
Council

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 19 November 2025 from 7.00 pm - 10.12 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, Andy Booth, Lloyd Bowen, Hayden Brawn, Derek Carnell (Deputy Mayor), Ann Cavanagh, Shelley Cheesman, Simon Clark, Alex Eyre, Tim Gibson, Alastair Gould, Angela Harrison, James Hunt, Carole Jackson, Elliott Jayes, Mark Last, Peter MacDonald, Peter Marchington, Ben J Martin, Charlie Miller, Kieran Mishchuk, Lee-Anne Moore, Pete Neal, Tara Noe, Tom Nundy, Chris Palmer, Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin, Ashley Shiel, Julien Speed, Sarah Stephen, Terry Thompson, Karen Watson (Mayor), Mike Whiting, Tony Winckless, Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster.

PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Mark Tucker.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Steph Curtis, Robin Harris, Jo Millard and Larissa Reed.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Martyn Cassell and Emma Wiggins.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Lloyd Chapman, Roger Clark, Charles Gibson, Kieran Golding, Rich Lehmann, Claire Martin, Carrie Pollard, Paul Stephen and Mark Tucker.

466 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

467 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 1 October 2025 (Minute Nos. 357 – 370) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

468 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Simon Clark declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 9 – Motion – as he was a trustee of MenTalk Swale.

Councillor Alastair Gould declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 9 – Motion – as he was a GP in Swale.

469 **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor advised that half way through her term as elected Mayor, herself and the Deputy Mayor had attended over 80 engagements. Recent events included:

- The dementia event;
- unveiling of Milton Regis and Kemsley signs;
- Faversham Carnival; and
- a number of different events on the Isle of Sheppey including an interview with Sheppey FM and visiting The Criterion and Sheppey Little Theatre.

The Mayor said attending Remembrance Sunday and Armistice Day, remembering

those who had given their lives, was a proud moment. She thanked all those that attended, particularly those that laid wreaths on her behalf.

Referring to upcoming events, the Mayor highlighted a fundraising event she was holding at luxury handbag manufacturers Elvis & Kresse in Faversham on Friday 21 November 2025. Among the many other events she was attending in the coming weeks she highlighted a domestic abuse event in Faversham, alongside Councillors Ben J Martin and Tom Nundy, Bobbing Christmas Fayre, Eastchurch Christmas Lights, Borden School Assembly for White Ribbon, Swale Youth Democracy event and celebrating Romanian culture.

Finally, the Mayor advised Members a Food Bank box would be placed in the Members' Room, Swale House and she encouraged Members to donate.

470 **Questions submitted by the Public**

The Mayor advised that one question had been received from a member of the public. Mr Greenhill was unable to attend the meeting in person and the Mayor read out his question as set out below:

Question 1

With reference to the proposal of Swale Council to close some essential public toilets in Swale, will the Council, having regard to the expressed intention of Kent County Council to refurbish the public library in Central

Avenue and create a Community Hub for the provision of many social and other activities which will doubtless create a greater need for toilet facilities:

*a) relieve the public toilets in Central Avenue and continue their provision; and
b) accept, that in any event those toilets are an essential facility;*

and having enjoined public houses, restaurants and cafes, etc. in the town to make their toilet facilities available

generally to the public, will the Council lead by example and make toilet facilities at Swale House available to the public who attend there during the scant hours that the Council offices are open to the public; and in either case, if not, why not?

Response – Chair of Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee

a) Councillors debated the provision of public toilets at their Environmental Services and Climate Change committee on 12 November. Councillors voted for the proposals, which suggested retaining the Central Avenue toilets in Sittingbourne and closing the Forum toilets. The report also detailed the benefits of rationalising locations for improved maintenance of the remaining sites. Central Avenue toilets are therefore earmarked for refurbishment in the future.

b) The report that Councillors considered, agree that town centre public toilets are vital for encouraging economic activity, attract visitors and support our vulnerable residents.

c) The Council reception at Swale House does contain a public toilet which can be used during our public hours of operation.

The Mayor advised that Mr Greenhill would receive a written response.

471 Questions submitted by Members

The Mayor advised that two questions had been received from Members.

Question 1 – Councillor Ben J Martin

Given the requirement for the timely determination of planning applications and the observed significant volume of applications currently awaiting a decision, could the Chair please explain the reasons for the recurring cancellation of scheduled Planning Committee meetings, with 3 of the 5 scheduled meetings between June & October being cancelled, and what immediate action is being taken to address the subsequent backlog and ensure the statutory timetable for decisions is met going forward?

