
Council

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Tuesday, 23 June 2026 from 7.00 pm - 8.32 pm.

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

OFFICERS PRESENT: Emma Wiggins, Lisa Fillery, Robin Harris and Tim Neal.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Mike Baldock, Monique Bonney, Roger Clark, Kieran Golding, James Hunt, Rich Lehmann, Claire Martin, Pete Neal, Carrie Pollard, Julien Speed and Mark Tucker.

112 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chairman outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

113 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 May 2026 (Minute Nos. 1-13) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

114 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

115 **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor reported on a number of civic engagements undertaken since the previous meeting and noted that there had been a particularly busy programme of engagements over the period.

Among the engagements specifically highlighted were attendance at the launch of Studio Pottery in Bobbing, where the Mayor noted the organisation's work supporting people who were lonely and people with special needs; a visit to the Player Residential Park Home; Swale Blue Flag Day; attendance at the Aviation Museum for a presentation connected with the King's Award for Voluntary Service; and the launch of the Sheppey Festival, where the Mayor had travelled on the Kemsley train and was formally announced by the town crier.

The Mayor also referred to attendance at the Civic Service for the Mayor of Faversham, Councillor Claire Martin, and at the Armed Forces Day flag-raising ceremony in Maidstone earlier that day.

Looking ahead, the Mayor advised that there were a considerable number of forthcoming engagements, including the High Sheriff of Kent's Garden Party and the Mayor's Open Garden event. The Mayor indicated that a fuller update on future

engagements would be given at the next meeting.

The Mayor concluded the announcements by thanking Councillor Bowen for organising the World Cup sweepstake, which had raised £120 for the Mayor's two charities.

116 **Questions submitted by the Public**

The Mayor advised that one question had been received from a member of the public and invited Simon Fowle to ask his question.

Question 1

Given the significant opposition from Queenborough residents, businesses, and volunteers, what urgent steps will the Chair of the Environment Committee take to mitigate the damage caused by the introduction of car parking charges, including the adverse effects on the community centre, local businesses (one of which has already shut) residents, and road safety?

Response – Chair of Environmental Services & Climate Change Committee

The decisions of committees are taken by the majority position of its committee members. A Chair of a Committee cannot make unilateral decisions outside of the policy agreed by the committee. The Committee agreed to review the decision it made in the following manner;

'That a report be written reviewing the income generated from levying the charges, at a time that was right, so it fitted in with the 2027 Council budget.'

Given that the charges were only implemented in April of this year, it is too early to assess the matter fully and a report is planned for October Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee.

Supplementary

Your role is to work for the constituents, not for a party or any other outside influences. But you have not listened to what your constituencies wanted. They voted with their feet, with petitions, and you haven't listened. Perhaps the clearest indication of the policy's failure is the car parks themselves. They are empty. People have voted with their feet. I own a business in Queenborough, and we are suffering. And we can't wait till October or everything. So, how are you going to answer that? How can you say that I'm not responsible for it, but you're responsible for the failure of Queenborough community?

Response

I'll refer you to the comments that were just made that the committee makes the decision rather than an individual person. The committee have made their decision, and they will be reviewing it in due course.

117 **Questions submitted by Members**

The Mayor advised two questions had been received by members.

Question 1- Councillor Mike Whiting

I am sure The Leader recognises the real hardship that the Environment Committee's decision to introduce car parking charges is having on local businesses in my ward of Queenborough & Halfway, businesses that have seen trade fall off the cliff following introduction of the charges on 1 April. Such is their plight, some are offering to deduct the cost of parking from customers' bills simply to maintain turnover and reducing opening hours to reduce overheads. Of course, that is not sustainable and some fear closing for good.

The Leader will be aware that the council funds a refund scheme at our leisure centres, where centre users can claim back all or part of their parking costs. The current policy was agreed by the Housing, Health and Communities Committee at its meeting of 25 July 2025.

The HH&C Committee report recognised that making customers pay the full amount for their parking, would likely increase the financial risk to the leisure business by reducing its customer base. Members at that meeting commented that "car park refunds encouraged the use of the leisure facilities", and "removing the parking concessions would result in people not visiting the leisure centres".

The same risks are now playing out for real for businesses in Halfway and in Queenborough due to the introduction of parking charges in these areas, risks that were not highlighted or considered in the report to the Environment Committee at its meeting in November 2025.

Now we have evidence, will the Leader ask the Environment Committee to reconsider its decision of November 2025, to see how the Council might support local businesses with council tax-payers' money to offer a customer refund scheme in the same way the Housing, Health and Communities Committee has chosen to support the operators of the three leisure centres?

