Policy and Resources Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 11 March 2026 from 7.00 pm - 10.05 pm.

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

OFFICERS PRESENT: Janet Dart, Natalie Earl, Robin Harris, Ian Harrison, Joanne Johnson, Jhilmil Kishore, Tim Neal and Stuart Watson.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Lisa Fillery and Zoe Kent.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Mike Whiting.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Monique Bonney.

795 Emergency Evacuation Procedure

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

796 Declarations of Interest

No interests were declared.

797 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

798 Forward Decisions Plan

Resolved:

(1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.

799 Houses in Multiple Occupation SPD – consultation launch

The Manager, Planning Applications, introduced the draft Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), outlining its origins in the Council motion of 1 October 2025 and the need to progress quickly due to the national June 2026 adoption deadline. Members were reminded that the SPD supported existing policies by addressing HMO dispersal, parking standards, bin storage, and minimum room sizes.

The Chair invited questions and comments from Members. These included:

- Support for the SPD was an important step, alongside a request to explore whether a dedicated HMO planning policy should be developed and referred to the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group (PTPWG) for consideration;
- concern about high concentrations of HMOs in certain wards (especially Sheerness), and questions about how such clustering had been allowed to develop over time;
- observations that deprived communities often hosted the highest concentration of HMOs while simultaneously experiencing reduced access to services such as GPs;
- requests for clearer data and methodology explanations — particularly around output areas, how HMOs were counted, and whether long-vacant or fire-damaged HMOs should still appear in the tables;
- strong concerns about parking pressures, with Members emphasising that surveys must reflect evening and overnight conditions, rather than daytime observations;
- questions about permitted development rights and the extent to which planning could intervene when householders carried out unauthorised or intrusive works linked to HMO conversions, particularly in relation to roofs, dormers and party walls;
- calls for additional training for parishes and town councils to help them understand concentrations, thresholds and the criteria in the SPD;
- the Council should temporarily pause HMO planning applications until the SPD was adopted;
- new policy should sit in the Local Plan or be developed locally at neighbourhood plan level; and
- mixed views on whether adding another policy layer would slow down the Local Plan programme or unnecessarily duplicate existing guidance.

In response, the officer advised:

- Parking surveys must follow recognised methodologies that identified and measured parking at peak times;
- many of the issues raised (e.g. damage to neighbouring roofs or party walls) were civil matters and could not be controlled through planning or building control;
- permitted development rights for extensions and roof alterations remained in place for most dwellings, including HMOs, unless explicitly removed;
- output area statistics were based on official census boundaries and lawful use classes; properties remained counted as HMOs until their lawful status changed;
- the planned Article 4 direction would remove automatic rights to convert dwellings into HMOs, requiring planning permission borough-wide;
- the SPD provided robust policy guidance and formed part of the development plan; it was not merely advisory;
- creating a new HMO policy within the Local Plan would require an evidence base demonstrating specific problems beyond those addressed in the SPD and Article 4, and might impact timelines; and
- a neighbourhood plan could consider localised policy, but was time-consuming and resource-intensive for parishes.

Councillor Mike Baldock moved the following motion: That the matter be referred to the PTPWG for consideration and this was seconded by Councillor James Hunt, and on being put to the vote was agreed.

Councillor Baldock moved the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Charles Gibson.

Resolved :

(1) That the new time constraints for the adoption of Supplementary Planning Documents be noted.
(2) That the importance of this SPD to the Council motion be noted.
(3) That the draft Houses in Multiple Occupation SPD (Appendix I) be approved for consultation purpose.
(4) That the Head of Place be given delegated authority, in consultation with the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group Chair, for the making of minor amendments and corrections to the draft HMO SPD document prior to the start of the consultation period.
(5) That the matter be referred to the PTPWG for consideration.

