POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 4 February 2026 from 7.00 pm - 10.00 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Lloyd Bowen (Vice-Chair), Charles Gibson, Tim Gibson (Chair), Alastair Gould, Angela Harrison, Elliott Jayes, Mark Last, Ben J Martin, Kieran Mishchuk, Lee-Anne Moore, Richard Palmer, Julien Speed, Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Lisa Fillery, Robin Harris, Joanne Johnson, Kieren Mansfield, Tim Neal, Baljinder Sandher and Claire Stanbury.

APOLOGY: Councillor James Hunt.

698 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

699 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meetings held on 5 November 2025 (Minute Nos. 426 – 439), the Extraordinary Meeting held on 18 November 2025 (Minute Nos. 463 – 465), the Meeting held on 26 November 2025 (Minute Nos. 498 - 510) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

700 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No interests were declared.

701 MATTERS ARISING

There were no items raised for discussion.

702 FORWARD DECISIONS PLAN

Resolved:

(1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted

703 RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE SWALE JOINT TRANSPORTATION BOARD MEETING HELD ON 8 DECEMBER 2025

Resolved:

(1) That Minute No. 549 from the Swale Joint Transportation Board meeting be approved.

704 2026/27 BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN AND CAPITAL STRATEGY

The Section 151 Officer introduced the report and highlighted the following:

- The report set out the final 2026/27 revenue budget, developed through a cross-party working group, with all political groups invited to participate, and based on work undertaken since June.
- The budget updated the draft proposals reported in November to reflect the outcomes of the Fair Funding Review and the Business Rates Reset.
- The funding position for 2026/27 was broadly neutral, with the loss of business rates growth largely offset by an increase in Revenue Support Grant.
- Changes to the Revenue Support Grant incorporated several service-specific grants and new burdens from 2026/27 onwards, and it was confirmed that 2025/26 was the final year of the New Homes Bonus.
- Transitional protection for the loss of business rates growth would end, resulting in a reduction of over £700,000 in 2027/28 and 2028/29, alongside a reduction in homelessness funding in those years.
- These issues had been raised with MHCLG and the LGA, and while the final settlement was awaited, no material changes were anticipated.
- The updated budget position included a planned use of £459,000 from reserves.
- The Section 25 report confirmed that the budget estimates and reserve balances were considered robust, while noting that longer-term funding gaps would require permanent solutions.
- The report also covered the capital programme, fees and charges, use of reserves, collection fund balances, council tax base, the MRP statement, and parish council precepts.

The Chair then invited comments from members and these included:

- Concern was raised regarding the reduction in homelessness funding, with Members questioning why funding levels would decrease despite ongoing and increasing homelessness pressures.
- Objection was expressed to the proposed introduction of parking charges at four currently free car parks on the Isle of Sheppey, with Members requesting that these charges be removed or postponed.
- It was argued that the introduction of charges could have a negative impact on town centres, local businesses, charities and service users, potentially discouraging footfall and increasing on-street parking pressures.
- Members suggested that the estimated income from the charges would be broadly offset by the costs of implementation in the first year, resulting in no net financial benefit.
- Concerns were raised about the potential loss of business rates income, impacts on local employment, and longer-term damage to community facilities.
- It was proposed that postponing the charges for 12 months would be budget neutral, allow time to assess impacts, and enable further consideration of asset transfers to town and parish councils, particularly in the context of local government reorganisation.
- Members also questioned whether alternative approaches, including the use of reserves, could be explored to address the budget position.

In response, the officer advised that:

- The change to homelessness funding arose from a new funding formula under the Fair Funding Review, which had resulted in anomalies affecting a small number of councils, including Swale.
- This issue had been raised with MHCLG and the LGA, and representations had been made to Government, with the matter under review.
- Officers clarified that the Council was not proposing to give away reserves, and that their use was being managed prudently within the approved financial framework.

