
SITTINGBOURNE AREA COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Virtual Meeting - Via Microsoft Teams, on Thursday, 11 December 2025 from 7.00 pm - 8.02 pm.

PRESENT (Virtually): Councillors Derek Carnell, Shelley Cheesman, Simon Clark, Tim Gibson, Mark Last (Vice-Chair), Carrie Pollard, Karen Watson and Ashley Wise (Chair).

OFFICERS PRESENT (Virtually): Janet Dart, Lisa Fillery, Louise Galloway and Charlotte Hudson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually): Councillors Mike Whiting and Dolley Wooster.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Charlie Miller, Kieran Mishchuk and Tony Winckless.

569 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

As the meeting was an informal, remote meeting, this item was not required.

570 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 25 September 2025 (Minute Nos. 341 – 351) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

571 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

As the meeting was an informal, non-decision-making remote meeting, this item was not required.

572 BUDGET 2026/27

The Director of Resources gave a presentation on the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) Proposals 2025/26 to 2029/30.

She said that Swale Borough Council (SBC) legally must set a balanced budget and explained the financial challenges which included rising costs due to inflation. Decisions needed to be made to raise income and make savings to offset rising costs. There was an estimated budget gap of £665k for 2026/27 even with current savings proposals. Reserves would help set a balanced budget for 2026/27 but would be depleted by 2029/30 without further ongoing savings being found.

The process for setting the budget for 2026/27 started in June 2025 when a Cross Party Member Working Group met to agree an approach to setting the budget. Full Council would meet on 18 February 2026 to approve the final budget.

The draft budget was approved for consultation at the Policy & Resources Committee on 26 November 2025 and would close on 9 January 2026. The consultation could be found on the Council's website: swale.gov.uk/budget-consultation.

573 COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW (POTENTIAL CHANGES TO ARRANGEMENTS FOR TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS)

Councillor Mike Whiting, the Chair of the Community Governance Review (CGR) Member Steering Group gave a presentation on the CGR, explaining why it was being carried out.

The CGR was an opportunity for residents, or the principal authority, to kick start a process around governance of the Borough. It was an opportunity to make governance better reflect local identities and facilitate a more effective local government. The review was an opportunity to consider how individuals and groups within the community were listened to and able to influence decisions that affected them.

Residents could be affected in one of the following ways:

If you lived in an area that was currently unparished:

- A new parish or town council could be created;
- one of the existing parish councils could expand to include the area in which you lived; or
- no changes.

If you lived in an area which was already parished:

- The council could change its size;
- there could be some changes to the boundaries; or
- no changes.

Councillor Whiting said that the CGR was a 12-month process which started when the Terms of Reference had been published. There would then be a first stage public consultation from 18 December 2025 to 9 February 2026. The review would then move onto draft recommendations compiling all consultation responses and informing a second stage consultation in Spring 2026.

Following the second stage consultation, final recommendations would be drafted to go to Full Council in September 2026. If it was decided by Full Council to accept the recommendations, any changes would be implemented at the May 2027 local elections.

Any questions/comments/concerns please email CGR@swale.gov.uk

The following comments were raised:

- It was important to reinforce that this was a resident review where people could state where they felt a sense of community, especially in unparished areas;
- councillors should go out into their wards to encourage people to take part in the review; and
- residents in Kemsley, Sittingbourne, had already shown an interest in the review.

574 LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (GOVERNMENT WANTS US TO DELIVER YOUR SERVICES DIFFERENTLY)

The LGR Project Officer gave an update on the Local Government Reorganisation. She went through the timetable and said that the final business case submissions had been made to Government on 28 November 2025 and the next stage was a public consultation which would be carried out in Spring 2026 followed by the Government's decision on their chosen model by Summer 2026. Shadow elections would be held in May 2027 and then the 'go live' date (vesting day) was 1 April 2028.

Each district in Kent along with Medway and Kent County Council (KCC) selected their favoured unitary model for Kent. The SBC Full Council met on 19 November 2025 and agreed that their chosen option for Kent was 4b which was made up of 4 unitary authorities which would mean that Swale would form a unitary council with Ashford and Folkestone and Hythe.

Full business cases for each unitary option were available at: <https://kentcouncilleaders.org.uk/councils-reveal-draft-business-cases-for-new-councils/>.

575 PUBLIC FORUM

No issues were raised.

576 MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MEETINGS

No issues were raised.

577 SWALE BUS PARTNERSHIP FORUM

The Minutes of the last Local Bus Forum were noted.

Councillor Karen Watson advised that the next meeting was scheduled for 19 January 2026 and if anyone had any issues they would like raised, could they please email her and Councillor Tony Winckless.

Jackie Davidson had raised a number of issues via email which Councillor Watson would be discussing with him.

578 LOCAL ISSUES TO BE RAISED

Councillor Tim Gibson said that it was disappointing to see comments in the press made by Chalkwell Coach Hire about the closure of the public toilet facilities in the Forum Car Park, Sittingbourne, especially as the Managing Director had been in attendance at the Sittingbourne Area Committee meeting when the item was on the agenda. Councillor Dolley Wooster said that SBC did not have a statutory duty to provide public conveniences.

Councillor Gibson thanked the Chair for instigating the Sittingbourne Town Centre meetings which took place on a quarterly basis.

579 MATTERS REFERRED TO SERVICE COMMITTEE CHAIRS FOR CONSIDERATION

No issues were raised.

Chair

Copies of this document are available on the Council website <http://www.swale.gov.uk/dso/>. If you would like hard copies or alternative versions (i.e. large print, audio, different language) we will do our best to accommodate your request please contact Swale Borough Council at Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 3HT or telephone the Customer Service Centre 01795 417850.

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