Response – Chair of Planning Committee, Councillor Andy Booth

I will break this question down into separate elements , which are not as interrelated as they might appear.

In terms of the general ‘backlog’ of applications and volume of applications that are awaiting decision, this is reducing. We work to a definition of ‘backlog’ as any application that has not had any activity for over a year. This has reduced from 189 cases in February to 21 now. There are still over 200 out-of-time planning applications with the Council but we can see from the activity that is recorded that these cases are being worked on and the number of such applications is also reducing. This has been achieved through a variety of measures but, in the face of other commitments, such as the Highsted Inquiry, three other large scale strategic applications being with the Council, historic and legacy staffing challenges, and oft-changing requirements such as BNG, this significant progress.

A measure that is being introduced that is expected to support in further reducing the backlog is the introduction of charging to make amendments to planning applications, as approved by Full Council very recently. Moving forward, as amendments to planning applications will be less common, officers can expect to determine more applications within the conventional time periods, with a reducing reliance on agreeing extensions of the determination period with applicants. Working more frequently within statutory timeframes will reduce the flow of applications into the backlog, with existing older applications gradually being reduced in number.

With this in mind, the cancellation of scheduled Planning Committee meetings is only partly related to the number of older applications that remain undetermined.

We maintain a list of applications that are due to be presented to Planning Committee. At this time the list comprises 25 items. 8 of those are applications related to the occupancy period of caravan parks on the Isle of Sheppey that will be presented to committee this year, having only been validated in September 2025. Of the remaining 17, three are strategic major applications for over 1,000 dwellings and, as members will be aware from a recent briefing, they are being worked on with the expectation that they will all be presented to Planning Committee in early 2026. Of the remaining 14, there are a mixture of applications from this year or older applications where there have been on-going discussions or problems identified that an applicant is attempting to address. It is anticipated that 4 or 5 of these will be presented to the Planning Committee meeting in December. The “backlog” of committee items is therefore relatively small but being

worked on continually in most cases.

In each case where a Planning Committee has been cancelled, officers have sought my view as Chairman of the Planning Committee as to whether it should proceed. In each case, I have deemed that there have been too few items ready to be presented to justify the resource that would be required. I have made a judgement in respect of each Committee about the need for it to proceed based on the number of items, the urgency of those items, the potential risks of not proceeding with the Planning Committee and the best use of resources. As a mirror example of this, I recently agreed to an extraordinary Planning Committee being added to the calendar.

It is regrettable that planning applications do not arrive in a steady, even flow, but given that they cannot and do not, I am pleased to be agile when considering Committee members' time.

There is, therefore, a link between the elements of the question, but they are also separate, moving parts. Overall, I am confident officers are committed to determining as many applications as possible, in the timeliest manner, without reducing the soundness or robustness of either their decision-making or their recommendation-making. As Chairman, I echo this commitment and would end on noting the balance to be made – as with all things planning – in bringing items to the soonest practical Planning Committee with also having an eye on the best use of resources.

Supplementary Question

Thank you, I share your confidence in the officers' ability and thank them. Do you share my concern over the increase in contact from residents who have made planning applications and are now considering appeals for non-determination due to the time that has lapsed. Are you also concerned of the impact that might have on the budget going forward?

Response

As stated at a number of Planning Committee meetings, the decisions made by Members of the Committee are based on a Member's technical knowledge, their heart and the financial impact that might impact the Council, and I share your concerns. I have regular conversations with senior officers at the Planning Committee and we discuss the impact. It is mindful that all members of the Committee take that onboard.

Question 2 – Councillor Ben J Martin

Could the chair provide details of the current number of pipeline affordable homes secured through planning section 106 agreements without a confirmed partner Registered Provider in place, and confirm if the council is encouraging use of the Homes England Section 106 affordable housing clearing service?

Response

A report on affordable housing delivery was presented at Housing, Health and Communities Committee on 28th October. That report highlighted that there are currently 15 approved sites with a total 236 s106 homes with no associated registered provider. Developers and Registered Providers are regularly signposted to Homes

England to enable delivery and additional grant funding has been enabled via Affordable Homes Programme 2021-2026 AHP, Homes England Strategic Partnership (HESP) and Recycled Capital Grant Funding (RCGF).