The following amendment was proposed by Councillor Palmer and seconded by Councillor Baldock:

That the proposed introduction of parking charges at the four car parks on the Isle of Sheppey which are currently free of charge be removed from the 2026/27 revenue budget and Medium-Term Financial Strategy.

The Chair invited contributions from Members. These included:

- Introducing charges could negatively impact local businesses, town centres and service users, particularly in areas with fewer transport alternatives.
- The first-year costs of installing parking machines would broadly offset any income generated, resulting in little or no financial benefit.
- There was insufficient evidence to demonstrate that the charges would be effective or proportionate.
- Postponing or removing the charges would allow time to explore alternative options, including potential asset transfers to town or parish councils, and reduce risks ahead of local government reorganisation.
- The proposal risked disproportionately affecting poorer communities and could reduce footfall, employment and business rate income.
- The decision to introduce charges had already been taken by the appropriate committee following extensive consideration.
- The proposal was necessary to ensure equity and consistency across the borough, as other car parks already charged for parking.
- Continuing to revisit the issue would delay implementation of agreed decisions and was not considered an effective use of Council time.
- The charges aligned with wider Council policies, including climate and transport objectives.
- Capital and revenue funding operated separately, and previous parking initiatives had exceeded initial income forecasts.

Members requested a recorded vote on this amendment.

For: Councillors Mike Baldock, Lee-Anne Moore, Elliot Jayes, Kieran Mishchuk, Richard Palmer, Julien Speed,

Against: Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Charles Gibson, Tim Gibson, Alistair Gould, Angela Harrison, Mark Last, Ben J Martin, Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster

The amendment was lost.

On returning to the substantive motion, the Chair invited further feedback from members. Comments included:

- It was emphasised that the Council operated as a hung authority, with budget development undertaken through cross-party committees and a cross-party budget working group, and that Members had been given opportunities to participate throughout the process.
- Some Members expressed concern that consultation feedback was being selectively relied upon, noting that decisions must ultimately reflect the wider interests of the borough, not solely consultation outcomes.
- Reference was made to best value legislation, with Members noting that Council assets could not be transferred without first understanding their financial value.
- It was highlighted that many areas of the borough, including Sheerness, already had no free car parks, and that charging had previously been necessary to enable effective enforcement and management of certain sites.
- Members queried a range of specific budget lines, including:
    - Capital financing for leisure centre investments.
    - Legacy budget adjustments correcting historical inaccuracies.
    - Estimated costs for the public toilet contract.
    - Chamber meeting security, with concern expressed about proportionality.
    - Provision for major planning appeals.
    - Proposed additional posts, including communications and coastal erosion roles.
- Concern was raised about the clarity of fees and charges, including:
    - The absence of named car parks in the fees and charges schedule.
    - Whether certain charges (e.g. use of council land, travelling fairs) were daily fees.
    - The presentation of statutorily set gambling and bingo licence fees.
    - The description of Members' pension costs, with a request for clearer wording.
- Members commented on proposed increases to bulky waste charges, linking this to operational performance and fly-tipping risks.
- Reference was made to public opposition to certain parking proposals, including:
    - Evening parking charges and their start time, particularly in Faversham.
    - Concerns that parking charges could affect access to community facilities, town centres and local services, especially on the Isle of Sheppey.
- Members queried whether parish and town councils had been approached regarding potential asset transfers or contributions.
- Wider concerns were raised about making decisions that might later prove unnecessary if budget provisions were not ultimately required.
- Some Members expressed overall discomfort with aspects of the budget, while others acknowledged that no budget would satisfy all areas equally, and that difficult compromises were unavoidable.

