
Council

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 1 April 2026 from 7.00 pm - 11.27 pm.

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

PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Councillors Pete Neal and Mark Tucker.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Lisa Fillery, Robin Harris and Jo Millard and Larissa Reed.

OFFICER PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Emma Wiggins.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Roger Clark, Alex Eyre, Kieran Golding, Rich Lehmann, Pete Neal and Mark Tucker.

856 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

857 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Council meetings held on 28 January 2026 (Minute Nos. 657 – 673) and 18 February 2026 (Minute Nos. 726 – 740) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as correct records.

858 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Monique Bonney declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of Item 11 Local Plan Growth Strategy and sites for allocation as she chaired the Five Parishes Group.

Councillor Julien Speed declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of Item 11 Local Plan Growth Strategy and sites for allocation as he was involved in the Teynham and Highsted Action Group.

Councillor Mike Baldock declared a non-pecuniary interest in respect of Item 11 Local Plan Growth Strategy and sites for allocation as he was involved in Communities Against Bobbing Expansion.

859 **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor announced that this meeting would be her last ordinary Full Council meeting as Mayor, because Mayor Making for the civic year 2026/27 was scheduled for May 2026.

The Mayor said she and the Deputy Mayor had attended 23 engagements since the last Full Council meeting held in February 2026 and these included:

- Romanian Community Church Service;
- Sittingbourne Carnival selection;
- the Ukrainian fourth Birthday celebrations;
- Taste of Ramadan;
- International Womens' Day;
- visit to Fulston Manor School, Sittingbourne;
- formal balls at Bromley and Faversham, and the President's Ball at Minster Rotary Club;
- opening of the Extension to the East Kent College;
- interviewed by Radio Kent; and
- meetings for Swale Pride and Next Youth.

The Mayor said earlier in the week she had joined the Mayor of Medway at the Wisdom Hospice and the Deputy Lord Lieutenant Jools Holland had opened the therapy centre and she praised the work of the Wisdom Hospice.

Looking forward, the Mayor said engagements included Elmley Prison, a Julian Smith concert, Menopause café, pie and mash with the Royal Society of St. George, Eastchurch Aviation Museum, a MenTalk fundraiser on the Isle of Sheppey and her Drag Bingo charity event on 18 April 2026.

Finally, the Mayor drew Members' attention to her Tour of Kent charity bike ride from 8 to 10 May 2026, which eight members of staff were taking part in and totalled 170 miles. She encouraged Members to sponsor the event, the funds of which would be donated to her charities.

860 **Questions submitted by the Public**

The Mayor advised that no questions had been received by members of the public.

861 **Questions submitted by Members**

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

Question 1 – Councillor Mike Whiting

Could the Chair of the Environment and Climate Change Committee confirm the current implementation status of the new car parking charges agreed in November, including whether they have gone live as of this morning (1 April), and whether all associated payment machines, signage, and bay markings are fully installed and operational at the Library and Park Road car parks in Queenborough, and the Halfway and Little Oyster car parks on the Isle of Sheppey?

Could the Chair also set out the installation costs for these four car parks and advise whether any amendments have been made to enforcement officers' rotas to ensure effective enforcement of the new charging arrangements?

Response – Chair of Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee

The parking operations team have surveyed each of the 6 sites since the committee decision and are undertaking the final preparations for the charges going live. At the time of drafting this response the intention was to go live throughout the day on the 1st April 2026, subject to any final equipment being delivered/installed on time.

The total estimated costs (subject to final invoices) for these 4 car parks will be £24,965.

Each car park required different elements which are summarised below;

Car Park	Works undertaken/planned
Library Car Park Queenborough	Signage / Mains Parking Machine installation (spare taken from other site)
Park Road Car park Queenborough	Signage / New solar parking machine / Deep clean from cleansing contractor / relining bays (planned)
Halfway Car Park	Signage / Mains Parking Machine installation (spare taken from other site) / surface patch repairs / relining bays (planned)
Little Oyster	Signage / Refurbished solar parking machine / reviewing entrance road works

As Members will be aware and as was stated in the January committee report, no additional enforcement hours have been added to the Civil enforcement contract. This remains at 15,000 deployed hours which will be spread across all of our on and off street locations. Rotas already change weekly depending on the time of the year and reacting to reported issues to amend inappropriate parking behaviour.

Supplementary Question:

There was no supplementary question.

Question 2 – Councillor Tom Nundy

Can the Chair of the Environment and Climate Change Committee confirm how many PCNs have been issued at the Shingle Bank since parking charges were introduced, what actions are planned to address non-paying caravans on the site, and how the enforcement workforce is being increased to manage the additional charged locations introduced this year?

Response – Chair of Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee

A total of 32 penalty charge notices have been issued at the Shingle bank since introduction of the charges in July 2025 which has largely regulated activity and generated some income for the Council from the overnight fees.

Council officers from a range of teams have engaged and supported individuals that were residing in caravans on the shingle bank. This number has reduced over time and whilst occupants were engaging with housing support teams, it was not felt proportionate to undertake enforcement.

There are currently two caravans left in situ (one a very recent arrival). It would not be suitable to talk in detail about individual cases. However, we have taken enforcement action under section 77 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (ultimately a direction to leave) on both. Should this not be adhered to then a section 78 will be issued which requires removal of the vehicle unlawfully on the land.

There are no current plans for additional civil enforcement resource for the new parking charges implemented this financial year. This remains at 15,000 deployed hours which will be spread across all of our 'on and off' street locations. Rotas already change weekly depending on the time of the year and reacting to reported issues to amend inappropriate parking behaviour.

Supplementary Question:

There was no supplementary question.

862 Motion - Supported Bus Services

The Mayor advised that an amendment to the motion on Supported Bus Services had been received, circulated to Members and published on the Council's website, and following discussions with the Member who had proposed the amendment, the proposer and seconder of the original motion had agreed to alter point three of the motion as tabled.

In proposing the motion, Councillor Dolley Wooster explained that the Labour Government had given Kent County Council over £78million in funding for bus services and extended bus fare cap - £78.2million to overhaul the local bus services, to increase the reliability of the service, reduce fares and upgrade vehicles. She explained that the motion was self-explanatory and anticipated cross-party support to address residents' concerns about maintaining sustainable services in the borough. Councillor Wooster said that Swale Borough Councillors who had attended the bus partnership meetings with KCC officers and bus operators shared residents' concerns and she was critical that follow up meetings did not occur and there was very little information to report back to Area Committees. She said that investment in bus shelters was welcomed but residents needed regular, reliable bus services including at weekends so that it could support tourism. Councillor Wooster commended the bus operators who had continued bus services without disruption, despite the large increase in fuel bills.

