
Council

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 22 July 2026 from 7.00 pm - 9.48 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock, Andy Booth, Lloyd Bowen, Hayden Brawn, Derek Carnell (Mayor), Ann Cavanagh, Charles Gibson, Tim Gibson, Kieran Golding, Angela Harrison (Deputy Mayor), Carole Jackson, Mark Last, Rich Lehmann, Peter MacDonald, Peter Marchington, Ben J Martin, Charlie Miller, Kieran Mishchuk, Lee-Anne Moore, Pete Neal, Tom Nundy, Chris Palmer, Richard Palmer, Hannah Perkin, Carrie Pollard, Julien Speed, Paul Stephen, Sarah Stephen, Terry Thompson, Karen Watson, Mike Whiting, Tony Winckless, Ashley Wise and Dolley Wooster.

PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Councillors Simon Clark, Elliott Jayes, Tara Noe and Mark Tucker.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Robin Harris and Jo Millard and Larissa Reed.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Steph Curtis.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Monique Bonney, Lloyd Chapman, Shelley Cheesman, Roger Clark, Alex Eyre, Alastair Gould, James Hunt, Claire Martin and Ashley Shiel.

235 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Mayor outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

236 **Declarations of Interest**

During the meeting, Councillor Dolley Wooster declared an non-pecuniary interest in Item 8 – Motion on Future Secondary School Provision on the Isle of Sheppey as she was a Governor of a school on the Isle of Sheppey.

237 **Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor reported on a number of civic engagements undertaken since the previous meeting, including attendance at the reopening of the Len Goodman memorial tree at Demelza Open Gardens. He explained that each leaf on the tree signified the passing of a child and he described this as an emotional visit.

He also reported on attending the reopening of the refurbished McDonald's restaurant at Bobbing, the High Sheriff of Kent's garden party at Elmley Nature Reserve, the Not Forgotten Association garden party, the Swale Stroke Group's fifteenth anniversary event and an interview with Sheppey FM Community Radio. The Mayor also outlined a number of forthcoming engagements and events.

The Mayor thanked the Deputy Mayor, Councillor Angela Harrison, for attending engagements on his behalf when he was unable to do so.

The Mayor paid tribute to Kelly Mehmet, Environmental Contracts Manager, who would be leaving the Council at the end of August 2026 after 26 years' service. He highlighted her contribution to the Council and wished her well in her future career. A presentation of flowers would be made on her final day with the Council.

238 **Questions submitted by the Public**

There were no public questions.

239 **Questions submitted by Members**

There were no questions from Members.

240 **Leader's Statement**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Tim Gibson, delivered a verbal statement.

He began by expressing condolences following the death of former Member of Parliament Ann Widdecombe, paying tribute to her public service and extending sympathies to her family, friends and colleagues.

The Leader highlighted a range of recent developments and achievements across the Borough, including:

- the future management of Barton's Point Coastal Park, Minster, following ecological surveys which had identified the importance of the site's unique environment and informed proposals to enhance the park whilst protecting its natural features;
- progress on the development at Cockleshell Walk, Sittingbourne, which would provide affordable housing for local residents;
- developments in respect of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), including confirmation of the Government's preferred unitary authority option and the continuing importance of the Community Governance Review (CGR);
- proposals arising from the CGR following public consultation;
- representations made to Government regarding planning reforms and the need for infrastructure, services and environmental protections to accompany housing growth;
- increased participation in the Borough's food waste collection service; and
- action taken in relation to ongoing disruption at the Sheppey Crossing and recent water supply and wastewater issues within the Borough.

The Leader also congratulated the England men's football team on their recent World Cup tournament campaign. Finally, he reiterated the Council's commitment to delivering services, protecting the environment, strengthening communities and ensuring the Borough's interests were represented during the period of LGR.