In response to Members' comments and questions, officers advised that:

- Capital financing for leisure centres related to previously approved capital investment, covering essential works such as plant, boilers and filtration systems.
- Legacy budget adjustments reflected corrections to historic budget inaccuracies, including income targets and under-budgeted items.
- The toilet contract provision was based on estimated cost increases, including changes in legislation, to ensure sufficient budget for procurement.
- Security costs were included to reflect risk assessments, recognising that requirements may vary over time.
- Provision for planning appeals was included as a prudent contingency, allowing appeals to be funded without returning to committee.
- Additional posts, including coastal erosion roles, were provisions linked to forthcoming reports, intended to ensure decisions could be implemented if approved.
- Officers stressed that budget setting required prudent forecasting, and that including contingencies did not imply that all funding would be spent.
- Parish precept information was included within the papers, and officers confirmed figures could be located within the documentation.
- Fees and charges, including car park details, were published through agreed policies and on the Council's website, following decisions by the relevant service committees.
- Clarification was provided that certain charges (e.g. use of council land) could be reviewed for clarity where wording might cause ambiguity.
- Officers confirmed that Members' pension costs reflected the proposed option for Members to join the scheme.
- Professional services budgets covered a range of costs, including consultants and temporary staff.
- Officers confirmed that Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) funding:
    - Was restricted to waste and recycling purposes.
    - Had a guaranteed minimum allocation, with additional funding uncertain.
    - Should be budgeted cautiously to avoid reliance on unconfirmed income.
- Officers advised that CCTV services were intended to support businesses and coordination, not to replace police responsibilities.
- It was reiterated that overall the budget had been prepared to be robust, balanced and deliverable, while allowing flexibility for future decisions.

Resolved:

That Policy & Resources Recommends to Council:

(1) To approve the Administration's 2026/27 revenue budget proposals.
(2) To approve the proposed Council Tax Band D increase for 2026/27 to £212.76.
(3) To approve the Medium Term Financial Plan.
(4) To approve the Capital Strategy.
(5) To approve the capital programme proposals.
(6) To note the additional amount of Council Tax for Parish Precepts.
(7) To endorse the Statement (Appendix III) provided by the Director of Resources.

(8) To approve the minimum revenue provision statement.
(9) To delegate authority to the Director of Resources to adjust charge out rates within fees and charges as appropriate, where they are based on costs incurred and where legislation changes are made to centrally set charges in year
(10) To approve the use of reserves statement as detailed in appendix VII as to ensure reserves are valid and support the assumptions in the MTFS

705 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2026/27

The Head of Finance and Procurement introduced the report and advised that:

- The report set out the Treasury Management Strategy for the forthcoming year, which required recommendation to Full Council.
- The Strategy had already been considered by the Audit Committee, which had approved its referral to this Committee.
- The policy is reviewed annually, with the current context reflecting slower economic growth, continued global uncertainty and gradually falling interest rates.
- The Strategy outlined how the Council would manage cash balances, including borrowing where required and investing surplus cash securely.
- Affordability of borrowing and the security of investments would remain key priorities.
- It was proposed to increase the limit for investments in money market funds from £3 million to £4 million to support effective short-term cash management.
- Money market funds were described as a safe and efficient means of managing surplus cash, with funds spread to manage risk.
- No other changes were proposed to the existing Treasury Management Strategy.
- The report also set out the prudential and treasury indicators for the year ahead, as detailed in Appendix One.

Councillor Baldock proposed the recommendation and was seconded by Councillor Harrison.

Resolved:
(1) That Policy and Resources recommends Full Council approve the Treasury Management Strategy 2026/27 and the Prudential and Treasury Management Indicators

706 PAY POLICY STATEMENT

The Head of HR Shared Services introduced the report and advised that:

- Under the Localism Act 2011, the Council is required to review and approve its Pay Policy Statement annually.
- The Statement must be approved by the relevant Committee and Full Council before being published on the Council's website.
- The report did not propose any decisions other than the approval of the updated Pay Policy Statement.
- The format of the Statement remains unchanged from previous years.