Response – Leader

Car parking refunds have been contained within the Leisure Centre Management Contract since its approval in 2004. This contract is in its final year and will be superseded by a new contract from 1st April 2027. The decision that Housing, Health and Communities took in July 2025 actually reduced the level of refund for leisure users for the new contract.

The November 2025 Environmental Services and Climate Change committee report (and appendices), relating to the introduction of parking charges at 6 car parks across the Borough, did in fact highlight the context of each car park and what they were used for, with some serving local shops. Members raised the concerns of business impact on the night, so the Committee did adequately debate the issue.

The second committee report in January 2026 clearly covered the feedback from the traffic order consultation and singled out economic impact on businesses and tourism. Members of the committee were reminded that these issues were not unique to Sheppey (as stated in the November meeting) and similar issues were in place across the Borough.

It would of course, not be affordable for the Council to offer parking refunds to all local businesses across the Borough. The leisure centre refunds relate to a Council service promoting health and wellbeing for residents, which is a core commitment in the Corporate Plan.

Supplementary – Councillor Whiting

Was the Leader aware that the subsidy that we paid to the Swallows last year was £220,000. The subsidy that we paid to the Sheppey Leisure Centre was £90,000. And that makes the figures that we're asking for the help for local business in Queenborough and Halfway somewhat puts them into perspective.

Response - Leader

Thank you, your comments have been duly noted.

Question 2 – Councillor Whiting

Is the chair of the Environment and Climate Change Committee satisfied that there was sufficient public consultation prior to the decision taken by her committee on 12 November 2025 to introduce car parking charges at three car parks in my ward, and that there was sufficient risk assessment done on the wider effects of bringing in these new charges? Is she also satisfied that the Decision was taken in accordance with the *Gunning Principles*, as case law requires, and that it followed the rules and procedures laid out in the council's *Consultation Policy Statement*, the *Officers' Consultation Toolkit* and *Councillors' Guide to Consultations*, all agreed and noted by P&R on 10 September 2025?

Response- Chair of the Environment and Climate Change Committee

I would remind the Councillor that the Chair of the Committee is not a Cabinet member and therefore individual satisfaction is not of relevance.

However, there are two elements to the parking service in Swale – firstly the policy and secondly the operational management.

The parking policy was written in 2024 by a cross-party group representing all areas of the Borough. One of the main principles members were insistent on was that that we had a fair, consistent and transparent parking policy. There was a feeling that there was an inequity in a system that charged some places in the Borough and not others. Members of the working group said that they had heard from residents that the system was unfair. It was also raised that there was a situation where the car parks in one of the most deprived areas on the Island (Sheerness) were chargeable and this was not fair.

The Parking Policy was widely consulted on in line with the consultation policy we had at the time and in line with national principles – the consultation took place from 1st Nov 2023 and 2 January 2024. Members agreed the policy and no changes were made.

The policy advises that the free car parks should be consistently reviewed.

This brings me to my second point. Under the operational management of the parking service, the free car parks were reviewed and a decision taken (within the policy) to put a number forward to Members for paid parking. These were not all in Sheppey, but they were car parks that were reviewed as suitable for car park charges. The November 2025 committee report included an appendix detailing the context of each of the car parks. These car parks are well used and there is an ongoing cost for maintenance of these car parks. This cost was being subsidised by the other car parks across the Borough and this is against the policy members agreed, which was to have a fair, consistent and transparent policy.

The policy to do this had been consulted on and so members took the decision to charge in these car parks. We do not consult on the charging of individual car parks – but on the policy.

We did then consult on the traffic order which details the changes in each individual car park, as required in legislation and changes were made as a result of views of residents and businesses.

Both committees that considered the matter were well debated and officers answered questions raised by Committee Members and visiting members.

Supplementary – Councillor Whiting

It's a question to the chair whether she was satisfied that we followed the right procedures and the right procedures had been followed. And I get from the answer that the answer was simply yes, she is.

Response- Chair of the Environment and Climate Change Committee

Declined to answer the question.

118 Leader's Statement

The Leader gave a short verbal statement. He advised that, whilst a great deal continued to happen across the Borough, he intended to keep the statement brief. He thanked members, officers and residents for continuing to deliver and support services across Swale, and he wished England every success in the World Cup match taking place that evening.

In response to the statement, members made a range of comments, including support for the England team and references to other sporting events taking place at the same time. A number of members also used the opportunity to highlight concerns about domestic abuse and to promote the White Ribbon campaign, with particular reference to the need for awareness at times of major sporting fixtures.

Reference was also made by members to transport difficulties affecting the Isle of Sheppey, and to the importance of local services and support networks within the Borough.