In response to the statement, Members:

- joined the Leader in expressing condolences following the death of Ann Widdecombe;
- discussed LGR, including future governance arrangements, accessibility of services and representation, and the importance of leaving a positive legacy for residents;
- commented on planning reforms and concerns regarding centralisation of decision-making powers;
- welcomed progress on affordable housing delivery and the Cockleshell Walk, Sittingbourne development;

- discussed ongoing issues relating to the Sheppey Crossing and transport infrastructure;
- praised the contribution of Council officers, including reference to the service provided by Kelly Mehmet during her time with the authority;
- welcomed environmental initiatives including protection of Barton's Point Coastal Park, food waste collection performance and the achievement of Green Flag status at Milton Creek Country Park; and
- discussed skills, apprenticeships and workforce development, particularly in relation to the construction industry.

In reply, the Leader thanked Members for their contributions and welcomed the broad consensus expressed on a number of the issues raised. He reiterated concerns regarding planning reforms, thanked Kelly Mehmet for her service to the Council, welcomed progress on affordable housing delivery, supported recognition of environmental achievements within the Borough, and highlighted the value of apprenticeships in developing skills and careers.

241 Motion: Future Secondary School Provision on the Isle of Sheppey

Council considered a motion regarding the future provision of secondary school places on the Isle of Sheppey.

In moving the motion, Councillor Lee-Anne Moore referred to discussions that had taken place at a recent Councillor and Resident Forum, and expressed concern regarding both the current and projected shortage of secondary school places. She said that whilst the immediate position had improved compared with the previous year, concerns remained regarding future intakes and projected shortfalls in school capacity.

Councillor Moore highlighted the difficulties faced by families whose children had been unable to secure a local school place and spoke of the impact that long travel distances and the absence of suitable provision had on pupils and their families. She said that some children had been without a school place for an extended period and stressed the importance of ensuring that every child had access to appropriate education. Councillor Moore emphasised that the purpose of the motion was to bring together all relevant bodies in order to identify solutions rather than apportion blame.

Councillor Lloyd Bowen seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

An amendment submitted by Councillor Richard Palmer was withdrawn with the agreement of the seconder, Councillor Chris Palmer.

During the debate, Members expressed broad support for the motion and discussed a range of issues relating to secondary education provision across the Isle of Sheppey and the wider Borough.

Members' comments included:

- concerns regarding current and future shortages in secondary school places and the projected increase in demand over coming years;
- the impact on children and families of being required to travel significant distances to attend school;
- highlighted the effect that lengthy journeys could have on pupils' wellbeing,

- educational attainment and ability to participate in extracurricular activities;
- concern that some children had been without suitable school places for prolonged periods;
- discussion regarding the respective responsibilities of Government, Kent County Council (KCC), academy trusts and local authorities in securing sufficient school provision;
- the need to ensure that planned housing growth was accompanied by appropriate educational infrastructure;
- concerns regarding the operation of admissions arrangements and the accessibility of school places for children living in parts of the Isle of Sheppey;
- discussion regarding the use of developer contributions and wider planning considerations relating to school provision;
- the importance of ensuring that children and parents were represented in future discussions;
- concerns regarding the potential impact of a lack of educational provision on future opportunities for young people; and
- the need for all relevant organisations to work collaboratively to identify and implement solutions.

A number of Members stated that greater accountability was required from those responsible for education provision, whilst others emphasised the need for joint working between all agencies involved. Members were united in expressing concern regarding the consequences for children and families if additional provision was not secured.

Councillor Bowen said that the issue was not a political matter, but one of ensuring that all young people had access to high quality secondary education. He referred to projected shortages in future secondary school provision and highlighted the practical and financial burden placed on families required to travel long distances to access school places. Councillor Bowen welcomed the motion's proposal to bring together KCC, Members of Parliament, academy trusts, school leaders, the Borough Council and parents in order to develop a clear plan and timetable for addressing future need.

In summing up, Councillor Moore thanked Members for their support. She said that the debate demonstrated the importance of the issue for families across the Isle of Sheppey and expressed appreciation that Members from all groups had supported efforts to secure improved educational provision for children and young people.

Resolved:

That Council notes:

(1) That Kent County Council has advised that there is a forecast shortfall of secondary school places in Swale from 2026 onwards, with a deficit of up to five forms of entry (approximately 150 places).

(2) That some children are already travelling significant distances to access education.