Finally, Councillor Wooster encouraged all groups to support the motion to lobby KCC for action in protecting existing bus services in Swale from further reduction, to work with bus operators to improve reliability, frequency and coverage of services across the borough, prioritising connections between neighbourhoods, rail connections and communities with no public transport and to request that the Leader of SBC and relevant committee chairs wrote formally to KCC with their concerns and to take part in meaningful and long-term engagement.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Ashley Wise reserved his right to speak.

Members were invited to debate the motion and made points including:

- Welcomed the motion but said there was no duty on KCC to subsidise buses or provide services, and routes were organised, planned and controlled by private companies;
- highlighted KCC's only legal obligations on children's school bus journeys and the old persons bus pass;
- there was a national shortage of qualified bus drivers and engineers;
- running rural bus services was unviable;
- it was Central Government who could reduce the tax and regulatory burden that had put bus companies out of business or change the law that compelled local authorities to subsidise loss-making routes;
- compared the higher grants per head of population to run public transport in London than Kent;
- the partnership meetings already gave direct access to lobby Government and suggested KCC Members and the MP should be doing more;
- suggested inviting the relevant people from KCC and from Government to the next Swale Joint Transportation Board meeting;
- had raised previously at the bus partnership meetings that several bus routes from Sittingbourne to rural areas ceased at 6pm, which did not encourage the nighttime economy;
- needed Sunday services and more connectivity;
- supported the motion;
- spoke of potential missed hospital appointments due to unreliable bus services;
- spoke of the impact of unreliable and cancelled services on those trying to move around the borough;
- young and old people, disabled people and those with long term health conditions felt the impact of poor bus services the most;
- cheap fares were pointless if the bus did not turn up;
- the motion was reasonable and asked Members to stand up for their residents who deserved a better bus service;
- Swale was under-served by buses;
- when groups and partnerships worked together, they were more effective;
- described incidents where young people had to give up jobs they had secured as they were unable to get to the jobs using public transport;
- the motion kept the issue at the forefront;
- praised the Hopper bus provided by Faversham Town Council which helped residents in Oare, Ospringe and other areas;
- lack of buses impacted on the quality of residents lives;
- the issue of poor and lack of bus services has been raised with KCC for over 20 years;
- KCC had to provide funding to bus operators in the whole of Kent, not just Swale;
- bus operators were commercial businesses and they chose the routes and timings of buses;
- historical lobbying for improved bus services had brought little response;
- suggested going direct to bus operators rather than KCC;
- many bus routes had ceased due to lack of use by the public;
- the previous KCC administration removed subsidies from many bus routes making them unviable;
- for many residents, buses were a lifeline;

- funding loans alone did not guarantee a bus service that worked for the people that required it;
- reliable, frequent and affordable bus services were fundamental to Swale's economic, social and environmental well-being;
- buses played a crucial role in reducing congestion and cutting emissions;
- KCC should protect existing services from further cuts and work proactively with operators to improve reliability, frequency and coverage;
- Government, KCC and bus operators all had responsibility and public had to use bus services to make them viable;
- drew attention to the lack of bus services to the Memorial Hospital, Sittingbourne that served minor injuries;
- referred to Section 106 monies for bus services;
- compared to bus services in Cornwall which were Council-coordinated where there was a similar amount of investment on buses and where a 40% increase in footfall had been achieved using bus services;
- residents received poor value for money under the current bus operating system;
- some residents felt isolated because of the lack of a bus service in some areas;
- this should not be just about bus services but about integrated mass transit system where all forms of public transport formed a coherent network;
- planning bus routes had to be coordinated with the traffic commissioner to ensure an efficient service;
- suggested buses would be more economical if they were allowed to use tax-free fuel;
- spoke of the years of decline in an efficient service; and
- funding for public health and environmental projects should be directed to help subsidise public transport.

Councillor Wise, the seconder of the motion, thanked Councillor Palmer for the amendment. He referred to the attendance at Area Committees by the bus operators when the significant challenges in providing sustainable bus service for Swale were discussed. Councillor Wise reiterated the benefits already raised by Members and said it was crucial that authorities worked together to ensure the public received an efficient bus services. He acknowledged that the issue had been ongoing for over 20 years but reminded Members of the significant development that had taken place in the area and the increased numbers of residents who did not have basic connectivity to travel around the borough. Councillor Wise said Swale needed to start with a bus service that people wanted to use, preserve the service and expand, and lobbying was the start of that process.

Councillor Wooster, proposer of the motion, welcomed Members' comments and said there were other ways that Members could become involved by talking to their residents and asking KCC Councillors why they were not attending meetings such as the Swale JTB where the issues were discussed. She urged all Members to support the motion.

Resolved:

That Council notes:

(1) That Kent County Council (KCC) is the local highway authority and has responsibility for support bus services across Kent.

(2) The support the government has given to bus travel through £78million in funding to KCC and the extended bus fare cap.

(3) Ongoing concerns from Swale residents regarding the reliability, frequency and coverage of local bus services, particularly in rural areas and outside peak hours.

(4) The importance of accessible public transport in supporting employment, education, healthcare access, social inclusion and reducing carbon emissions.

(5) Councillor Richard Palmer, in his capacity as County Councillor Swale West Division at KCC, had already arranged a cross-party engagement meeting between Swale Borough Council Members and KCC, to be held at Swale House on 10 April 2026 at 10am, at which the KCC Deputy Cabinet Member for Highways, Spencer Dixon, and senior KCC highways and public transport officers will attend to discuss bus service provision and Section 106 funding in Swale; and resolves that the outcome of that meeting, including any commitments by the KCC officers or Members, be reported back to Full Council or the relevant service Committee no later than June 2026.

This Council believes:

(1) That reliable and affordable bus services are vital to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of Swale.

(2) That poor bus provision disproportionately affected young people, older residents, disabled residents, and those without access to a car.

This Council resolves to:

(1) Lobby KCC to:

(a) Protect existing bus services in Swale from further reductions and work with bus operators to improve reliability, frequency and coverage of services across the borough.

(b) Prioritise connections between neighbourhoods, rail connections and communities with limited or no public transport.

863 Motion - Water Supply Provision

In proposing the motion as set out in the Agenda, Councillor Lloyd Bowen said something as basic and non-negotiable as water could no longer be taken for granted and he referred to the recent separate incidents in Kent when thousands of homes had been left without water, some for several weeks. Drawing attention to an incident in January 2026 which caused disruption to many residents, including those in Swale, he said incidents were becoming more regular and some of the failures were foreseeable and preventable. Councillor Bowen said Ofwat had fined water companies millions of pounds, and had cited poor maintenance, weak planning and a slow, disorganised response, which impacted thousands of customers. Reflecting on the evidence, he said families had been left unable to bathe children, care settings struggled to maintain basic hygiene, there had been disruption to schools and a reliance on bottled water.

