
Extraordinary Housing, Health and Communities Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 25 February 2026 from 7.00 pm - 8.55 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Hayden Brawn, Ann Cavanagh, Kieran Golding, Angela Harrison (Vice-Chair), Peter Marchington, Ben J Martin, Tom Nundy, Hannah Perkin (Chair), Carrie Pollard and Karen Watson.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Steph Curtis, Tina Grafton, Charlotte Hudson and Philippa Richardson.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY): Councillor Ashley Shiel.

APOLOGIES: Councillor Pete Neal.

763 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

764 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Peter Marchington declared a disclosable non-pecuniary interest in respect of item 6 Temporary Accommodation (TA) Scrutiny Report as he rented out a property in the Borough.

765 **Chair's Update**

At this point the Chair provided an update on her work as Chair of the Committee. She had recently attended a Police & Crime Panel (PCP) meeting where there had been feedback on the annual survey which the Police had carried out to look at their priorities and trust and support within the community. There had been broad support for their four priorities: protecting people; protecting places; protecting property; and protecting productive partnerships. The 'takeaway' from this was that there had been some small improvements in trust; but there was some work to be done in improving people's perception of their own safety within the Borough's town centres. There had been a small increase in people who had seen a police officer in their neighbourhood and a gradual increase in trust in the Police over the last three years. There had been a small reduction in people experiencing anti-social behaviour (ASB), but there was also a significant proportion of people that did not want to report it. The Police were encouraging more people to report ASB incidents, as the report levels did not reflect the amount of ASB crime. The Police had said there had been a substantial response for the first time from under 18s. There had been joined-up work with schools and in-person engagement at public meetings with community groups and businesses. Overall, crime was slightly down and trust was very slightly up. The meeting also discussed the budget settlement. The only ring-fenced money for 2026/27 would go into neighbourhood policing. There was a proposal for a £15 precept increase which meant that the proportion of funding coming from council tax had gone up from 27% to 44%. There had been an increase in costs and pay, but no overall increase in core policing grant and the council tax precept increase would not reach the overall requirement of £30 billion. The Chair explained that she did not present any questions to the PCP this time, but she would submit a question on the designing-out crime scheme to the next panel meeting. She also asked that Planning Committees across Kent be briefed about

the designing-out crime scheme. The Chair also attended a Local Children's Partnership group meeting where there was an update on the Kent Family Hub Scheme. The LCPG was due to close and would be replaced by the Kent Family Hub Forum. She had also attended the Place Partnership Group meeting.

In response, some Members confirmed that local Policing was more visible; and designing-out crime and disorder within the planning system was a good initiative.

766 **Swale Domestic Abuse Policy Refresh 2026**

The Chair introduced the report which set out updates made to the Domestic Abuse (DA) Policy in legislation and minor changes due to best practice in domestic abuse work.

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

- Welcomed the report and thanked officers involved in writing it;
- this was one of the Council's policies that would really make a difference and could potentially save lives;
- referred to a recent report in the press about domestic violence, noted that suicide as a result of DA was often under reported and cases were sometimes overlooked;
- it was very important that the policy remained a priority going forward beyond the Council devolution;
- reports of DA had risen which was positive in one way as it meant that victims had the courage to speak out against it;
- considered it could be beneficial to have a survivor's point of view;
- a performance dashboard would help to monitor how quickly help was received and actions taken;
- this was a really important policy;
- recognised the really good work that officers had carried out and the difference the team made, considered them to be 'unsung' heroes;
- welcomed the policy which was well laid out, straightforward to read, and liked that the report did not include pictures and suggested future policies should be set out in this way;
- other organisations, such as 'White Ribbon' also had an invaluable part to play, alongside the Council;
- clarification sought on whether there was any data in terms of connections between DA/perpetrators/triggers/the failing National Health Service (NHS) and the mental health crisis;
- did any data outline a need for additional safe refuge in the Borough?;
- considered refuge placements should be included in the housing needs assessment of the Local Plan, without sacrificing social housing;
- DA was part of larger, cultural matters including mental health issues, lack of support from the NHS, social media use in schools; and
- the Council was fortunate that many parts of the organisation worked together as a team to resolve DA throughout the borough.