Supplementary Question

I will do everything possible to encourage Registered Providers to invest in Swale. As Chair of Housing, Health and Communities Committee, do you have a message for the Registered Providers and those seeking to invest private funds in affordable and sociable housing?

Response

The message is quite simple. We really want to work with Registered Providers. The people of Swale deserve to have those affordable houses in place and operational. Officers and Councillors are already really invested and reaching out to RP's. If anyone is interested in investing in Swale, we would encourage those conversations.

472 Leader's Statement

The Leader said:

"Madam Mayor, thank you.

As Leader of Swale Borough Council, there is, as always, a whole range of matters that I could report on this evening and of course many activities across the borough that I would ordinarily wish to highlight.

However, I am mindful of the significant and pressing items before Full Council tonight, and I believe that it is important that we devote our time and attention to the business requiring decision.

In that spirit, and out of respect for the importance of the agenda ahead, I will keep my statement deliberately brief and cover pertinent issues at December's meeting when less constrained by time.

In the meantime I will touch briefly on a few pressing matters of particular relevance to our residents, notwithstanding what is to follow on this evenings agenda. Firstly, the continuing highways issues in and around the Sittingbourne area and secondly the pressures and difficulties within education provision in Swale, both of which are of course Kent County Council responsibilities. These challenges have a direct and daily impact on our communities, and I want to reassure colleagues that I am continuing to raise these concerns directly with KCC Leader and relevant Cabinet members, pressing for more effective action and clearer communication.

I also wanted to place on record my welcome for the proposed reopening of Faversham Cottage Hospital on the second of December having lobbied for its return. This is a positive step for local healthcare provision and for our communities in the Eastern part of the borough, and I hope to see this progress continue in collaboration with our partners.

To close Madam Mayor, I would like to conclude by expressing my appreciation for the continued professionalism and dedication shown by our officers during what are uncertain times. And to state that personally I remain committed to working constructively with all colleagues as we navigate the challenges and opportunities that

lie ahead.

Thank you Madam Mayor”.

In response, the Leader of the Conservative Group agreed that the disruption and impact on residents and the local economy as a result of the highways issues was appalling and spoke frustratingly at the lack of action to address it. He referred to the additional delays caused because of the change in traffic light frequency and priority at the junction of St. Michaels Road and Crown Quay Lane, Sittingbourne. He welcomed and thanked those involved in the re-opening of the Cottage Hospital, Faversham giving particular thanks to the Faversham and Mid-Kent MP Helen Whately. Finally he said that political groups working together efficiently made the Council better.

Referring to the traffic issues in the area, the Leader of the SIA Group was critical of the promises made previously to address it, with no changes. He said many residents had contacted him about the closure of The Appleyard, Sittingbourne and he asked the Leader if there was anything the Council could do?

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group said the Faversham Cottage Hospital was a cherished community service and she thanked all those involved in lobbying for it to be re-opened, acknowledging that all political parties came together to push for its reopening. She highlighted that the staff who worked there had been through an uncertain time.

The Leader of the Reform UK Group joined others in praising the collaborative efforts to reopen Faversham Cottage Hospital. Addressing highways issues in the Borough, he reminded Members that Swale Borough Council (SBC) was the local planning authority responsible for granting applications that increased pressure on the road network. He noted that Members of the Planning Committee had the discretion to refuse applications, even when Kent Highways and Transportation advised otherwise. He said other councils had taken this approach and successfully defended their decisions at appeal. The Leader of the Reform UK group said previous Governments had not invested into the road network and had cut funding to local authorities.

The Leader of the Green Group shared that he had previously worked at Faversham Cottage Hospital and highlighted its importance to residents across a wide area. He echoed others in expressing his pleasure at its reopening.