800 **Housing Benefits - Housing Payments Policy**

The Head of Revenues and Benefits explained that the Council has operated a Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) scheme since 2001 to help residents cover shortfalls between rent and housing benefit/Universal Credit housing costs. From April 2026, the government planned to merge this with the Household Support Fund into a Crisis and Resilience Fund. Districts would continue to receive a Housing Payments Fund grant—£262,000 for Swale—which mirrored previous DHP funding. A new Housing Payments Policy was required to administer the fund and had been drafted in line with the former DHP policy, updated with input from the Housing Team and was compliant with the Renters' Rights Act. The scheme supported residents to remain in suitable accommodation and helped reduce demand for temporary accommodation.

The Chair then invited questions and comments from Members. These included:

- Expressed disappointment that government funding had not increased despite rising private rental costs, but supported adopting the new Housing Payments Policy; and
- was the scheme cost-neutral to the Council and sought clarity on whether administering the fund imposed any financial pressure beyond staff time.

Officers confirmed that the scheme was cost-neutral provided the Council stayed within the government grant. While the Council could choose to top up the fund, historically the allocation had been sufficient for demand. Staff time was the only cost to the authority.

Councillor Baldock moved the recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Ashley Wise.

Resolved:

(1) That the Housing Payments Policy be adopted.

801 **Local Plan growth strategy and sites for allocation**

The officer introduced the report and advised Members that the Local Plan Review had reached a critical stage. It was explained that the Council was required to proceed to a Regulation 19 consultation in summer 2026 and submit the plan for examination by December 2026 in order to remain within the current (legacy) plan-making system. Members were advised that agreement of the recommendations was required to allow key evidence work to commence, including transport modelling, air quality assessments and sustainability appraisal. Failure to agree the recommendations would risk delay and potentially move the Local Plan into the new national system following local government reorganisation.

Members agreed that the two recommendations in the report should be considered separately.

Members made comments including:

- Concerned that the growth strategy recommended by the PTPWG would concentrate development disproportionately in the eastern part of the borough;
- arguments that an alternative strategy would provide a more balanced distribution of growth across the borough and better reflect recent approvals and existing development commitments;
- parts of the borough, particularly those already experiencing significant growth, would not support further strategic allocations;
- observations that the PTPWG recommendation had not been unanimous and that Members were therefore justified in reassessing the outcome;
- counter-arguments stressing the importance of respecting the PTPWG's evidence-based work and avoiding undermining the Local Plan process;
- concerns regarding infrastructure capacity, traffic congestion, and cumulative impacts, particularly around Sittingbourne and the Isle of Sheppey;
- warnings that further delay or indecision could leave the Council without an up-to-date Local Plan and weaken its ability to manage development effectively; and
- requested that votes on the key recommendations be taken as recorded votes due to the significance of the decisions.

Officers responded that:

- The Local Plan timetable was extremely constrained and additional stages or delay would likely push the Regulation 19 consultation into the autumn, requiring delegated authority for submission;
- officers could not commence detailed evidence work without certainty on the strategic growth option and site allocations;
- the proposed non-strategic site allocations were based on a hybrid approach using the settlement hierarchy and could operate alongside different growth options;
- strategic sites such as Highsted were treated cautiously due to uncertainties around deliverability and infrastructure mitigation; and
- officers were satisfied that evidence existed to support alternative growth strategies at examination, but emphasised the importance of maintaining flexibility and a housing buffer.

Councillor Ben J Martin proposed the following amendment which was seconded by Councillor Angela Harrison**: That it be recommended to Full Council that option four be selected for the drafting of the Regulation 19 Local Plan consultation.**

In accordance with **Council Procedure Rules 3.1.19(2)**, a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:
For:
Councillors Bowen, Charles Gibson, Tim Gibson, Gould, Harrison, Ben J Martin, Speed, Wise and Last.
Total equals: 9
Against:
Councillors Baldock, Chapman, Hunt, Jayes, Palmer and Wooster.
Total equals: 6
Abstain:
None
Total equals: 0
Resolved:

(1) That it be recommended to that option four be selected for the drafting of the Regulation 19 Local Plan consultation.