Key updates included:

- Updated pay figures for 2025/26 (Section 3.6).
- Updated information on Chief Executive remuneration (Section 4).
- Updated trade union facility time data.
- Appendix 1G set out details of senior officer salaries, with final figures to be updated at the end of March prior to publication.
- The report also included the gender and ethnicity pay gap information (Appendix 1H), which the Council is legally required to publish on both the Council and Government websites.

The Chair invited comments from members. These included:

- A preference was expressed for the previous layout of the Pay Policy Statement, which presented information in remuneration bands rather than departmental groupings, as it was considered clearer and more accessible for the public.
- Clarification was sought regarding the Chief Executive and Director appraisal process, with a request to ensure transparency around Member involvement.
- All group leaders were invited to feed into the Chief Executive appraisal process, with the formal appraisal arrangements set out clearly in the report.
- Members emphasised the importance of the Pay Policy Statement in the context of recruitment and retention, particularly given challenges facing local government and uncertainty arising from potential local government reorganisation.
- Concern was raised about the gender pay gap, noting that both the mean and median gaps had increased since previous years and that the scale of the disparity was concerning.
- Questions were raised by residents regarding other employee benefits, with Members seeking confirmation as to whether these were fully reflected within the report or documented elsewhere.
- Reference was made to public perceptions of staff pay arising from consultation responses, with Members stressing the need for staff to be fairly remunerated for their professional skills.

In response, officers advised that:

- The gender pay gap largely reflected workforce composition, with a predominantly female workforce concentrated in lower and middle pay bands, while a higher proportion of senior roles were held by male staff.
- The reported bonus pay related solely to long service awards, as the Council did not operate a bonus scheme, and reporting was required by legislation.
- Officers noted that the methodology and timing prescribed by legislation for calculating the gender pay gap could be misleading and did not always reflect recruitment or pay practices accurately.
- The report outlined the main rewards and benefits available to staff, and officers confirmed that all payments and benefits were included for transparency purposes.
- Additional benefits, such as the Employee Assistance Programme, were part of standard employment arrangements and comparable to those offered by other local authorities.
- Officers confirmed that the Council’s overall employment offer was broadly in line with sector norms.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Wise and seconded by Councillor Baldock.

Resolved:

(1) That the proposed Pay Policy Statement be agreed for publication on the council's web site.
(2) That the information within the Pay Policy Statement is updated with actual year-end figures before final publication.

707 LOCAL HERITAGE LIST - RECOMMENDATIONS FROM 2025 CALL - APPENDIX I TO-FOLLOW

The Principal Heritage Officer introduced the report and explained that this represented the second round of Local Heritage List designations. The Officer advised that the selection panel had met on 13 January 2026 and considered a total of 115 heritage assets, of which 90 were shortlisted. It was noted that the report currently referred to 80 shortlisted assets and this should be corrected to 90.

The Chair then invited discussion from members. Comments included:

- Thanks were expressed to the Officer for the extensive work undertaken and for presenting the second round of Local Heritage List designations.
- It was noted that the submissions demonstrated that, despite earlier rounds, additional heritage assets continued to come forward, including items that had previously been missed.
- Reference was made to the intention that the Local Heritage List process should be undertaken one final time in 2027, prior to local government reorganisation.
- Members emphasised the importance of encouraging both Councillors and members of the public to bring forward remaining heritage assets to ensure the fullest possible record of local history.
- It was suggested that the proposed final round in 2027 should be clearly referenced, as this currently did not have formal status within the report.
- Appreciation was expressed for the extensive work undertaken on the Local Heritage List and its importance in safeguarding local heritage, particularly in the context of future local government reorganisation.
- Members highlighted the value of the process in identifying further heritage assets that had not been captured in earlier rounds and noted the contribution this work made alongside conservation area reviews.
- Concern was raised about the process for selecting Area Committee representatives to sit on the selection panel. It was noted that some Area Committees had not formally considered or appointed a representative and that invitations had not always been received in sufficient time.
- In response, the Officer explained that invitations had been issued to Area Committee Chairs, with Chairs asked either to attend or nominate a representative, and confirmed openness to reviewing and improving this process.
- Members noted that levels of engagement varied between areas, often reflecting whether active local heritage groups were present, and acknowledged the difficulty of ensuring consistent representation across all areas.