Other Members were invited to ask questions and make comments which included:

- There were currently around 540 Year 6 pupils on the Isle of Sheppey who would need a secondary school place in September 2026, but only 330 places were available on the Isle of Sheppey. Kent County Council (KCC) appeared to be forecasting that the remaining 210 pupils would need to attend schools on the mainland. What was the Leader's view on this?
- thanked SBC for providing parents with a platform to raise concerns about the shortage of school places for Isle of Sheppey residents;
- thanked Councillor Elliott Jayes and the Chief Executive for making space on agendas to ensure that parents were heard;
- referred to the response received from the Cabinet Member for Education which stated that the issue was not their problem, and highlighted it was not the problem of the students needing a school place;

- traffic issues were not just unique to Swale;
- there was a lack of communication between those leading on developer-funded works to those leading on maintenance works, at KCC;
- praised the hard work of all SBC Officers;
- referred to the continual delays to the Grovehurst Road, Sittingbourne scheme, and how the concurrent closures impacted so many;
- called for KCC to advise what fines and penalties had been issued against the contractors for the extreme delays on the Grovehurst Road project and for money to be spent in communities who had been particularly badly affected by the delays;
- thanked the Leader for his efforts on the re-opening of the Faversham Cottage Hospital and praised its good service;
- Sittingbourne was the largest area in Swale but did not have the health facilities it needed, what was the Leader doing to address this?; and
- suggested that SBC should force developers to be upfront in their commitments to Section 106 Agreements.

In response, the Leader said he recently met with the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation at KCC and raised the issue of the traffic lights sequence at the junction of St. Michaels Road and Crown Quay Lane and for the box junction at the bottom of Bell Road, Sittingbourne to be remarked as a priority. He shared with Members the explanations he had been given for the reason the traffic built up in that area.

473 **Motion - 19 November - International Men's Day**

Before inviting the proposer of the motion to speak, the Mayor advised that Councillor Sarah Stephen would now be seconding the motion in Councillor Paul Stephen's absence.

Councillor Nundy confirmed with Members they had all read the motion as set out in the Agenda, and he began by sharing that he had known many men who had died by suicide and spoke emotionally about how he felt when he received such news. He said the theme for International Mens' Day this year was 'Celebrating Men and Boys' and said it was important to discuss the struggles that men and boys faced. Councillor Nundy spoke about the toxic gender roles imposed on men by society and the stress these expectations caused.

Councillor Nundy informed Members that Swale ranked as the third highest borough in Kent for suicide rates, with an average of 12.8 suicides per 100,000 people and a rolling average of 18 to 20 men per 100,000 - above the national average, where men accounted for 75% of all suicide deaths. He noted that the reasons for the high rate among men were varied, but emphasized that men often did not talk about their feelings.

Councillor Nundy said the motion asked the Council to acknowledge the crisis in our community and to urge the Government to do better. He highlighted the national support groups 'The Campaign against Living Miserably' and the Samaritans as well as local groups including MenTalk Health Swale and 'Sheppey Dads'.

Finally, Councillor Nundy spoke of those in our community who had died by suicide, and he asked Members to support the motion.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Sarah Stephen spoke passionately about MenTalk and the support it had given to so many men in the borough, including setting up educational programmes, walking groups and art classes, as well as 24/7 chat support. She said MenTalk was a lifeline for many men and it had not lost a single man to suicide. Councillor Stephen said MenTalk were expanding onto the Isle of Sheppey with strong community backing from Sheppey Matters, Sheppey United Football Club and Sheppey Rugby Club. She added that they were also supported by the current Mayor of Faversham and the vicar of St. Mary of Charity Church, Faversham. Councillor Stephen asked for SBC's help to work as a partnership and to identify billboard locations across the borough to use to display life-saving messages to reach those that needed it most.

Members were invited to speak and raised points including:

- Was supportive of the core aims, particularly the commitment to destigmatising men's mental health, promoting support services and calling for improved access to care from Government and the NHS ;
- raised concern that paying tribute to those in our community who had tragically died by suicide was complex, and loved ones might not wish to be referenced in public or in a political forum;
- should take care not to cause distress or appear to use tragedy symbolically;
- gave examples of individuals who, after engaging in unlawful activities, subsequently ended their own lives and said those individuals should not be paid tribute;
- needed to acknowledge the broader impact on suicide on our communities and reaffirm the commitment to prevention and support;
- should be clear about what practical actions would follow when declaring a mental health crisis;
- questioned whether there had been an increase in mental health issues or was society now more open to discussing it?;
- awareness raising should be paired with clear pathways into services; and
- welcomed the spirit of the motion and shared the desire to support men and boys in the community but more information was needed.

Councillor Mike Whiting proposed a minor amendment at points 4 and 5 in the motion:

4. *To write to central government and Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Trust to urgently improve the doctor to patient ratio in Swale and to ensure better access to mental health services at the point of need.*

5. *To write to local schools to promote mental health awareness, particularly with boys.*

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Mike Baldock.