In reply, the Leader stated that comments attributed to a Member of Parliament in relation to violence against women were unacceptable, echoed the importance of

tackling domestic abuse and supporting the White Ribbon campaign, and briefly responded to the comments made about access to and from the Isle of Sheppey. He also acknowledged the comments regarding other sporting events before concluding by again wishing England well.

119 Motion - Water Quality Improvements Milton Creek

The Mayor invited Councillor Paul Stephen to propose the motion.

In proposing the motion, Councillor Stephen referred to recent citizen science monitoring work undertaken by Raybel Charters and outlined concerns regarding water quality in Milton Creek, including evidence of elevated pollution levels. He explained that the monitoring programme had identified key pressures on the Creek, including sewage discharges and urban run-off, which were impacting ecological health and biodiversity. Councillor Stephen outlined the purpose of the project, which was to better understand the historical and current environmental condition of Milton Creek and to identify practical measures to improve water quality. He referred to potential solutions including improved drainage systems, floating reed beds, wetland treatment systems, and partnership working with local businesses, developers and community groups. The motion sought Council support to engage with Southern Water and to support Raybel Charters in securing external funding to progress the work.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Ashley Wise spoke in support and emphasised that the motion did not seek direct financial contributions from the Council, but instead sought endorsement and partnership support to enable external funding applications. He highlighted the alignment of the project with the Council's wider environmental and community objectives.

During consideration of the motion, a procedural motion was moved and seconded, under the Council's Constitution, to refer the matter to the Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee on the basis that it fell within that Committee's remit.

Advice was provided by the Monitoring Officer that referral to Committee was at the discretion of the Mayor where a matter fell within the remit of a service committee.

Members raised points including:

- concern that referral could delay support for external funding opportunities;
- acknowledgement that the issue cut across multiple service areas;
- the importance of ensuring that the appropriate Committee considered the technical detail; and
- the need for timely engagement with external partners.

The Mayor determined that the matter should be referred to the Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee.

Resolved:

(1) That the motion be referred to the Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee for consideration without debate.

120 Motion - Car Parking Charges Isle of Sheppey

The Mayor invited Councillor Tom Nundy to propose the motion.

In proposing the motion, Councillor Nundy referred to the introduction of parking charges

at Little Oyster, Castle Connections, Park Road and Halfway Road car parks and explained that these locations were key access points for residents, businesses and visitors on the Isle of Sheppey. He stated that the charges were having a detrimental impact on local businesses and residents, particularly at the start of the summer season, and highlighted reports that some businesses were considering closure as a result of reduced footfall.

Councillor Nundy referred to sustained public opposition to the charges, including petitions, consultation responses and feedback from residents and the Sheppey Councillors and Residents Forum. He emphasised that the concerns raised included the impact on local trade, displacement of parking onto surrounding roads, and wider traffic and road safety implications. He drew comparisons with other areas of the borough, stating that local facilities and the nature of usage differed significantly, and argued that a consistent approach across the borough did not reflect local circumstances.

Finally, Councillor Nundy urged Council to support the motion to reconsider the decision as soon as possible rather than wait for the original 12-month review period.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Elliott Jayes spoke in support and referred to the impact on local businesses and the wider community. He described the charges as unnecessary in the context of the Council's financial position and noted concerns about the appearance of empty car parks and their effect on visitor perception of the area.

During consideration of the motion, the Mayor advised that, in accordance with the Constitution, he proposed to refer the matter to the Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee.

Members made points including:

- concern regarding the impact of the charges on local businesses, particularly during the tourism season;
- reference to evidence of reduced usage of car parks and displacement parking on surrounding streets;
- acknowledgement of strong public opposition expressed through petitions and consultation responses;
- recognition that the decision had originally been taken by the Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee and sat within its remit; and
- concern regarding the capacity of the relevant Committee to consider the matter in a timely manner given the forward plan.

Advice was provided during the meeting that it was not appropriate for Council to determine the timing of committee consideration and that referred matters would be scheduled through the Committee's forward plan.

The Mayor exercised his discretion to refer the matter to the Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee.

Resolved:

- (1) That the motion be referred to the Environmental Services and Climate Change Committee for consideration without debate.***

121 Urgent Motion - Erosion of local democracy in the planning system

The Mayor advised that he had accepted an urgent motion on the erosion of local

democracy in the planning system due to the timing and sensitivity of recent Government announcements regarding planning committee reform.

The Mayor invited Councillor Julien Speed to propose the motion.