- A suggestion was made that Area Committees should include the Local Heritage List as a standing or scheduled agenda item, both to promote future rounds and to formally select their panel representatives.
- It was observed that a scheduled Area Committee meeting had been cancelled, which had prevented the appointment of a representative in one area.
- A technical issue was raised regarding access to Appendix 1, with members reporting that the document link was not currently accessible online.
- Clarification was sought on whether any heritage assets within the Eastern Area had been rejected. The Officer confirmed that no significant assets from that area had been rejected and explained that items not shortlisted were either too modern, too common, or required further research and could be reconsidered in a future round.
- Questions were raised regarding the inclusion of assets located on private property, and the Officer clarified that Local Heritage List designation was advisory in nature and would not prevent works, though owners would be expected to notify the Council.
- Further explanation was provided regarding the historic significance of certain listed items, including street furniture, where distinctive historic features justified their inclusion.
- Members reiterated the importance of encouraging wider public and councillor engagement ahead of the next round to ensure a comprehensive record of local heritage.

Councillor Baldock moved the following amendment that was seconded by Councillor Richard Palmer: That the report include reference that 2027 will be the final round for inclusion on the heritage list.

The amendment was carried.

The recommendations of the report were moved by Councillor Baldock and seconded by Councillor Jayes.

Resolved:

(1) To agree the schedule of heritage assets proposed to be designated as Local Heritage Assets based on the outcome of the Selection Panel meeting.
(2) To note that the schedule of heritage assets proposed to be designated as Local Heritage has been developed in line with best practice guidance published by Historic England and will afford protection to a range of non designated heritage buildings and structures within the Borough.
(3) That the report include reference 2027 will be the final round for inclusion on the heritage list.

708 WINDING UP OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR SITTINGBOURNE LIMITED

The Officer introduced the report and explained that it sought the Committee's approval for the winding up of Opportunities for Sittingbourne Limited following the sale of its only asset at 34 High Street. The Officer outlined the proposed arrangements for the distribution of the sale proceeds, including the repayment of the original loans to Swale Borough Council and U and I Limited, together with the use of the remaining balances to meet asset-holding costs, accounting requirements and the company's formal closure and winding-up procedures.

The Chair invited feedback from members. This included:

- Clarification was sought on whether any funds would remain for the company or the Council following the sale of the asset, as this was not immediately clear from the report.
- A Member commented that, should any surplus funds arise from the sale, consideration should be given to reinvesting them in Sittingbourne High Street to support improvements to the area.

Officers responded and advised:

- The Officer explained that the asset had been sold for approximately £270,000, with around £10,000 deducted for sales fees, leaving approximately £260,000.
- It was confirmed that the original loans of £118,000 each from Swale Borough Council and U+I Limited would be repaid in full.
- The Officer advised that the remaining balance would be used to meet holding costs incurred by the Council, estimated at around £5,000, together with winding-up and accountancy costs estimated at between £15,000 and £20,000.
- It was noted that, depending on final costs, there was a possibility of a modest surplus to be divided between the shareholders, or a small additional contribution being required.
- The Section 151 Officer confirmed that any surplus arising from the sale would be treated as a capital receipt and managed in accordance with the Council's capital receipts and capital strategy, to be applied to appropriate capital projects.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Harrison and seconded by Councillor Bowen.

Resolved:

(1) To approve the winding up of Opportunities for Sittingbourne Limited following the disposal of its sole asset at 34 High Street, Sittingbourne.

(2) To delegate to the Head of Place, in consultation with the Head of Mid Kent Legal Services and the company's co-shareholder, to take all necessary steps to effect the winding up of the company, including the settlement of outstanding debts and the distribution of remaining funds.