Discussion that ensued on the amendment and points raised included:

- It would have been more efficient to have a more thought out motion presented to Members;
- raised concerns about writing to schools as more professional staff should be leading on childhood mental health;
- referred to mental health issues for those not in schools and did not receive the professional support that schools provided; and

- said the Government were currently looking at a men's health strategy, using schools to educate and breakdown stereotypes.

The seconder of the amendment reminded Members that the amendment was seeking the Leader to write to Central Government and the appropriate influential bodies, including schools to inform them of services that were available and to act.

The proposer and seconder of the substantive motion supported the amendment.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was agreed.

Members continued to discuss the motion and made points including:

- Praised and gave their personal experience as a service user of MenTalk;
- would like to have seen more facts and figures before declaring a mental health crisis;
- there were problems accessing mental health services but did not agree there was a mental health crisis;
- women between the ages of 16 and 24 were almost three times as likely to experience a common mental health issue as men of the same age, rates of self-harm had tripled since 1993 and women were 10% more likely to attempt suicide than men;
- it was appropriate to talk about men only as it was International Mens Day;
- International Mens Day gave the opportunity to celebrate the positive contributions of men and boys in the community, as well as to be honest about the mental health challenges so many faced;
- everyone needed to work together to tackle the stigma of mental health;
- praised the charitable organisations that supported those with mental health challenges, giving particular praise to the Men Shed at the Psychic Garden in Faversham;
- the motion was compassionate and practical;
- men spoke less openly about their struggles with mental health;
- receiving early assessments was key;
- raised the issue of support for those that relapsed;
- spoke of other service providers, such as housing providers, also having a responsibility for vulnerable residents with mental health issues;
- the motion needed to have a practical impact to support;
- SBC should be actively promoting the support services available to residents in Swale's public and private online spaces;
- SBC needed to consider its own social responsibility for mental health when employing staff;
- health authorities needed to do more;
- highlighted to Members that dialling 111 had a mental health crisis option and for those in a severe mental health crisis should choose option 2 after dialling;
- there had been an increase in mental health issues, particularly in young people, some of which arose from the Internet and some was the polarisation of society;
- schools were often the first port of call for young people to access mental health support;
- spoke of the pressure on children in schools from social media;
- said that everyone in the community should have been included in the motion, not

just men;

- there was a higher than average issue with mental ill health in Swale;
- the motion was the right length, if more detail had been added, Members might suggest it was too long; and
- SBC needed to lead on supporting those with mental health issues.

A Member sought an alteration to point 6 of the motion to:

*“6. Pay tribute to **those** in our community.....”*

The original proposer and seconder of the motion accepted the alteration.

In summing up, Councillor Nundy reminded Members it was International Mens Day and he said he had not suggested that mental health issues did not affect woman. He said the motion sought a generic, not individual, tribute to those who had taken their own lives, and to raise awareness. Councillor Nundy said there was a national mental health crisis and he confirmed the statistics he quoted earlier in the debate. He said the motion was about standing with the community and showing SBC understood the severity of mental health issues and letting men and boys know that it was OK to be upset, and encouraging men to seek the support that was available.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 3.1.19(2), a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Gould, Shiel, Wooster, Whiting, Marchington, Cheeseman, Nundy, Eyre, Wise, Miller, Jayes, Watson, Bonney, Clark, Winckless, B J Martin, C Palmer, Perkin, Last, R Palmer, Mishchuk, Neal, Thompson, Carnell, Hunt, Moore, Baldock, MacDonald, S Stephen and T Gibson. Total equals 30.

Against: Councillors Speed, Harrison, Brawn and Cavanagh. Total equals 4.

Abstain: Councillors Bowen, Booth, Noe and Jackson. Total equals 4.

The Mayor announced the motion was carried.

474 **Terms of Reference for Community Governance Review**

In proposing the recommendation, the Leader said the Community Governance Review (CGR) Member Steering Group had met and developed the draft Terms of Reference and these were set out within Appendix I.

The Chair of the Member Steering Group seconded the recommendation and in doing so paid tribute to the members of the steering group and the Chief Executive, the Policy and Communities Manager and the Local Government Review (LRG) Project Officer for their work. He urged Members to agree the terms so that matters could be progressed.