Councillor Bowen said providing clean water was not a luxury but a fundamental public service and the failure by the water companies to deliver was unacceptable. He said SBC needed to formally state its dissatisfaction with the performance of South East Water and Southern Water because apologies were not enough and residents deserved accountability, transparency, and confidence that disruption to water would not continue. Councillor Bowen said explanations on what went wrong, why the contingency plans were insufficient and what the resilience will be going forward were needed. He said where standards were not met there should be consequences and senior executives from the water authorities should be held publicly to account to explain the failures and how they intend to supply current and future residents in new developments planned for Swale by 2042.

Finally, Councillor Bowen said the motion sought to send a clear message to water authorities that enough was enough, while also making it clear to residents that access to a fundamental service – being able to turn on a tap and expect clean, reliable water – should no longer be a matter of uncertainty.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Julien Speed reserved his right to speak.

Members were invited to debate the motion and made points including:

- It was an important issue for everyone;
- the outages were increasing;
- it was a long term issue that could be traced back to privatisation and water companies had prioritised their shareholders above investment into infrastructure;
- there was a lack of investment and planning in reservoirs;
- water companies needed to be taken back into public ownership;
- regular update meetings between the Chief Executive and Chief Executives of the water companies were previously agreed and should be resurrected if they had stopped;
- regular liaison meetings with senior officers and representatives from the water companies would build up good relationships and should be encouraged;
- the Environment Agency should also be held accountable;
- water companies should be statutory consultees on planning applications;
- the business plans of water companies needed to include significant infrastructure upgrades to accommodate new development;
- there was a resource impact on SBC's officers, exemplified by a recent disruption out of hours;
- there was a lack of communication between water companies, particular when, as in some wards in Swale, both companies shared responsibility;
- there were also freshwater problems as highlighted by the tankers currently at the local sewage treatment works caused by over capacity;
- it was important to highlight the issues of wastewater also and suggested an amendment to include this;
- there were continuing issues with water levels at reservoirs;
- spoke about the Surfers Against Sewage phone app which provided live data of sewage discharge;
- referring to the blue flag scheme, said the Council should re-consider being part of the scheme with the number of incidents of sewage discharge;
- despite new guidelines and legislation, water companies were not complying;
- it was outrageous that management at the water companies were able to claim

- bonuses despite dumping raw sewage off coasts or into waterways;
- referred to the significant increases in water bills from both companies whilst continuing to pay shareholders;
- the water companies must take accountability;
- gave an example of an incident of the impact on residents when water supply was diverted from one reservoir to another area;
- spoke about the impact that hotter summers in the UK might have on water supply and questioned any contingency by the water companies to prepare;
- there had been a decrease in water quality;
- a new reservoir in Kent was necessary;
- water companies should be liaising with health authorities to understand the disproportionate impact of water outages on communities who were most impacted, for example, those residents on home dialysis, suppressed immunity, or who could not lift large bottles of water provided at a time of water disruption;
- spoke about the impact on the fire service;
- SBC held some responsibility as decision maker to development and should consider refusing more planning applications due to lack of infrastructure; and
- highlighted the poor quality of the water at Milton Creek caused by the spillage from the sewage farm.

Councillor Wooster proposed an amendment to the second bullet point at (4) Consideration of enforcement action where standards have not been met to add *"including issues around water quality"*. This was seconded by Councillor Bonney and the proposer and seconder of the motion accepted the amendment.

The seconder of the motion, Councillor Speed, said housing targets in Kent were unachievable because of the pressure on the water supply and water companies had started to acknowledge that demand would be higher than planned for in their water resources management plans. He said Southern Water were recently fined £22million for water outages across Kent between 2020 and 2023 and highlighted an incident in Dargate in July 2025 which left residents without water for eight days and another in January 2026 that impacted many areas including villages around Sittingbourne. After the water companies had admitted significant supply issues for new development in other parts of Kent, Councillor Speed questioned what the situation might be for Swale? He said the level of communication from the water companies with SBC's planning officers was not good enough.

Councillor Speed said public confidence in the water utilities was at an all time low and their top executives needed to be held to account.

Councillor Speed proposed an amendment to (1) to formally state the Council's dissatisfaction with the performance of South East Water and Southern Water in relation to water supply provision and wastewater treatment within Swale Borough.

In accepting the amendment, Councillor Bowen, the proposer of the motion thanked Members for their support and respectful debate of the motion. He gave an example of proposed new development in his own ward that the water authority had advised they did not have the infrastructure to provide water to. Councillor Bowen referred to the need for an efficient water supply in the ever increasing rising temperatures in the summer months.

Resolved:***This Council notes that:***

- (1) Residents and businesses across Swale Borough have experienced repeated, prolonged and, in some cases, severe failures in water supply in recent years.***
- (2) The scale, frequency and duration of these incidents go beyond isolated or exceptional events and point to systemic shortcomings.***
- (3) Across areas of Kent including within Swale, residents, including vulnerable individuals, families, schools, and care settings, have been placed in unacceptable situations as a result of these failures.***

This Council believes that:

- (1) Reliable access to clean water is a fundamental public service and persistent service failures is unacceptable.***
- (2) Without decisive intervention and investment, there is a real risk of continued disruption and further erosion of public trust.***

This Council resolves to:

- (1) Formally state its dissatisfaction with the performance of South East Water and Southern Water in relation to water supply provision and wastewater treatment within Swale Borough.***
- (2) Write to the Chief Executives and Boards of South East Water and Southern Water to:***
 - Demand a comprehensive written account of the causes of recent failures.***
 - Require a clear explanation of why existing contingency and resilience plans were insufficient.***
 - Seek firm, time-bound commitments to infrastructure investment, operational improvement and enhanced customer communication.***
- (3) Request South East Water and Southern Water to attend a public meeting or relevant Council committee, at senior executive level to:***
 - Account publicly for recent service failures.***
 - Respond to questions from Councillors.***
 - Set out how confidence will be restored and future failures prevented.***
 - Explain how they plan to supply the 17,875 new dwellings that form the Swale Local Plan housing needs target to 2042.***
- (4) Escalate the Council's concerns to Ofwat, the Environment Agency, and the Drinking Water Inspectorate, requesting:***
 - Formal scrutiny of South East Water's and Southern Water's performance in Swale.***

- ***Consideration of enforcement action where standards have not been met including issues around water quality.***

(5) Request that Council officers assess whether further representations should be made jointly with other affected Kent authorities to strengthen the call for regulatory intervention.

(6) Commit to keeping residents informed of outcomes arising from this motion and to continue to press for tangible improvements until a reliable and resilient water supply is demonstrably achieved.

