
Housing, Health and Communities Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 20 January 2026 from 7.00 pm - 9.16 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Hayden Brawn, Ann Cavanagh, Alastair Gould, Angela Harrison (Vice-Chair), Peter MacDonald, Peter Marchington, Ben J Martin, Hannah Perkin (Chair), Ashley Shiel (Substitute for Councillor Kieran Golding) and Karen Watson.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Charlotte Hudson, Robert Lucas, Kellie MacKenzie, Sarah-Jane Radley, Philip Sutcliffe, Graeme Tuff and Emma Wiggins.

OFFICER PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Martyn Cassell.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Kieran Golding and Carrie Pollard.

615 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

616 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 28 October 2026 (Minute Nos. 404 – 419) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

617 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

618 **Matters Arising**

The Chair reported that she had attended the Police and Crime Panel meeting and had put forward the questions raised by Members at their last meeting on 28 October 2025. She reported the response to each question as set out below:

- *Did the Police & Crime Commissioner consider the reported evidence of reductions in the various aspects of crime were factually accurate or whether there was an element of public perception built into that and complacency? A report which covered perceptions would be published soon and would indicate whether the figures reflected public perception.*
- *what were the Police going to do to ensure the people of Kent felt confident in reporting something to them so that residents felt safe? The Police would be publishing some reports detailing Police successes. They had made improvements to their communication which they hoped would improve trust in the Police locally.*
- *could we have an update on the roll-out of the neighbourhood policing model, and why there had been a failure in providing a dedicated officer to each ward and what were the Police going to do about this? Each ward in Kent now had a named officer and an officer named for multiple wards in some areas, but there*

would not be a 'dedicated' officer for each ward.

The Chair reported that at the Panel meeting she had spoken about inviting the MPs and Councillors to the Council's Rough Sleeper Count. She thanked those Members that had attended the count, and also the housing team who were doing an incredible job supporting some of the borough's most vulnerable residents.

In response to a question from the Chair about an action from the previous meeting, the Head of Housing and Communities reported that she understood the Leader of the Council would be writing to the Government about Statutory Services.

619 **Chairs Briefing**

The Chair provided an update on her work as Chair of the Committee. She reported that the Police and Crime Panel had been busy with briefings and discussions on the precepts which would be set in February 2026. The Chair further reported that at the Panel meeting before Christmas 2025 they had considered the report of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) which focused on: holding the Chief Constable to account; crime prevention; partnerships and funding. The PCC report had shown a strong emphasis on prevention as a core policing priority delivered through neighbourhood policing and early intervention, by working with young people partnerships and problem-solving approaches to reduce repeated crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB).

The PCC had also spoken about the use of the crime reduction grants and violence reduction unit to support: multi-agency initiatives; community safety projects; education; victim support; and targeted interventions addressing issues like violent against women, ASB, and retail crime. The Chair reported that all the documents from the Police and Crime Panel meetings were available on Kent County Council's (KCC) website.

The Chair thanked the Vice-Chair for chairing the pre-meeting in her absence. She also thanked the Head of Housing and Communities for the Renters Rights Bill training and the Housing team for the Housing Options training.

620 **Questions for the Police and Crime Panel**

The Chair advised that it was the Community Safety Partnership's (CSP) turn to submit the questions. A Member who was a Council's representative on the CSP agreed to raise at the next CSP meeting.

621 **Forward Decisions Plan**

The Head of Housing and Communities reported that with regard to the Permissive Environments Policy Statement, guidance from KCC was awaited so that item might need to be deferred to the March 2026 meeting or possibly a meeting in the new municipal year.

Resolved:

(1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.

622 **Play Area Review**

The Chair introduced the report which set-out the detailed work undertaken to review the play area provision within the Borough and formulation of the recommendations, with some being considered for improvement, closure or transfer of the asset.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, and these included:

- Needed to consider that some play areas were in secluded locations across the Borough making them a safeguarding issue;
- considered it was not appropriate for the only play area in Lynsted at Batteries Close to be closed;
- welcomed transferring the play areas as assets to Parish and Town Councils, but could they just 'buy-in' to some of Swale Borough Council's (SBC) services?;
- could any of the good quality equipment be moved elsewhere?;
- once play equipment was removed, would the site just remain as open grass?;
- welcomed engagement with Parish and Town Councils;
- welcomed the concise report and work undertaken;
- would have liked to have seen a map detailing the sites within the report. Could this be provided in the Members' Room when considering other items?;
- Lionfield play area, Faversham was already closed as it had no play equipment;
- Housing Associations and management companies for housing estates should also be consulted as they operated some play areas;
- how was the usage of the play areas being measured?;
- considered the Council needed to be a lot tougher on landowners and increase funding as part of any Section 106 agreements;
- play areas needed to be located in areas that were best for local residents, not developers. It was important that Members had control over the Section 106 agreements;
- would the Local Government Review (LGR) be considered during discussions with the Parish and Town Councils?; and
- referred to recommendation (4) of the report and raised concern that of the seven play areas earmarked for closure, five were in Watling Ward and two others were close to Watling Ward.