(3) To approve the application of the sale proceeds from 34 High Street to first settle the company's outstanding liabilities (including post-tenancy holding costs, accountancy fees, and audit fees), with the balance used to repay the original loans provided by Swale Borough Council and U+I Limited (now Landsec U+I), and any residual profit divided equally between the two shareholders.

709 DESIGNATING AREA OF SPECIAL CONTROL OF ADVERTISEMENT (ASCA)

The Officer introduced the report and explained that it proposed undertaking public consultation on the designation of Areas of Special Control of Advertisements within eight conservation areas that contained commercial centres. The Officer outlined that the Committee was being asked to note and agree the contents of the draft consultation document relating to the proposed designations and to confirm that the document was fit for purpose for public consultation. It was further reported that the draft had previously been considered by the relevant working group in December and that feedback received had been incorporated into the document.

Members commented and questions raised included:

- A Member highlighted a potential typographical error in the report relating to excluded groups of advertisements and sought clarification on which types of advertisements would be excluded from planning control.
- A comment was made about the numbering of the conservation areas within the report, noting that the list began at number four and suggesting that alternative numbering might be clearer.
- Clarification was sought as to why certain conservation areas with small commercial centres were not included within the proposed designation.
- Members welcomed the proposals in principle but raised concerns that the consultation could raise public expectations around enforcement activity, particularly given existing concerns about perceived inaction in some conservation areas.
- Questions were raised about the capacity of the planning enforcement team and whether the proposals would add to existing workloads or have future budget implications.
- Further clarification was sought on what constituted an advertisement, including illuminated, electronic and temporary signage, and whether such items would be covered.
- Members asked about the timetable for the consultation process and when the matter would return to the Committee.
- A question was raised regarding the potential impact of the proposed designation on temporary markets, including the ability of market traders to advertise.

Officers responded and advised:

- Officers acknowledged the identified typographical issue and confirmed that further clarification could be provided outside the meeting.
- It was explained that the proposed Areas of Special Control of Advertisements focused on conservation areas with higher levels of commercial activity, and that smaller or more rural areas would be better addressed through alternative planning controls, such as Article 4 Directions.
- Officers clarified that enforcement activity would remain reactive rather than proactive, relying on intelligence from Members and the public, and would follow the Council’s adopted planning enforcement strategy.
- It was confirmed that enforcement processes were necessarily lengthy due to evidential requirements and prioritisation of cases based on potential harm.
- Officers advised that the designation would not apply retrospectively and would only affect new advertisements, with impacts expected to be gradual rather than immediate.

- It was confirmed that the consultation would run for eight weeks and, following consideration by the working group, would return to the Policy and Resources Committee before submission to the Secretary of State for approval.
- Officers explained that temporary markets and associated signage would not be adversely affected, as traditional market activity and temporary signs did not fall within the scope of the proposed controls.
- Further explanation was provided that the designation was intended to protect historic character, including traditional shopfronts and signage, and could contribute to removing conservation areas from the Heritage at Risk Register.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Baldock and seconded by Councillor Ben J Martin.

Resolved:

(1) To note the content of the consultation document relating to the proposed designation of an Area of Special Control of Advertisements (ASCA).

(2) To agree that the consultation document is fit for purpose to undertake public consultation and progress the designation process.

710 BEXON - CONSERVATION AREA DESIGNATION

The Officer introduced the report and explained that Bexon Conservation Area was a newly reviewed area proposed for designation as a conservation area. The Officer advised that, if approved, this would become the Borough's 52nd conservation area. It was reported that seven responses had been received to the public consultation, all of which were supportive. The Committee was therefore recommended to agree the document and designate Bexon as a conservation area.

Recommendations were proposed by Councillor Baldock and seconded by Councillor Gibson.