864 **URGENT MOTION - UKSPF Funding**

The Mayor said she would use her discretion and bring forward Item 15, an urgent motion. She said that the urgent motion on UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) had been received outside of the deadline, and due to the time-sensitive nature of the issue, she had allowed the motion to be included for debate.

In proposing the motion as set out on the Agenda, Councillor Hannah Perkin said it had been extensively debated at the last Housing, Health and Communities Committee meeting in March 2026.

In seconding the motion Councillor Wise said that there had been several years of UKSPF allocated to Swale and the final year had been a significant increase on the previous in-year allocations, and he stressed the importance of a replacement funding in the coastal and industrial area that Swale was as it faced very specific challenges. He said that whilst it was positive that other one-off funding had been allocated by Government for other projects, it was vital that there was long term replacement funding.

In accordance with procedure rule 3.1.15, Members moved straight to the vote.

Resolved:

(1) That Council asks the Leader to write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to express its deep concern at the lack of replacement revenue funding from 2026/27 onwards after the cessation of the UKSPF fund and the impact that could have on Swale.

(2) That the wording of the letter be delegated to the Head of Housing & Community Services, in collaboration with the Chair of the Housing, Health and Communities Committee.

865 **Leader's Statement**

The Leader said:

"I begin this evening on a very sombre note as my thoughts are with the family and friends of Juliette Kenny, a sixth form pupil at Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School in Faversham. The family so tragically lost their daughter as a result of the recent meningitis outbreak. No words can truly ease such a loss, but I want to place on record this Council's deepest condolences. As a community, we stand with them in their grief and I would like to thank our health partners, schools, local services and our own staff

for their swift response in what was an incredibly difficult, challenging and distressing time. As a council we will continue to support all efforts to safeguard public health and provide reassurance to our residents. Moments like this remind us of the importance of community, of looking out for one another, and of the vital role that our public services play every single day.

Turning to more positive matters, I was delighted to attend the official opening of the extension at EKC Sheppey College. This investment represents a significant step forward for education and skills on the Island. It is not just a building, it is an opportunity. An opportunity for young people and adult learners alike to access high-quality education, develop new skills, and build brighter futures. As a Council we are proud to support initiatives that strengthen pathways into employment and help our local economy to grow.

Whilst on the Isle of Sheppey I would like to commend the recent Royal Ballet and Opera, Sheppey Sings project, which brought young people from across the island's junior schools together through music in a truly uplifting way. It was an absolute privilege to attend and witness the project in action as the young people performed excerpts from Humperdink's opera Hansel and Gretel. Initiatives like this demonstrate the power of creativity and community spirit, they remind us that Swale is indeed rich in talent and can provide opportunities for youngsters to grow in confidence and ability.

I also wanted to briefly update Members on the £20 million Sheppey East, Government's Pride in Place programme aimed at improving both physical infrastructure and wider social outcomes for the community. We are currently recruiting an independent chair to lead a new neighbourhood board, which will be responsible for shaping how this funding is used and ensuring that it delivers real, lasting benefits for local people. The chair will work with a diverse group of community representatives to develop and deliver a long-term plan focused on priorities such as transport, health, education, safety, and economic opportunity. This is a genuinely community-led initiative, designed to empower residents to shape the future of their area and it is great to see those closest to the coal face getting involved and in particular the enthusiasm and commitment from Ward councillors Lee-Anne Moore and Tara Noe. It is an exciting opportunity to bring forward fresh ideas, attract further investment, and deliver transformational change in Sheppey East and I would encourage anyone with the passion, skills, and commitment to get involved.

Back on the mainland I am delighted to announce progress in Sittingbourne town centre area, where we are delivering 51 new high-quality affordable homes on the former Cockleshell Walk car park, supported by funding from Homes England. These will be social rented homes, providing genuinely affordable housing for local families, at around half the cost of private rents.

This development will not only help address the significant demand for housing in the borough, but will also contribute to the wider regeneration of the town centre. The scheme has been carefully designed to reflect Sittingbourne's heritage and enhance the local environment. I want to pay tribute to our officers and members past and present who have worked so hard to make this vision a reality. Councillors Ben Martin and Angela Harrison I know will be delighted to see this come to fruition but maybe not as delighted as former councillor colleagues Roger Truelove and Ghlin Whelan who has relentlessly chewed on my ears about progress.

Moving on we are continuing to invest in the heart of the town through the refurbishment of the public toilets at Central Avenue car park. These well-used facilities are being comprehensively upgraded, including structural repairs, modern interiors, improved accessibility, and new baby changing facilities. The improvements will create cleaner, safer, more energy-efficient and family-friendly facilities, whilst also enhancing the external appearance of the site. While there will unavoidably be temporary disruption during the works, I am confident that the end result will be a facility that better meets the needs of all of our community.

Finally our initial consultation on Community Governance Review (CGR) closed on 9 February and the responses to that consultation have been used to prepare draft recommendations. Subject to this council's approval a second consultation will be launched to get people's views on the proposed changes. I would therefore implore you all to reach out to your residents and provide as much information as possible to allow them to engage in the process and respond to the consultation."

In response, the Leader of the Conservative Group thanked the Leader for his statement and echoed his words around the meningitis outbreak, sending his condolences to all those impacted by it. He raised the issue of negativity around social media sharing incorrect information on the topic, particularly younger people. Acknowledging the funding awarded to projects on the Isle of Sheppey, he said he hoped it delivered what was needed and he highlighted the important role that the community and Councillors played. The Leader of the Conservative Group said it was the responsibility of Councillors to paint the whole picture of CGR to residents, including the potential costs.

The Leader of the SIA Group sent his condolences to those impacted by the meningitis outbreak. Turning to the funding for Isle of Sheppey projects from Pride in Place, he spoke positively about the community and he encouraged more residents to become involved. The Leader of the SIA group said that CGR gave the opportunity for those areas without parishes to become more involved adding that localised projects and focus motivated local people. He contrasted Government's encouragement of resident involvement in some ways whilst removing its voice in local government reform. He referred to the good work that Faversham Town Council did, particular the Hopper bus, and said all areas of Swale needed this and could be included if Sittingbourne Town Council was set up as a result of CGR.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group echoed the sentiments of others over the untimely death of the Faversham student, Juliet Kenny, from meningitis, and said it had shocked and devastated the student and Faversham community. She said Juliet was a dedicated community volunteer and had been nominated for a GEM award in 2023 for her compassion as a Queen Elizabeth (QE) school well-being ambassador. The Head Teacher of the QE had described Juliette as an incredibly kind individual and simply by being herself, she naturally lifted people. The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group sent her condolences to Juliette's friends and family and thanked everyone involved in the community response. Turning to the Pride in Place funding, the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group said it was an excellent opportunity for co-production on the Isle of Sheppey and she said more could be done to include local residents in designing services for the local community. The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group said the Cockleshell Walk, Sittingbourne housing scheme was exciting, and she thanked current and previous Councillors, alongside officers who she said had been dedicated in achieving the funding required to be able to provide social housing. Finally she welcomed the news on the upgrading of the public toilets at Central Avenue car park,

Sittingbourne.

