
Extraordinary Policy and Resources Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 13 January 2026 from 7.00 pm - 8.00 pm.

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

OFFICERS PRESENT: Janet Dart, Lisa Fillery, Robin Harris, Zoe Kent, Kellie MacKenzie and Tim Neal.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY): Councillors Simon Clark and Peter MacDonald.

APOLOGY: Councillor Mike Baldock.

596 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

597 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

598 **Council Tax Support Scheme 2026/27**

The Head of Revenues and Benefits introduced the report, as set out in the agenda pack, which recommended changes to the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme effective from 1 April 2026, following the consultation approved in July 2025. The results of the consultation were set out at Appendix II of the report.

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

- Could the proposals lead to more unfairness within the system, especially those that were in employment and not on benefits but who were struggling financially, how would they be supported;
- how confident were officers that the consultation process had been fair and thorough;
- referred to paragraph 2.8 of the report and research by the Resolution Foundation and asked whether officers were monitoring this specifically to Swale?;
- the Council's Cost of Living meetings were an excellent forum that Members could attend to support the data on those on low levels of income;
- how much would the Council lose from the offset of the provision for bad debts?;
- the increase in the percentage of Council Tax would be offset by the provision for bad debts;
- supported the proposals which would help to reduce the risk of homelessness for the poorest in our society; and
- supported the proposals and considered the Council had to manage failures in previous years to manage benefits in line with inflation and also lack of government funding, and on balance considered the proposals were the best way to support those on the lowest incomes with the resources the Council had.

In response, the Head of Revenues and Benefits reported that all working-age claimants had received the consultation either via email or through the post. The Council's Communications Team had ensured the consultation was on the Council's website and on social media so those not on benefits had the opportunity to respond. With regard to Resolution Foundation, the Council used Policy in Practice so its Welfare Officers could contact groups at ward level to establish where residents were living on low incomes.

The Director of Resources advised that the provision for the support scheme formed part of the council tax base calculation and the Council's assumptions were on collection, so it was not directly quantified in that calculation, she had assumed that the Council's council tax base should not be affected by the different levels for 80%, 90% to 100% because of the differing collection rates. The Head of Revenues and Benefits added that there was a whole group of residents that did not pay anything, single residents suffered the most and by removing them from paying council tax it should effectively improve collection rates.

Councillor Ashley Wise proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Lloyd Bowen.

Recommendations to Council:

- (1) That a scheme offering a maximum 100% Council Tax Support be moved.***
- (2) That the percentage support in income bands 2 to 4 be increased by 10%.***
- (3) That the income thresholds for each band by the welfare benefit uplift applied by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for 2026/27 be increased.***
- (4) That the minimum income floor for self-employed working age claimants be removed.***
- (5) That the Council Tax reduction Scheme with DWP benefits be aligned by disregarding the additional compensation payments listed in paragraph 2.20.***
- (6) That delegated authority be given to the Director of Resources and the Head of Revenues and Benefits to update and publish the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) policy in line with the agreed recommendations.***

599 Constitution amendment: Various

The Chair confirmed with Members that they had all seen the tabled email from Councillor Mike Whiting which had been circulated earlier in the day and published on the Council's website.

The Monitoring Officer introduced the report and confirmed with Members that they had all seen the to-follow Appendix I. The report set-out a number of changes to the Council's constitution to correct errors, provide clarity and generally improve the document, and Members were asked to recommend the amendments to Council for adoption.

The Monitoring Officer suggested that Members discuss and take a vote on each separate proposed change.

Item A – Member Protocol for Pre-application and Pre-decision Developer Engagement

In response to a question from a Member, the Monitoring Officer said it was normal

practice for Local Authorities to have such detailed protocols and for transparency it was a good idea for it to be published with the Council's Constitution.

Members agreed to the insertion into the Council's Constitution of the entire Member Protocol for pre-application and pre-decision developer engagement.

Item B – Changes to budget amendment deadline

Members agreed the amendment.

Item C – Name change and other items to be added to the function of the Area Committees

The Policy & Engagement Officer provided some background as to why the Constitution Working Group had suggested the changes.

In response to a request from a Member, the Monitoring Officer said it made sense that the changes did not come into effect until after Annual Council on 13 May 2026. This was agreed by Members.

A Member considered that to avoid confusion that Chairs of the Area Committees should meet before and after each round of meetings to review and forward plan.

Councillor Bowen proposed the following amendment to point 4): "Chairs to meet **before** and after each round" Following advice from the Monitoring Officer, Councillor Bowen withdrew the amendment.

Councillor Bowen proposed the following amendment to point 4): "Chairs to meet **before** each round" This was seconded by Councillor James Hunt.

Councillor Julien Speed proposed the following amendment to point 4): "...will consider and **agree** future items...". This was seconded by Councillor Bowen.

On being put to the vote both amendments to point 4) were agreed.

Councillor Charles Gibson proposed the recommendation as amended, and this was seconded by Councillor Ashley Wise. On being put to the vote Members agreed the changes to the functions of the Area Committees.

Item D – Use of Electronic Seal

Councillor Bowen proposed the recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Richard Palmer, on being put to the vote the use of the electronic seal was agreed.

Recommendation to Council:

(1) That the amendments at Appendix I, subject to the changes as minuted, be incorporated into the constitution.

600 Reduction in number of Service Committees

The Director of Resources introduced the report which asked Council not to implement

the decision taken by Council on 2 April 2025 to change the committee system to reduce the committees by one for the Municipal Year 2026/27.

Councillor Wise proposed the recommendations, which were seconded by Councillor Jayes.

Recommendations:

(1) That Council does not implement the part of decision taken on 2 April 2025 to reduce the committees by a further reduction of one in the municipal year 2026/27.

(2) That Council keeps the committee structure as follows:

- ***Policy and Resources Committee;***
- ***Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee;***
- ***Housing, Health and Communities Committee; and***
- ***Economy and Property Committee.***

Chair

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