Resolved:

(1) To note the character appraisal and management strategy document (public consultation draft) for the proposed new Conservation Area, and representations made by interested parties, as set out in Appendix I.

(2) To agree the changes to the assessment document proposed by officers in response to the representations received during the course of the public consultation.

(3) To resolve that the area within the boundary shown is of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and that as such, that it should be designated as a Conservation Area in accordance with section 69 of

the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act, 1990.

(4) Adopt the Character Appraisal and Management Strategy subject to any minor editorial amendments and formatting.

711 PRIDE IN PLACE PROGRAMME - OUTLINE AND NEXT STEPS

The Officer introduced the report and explained that it provided an overview of the Pride in Place (PIP) programme. The Officer advised that PIP would deliver £20 million of investment to Sheppey East over a 10-year period, noting that the programme had been announced in September 2025, with initial guidance issued in December and further guidance still awaited.

It was reported that the paper had been brought forward at an early stage and summarised the spend rules, parameters and opportunities associated with the programme. The Committee was advised that the report contained three key recommendations: acknowledging the Council's various roles within PIP, including as accountable body and secretariat; agreeing the use of capacity funding to support those roles; and approving initial preparatory steps, particularly in relation to recruitment and community engagement, including the establishment of a community panel, appointment of a Chair and the subsequent formation of a neighbourhood board.

The Officer emphasised that the funding was not controlled by the Council and that decisions on expenditure would be made by an independent neighbourhood board. It was further noted that the report was process-focused and did not set out spending proposals, but instead outlined how the Council could support the community and board in developing proposals in an inclusive and effective manner. Members were also advised that the first tranche of funding was not expected until Spring 2027, allowing a preparatory phase before delivery commenced.

Members were invited to make comments and these included:

- Concerns were raised that the Pride in Place programme was intended to be community-led, but that engagement to date had not reflected this, with limited involvement from residents, parish councils and ward Members for Sheppey East.
- Members expressed concern that the report placed a stronger emphasis on the role of the local MP than on community representation, and that requirements for consultation with the MP were clearer than those for engaging local residents or Councillors.
- It was noted that the minimum requirement for 51% of board members to live or work in the area could allow a significant proportion of decision-makers to lack a direct connection to Sheppey East.
- Members commented that the absence of early public meetings and local engagement risked undermining trust and creating a perception that decisions were being made about the community rather than with it.
- Ward Members for Sheppey East stated that they had not been informed of, or invited to, early meetings or events, and that information about the programme had been received late or indirectly.

- Concerns were raised about the eligibility criteria for the Chair and board members, including the exclusion of elected representatives, and whether this adequately recognised the role of ward and parish councillors as community leaders.
- Members questioned how community commitment and local knowledge would be assessed through the proposed recruitment process.
- Suggestions were made that the community should have a more direct role in selecting the Chair, including opportunities for residents to comment on or support shortlisted candidates.
- Further questions were raised about transparency, accountability, communication with the community, and how progress and financial matters would be reported over the lifetime of the programme.
- Clarification was sought on remuneration, officer resourcing, and whether the additional workload arising from the programme would have budgetary implications.
- While concerns were expressed about the process, Members acknowledged the significance of the £20 million investment and the potential benefits for Sheppey East.

The Officer responded and advised:

- It was confirmed that many aspects of the programme, including board composition, eligibility criteria and the minimum requirement for local representation, were prescribed by Government guidance and had been replicated in the report.
- Officers emphasised that the report was intended to set out the initial process and next steps, and that wider community engagement was planned to take place at an early stage, including open events to identify potential Chairs, board members and community panel participants.
- It was explained that early meetings with the MP had been arranged by Government to clarify roles and responsibilities, particularly in relation to accountability and governance.
- Officers acknowledged concerns regarding communication and access to events, including limited capacity at a London briefing session, and confirmed that these issues had been raised with Government.
- It was clarified that board members would not be remunerated, although legitimate expenses could be claimed.
- Officers explained that the Council's role as accountable body carried statutory responsibilities, including financial oversight and assurance, and that funding could not simply be passed directly to the community without appropriate controls.
- It was confirmed that detailed transparency and reporting to the community would be the responsibility of the independent neighbourhood board, rather than the Council, although the Council would be required to confirm that funding had been used in accordance with the agreed purposes.
- Officers recognised the strength of feeling expressed and confirmed that lessons would be taken forward to improve engagement with ward Members, parish councils and the wider community as the programme progressed.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Baldock and seconded by Councillor Moore.