In response, the Greenspace Technical Officer advised that the detail had not been agreed yet for transferring the Council's assets but Parish and Town Council's buying-in to SBC's services would be a possibility. Any equipment viable for reuse would be stored by the Council's contractor and any play areas removed would be returned to amenity grass. Maps of the relevant areas could be provided. There was no mechanism to accurately assess the amount of usage on any play areas within the Borough, this was assessed mainly through the consultation, officer experience of wear and tear, but mostly from the work carried out by the consultants.

The Green Spaces Manager explained that developer contributions would be sought and that currently developers contributed to play areas via Section 106 agreements as set out in the Council's existing Open Spaces and Play Area Strategy. With regard to LGR, the Green Spaces Manager said that it was relevant, 'out there' and being considered by Parish and Town Councils. He was aware that Parish and Town Councils had already shown an interest in the Council's assets including play areas.

The Chair said that it was incumbent on all Members to reassure their residents that currently no further closures were planned, beyond the two set out in Recommendation

(2) of the report. Any further closures would be subject to significant consultation with Parish and Town Councils and other organisations.

Councillor Lloyd Bowen proposed the following amendment to the final sentence of recommendation (2) of the report: "...transfer play areas 1,2,3,5,7,9,10 and 11 **should not** be considered for closure based on the strategy below, **until they had been considered further by the Housing, Health and Communities Committee**". This was seconded by Councillor Hayden Brawn. On being put to the vote the amendment was agreed.

Councillor Ben J Martin proposed the following amendment to the final sentence of recommendation (3) of the report: "Should any, or all, of the Town or Parish Councils **or other appropriate local organisation...**". This was seconded by the Chair. On being put to the vote the amendment was agreed.

Councillor Angela Harrison proposed the recommendations, as amended, which were seconded by Councillor Karen Watson.

Resolved:

- (1) That the outcome of the play area review be noted.**
- (2) That play facilities at Elm Grove, Sittingbourne and Lionfield, Faversham be removed.**
- (3) That the Council engaged with the relevant Town or Parish Council or other appropriate local organisation to offer and seek to transfer the following 14 play areas:**
 - 1. Batteries Close Play Area, Lynsted and Kingsdown**
 - 2. Colonels Lane (Horselees Road) Play Area, Boughton-under-Blean**
 - 3. Stangate Drive Play Area, Iwade**
 - 4. Woodpecker Drive (Village Park) Play Area, Iwade**
 - 5. Recreation Ground Play Area, Iwade**
 - 6. Colson Drive (Alefe Way) Play Area, Iwade**
 - 7. Mansfield Drive Play Area, Iwade**
 - 8. Homefield Drive Play Area, Upchurch**
 - 9. Rooks View Play Area, Bobbing**
 - 10. Randle Way Play Area, Bapchild**
 - 11. Anne Boleyn Play Area, Eastchurch**
 - 12. Village Hall Play Area, Waden Bay**
 - 13. The Spinney Play Area, Leysdown**
 - 14. Leysdown Coastal Park Play Area, Leysdown**

Should any, or all, of the Town or Parish Councils or other appropriate local organisation decline the opportunity for the transfer of play areas 1,2,3,5,7,9,10 and 11 should not be considered for closure based on the strategy below, until they had been further considered by the Housing, Health and Communities Committee.

- (4) That on completion of the above, review the list of remaining 15 potential removals to see what might be possible and engage with Ward Councillors and the community.**
- (5) That officers pursue funding options to upgrade the recommended play areas which would then allow removal of further sites as detailed in tables at paragraph 3.10 of the report.**

623 English Indices of Deprivation 2025

The Chair introduced the report which presented an analysis of the English Indices of Deprivation 2025 (IoD2025), which were published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on 30 October 2025.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, and these included:

- Sheerness had previously been 42nd on the list of Most Deprived Areas and was now 95th, this was a huge improvement;
- with the LGR pending should recommendation (3) include “potential other partners”?
- officers had delegated powers to amend names/organisations and also considered the wording ‘including’ within recommendation (3) covered any changes to partners due to the LGR; and
- aware that some partner organisations had only recently embraced the Lower-layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs), whilst Swale officers had for many years.