Recommendation 2: To recommend to Full Council the non-strategic sites set out in appendices I to VI for the drafting of the Regulation 19 submission version of the Local Plan including:
o Non-strategic housing allocations.
o Gypsy and Traveller sites.
o Employment land allocations.

In accordance with **Council Procedure Rules 3.1.19(2)**, a recorded vote was taken on Recommendation 2 and voting was as follows:

For:
Councillors Bowen, Charles Gibson, Tim Gibson, Gould, Harrison, Ben J Martin, Speed, Wise, Wooster and Last
Total equals: 10

Against:
Councillors Baldock, Chapman, Hunt, Jayes, Palmer
Total equals: 5

Abstain:
None
Total equals: 0

(2) That it be recommended to Full Council the non-strategic sites set out in appendices I to VI for the drafting of the Regulation 19 submission version of the Local Plan including:
o Non-strategic housing allocations.
o Gypsy and Traveller sites.
o Employment land allocations.

802 **Community Governance Reviews (CGR) – Recommendations for second stage consultation**

Officers reminded Members that the Council had agreed on 30 July 2025 to undertake a Community Governance Review (CGR), and that the first stage consultation had taken place between 18 December 2025 and 9 February 2026. It was reported that the work had been supported by officers and an all-party Member Steering Group, and that the Chair of the Steering Group, Councillor Mike Whiting, had been invited to introduce the recommendations arising from the stage one consultation.

Councillor Whiting addressed the Committee and advised that the Steering Group had considered all consultation responses in detail and that changes had been made to the stage two consultation proposals to reflect points raised by respondents. It was emphasised that all responses had been read and carefully considered, and that the proposals before the Committee reflected those views. Thanks were expressed to officers for their support and guidance throughout the process. Councillor Whiting commended the report to Members and invited questions.

Members made comments and asked questions including:

- Concerned that reliance on online consultation could exclude residents who did not have digital access, and that further steps should be taken to ensure the widest possible participation in stage two of the consultation;
- requested reassurance that parish councils and residents would have sufficient opportunity and time to respond to the second stage consultation;
- observations regarding proposed boundary changes in specific areas, including Murston, Bobbing, Grove Park and Snipshill, with questions about whether all potential boundary options had been appropriately illustrated through the consultation maps;
- queries about how responses would be assessed where views from residents directly affected by boundary changes were evenly split, and whether wider public responses would be taken into account.
- questions about how road names, postcodes and local identity would be considered when finalising parish boundaries.
- comments emphasising the importance of ensuring any new or altered parish councils were left with appropriate assets and boundaries to function effectively; and
- reassurance from members of the Steering Group that responses had been analysed carefully, including free-text comments, and that discrepancies between tick-box answers and written responses had been identified and taken into account.

Officers responded that:

- Stage two consultation would extend for nine weeks, longer than originally proposed, to ensure parish councils and residents had sufficient time to respond;
- parish councils would be formally written to at the start of the consultation and offered a range of response methods, including online and paper submissions;
- maps had been deliberately limited to a manageable number of options to avoid confusion, but respondents would still be able to suggest alternative boundary configurations through the consultation;
- all boundary proposals remained subject to change following the stage two consultation and further consideration by the Steering Group; and
- the process following stage two would involve further Steering Group meetings, with a report then returning to the Policy and Resources Committee and Full Council with final recommendations.

Resolved:

(1) That the results of the stage one consultation be noted.
(2) That the draft proposals and maps for stage two consultation be approved.
(3) That the stage two consultation be undertaken in accordance with the timetable and approach set out in the report.

803 **Corporate Plan 2023-2027 update report**

Corporate Plan 2023-2027 update report

The officer introduced the report and explained that following the May 2023 Borough elections, the administration had developed a Corporate Plan setting out its vision and priorities for the period 2023–2027, which had been adopted by the Council in April 2024. Members were advised that the report before them was the second annual update and provided progress against the actions within the Corporate Plan.