(3) That children from the east of Sheppey are often required to travel past several schools before reaching their allocated school

(4) That Kent County Council's Commissioning Plan identifies continuing pressure

on secondary school places in Swale and states that expansion of secondary school education will be required to meet future demand.

That Council believes:

- (1) Every child should have access to a suitable local school place.***
- (2) Long-distance travel places unnecessary burdens on pupils and families.***
- (3) Education infrastructure must keep pace with population growth and future demand.***

This Council resolves:

- (1) To express its concern regarding the projected shortage of secondary school places.***
- (2) To request that Kent County Council provides a clear plan and timetable for delivering the additional secondary school capacity required on the Isle of Sheppey.***
- (3) To ask the Leader of Swale Borough Council to convene an urgent meeting involving Kent County Council, local Members of Parliament, Swale Borough Council representatives, academy trusts and secondary school leaders to discuss current pressures and agree a long-term strategy to ensure sufficient secondary school places for children of Swale.***
- (4) To ask Kent County Council and local MPs for their support in securing the necessary investment and educational provision for Swale.***

242 Plan X Software - approach to Service Charge

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and moved the recommendations. He advised that the Policy and Resources Committee had recommended that the Council opt into applying a service charge to fee-paying planning services delivered through the PlanX digital platform. He explained that funding had been received from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to support implementation of the system and that the platform would provide improved digital services for planning customers.

Councillor Bowen seconded the recommendations and spoke in support of the proposal. He said that the system would provide residents and businesses with improved access to planning information and guidance, help users navigate the planning process more effectively, and support a more efficient planning service. Councillor Bowen also referred to the external funding received to support implementation and the proposed charging arrangements.

During the brief debate, Members commented on the proposal and the benefits of introducing improved digital planning services.

Resolved:

- (1) That Members agree that the service charge for PlanX be applied in accordance***

with paragraph 2.9 of the report.

243 **Recruitment of Independent Person**

The Chair of the Standards Committee, Councillor Harrison, introduced the report and moved the recommendation.

Councillor Harrison advised that Council had previously agreed to extend the appointments of the existing Independent Persons and had requested that a further Independent Person be recruited. She reported that a suitable candidate had been identified and sought approval for the appointment of three Independent Persons.

Councillor Hannah Perkin seconded the recommendation.

Resolved:

(1) That Council appoints the existing Independent Persons, Mr Christopher Webb and Mrs Patricia Richards, together with Mr Alan Harrison as Independent Persons for a period of three years from September 2026, or until the cessation of Swale Borough Council, whichever is earlier.

244 **Community Governance Review (CGR) Final Recommendations**

The Leader of the Council introduced the item and paid tribute to the work undertaken by the CGR Working Group and supporting officers throughout the review process.

Councillor Mike Whiting, Chair of the CGR Working Group, formally proposed the recommendations. In doing so, he thanked Members of the Working Group and officers for their work throughout the review. He explained that the review had been undertaken on a borough-wide basis and that the recommendations before Council had been developed following consideration of representations received through two rounds of public consultation. He said that proposals had been amended throughout the process in response to residents' views and that the recommendations reflected the evidence gathered during the consultation exercise.

Councillor Bowen seconded the recommendations and reserved his right to speak.

During the debate, Members:

- thanked the Working Group and officers for the considerable amount of work undertaken during the review process;
- welcomed the scale of public engagement achieved through the consultation exercise and the consideration that had been given to consultation responses;
- discussed the importance of local identity, community representation and local governance arrangements;
- recognised the benefits that town and parish councils could provide in representing local communities and promoting local priorities;
- welcomed the proposals to establish new parish arrangements and amend parish boundaries in a number of areas across the Borough;
- discussed the significance of the recommendations in the context of LGR and the need to preserve local voices within future governance arrangements; and
- noted that the review had sought to ensure that recommendations reflected the

views expressed by residents.

A number of Members expressed disappointment that the consultation responses did not support the creation of a Sittingbourne Town Council. Whilst some Members considered that a town council for Sittingbourne would have delivered benefits in the future, it was acknowledged that the Working Group had followed the evidence received through consultation and had recommended accordingly.