The Leader of the Reform UK Group said the student's death from meningitis was tragic and agreed with a previous speaker that a lot of misinformation had been shared locally. Referring to the Pride in Place funding, he praised the achievements of the community, the Council and former local MP Gordon Henderson when working together. He also agreed with a previous speaker's comments on CGR.

The Leader of the Green Group sent his condolences to the family of Juliette, and said the nature of the disease meant it was also sudden. He drew attention to the rapid and comprehensive public health response and the response of the community, describing the patience and good behaviour of students that queued for the vaccination. The Leader of the Green Group spoke positively about the social housing at Cockleshell Walk, acknowledging that it was not as many as hoped or needed but the level of affordable homes needed would not be delivered without changes and plans being made, referring to a report later in the Agenda.

Members were invited to give a response to the Leader's Statement and comments included:

- It was disappointing the hospital trust was slow to report the outbreak of meningitis to the health agency;
- praised SBC officers who helped coordinate the response to the outbreak;
- spoke of the panic across the country in the response to the outbreak, the difficulty in securing vaccinations against it and the impact on the economy by the slow response;
- children should routinely be vaccinated against meningitis;
- said it was 40 years since SBC had built any social housing and expressed pleasure that housing was finally about to be built;
- spoke of the long and difficult process to get to the point of delivering social housing and personally thanked Councillor Bonney in her role at Rainbow Homes, and the Head of Housing and Communities, the Section 151 Officer, the Director of Regeneration, the Accommodation and Resettlement Manager and the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager;
- thanked all those Members that had sat on the shareholder panel, particularly Councillor Perkin;
- the social housing scheme showed that investment and taking the initial risk was worth doing to provide for residents in the borough;
- praised the new extension and facilities at the East Kent College (EKC) but reminded Members there were still children in the borough out of education because they were missing mainstream schooling places;
- spoke about the good work of the Pyramid Project that supported youngsters not in school or work and said they were a charity that needed funding and she urged Members to contact the organisation if they knew of grant funding that might be available to the project;
- referred to the many years of work that former Councillor Roger Truelove had put into the EKC college;
- said that some of the youngsters who attended the bricklaying course at the EKC college helped build the extension and had now been taken on as apprentices;
- highlighted that it did sometimes take a long time for plans to come together but felt positively that education was looking up for the Isle of Sheppey; and

- decisions on education and school places needed to be made many years in advance.

In response, the Leader thanked Members for their comments. He said that Faversham Town Council did a good job and the residents of Faversham should be proud. He spoke fondly of and quoted former Councillor Ghlin Whelan's continued interest in the Cockleshell Walk social housing project. He joined in praise of the officers who had helped get the project this far, giving particular praise to the Section 151 Officer.

866 **Local Plan Growth strategy and sites for allocation**

In proposing the recommendations, Councillor Charles Gibson, Chair of the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group (PTPWG) praised the work of officers and recognised the considerable time and effort Members had invested in debate to advance the Local Plan to its current position. He acknowledged the Local Plan was not perfect, but said it was fair, equal, and served the borough for the future as well as it was hoped. Councillor Gibson drew attention to how central government policy constrained Councils in delivering high housing numbers. He acknowledged that the working group had not always agreed and Members' views had changed as the plan evolved but, including an amendment which he would later be proposing, it delivered a local plan that served the whole community. Councillor Gibson said agreeing the Local Plan with the proposed amendment made clear the Council's commitment to plan-led development, and that the Council stood in opposition to rogue and mercenary developers concreting over green belt and flood plains but was in support of development that served residents. He added that agreeing the proposed amendment also showed the Council's commitment to fighting the Highsted Park, Sittingbourne development as it was unsuitable for the community.

The Vice-Chair of the PTPWG, Councillor Hayden Brawn, seconded the recommendations and reserved his right to speak.

The Mayor confirmed all Members had seen the briefing note that had been circulated and tabled. She then advised that three amendments had been received, circulated to Members and published on the Council's website. She invited Councillor Mike Baldock to propose the first amendment.

Councillor Baldock proposed:

"That this Council adopts Growth Option 6 as the Council's agreed Strategic Settlement Strategy for the next Local Plan and Regulation 19 consultation, in line with the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group's well-considered recommendation to Policy & Resources, as set out in the officer's report of 11 March 2026."

He said the PTPWG selected Option 6 after going through extensively all the different development proposals and sites, and this was then overturned at the Policy and Resources Committee "on the hoof." Councillor Baldock said Members should listen to what the PTPWG said and Option 6 was chosen on viability. He said that if SBC wanted the high levels of environmental protections that its own policies sought, they were more deliverable in the east of the borough as there was higher levels of affordable housing and environmental protection.

Councillor Baldock said Option 6 included a strategy for buses and the alternative in Bobbing Garden Village was entirely car dependent. He added that SBC's policies were boosted by choosing option 6 and development in the east of the borough. Councillor Baldock said by building in the east of the borough, the Council could be reasonably sure it would meet its targets, and building in the west of the Borough had issues such as the impact development would have on traffic, particularly around the A249 and the Eurolink Industrial Estate, and a lack of school places. He also warned that if the Highsted Park appeal was granted, there would be development at both ends of Sittingbourne at the same time and the likely traffic chaos it would cause. Finally, he drew attention to the reduction in affordable housing in the policy proposed and he asked Members to agree the proposed amendment.

The seconder of the amendment, Councillor Mike Whiting, reserved his right to speak.

Responding to the amendment, Councillor Charles Gibson said that the current bus service that the Faversham Town Council ran was not a good enough or long term service for the area, and the Stagecoach service had been reduced and was barely functional most of the working day, and there was not efficient buses and connections in Faversham. He said that much of what Councillor Baldock had said about traffic and development in the west of the borough was true of Faversham also, and it had already had and continued to have substantial development. Councillor Gibson said that Faversham continued to take more than its fair share of development in Option 4 also, but that it was the fairer policy for the borough. He said that option 6 would not deliver the five year land supply and greenfield sites would remain vulnerable to speculative developers. Finally he said there was no viable maths route to retaining option 4 and not allocating some of the Highsted Park development in that allocation, and that Highsted Park was inappropriate for the borough, and he would not support the amendment.