In response, the Safeguarding Team Lead/ASB Officer referred to the press article and said the picture was much bigger than the victims themselves, and research was being carried out around wider family members, with officers working with local partners on

this issue; she acknowledged a need to do more on shared experiences, there were lived experience people who the Council worked with and KCC had just carried out a large piece of work on this and there was a lot to be learnt from that project. In terms of a performance dashboard, the safeguarding team produced a performance report per quarter and she said the team were assessed and scrutinised on many aspects, and the team were tenacious and always challenged cases and escalated them. With regard to Domestic Abuse Risk Assessment (DARA), this was already being looked at by a county level group. Learning from serious case reviews were published on a public accessible portal via KMSAB and KSCMP websites. Newsletters were also produced and these could be shared with Members. In response to statements about education abuse she said that KCC were looking into this and she could ask them for more information about their findings. The Safeguarding Team Lead/ASB Officer thanked Members for their comments and praise, and she spoke on the wider team that worked together at the Council with victims of domestic abuse.

The Head of Housing and Communities said the Local Plan team were updating the housing market assessment so research on the need for refuge placements could be linked with that. She advised that some new funding had recently been received for a supported housing strategy, and refuge placements could form a part of this work.

The Chair referred to the Abbey School, Faversham where 100 students had recently volunteered to be Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) Champions and she acknowledged and praised the team's gold accreditation as a massive achievement.

Councillor Lloyd Bowen referred to paragraph 3.3 in the report and suggested, for inclusivity, the sentence ended after 'for all', so that it would read: 'SBC recognises that domestic abuse can be experienced by anyone, and we will ensure an appropriate response for all'. This was agreed by the Committee.

Resolved:

(1) That the revised Domestic Abuse Policy refresh be noted and adopted, as amended – paragraph 3.3 'SBC recognises that domestic abuse can be experienced by anyone, and we will ensure an appropriate response for all'.

767 Swale Public Space CCTV Annual Report 2025/2026

The Chair introduced the item which set out the first annual report of the Swale Public Space CCTV Service. She then invited Members to make comments, and these included:

- Welcomed the report and thanked officers for their work on it;
- referring to Appendix I, considered work should be carried out with the Communications Team to go into more detail on the amount of incidents and subsequent arrests, as it looked as though only some of the incidents had been dealt with;
- more information 'out there' might help to bolster confidence in terms of arrests made, successful convictions and helping to show that the service was good value for money;
- clarification sought as to whether the CCTV operators reported to the Council when there were obstacles impeding the sightline of the cameras;
- considered the CCTV service to be very helpful when a call was made to them

out-of-hours recently;

- acknowledged that some residents might think that CCTV cameras were an infringement on their privacy, but that they were beneficial when an incident took place;
- it would be useful to have a breakdown of cameras that the Council monitored for different organisations;
- clarification sought on funding and positioning of cameras;
- residents needed to report incidents individually to show that there was an issue which warranted the installation of CCTV cameras;
- CCTV should be used as evidence and it would be good to see the data of footage used in criminal cases, and this would show a good cost benefit;
- incidents were not always criminal, sometimes it was just fortunate that CCTV cameras had 'picked up' an incident; and
- encouraged the use of 'Swale Link' and 'My Community Voice' for information on combating crime and local policing.

In response, the Strategic Policy and Communities Manager acknowledged that it was important to get the good news 'out there' and more of this could be done going forward. She said that future reports could include more detail of enforcement action that had taken place. CCTV operators sent through information on a daily basis in terms of any obstructions to CCTV, and if this was on a regular basis, this would be escalated to ensure the cameras were fit for purpose. Information in terms of a breakdown of cameras that the Council monitored for different organisations, would be provided. A new request for CCTV camera provision was determined by evidential need, and figures, in terms of statistics of CCTV used in court cases, could be included in the report going forward.

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

(2) That additional information be included in future reports as minuted.

768 Temporary Accommodation (TA) Scrutiny Report

The Chair introduced the report which set out an update on the current performance in relation to Temporary Accommodation (TA) and current budget position. The report also discussed the current risks and controls in place to manage the TA budget.