In response, the Chair said that with regard to LGR the announcements towards the end of 2026 about what it was likely to look like in Kent would help to inform agreed recommendations with the new unitary partners. This would likely be included in transitional discussions. The Chair considered that the Council used data of this kind really effectively in order to secure funding.

Councillor Brawn proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Watson.

Resolved:

- (1) That the publication of the English Indices of Deprivation 2025 (IoD2025) and the analysis of Swale’s relative position be noted.***
- (2) That the adoption of the IoD2025 data as the evidence base for targeting future interventions, specifically supporting the Corporate Plan priority of tackling deprivation and inequality be supported.***
- (3) That use of the domain-specific data by officers to strengthen advocacy with strategic partners, including the Kent & Medway Integrated Care Board (ICB) and Kent County Council (KCC), to secure needs-based resource allocation be supported.***

624 Household Support Fund (Round 7) and Tackling Poverty Update

The Chair introduced the report which provided an update on the delivery of Household Support Fund (Round 7) and the work of the Community & Partnerships Team on tackling poverty in the Borough.

The Community & Partnerships Manager reported that officers had received the guidance for the Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF), and further detail was required from KCC and a detailed update would be provided at a future meeting. With regard to recommendation (2) and the option for an Anti-Poverty Champion - internal, her role as Community & Partnerships Manager already delivered a lot of the required work, with the Cost-of-Living Partnership Group being well represented by partners from the voluntary sector so they would be well placed as the Anti-Poverty Champion - external.

The Chair invited comments from Members, and these included:

- Were Swale unusual in terms of other Local Authorities in using the information that had been gathered?;
- there was a lack of resilience and role models within communities, and they both needed to be a priority moving forward;
- the funding would make such a positive difference to the local community;
- suggested holding a One Swale Roadshow at Leysdown during October/November 2026 which would coincide with the closure of the holiday parks;
- requested that a One Swale Roadshow be held at Queenborough;
- needed to work in partnership with Southern Water and South East Water to ensure residents were aware of the social water tariffs, which offered customers a 50% discount if they were on benefits;
- welcomed the targeted benefit uptake campaigns, but there was more to do to ensure those that were entitled to Pension Credit were aware that they could claim it;
- could the Council 'tighten-up' on those illegally camping at the holiday parks on the Isle of Sheppey during the closed period?;
- sought clarity on the role of the Anti-Poverty Champion, and considered more could be achieved with a group of people championing rather than two individuals;
- considered the Council needed an improved communications vision rather than two anti-poverty champions;
- needed to be clearer on what would be required from the anti-poverty champion and referred to the Council's Armed Forces Champion;
- agreed that the Anti-Poverty Champion – internal should be an officer of the Council;
- sought clarity on whether the proposed champions would be the first contact point for Members regarding anti-poverty; and
- considered that more work was required on recommendation (2) so it was clearer what the role of the proposed champions would be.

In response, the Community & Partnerships Manager explained that in terms of resilience there was a new workstream within the CRF which would create many opportunities to develop resilience. There had been some successes with the One Swale Roadshows, and as the funding for them would be ending March 2026, officers would be reviewing whether they were being held in the correct locations and seeking views from those that attended them to inform their format moving forward. The Director of Regeneration & Neighbourhoods added that by October/November 2026 a board for the Pride in Place for Sheppey East should be set-up, and this might be one avenue to secure funding for the One Swale Roadshows.

The Community & Partnerships Manager reported that the water enrolment for Southern Water was up and running, and discussions were ongoing with South East Water. She said that officers would look at how all the anti-poverty work was being communicated and how Members could better access all the information.

With regard to the anti-poverty champion role, the Chair explained that she had envisaged the role being outwardly championing the fact that the Council cared and wanted to eliminate poverty. She said there was a huge amount of work that the Council

did that was not always 'out there', and envisaged the internal Anti-Poverty Role being taken up by the Community & Partnerships Manager.

The Head of Housing & Communities clarified the role of the Council's Armed Forces Covenant leads. She said there was a Member and an officer champion and their primary role was to help ex-service men and women link with groups such as The Royal British Legion etc.

Councillor Bowen proposed the following motion: That recommendation (2) of the report be deferred pending a more detailed proposal. This was seconded by Councillor Harrison. On being put to the vote the motion was lost.

Councillor Martin proposed the following amendment to recommendation (2) of the report: To **agree to appoint** two Anti-Poverty Champions...". That the Community & Partnerships Manager be appointed as the Council's Anti-Poverty Champion - internal and a representative from the Cost-of-Living Partnership Group be appointed as the Council's Anti-Poverty Champion - external. This was seconded by Councillor Watson. On being put to the vote the amendment was agreed.