Other Members were invited to debate the amendments and comments included:

- Highlighted that the PTPWG had spent a lot of time discussing the options which were overturned by the P & R Committee after a relatively short discussion, so would support the amendment;
- could not support the amendment as the P & R Committee voted for Option 4;
- drew attention that whilst it was well considered, the vote for Option 4 at PTPWG was a knife-edged decision, only carried by one vote;
- there should not be such high volumes of housing dumped in the east of the borough as it was not proportionate;
- Option 4 was not a re-balance but an over-balancing of the distribution of housing;
- Option 4 had the lowest residual requirement for non-strategic sites, so reduced the pressure on other settlements to accommodate the remaining development;
- Option 4 splits the burden on primary and acute health care between two different NHS trusts and East Kent would buckle under the strain of all development being in the east of the borough;
- referred to the recent announcement that the long-promised Brenley Corner upgrade was no longer going to happen until it was considered again in another ten years;
- highlighted that planning permission had just been granted as part of the Duchy development for 2,500 homes around Faversham and without the Brenley Corner upgrade the junction would not be able to cope with the extra traffic;

- the last 25-30 years has already seen constant development in Sittingbourne and the Isle of Sheppey, with little in Faversham until more recently;
- it was fair to have more housing to the east of the borough and the amendment should be supported;
- there had been investment at Grovehurst and Stockbury junctions but this was to support future growth already planned in the local plan;
- National Highways had already advised that even with the planned development within the current local plan, the Stockbury roundabout was already at capacity;
- there were already 1,500 houses still to be built out at north west Sittingbourne;
- what was the point of working groups like PTPWG if they were not listened to?;
- Members that did not sit on PTPWG or other committees historic or current, did still read reports from those committees;
- Option 4 meant that SBC did not make the same mistake they had made for the last two local plans of trying to put the majority of development in one particular area;
- supply and demand dictated that if all development was in one area, there would be an over-supply, leading to a reduction in price so developers slowed their building rates – as had happened in the Maidstone area who now have no five-year land supply and had speculative development;
- there were benefits to the local plan policies that had been developed;
- had sympathy for those in the west of the borough but needed a policy that delivered for the whole borough;
- Option 4 was the best option for the whole borough;
- PTPWG were a working group, the parent Committee were the decision makers;
- needed to be clearer with working groups about what was wanted;
- reminded Members they were making a decision at Full Council for the whole borough, not just their ward;
- referred to the recent news around refused applications being considered by the Secretary of State, and said that Option 4 crystallised what would likely happen anyway and in the process minimised the number of houses that had to be found across other sites in the borough;
- if Option 6 was agreed and planning permission was granted for Bobbing village, more agricultural land would be lost;
- Option 4 reflected reality and met the housing targets in the best way and limited the damage across the borough as a whole;
- referred to historical development as part of Thames Gateway;
- there was not the infrastructure to what has been developed and what was permitted to be developed, particularly around GP's and the GP to patient ratio in the Sittingbourne area was already significantly high;
- all infrastructure in the west of the borough had been impacted by the constant dumping of houses;
- residents on the Isle of Sheppey had suffered more than other areas with traffic delays on the A249, trying to get to work and school;
- drew attention that previous meetings were recorded and could be viewed so discussions and decisions made in the past could be seen; and
- criticised Members for a lack of realism regarding planning applications and for missing opportunities to agree developments that could have delivered resident benefits through Section 106 agreements, resulting instead in approvals at appeal with minimal Section 106 improvements.

The seconder of the amendment, Councillor Whiting acknowledged that many of the points raised by objectors to the amendment to agree Option 6 had been raised at PTPWG but Option 6 was agreed by the majority at the working group. He objected to the suggestion that Members were not acting on behalf of the borough and outlined the many hours Members had considered all information, concluding that Option 6 should be put forward. Councillor Whiting said the Members who discussed the recommendations at the P & R Committee did not have the benefit of many hours of detailed discussion around the many reports previously presented to PTPWG and whilst it might be expected that a parent committee may tweak a recommendation, it would not be expected to completely change it. He questioned if a parent committee disregarded a working group's conclusion, what purpose did they serve? Councillor Whiting went through the different aspects the PTPWG considered before coming to their conclusion which was then overturned by the P & R Committee, and urged Members to vote in favour of the amendment.

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

For: Councillors Pollard, Carnell, Hunt, Baldock, MacDonald, S Stephen, C Palmer, P Stephen, R Palmer, Jayes, Chapman, Bonney, Wooster, Whiting, Marchington and Nundy. Total equals 16.

Against: Councillors T Gibson, Harrison, Jackson, C Martin, Brawn, Thompson, B Martin, Perkin, Last, Wise, Miller, S Clark, Winckless, Gould, C Gibson, Speed, Bowen and Cheesman. Total equals 18.

Abstain: Councillors Watson, Moore, Booth, Noe and Cavanagh. Total equals 5.

The Mayor announced the amendment had fallen.

The Mayor invited Councillor Charles Gibson to propose amendment two, which had been circulated to Members and published on the website:

"To proposed to replace Annex 1 in the Agenda pack with the annex agreed at the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group meeting held on 12 March 2026."

In proposing the amendment, Councillor Charles Gibson explained that the Annex included follow on work since the previous PTPWG meeting, which changed the growth option, and included the new list of non-strategic sites that were more naturally matched to growth Option 4. He said it had removed all reference to Highsted Park and some of the smaller allocations to the western villages of the borough that the PTPWG were least comfortable with in the previous allocation.

In seconding the amendment, Councillor Gould reserved his right to speak.

Members were invited to debate the motion and made points including:

- Supported the amendment as it removed Highsted from the list of allocated sites;
- referred to the outcome of the Highsted Park public inquiry expected to be

received in June 2026, and the Reg 19 Local Plan consultation planned for July 2026;

- including Highsted Park would have sent a message to the Secretary of State that the Council had accepted that the Highsted Park development would proceed;
- developers could argue that the Council had allocated the land at Highsted Park for housing if it had been included;
- referred to the need to have held an emergency PTPWG meeting because the process had been muddled;
- was critical of the delays and process in reaching agreement;
- referred to amendment 3, yet to be heard, to amend a suite of documents that had been agreed by the PTPWG but included Highsted Park, and which the P & R Committee could not support; and
- supported the amendment.

The seconder of the amendment, Councillor Gould, said brownfield sites across the borough would still be prioritised and it crystallised the benefits of Option 4 as it included the minimum number of strategic sites.

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

Councillors Baldock, Chapman, Hunt, MacDonald, C Palmer, R Palmer and Whiting all voted against the amendment.

The Mayor invited Councillor Paul Stephen to propose the third amendment which had been published on the Council's website and circulated to Members. Before it was proposed, Councillor Stephen and Councillor Baldock withdrew the amendment.

Members then debated the substantive motion.

The Leader said none of the proposals were anything that any Members would have wished to have voted for but a Local Plan was needed. He said there had been delays and the Council were currently in a position of being open to speculative development and failure to adopt a Local Plan would result in one being imposed on the Council.