It was reported that, of the 59 actions identified, 47 were rated green, including nine completed actions, 37 ongoing or on track, and one completed with ongoing delivery. Twelve actions were rated amber and none were rated red. Members were informed that since the previous update in March 2025, a number of actions had improved in status. The officer also outlined that, in light of local government reorganisation and a proposed vesting day of 1 April 2028, it remained important for the Council to maintain an up-to-date Corporate Plan. Members were therefore invited to note the update and consider the recommendation to commence work on a new Corporate Plan in autumn 2026, to be effective from May 2027.

Members made comments including:

- Acknowledged the progress made against the Corporate Plan, alongside a caution that the Council should remain focused on delivering existing policies and strategies rather than diverting resources prematurely towards developing new ones;
- whilst starting work on a new Corporate Plan in late 2026 was appropriate, priority should remain on delivery during the remaining life of the current plan;
- queries about whether the recommendation should be amended to reflect uncertainty around local government reorganisation and the possibility of elections, and whether this would affect the length or scope of a future plan;
- concerns regarding the operation of the RAG rating system, particularly where actions rated amber were perceived by Members as being further behind delivery than the status suggested;
- specific reference to street cleansing improvements, with the view that delays in delivery could warrant a red rating rather than amber;
- suggestions that definitions and thresholds used for red, amber and green ratings should be reviewed when developing the next Corporate Plan;
- comments that positive work undertaken by the Council in relation to apprenticeships, work experience and skills development could be given greater prominence in future updates; and
- observations that health inequalities were not always clearly articulated or discussed at committee level, despite being identified as a consideration within

the Corporate Plan.

Officers responded that:

- The current update was based on information provided by Heads of Service, who exercised professional judgement when assigning RAG ratings in accordance with agreed definitions;
- an amber rating reflected actions that were delayed but still progressing towards completion, rather than being on hold;
- there was inevitable overlap between ratings in some circumstances, and the classification was not always clear-cut;
- in the event of changes to local government reorganisation or elections, it would be for any future administration to determine how to proceed with corporate planning priorities; and
- health implications were considered as part of decision-making processes, with Members able to raise concerns where they believed such issues required greater emphasis.

Resolved:

(1) That the update on delivery of the Corporate Plan 2023–2027 be noted.
(2) That work begins on developing a new Corporate Plan in autumn 2026, to take effect from May 2027.

804 **Graveney & Goodnestone Conservation Area Review**

The officer introduced the report and advised Members that the review covered three conservation areas: Graveney Church, Graveney Bridge and Goodnestone. Members were informed that the review had been undertaken by consultants and that the three conservation areas had been combined into a single character appraisal and management strategy document. It was explained that modest extensions to each conservation area were proposed as part of the review.

The officer reported that 12 consultation responses had been received, the majority of which sought a further extension to the Graveney Church Conservation Area. Officers had assessed this request and concluded that the additional land proposed for inclusion, being a large agricultural field, did not possess sufficient historic or architectural significance to warrant inclusion. It was noted that the listed building cited by respondents was already protected in its own right, including its setting. Members were also advised that a detailed response had been received from a planning consultant, and the officer response had been included and summarised within the report. The recommendation was to adopt the revised character appraisal and management strategy, subject to minor editorial and formatting amendments.

Members made comments including:

- Recognised the detailed and high-quality nature of the character appraisal and management strategy document;
- supported the proposed extensions and appreciated that historic features, including the lychgate at Graveney Church, had now been appropriately included within the conservation area boundary;
- the conservation area, while relatively small, contained a significant amount of historic interest and had been robustly assessed;

- a query regarding the Graveney Church boundary not following the existing field boundary and a request for clarification on the rationale for this alignment; and
- identification of minor editorial errors in the document, including typographical issues and an outdated job title, which were suggested for correction prior to adoption.

Officers responded that:

- Minor editorial corrections would be addressed prior to publication; and
- boundary lines had been drawn based on heritage assessment rather than solely following existing field boundaries, ensuring that areas of historic and architectural significance were appropriately captured.

Resolved:

(1) That the Graveney Church, Graveney Bridge and Goodnestone Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Strategy be adopted, subject to minor editorial and formatting amendments.

Chair