The Chair proposed recommendation (1) of the report, which was seconded by Councillor Bowen.

Councillor Martin proposed recommendation (2) of the report, as amended, and this was seconded by Councillor Alastair Gould.

Resolved:

- (1) That the report be noted***
- (2) That the Community & Partnerships Manager be appointed as the Council's Anti-Poverty Champion - internal and a representative from the Cost-of-Living Partnership Group be appointed as the Council's Anti-Poverty Champion - external.***

625 Sport England Place Partnership Programme

The Chair introduced the report which set out the Sport England (SE) Place Partnership Programme. The Chair said it was a great opportunity for Swale and drew attention to the three recommendations.

The Director of Regeneration and Neighbourhoods stated that Active Kent and Medway (AKM) would lead, but that SBC had been invited to be a partner. She said that SE recognised the indices of deprivation within Swale and the correlation between the most deprived wards and areas where people were less active.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, and these included:

- It was a fact that at least 50% of children and adults on the Isle of Sheppey were obese. It was such an embedded problem and more partners than were currently on the partner board needed to be consulted;
- Praised the good work of the Innerva gym at the Sheppey Leisure Complex, Sheerness;
- the Innerva gym at Sheppey Leisure Complex had been relocated. Would the

disabled parking spaces created specifically for the Innerva gym be relocated as well?;

- would health providers be involved with the partner board?;
- needed to understand the reasons why people were not getting involved in sport;
- activities such as table tennis should be considered;
- sports activities were known to improve mental health;
- this would make such a huge difference to local residents;
- important that health providers were included as there was so much support that was available to assist people with fitness; and
- welcomed the proposed holistic approach.

In response, the Director of Regeneration & Neighbourhoods explained that SE recognised it would be challenging and would trial different approaches and targeted interventions to help residents with very complex needs be more active. She confirmed that health providers would be involved at a strategic and lower level, and that officers would engage with a wide range of community groups.

The Chair proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Watson.

Resolved:

- (1) That the update provided on Swale being accepted as a Place Partnership by Sport England be noted.***
- (2) That the Chair of the Housing, Health & Communities Committee and the Director of Regeneration & Neighbourhoods be given delegated authority to sit on the Board of the Swale Place Partnership to contribute towards the delivery of the project.***
- (3) That the Head of Environment and Leisure be given delegated authority to use a relevant procurement framework to appoint consultants for the feasibility work for Sheerness Pool.***

626 Swale Community Safety Partnership Priority (CSP) Setting Consultation

The Chair introduced the report which provided an overview on the Swale community safety strategic assessment. Members were asked to provide feedback on the current CSP performance and any emerging issues the CSP might need to focus on.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, and these included:

- Domestic abuse was still not being reported, and the Police especially needed to do more work so that victims felt more confident to report it. This should be a priority alongside Violence Against Women and Girls;
- there was currently no CCTV at the large Neats Court business park which should have been picked up at the planning application stage. There were a lot of horrendous issues with crime and ASB. The site owners were happy for SBC to install CCTV, but did not want to pay for this;
- should look at business rates in respect of improving safety in town centres and business centres such as Neats Court;
- police did have the blueprint for 'designing out crime' at the planning application stage, but the CSP and the planning department needed to work together on planning applications to ensure items like installation of CCTV were not missed;

- welcomed the work with Swale Housing to reduce ASB, and the street marshalls had carried out some good work in that respect;
- concerned about the increase in community tensions which needed to be looked at as a priority;
- proud of the work undertaken by the CSP;
- community payback was a good service;
- the prisoner for homes scheme had been a success; and
- needed to be aware of funding risks moving forward.

In response, the Head of Housing and Communities said that with regard to designing out crime on planning applications, there used to be two officers based within the CSP unit at Swale House who dealt with that work which was sometimes provided as an advisory on applications. Future proofing of planning applications would need to be considered further by the CSP. The Head of Housing and Communities spoke about the Bid Process whereby business rates were enhanced and then invested within town centres but this had never had enough 'traction' in Swale. She agreed that officers needed to consider this further.

A Council's representative on the CSP agreed to take forward the issues regarding Neats Court. She asked Members to let her know about any issues they were aware of and she would raise these at the next CSP meeting.

627 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

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

628 **Play Area Review - Appendix II**

This item was not discussed.

629 **Adjournment of Meeting**

The meeting was adjourned from 8.30 pm until 8.40 pm.

Chair

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