The Leader of the Conservative Group said it was a difficult decision that nobody wished to take, and it impacted everyone in the borough for many years, but the alternative of not having a Local Plan was too risky. He acknowledged that Option 4 was not perfect but it was the best option for the borough. The Leader of the Conservative Group reflected on the delays for which he considered the previous coalition members were responsible for, and the hopes that housing numbers might change, and said that if a decision was not made now, the choice would be taken away under the current guidelines.

The Leader of the SIA Group said Members were being asked to condemn the borough to over development as it was being asked to over-allocate on a target that was already too high. He added that if the Highsted Park appeal was lost there would be an overallocation of 3,500 houses. In urging Members to reject the Plan he said that Option 4 would not deliver a 5 year housing supply and Members should not be accepting a Local Plan that was well above what was needed to settle a government timetable.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group expressed her frustration at the process and the lack of deliverability from the planning process, but said it was important that included policies were constructive and ambitious so the borough could grow. She said that future planning decisions looked to exclude local voices in discussions and she urged that a Local Plan needed to be in place before that happened. The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group spoke about the Faversham Neighbourhood Plan that was considered to be one of the best neighbourhood plans nationwide but said the lack of a Swale Borough Local Plan had meant it had largely been ignored by developers and the Planning Inspectorate. She criticised the planning system but urged Members to vote in support.

The Leader of the Reform UK Group said the borough's infrastructure and GP's could not take any more development and it was time to stand up for the people of the borough. He said he could not support the recommendation.

The Leader of the Green Group said not having a Local Plan meant SBC would be shooting itself in the foot for the little protection it had against the problems faced, and with or without a Local Plan, housing would likely be built. He said the infrastructure issues might be better with a Local Plan, but would not be better by not having one. He said nobody wanted more housing and it was not sustainable on water, environmental, or agricultural grounds but Members needed to vote for what was the least worst of a bad situation.

The Mayor invited other Members to speak and comments made included:

- Would reluctantly support the recommendation;
- housing number allocations were faulty and it was unlikely that developers would deliver the social housing needed;
- registered providers should be confirmed when planning permission was granted;
- there was no definition of 'unsustainable' and many of the elements included in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) needed to be strengthened or changed;
- Swale was unique and there needed to be an individual understanding of the area to protect it;
- an economy based on house building was not sustainable;
- the Government's aim was 1.5million homes by the end of the current parliament;
- Swale would end up with more development, and less infrastructure in agreeing Option 4;
- agreeing Option 4 gave the green light to the Bobbing application deferred at the previous week's Planning Committee;
- could not support the recommendation;
- agreed and apologised for the mistakes and delays made under the previous coalition;
- it was better to have a Local Plan set by elected Members than allow decisions to be made by a Secretary of State from anywhere in the UK, with no affinity to the area, or allowing developers to pick and choose where they wanted to build;
- the needs of future and existing residents needed to be balanced;
- shared the frustration of others that the housing targets were double the numbers needed to be built for local population growth;
- the Government's timetable would be missed, and the plan would have to be developed under a different regime, with less influence, if a decision was delayed;

- much of the debate was discussed seven years ago and SBC were no further forward;
- would not support as it was the wrong Local Plan to be taking forward even if a Local Plan needed to be in place;
- Swale was up to capacity in highway movements in the west of the borough;
- there was still a lot of unbuilt development with planning permission yet to be commenced;
- highlighted the lack of school places, and connectivity between housing and school provision and said the borough could not cope with any more housing;
- it was a difficult decision for Members to be forced to make;
- by not choosing an option, the Council were not stopping development but were giving up control over it;
- no plan was perfect;
- expressed disappointment that the current Labour Government had not redressed the housing target numbers;
- the Council could not ignore the consequences of the impact of the absence of a valid Local Plan;
- pushing development decisions to the Planning Inspectorate lead to an increase in costs to the Council;
- this was an opportunity to finally progress a Local Plan rather than speculative development with ad-hoc infrastructure filling the gaps;
- no single part of the borough could accommodate all of the housing development;
- made reference to a previous comment made in the chamber that a Local Plan was not required and decisions could be made by Government;
- spoke about applications that had been approved because of the delay in agreeing a Local Plan;
- drew attention that Local Plans had to be reviewed every five years;
- major sites had been allocated in the past and developers had failed to deliver which impacted on the five-year supply; and
- suggested that the process might still be subject to Judicial Review.

Councillor Brawn, the seconder of the recommendations, said Members could either vote for the Local Plan before them or not but, by not voting for it, would allow developers to build where they chose and that did not protect residents.

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

For: Councillors C Gibson, Wooster, Speed, Bowen, Marchington, Cheeseman, Wise, Miller, Gould, Clark, Winckless, Booth, B J Martin, Perkin, Last, Noe, Harrison, Jackson, C Martin, Brawn and T Gibson. Total equals 21.

Against: Councillors Nundy, Jayes, Chapman, Bonney, C Palmer, P Stephen, R Palmer, Thompson, Pollard, Carnell, Hunt, Baldock, MacDonald and S Stephen. Total equals 14.

Abstain: Councillors Watson, Whiting, Cavanagh and Moore. Total equals 4.

The Mayor announced the recommendation was approved.

Resolved:

(1) That Growth Option 4 as the growth strategy for the drafting of the Regulation 19 Local Plan consultation be agreed.

(2) That the non-strategic allocations set out in appendices I to VI for the drafting of the Regulation 19 Local Plan consultation be agreed

(a) Non-strategic housing allocations

(b) Gypsy and Traveller allocations

(c) Employment land allocations.

867 Swale Community Governance Review - Second Stage Consultation Proposals

The Chair of the Community Governance Review (CGR) Working Group thanked the Chief Executive, Policy and Communities Manager, the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Project Officer and the members of the working group. He said that LGR would impact local residents' decision making and Town and Parish Councils could help fill the democratic deficit which was why they were being consulted on the creation of new Town and Parish Councils in those areas currently unparished. The Chair of the CGR Working Group said it was important that non-parished areas had the opportunity to become parishes and the first consultation received a good response. He proposed the recommendations.

In seconding the recommendations, the Leader reserved his right to speak.

Members were invited to make comments which included:

- Had reservations around some of the boundary changes but would support the recommendations so that residents could respond;
- urged Members to encourage their residents to respond to the consultation;
- it was the opportunity for areas to benefit similarly to the good work carried out by Faversham Town Council; and
- reminded Members the consultation was about what residents wanted, not Members, and residents should be clear of the financial costs.

The Leader encouraged the community to get engaged in the process.

The Chair of the CGR working group confirmed the costs would be made clear.