In proposing the motion, Councillor Speed referred to recently published Government proposals concerning planning committee reform, including the introduction of a national scheme of delegation, proposed restrictions on councillors' ability to call in planning applications, and the imposition of a maximum planning committee size of 13 members. He also referred to requirements for local planning authorities to notify central Government where refusal of major developments was being considered.

Councillor Speed explained that, in his view, these proposals represented a significant shift in decision-making away from locally elected members and towards officers or central Government. He highlighted the importance of maintaining democratic accountability in the planning system and stressed that planning committees played a critical role in maintaining public trust.

He further noted that, in Swale, a large proportion of planning decisions were already taken under delegated powers and argued that the proposed changes would further reduce the role of elected members in decision-making. He raised concerns regarding the loss of local knowledge and the reduced opportunity for residents' concerns to be considered in a public forum.

In seconding the motion, Councillor Tara Noe reserved her right to speak.

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

- strong concern that the proposals would **reduce local democratic accountability** in planning decisions;
- the importance of **local knowledge and local representation** in determining planning applications and setting appropriate conditions;
- concern that a nationally prescribed committee size of 13 members was **overly rigid and did not reflect local governance structures**;
- criticism of increasing **centralisation of decision-making** and reduced confidence in local decision-making;
- acknowledgement that **planning reform was needed**, but that the proposals did not address key issues such as delivery and resourcing;
- recognition that planning committees played a key role in **ensuring transparency and public confidence**; and
- concern that proposals could lead to decisions being made by individuals with **limited understanding of local circumstances**.

Members also emphasised that the motion was **not an objection to development or growth**, but a defence of local democratic processes and accountability.

In exercising her right of reply, Councillor Noe reiterated that the motion sought to defend the role of locally elected members in planning decisions and stressed the importance of maintaining a balanced planning system that allowed for democratic input alongside professional advice.

Councillor Speed, in summing up, thanked Members for their contributions and reiterated that the motion sought to preserve local democratic control in the planning system and ensure that decisions affecting local communities remained accountable to those communities.

Resolved to:

- (1) Formally oppose Government proposals for a “national scheme of delegation” that would remove or significantly restrict planning call-in powers available to local councillors.**
- (2) Request amendments to Schedule 1 specifically, which sets out that householder, minor residential and minor commercial applications must in all circumstances be delegated to officers.**
- (3) Oppose the imposition of a maximum planning committee size of 13 members.**
- (4) Call for revocation of the directive requiring referral of planning decisions to central Government for applications of 150+ dwellings where refusal is recommended.**
- (5) Direct the Council Leader to write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government setting out the Council’s concerns as expressed above regarding the erosion of local democratic control within the planning system.**
- (6) Share this resolution with local Members of Parliament and neighbouring authorities to encourage broader opposition to these proposals.**

122 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) - Results of Public Consultation and Adoption

The Leader introduced the report and referred to the recommendations before Council. It was noted that the drafting of the SPD had followed earlier consideration of the issue by Council and by the relevant committees and working groups, and that the document had now been subject to public consultation.

During the debate, members welcomed the work undertaken by officers and by the committees involved in developing the SPD. Particular emphasis was placed on the practical importance of the document in helping to guide decisions on issues such as concentrations of HMOs, parking, waste management, room sizes and the wider impact on local neighbourhoods.

Members also commented on the need for the SPD to be treated as an active and useful planning document rather than a document which simply sat on file, and reference was made to the importance of supporting planning and enforcement teams in applying the guidance consistently where appropriate. It was also noted that, whilst the SPD formed an important part of the framework, other steps and controls would still be relevant to the Council’s wider approach to HMO management and regulation.

Resolved:

- (1) To note the responses received to the public consultation undertaken in relation to the Draft HMO SPD; and**
- (2) Subject to any recommendations made by the Policy and Resources Committee at their meeting of 17th June 2026, adopt the HMO SPD (as set out in Appendix I).**

123 DBS Checks

In presenting the item, the Chair of the Standards Committee explained that the matter had first been raised at committee level and had progressed through the Council’s

governance process. It was reported that 43 of the Council's 47 Members had completed a DBS check.

The Chair also advised that representations had been made to Government in support of DBS checks becoming mandatory for councillors in future, particularly in the context of local government reorganisation and the safeguarding responsibilities that would arise in any future unitary authority.

During debate, members strongly supported the initiative and emphasised the importance of DBS checks in maintaining public confidence, particularly where councillors engaged with schools, young people, vulnerable adults and the wider community.

It was also noted that residents might reasonably expect elected representatives to have undergone such checks.

Council noted the progress made and the update from the Standards Committee.

Resolved:

(1) The update be noted.

Mayor

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