The Leader of the Conservative Group welcomed the report but urged caution that any newly-established Town or Parish Councils should be made aware of the additional costs that might bring.

The Leader of the SIA Group said it was Members' responsibility to communicate and keep residents informed of implications.

The Chair of the Member Steering Group responded to a Member's request for clarification on paragraph 5.1 of the report, and he advised Members that the deadline for putting forward suggestions for areas to be reviewed was the following week. Another Member reminded Members that representations could include the desire to keep the current boundaries in addition to considering merging or abolishing existing Parish Councils, as well as forming new ones.

Other comments made by Members included:

- Transparency was vital as Town and Parish Councils could accrue debt in addition to assets;
- hoped that Sittingbourne formed a Town Council like the other two significant towns in the borough did as it needed the custodianship; and
- warned against the lack of interest from residents in some areas to sit on their Parish Council.

Resolved:

(1) That the adoption of the Terms of Reference for the Community Review in Swale be agreed.

475 Local Government Review

The Mayor explained the process that would be followed for the item, drawing attention that the recommendation did not include a recommended business case option and the reasons for this were set out in the report.

The Leader introduced the report and proposed the recommendations.

The Mayor seconded the recommendations and reserved her right to speak.

The Leader of the Conservative Group thanked the Chief Executive and other officers at the Council for their work on the LGR, and he said that SBC were very well-informed on the topic thanks to their efforts. He also thanked the Leader and other Group Leaders for their communication over the preceding months. The Leader of the Conservative Group referred to the five options, and said that the only positive for the option for a single unitary authority was the cost. He said options 3a and 4b had some merit, and he could not support the options that split the borough. The Leader of the Conservative Group said none of the recommendations were preferred options for Swale.

The Leader of the SIA Group expressed his appreciation to the officers for their efforts, acknowledging the complexity of the work undertaken. He remarked that some of the options presented were highly unsatisfactory and cautioned against pursuing option 3a. Whilst noting that all available options were undesirable and imposed upon SBC in a manner he considered anti-democratic, he indicated a preference for option 4b as the least objectionable choice.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group acknowledged the difficulty of selecting the best option when none truly reflected the wishes of Faversham residents. She stated that the LGR did not strengthen local governance and would result in Swale residents having less influence. She was highly critical of option 1a, the single authority model, noting that whilst it was the cheapest, this did not make it the most suitable. She further

expressed concern that options 3a and 4b risked silencing local voices, while options 5a and 4d, —although preferred by Faversham residents — could become secondary considerations in any reorganisation. She highlighted that an Equality Impact Assessment would only be required once the Government announced the final unitary model and that tax-payers money would be used to make the changes. Concluding, she emphasised that none of the options preserved local character or decision-making and asserted that residents deserved better.

The Leader of the Reform UK Group referred to the potential cost savings achievable under a single unitary authority and warned that some councils could face bankruptcy if action was not taken. He acknowledged that no one was happy with the LGR proposals but stressed the need for realism. He highlighted that coastal communities in Kent incurred the highest costs and, if divided, other areas could not be relied upon to subsidise them. He reported that residents he had spoken to wanted lower Council Tax and improved services, and argued that services would not improve if Kent was split. The Leader of the Reform UK Group identified Adult Services and Special Educational Needs (SEND) as significant financial pressures, particularly concentrated in East Kent. He stated that none of the options were perfect, the reform was not ideal and was being imposed, but some options were better than others. He concluded that residents would most closely identify with the Kent-wide unitary option.

The Leader of the Green Group agreed with many that the process was costly and noted there was little evidence to support the options presented. He stated that, of the options offered, option 4b was the “least worst” as it reflected a shared identity of being a town with a rural background and similar communities. He expressed concern that option 5a carried high costs and reiterated that he was not satisfied with the overall process.