Resolved:

(1) That Council approve the following proposals to be included within the second stage CGR consultation:

- a) To change the name of Warden Parish Council to Warden Bay Parish Council***
- b) To create a Halfway Parish Council for the currently unparished area of Halfway (Map 1 in appendix 2) with transfer of identified land with Minster-On Sea Parish Council (Map 2 and 3), Queenborough Town Council (Map 3 and 5) and Sheerness Town Council (Map 4)***
- c) To expand the boundary of Queenborough Town Council to include the***

- currently unparished area of Halfway (Map 6) with transfer of identified land with Minster on Sea Parish Council and Sheerness Town Council.*
- d) To move Lucas Close from Sheerness Town Council area to Queenborough Town Council (Map 7).*
 - e) To increase the number of councillors representing Watling Ward (Faversham Town Council Ward) from 4 to 6 (3 per ward if split occurs)*
 - f) To increase the number of councillors representing Priory Ward (Faversham Town Council ward) from 2 to 3.*
 - g) To split the existing Watling Ward (Faversham Town Council ward) into two (Map 8)*
 - h) To extend the Watling Ward (Faversham Town Council ward) to encompass Perry Court (Faversham Town Council owned land) from Ospringle Parish Council (Map 9).*
 - i) To extend Watling Ward (Faversham Town Council ward) to cover area shown in Map 10 currently within Ospringle Parish area.*
 - j) To extend the boundary of Watling Ward (Faversham Town Council ward) to cover land within Boughton Under Blean Parish Council and Selling Parish Council (Map 11)*
 - k) To transfer land from Faversham Town Council to Sheldwich Parish Council (Map 12)*
 - l) To extend Watling Ward (Faversham Town Council ward) to transfer School Farm along Graveney Road, Graveney Road from Graveney with Goodnestone Parish Council (Map 13)*
 - m) To amend the Iwade Parish Boundary, including that with Bobbing Parish Council (Map 14).*
 - n) To create a Murston Parish Council (Map 15).*
 - o) To create a Great Easthall Parish Council (Map 16) moving land from Tonge Parish Council.*
 - p) To merge the currently unparished area of Great Easthall with Tonge parish council (Map 17).*
 - q) To create a Kemsley Parish Council (Map 18).*
 - r) To create a Milton Regis Parish Council (Map 19).*
 - s) To create a Meads Parish Council (Map 20) moving land from Bobbing Parish Council.*
 - t) To extend Bobbing Parish Council to encompass all of the unparished area of The Meads (Map 21).*
 - u) To extend Bobbing Parish Council to encompass all of Grove Park (Map 22).*
 - v) To create an Urban Sittingbourne Town Council (Map 23) taking merging some land from Tunstall and the remainder of unparished areas.*
 - w) To create an Urban Sittingbourne Town Council including Grove Park (Map 24).*

(2) That Council agree the adoption of the updated Terms of Reference for the CGR, as shown in appendix 3.

868 Review of Member Allowances

The Leader introduced the report which sought Members' views on the Members' Allowance Scheme recommendations of the Independent Remuneration Panel. He proposed that Members' accepted the scheme as set out by the panel.

The Leader of the Conservative Group seconded the recommendation, including the proposal to accept the scheme, and reserved his right to speak.

In the absence of the Leader of the SIA Group, Councillor Jayes condemned the proposed rise in allowances comparing the removal of free parking in six car parks in the borough introduced that day. He questioned whether the £30k impact had been budgeted for in the annual budget. In response, the Section 151 Officer confirmed that provision had been made within the overall salary and Members' allowances budget for uplift, together with an allowance for Members' participation in the Local Government Pension Scheme, which should be sufficient depending on the decision taken that evening.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrats Group drew attention to the table in the report which set out that carers' allowance was capped at £9.40. She said that if a carer was supporting someone with complex high needs or special educational needs, the cap would impact more than on somebody who did not have those needs and she suggested that the Constitution Working Group (CWG) considered amending the allowance to a more equitable carers' allowance. The chair of the CWG agreed to raise at the next meeting.

The Leader of the Reform UK Group agreed that the 8.1% increase should not be accepted in the current climate and would not be popular with the public. He proposed that the increase be shared amongst Members' grants in order to benefit local residents. However, as no Member wished to second the proposal, it was not debated or voted on.

The Leader of the Green Group agreed that the increase was uncomfortably high in the current climate.

Members were invited to speak and made comments including:

- Reminded Members that it was an Independent Panel that made the recommendations;
- highlighted that it was the first increase in four years so the increase appeared more than it was;
- it was important to encourage Councillors to stand, and the remuneration had to cover the time spent;
- if the increase was not supported, the allowance would have stayed static throughout the entire four year term;
- for the average hours committed to Council work, the allowance paid less than half the minimum wage;
- if remuneration was set too low, it could deter the right number and calibre of people to the role;
- Members should accept the panel's recommendations;
- 8.1% increase was steep, and few people in Swale would receive a pay rise that high this year;
- many other workers had not received a pay rise over the past four years;
- it was morally wrong to accept the increase;
- Member allowances were a contribution to time spent, not a reimbursement;
- some working Members were not paid well in their day jobs and might have to take time off unpaid to cover their Council duties;
- suggested that the Remuneration Panel should consider an uplift to carers' leave

- when the shadow authorities were set up;
- supported the process because the Independent Panel made recommendations but would not personally accept the increase;
 - reminded Members that three local residents sat on the panel;
 - it was down to each individual Member what they did or did not personally accept but the recommendations from the Independent Panel should be agreed;
 - KCC had recently authorised a larger basic allowance; and
 - residents had good value for money from their Councillors.

Councillor Bowen reminded Members that the Independent Panel's recommendations were based on what they considered Councillors deserved, and the lack of increase for four years had driven the higher than expected increase. He said Councillors had the choice to not accept the additional money or donate to charity if they wished.

Resolved:

(1) That the Council considered and agreed the Members' Allowances Scheme proposed by the Independent Remuneration Panel.

869 Recalculation of Political Balance and Allocation of Committee Seats

The Leader introduced the report and proposed the recommendations.

The Leader of the Conservative Group seconded the recommendations.

As it was the Mayor's last ordinary Council meeting, Councillor Whiting thanked and praised the Mayor for the exemplary way she had chaired Council meetings. Members applauded in agreement.

Resolved:

(1) That Council agreed the Political balance calculation as set out in Appendix II.

(2) That Council allocated seats to the Committees and to agree the appointment of Members to those Committees, in accordance with the wishes of Group Leaders, as set out in Appendix III.

870 Adjournment

There were adjournments from 8.30pm until 8.40pm and from 10.45pm until 10.55pm.

871 Extension of Standing Orders

The Mayor extended Standing Orders from 10pm, 10.30pm and 11pm 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