Resolved:

(1) That members note Swale Borough Council's role in the Pride in Place programme, including as Accountable Body and initially at least as Secretariat, as set out in paragraphs 2.21 to 2.32.

(2) That members note the indicative proposals for the use of capacity funding as set out in paragraphs 2.34.4 – 2.34.6 including appointing appropriately-skilled fixed-term staff to fulfil required local authority functions effectively.

(3) That members agree to launch the recruitment process for the Chair of the Neighbourhood Board in line with paragraph 2.34.1, and with the draft role description (as provided by MHCLG) and terms of reference as set out in Appendices I and II

712 PRIDE IN PLACE IMPACT FUND

Members were invited to make comments on the report. These included:

- Clarification was sought on the membership and composition of the working group that had developed the proposals, including whether it included representation from the Isle of Sheppey.
- Concerns were raised that projects described as benefiting the Isle of Sheppey appeared to be concentrated in specific locations, with limited or no allocation for other communities, including Minster, Queenborough and Rushenden.
- Members questioned whether the funding was intended to address any overspends from previous programmes, including Levelling Up.
- It was suggested that wider consultation could have been undertaken, including engagement with Chairs and Vice-Chairs of service committees and all Members, to invite project ideas.
- Concerns were raised about the timescales for submitting project proposals, with particular reference to parish councils that met infrequently and may not have had sufficient opportunity to respond.
- Members sought clarification on which project ideas relating to the Isle of Sheppey had been rejected and what alternative projects had been considered.
- While acknowledging the constraints of the process, some Members expressed disappointment with the final list of projects and indicated a preference for alternative or more cross-island initiatives.
- Comments were made regarding the importance of timely delivery, learning lessons from previous funding programmes, and ensuring coordination with other authorities and partners where appropriate.
- A suggestion was made to amend working group procedures to allow more time for Members to receive and review papers ahead of meetings.

The Officer responded and advised:

- Officers confirmed that the working group was a cross-party group drawn from the Economy and Property Committee and outlined its membership, noting that it was not area-based.

- It was clarified that the funding was not intended to address overspends from other programmes and that projects had been brought forward based on eligibility and readiness for delivery.
- Officers explained that a call for projects had been undertaken across Council services, and that the working group had considered a wide range of proposals, including several relating to the Isle of Sheppey.
- It was noted that Government timescales required relatively rapid decision-making, limiting the scope for wider or prolonged consultation.
- Officers confirmed that project costings were necessarily indicative at this stage and that contingency had been built into the programme, with any underspend to be reconsidered by the working group.
- It was acknowledged that the process had not been ideal, but Officers emphasised that the working group had sought to develop a balanced programme within the constraints imposed.
- Officers indicated that suggestions regarding notice periods for working group papers could be accommodated without the need for a formal resolution.
- Members expressed concern that, notwithstanding reservations raised, approval of the proposals was required in order to avoid the risk of losing the funding allocation.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Baldock and seconded by Councillor Wise.

Resolved:

(1) Approve delivery of the Pride in Place Impact Fund (PIPIF) capital grant programme as set out at Appendix II, in line with the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government prospectus and guidance.

(2) Delegate authority to the Head of Place to deliver the Pride in Place Impact Fund programme, in consultation with the Prosperity Fund and PIPIF Member Working Group.

Chair