The Head of Housing and Communities added that the Council had been notified of their grant for the next three years, which included the previous homeless prevention grant and domestic abuse grant, plus rough sleeping funds. The TA element had been split and was in the revenue support grant. She was very disappointed that the funding would decrease in the next couple of years. When the homeless prevention grant was consulted on last year, the revised formula indicated that the Council would be better off, but in fact was worse off. She added that other deprived areas had the same issue, so it appeared the formula was wrong and the areas most in need seemed to be missing out. The Council was now looking into what lobbying could be done to resolve this.

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

- Clarification sought for the terms 'homeless' and 'sleeping rough';

- considered the 2025/26 winter had been very wet, rather than very cold, and referring to paragraph 2.15 in the report where the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) had been activated for 27 nights, how did this compare to previous winters?;
- had a response been received from Alison McGovern MP, as set out in paragraph 2.5 of the report?;
- was a change in Registered Providers (RP) delivery forecast in the next one or two years;
- was there any evidence of some landlords exiting the market, as predicted by the Renters Rights Act?;
- in terms of the decrease in grant funding, considered this was a mistake in the worked formula;
- clarification sought as to whether bed and breakfast accommodation was block booked ahead, or booked on the day?;
- what was the turnaround for a Council-owned property to be fit for purpose for the next resident?;
- how did caravan parks impact on the TA figures during their closed season?;
- Energy Performance Certificate changes would lead to further delays in achieving RPs;
- needed to recognise that Q3 was always 'tough', and going forward needed to encourage Parish Councils to develop rural exception sites by commissioning Local Housing Needs Assessments to justify building affordable homes on land not normally used for housing, and this would also help with the Council's five-year housing supply and KALC should be asked to promote this;
- referring to Bridge House, could an update be provided?; and
- was a commuted sum policy, or the law?

In response, the Head of Housing and Communities explained that broadly, when someone 'bedded down' they were classed as 'sleeping rough', and she added that the Council services were available to all who needed it in any case. In terms of SWEP, this had been activated in November/December 2025 when there had been relatively warm days, followed by cold nights, and activations of SWEP had been higher this winter. The Section 151 Officer had received a response to the letter saying they would look into the grant funding matter. She added that there was not supposed to be more than a percentage decrease in the grant funding each year. They had acknowledged that the calculation was wrong and this year's grant had been retained. In terms of the risks around RP delivery programme, with the announcement of the new affordable homes programme, it was hoped that there might be some increase. A lot of the Council's RPs were still improving the conditions of their existing stock and until they had resolved those capital strategies, there was unlikely to be a quick delivery. She outlined the process of securing RPs through the Section 106 process, and said that although there were many solutions, they were not necessarily lining up. Generally nightly-let accommodation was booked on the day, but there were some houses in multiple occupation (HMO) which could be block booked. There were sometimes delays on getting new residents in Council-owned properties as electrical testing had to be carried out for each new tenant to make sure the property was safe. In terms of a person's route to homelessness, this varied from case to case, and she highlighted that domestic abuse cases were prioritised. Information on caravan parks was set out in paragraph 2.16 in the report and the Head of Housing and Communities explained that this was a massive 'hidden' issue and suggested a housing needs assessment on the east of the Isle of Sheppey could help to unpick the issue. She confirmed that she would provide

some information in terms of having a contractor in place to clear meter debts between lets. Bridge House was empty at the moment, it was unsuitable for referrals from SBC and Southern Housing were looking for alternative uses for the building. In terms of commuted sums, the Council negotiated affordable housing with the developers, then viability was discussed. The Council always went with homes above a commuted sum. She confirmed that she would get further information on the matter from the relevant officer. She confirmed that it was policy and could be amended as part of the emerging Local Plan.

Councillor Angela Harrison moved the following motion: That once the formal information on commuted sums was received, this be considered by the Planning & Transportation Policy Working Group. This was seconded by Councillor Ben J Martin and on being put to the vote the motion was agreed.

Resolved:

- (1) That the comments made on the performance report and the controls in place to manage the TA budget be noted.***
- (2) That once the formal information on commuted sums was received, this be considered by the Planning & Transportation Policy Working Group.***

Chair

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