The Mayor invited other Members to speak and points raised included:

- Water Lane, Ospringe in Watling ward and parts of Ashford Road, Faversham being split, and falling under different authorities under some options and said this was nonsense;
- Swale was stronger together and could have a voice;
- option 1a did not match the criteria and having a higher ratio of residents per Council was unmanageable;
- the options the public chose were discounted by Government;
- option 4b balanced the books and avoided taking on the double debt of Medway Unitary and Kent County Council whilst also being able to serve residents;
- some SBC schemes were still being delivered and choosing Options 4d and 5a might mean taking on the debt of those schemes without the benefit;
- the process would likely be delayed and might cost more than expected;
- referred to the £732million debt of KCC, compared to £13million debt of SBC;
- Medway might have assets but also had £612million debt;
- referred to the recent loan from Ashford Borough Council of £72million invested with a developer for a recent scheme which added to their existing £260million debt;
- Swale was a valuable asset on its own with comparatively little debt;
- compared to other Councils who were now part of one unitary and said there was no localism;
- it was a waste of officer time that could be spent delivering services locally;
- option 4b gave more rural and coastal connection;

- eight out of ten of the lowest spending Councils had a population lower than the medium population of existing unitary Councils and the review would not save money;
- referred to Government not listening to residents or Councils in Surrey;
- most residents did not want this but if pushed many said their allegiances were more with Medway than Folkestone;
- although the decision was of considerable importance, there was a sense of fatigue and resignation with Members and public with the continued discussions on the matter;
- collaboration with Ashford and Folkestone, in particular, could offer benefits to the Isle of Sheppey through their tourism experience;
- there was potential for different structures to work, and SBC already currently shared services and contracts with other authorities;
- there should have been greater clarity and steer from Government and this had impacted the options and proposals;
- some residents had expressed the fear that Kent would lose its identity if it was split up too much;
- highlighted that KCC already delivered Adult Social Care, Children's Services and education across Kent;
- sought clarity on facts and figures on the business cases;
- highlighted residents' lack of interest in voting, citing feelings of disengagement and underrepresentation, and stressed that the decision should reflect what was best for those individuals;
- some residents were unaware of the distinction between their borough and County Council and the services they provided;
- a ratio of 11,700 residents per Councillor proposed under option 1A was undemocratic;
- residents at the Eastern end of the borough did not align themselves with authorities on the outskirts of London such as Gravesham and Dartford; and
- could not support options that split wards and parishes.

Councillor Ben J Martin proposed an amendment to recommendation 1:

*"That Council agrees **option 4B** be put forward to Government for Local Government Reorganisation for Kent and Medway"*

He also proposed a third recommendation:

"That Council notes its thanks to the officers both at SBC and other Kent Councils for their work into developing the business cases, and ensuring that Members were well informed."

Councillor Baldock seconded the amendment.

The Monitoring Officer clarified that Members understood the process to consider the amendment put forward. Members then debated the amendment and made points including:

- Could not support option 4b;
- felt conflicted as SBC had worked well previously with the North Kent Coast authorities under the Thames Gateway schemes;

- spoke of the lack of public transport links to areas authorities within option 4b;
- noted that patient transport was not relevant to the discussion as patients had the ability to choose which hospital they attended according to need;
- the location of the head office of any new authority was irrelevant as most residents did not visit the building but phoned or emailed; and
- irrespective of the decision Council made, there would still be a full consultation process

In accordance with Procedure Rule 3.1.19(2), a recorded vote was taken and voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Cavanagh, Carnell, Hunt, Moore, Baldock, S Stephen, T Gibson, Harrison, Jackson, Neal, Thompson, Booth, B J Martin, Last, Noe, Ayre, Wise, Jayes, Watson, Bonney, Winckless, Gould, Shiel, Wooster, Speed, Bowen, Marchington, Cheesman and Nundy. Total equals 29.

Against: Councillors Macdonald, Brawn, Mischuck, C Palmer, Perkin, R Palmer, Miller, S Clark and Whiting. Total equals 9.

Abstain: None. Total equals 0.

The Mayor announced that the amendment had been agreed.

Members then debated the substantive motion. A Member queried whether the Council could submit its proposal and highlight concerns about the democratic nature of the process. The Chief Executive advised that whilst the business case could not be amended, a covering letter could be sent, signed by Group Leaders, to express their dissatisfaction.

Members then voted on the substantive motion.

Resolved:

(1) That option 4B be put forward to Government for Local Government Reorganisation for Kent and Medway.

(2) That delegation be given to the Chief Executive to submit the agreed proposal to MHCLG by the 28 November 2025 and to undertake any other necessary steps as part of this process.

(3) That officers both at SBC and other Kent Councils be thanked for their work into developing the business cases, and ensuring that Members were well informed.

476 **Adjournment**

There was an adjournment from 8.53 pm to 9.03 pm.

477 **Extension of Standing Orders**

Members agreed to extend Standing Orders at 10 pm in order that Council could complete its business.

Mayor

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