.

510 **Adjournment of Meeting**

The meeting was adjourned from 8.00 pm until 8.15 pm.

Chair

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