Members also referred to the opportunities that town and parish councils could provide for community engagement, local representation and partnership working, and welcomed the recommendations relating to areas including Milton Regis, Murston, Grove Park, Bobbing and Kemsley.

Councillor Bowen thanked the Chair, Vice-Chair, Members of the Working Group and officers for their work. He noted that whilst some Members may have preferred different outcomes in certain areas, the recommendations reflected the evidence submitted by residents through the consultation process.

In summing up the debate, Councillor Whiting thanked Members, officers and residents who had participated in the review. He reiterated the importance of strengthening local representation ahead of LGR and expressed his hope that future parish council elections would proceed as planned in May 2027.

Resolved:

(1) That Council adopts the Community Governance Review final recommendations, as set out in this report, following consideration by the Policy and Resources Committee on 13 July 2026.

245 Local Plan Review - Regulation 19 Consultation Launch

Prior to consideration of the item, the Mayor read out a letter received from the Western Residents and Councillors Forum which objected to the inclusion of Bobbing Garden Village as a strategic allocation within the Local Plan Review and expressed concerns regarding the impact of development on local communities and infrastructure.

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and moved the recommendations. He thanked the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group (PTPWG) and officers for the considerable work undertaken in preparing the draft Local Plan Review, Sustainability Appraisal, Habitat Regulations Assessment and Infrastructure Delivery Plan. He explained that the purpose of the report was to seek approval to commence the Regulation 19 consultation on the draft documents.

Councillor Charles Gibson seconded the recommendations and reserved his right to speak.

During the debate, Members discussed:

- the extensive work undertaken by Members and officers during preparation of the Local Plan Review;
- concerns regarding nationally imposed housing targets and the effect these had on the Borough;

- the risks associated with continuing without an adopted Local Plan, including vulnerability to speculative development and reduced ability to influence future planning decisions;
- concerns regarding infrastructure capacity, including education, healthcare, water supply, highways and transport;
- concerns regarding the inclusion of Bobbing Garden Village and the potential impact of development on local communities and the wider highway network;
- the implications of the ongoing Highsted Park, Sittingbourne proposals and whether further delay to the Local Plan process should be considered;
- the importance of securing affordable housing and ensuring a more balanced distribution of housing growth across the Borough;
- the need to protect local planning policies and neighbourhood plans from challenge;
- the environmental policies included within the draft Plan, including provisions relating to water infrastructure and sustainability; and
- the implications of LGR and the potential consequences of failing to progress the Local Plan within the required timescales.

A number of Members opposed the recommendations, arguing that the scale of development proposed was unacceptable, that infrastructure provision would not keep pace with growth and that further consideration should be given to the implications of the Highsted Park proposals before progressing the Plan.

Other Members supported the recommendations, acknowledging that the Plan represented a compromise but arguing that an adopted Local Plan was essential to provide certainty, strengthen the Council's position when determining planning applications and protect communities from speculative development. Supporters also referred to the inclusion of affordable housing, environmental protections and locally developed planning policies within the draft Plan.

In seconding the recommendations, Councillor Charles Gibson thanked residents, Members and officers for their involvement in the process. He said that, while the Plan was not perfect, it represented the best approach available within the current national planning framework and highlighted the risks of further delay.

The Leader of the Council, in exercising his right of reply, reiterated that the Council needed to proceed with the consultation and that failure to do so would risk losing control of the process.

A recorded vote was requested and supported by the requisite number of Members.

In accordance with procedure rule 3.1.19(2) a recorded vote was taken, the result of which are as follows:

For:

Councillors Charles Gibson, Dolly Wooster, Julian Speed, Lloyd Bowen, Peter Marchington, Ashley Wise, Charlie Miller, Karen Watson, Tony Winckless, Andy Booth, Ben J Martin, Hannah Perkin, Kieran Golding, Mark Last, Paul Stephen, Angela Harrison, Carole Jackson, Hayden Brawn, Anne Cavanagh, Derek Carnell, Sarah Stephen, Tim Gibson and Mike Whiting. Total equals 23.

Against:

Councillors Tom Nundy, Chris Palmer, Richard Palmer, Kieran Mishchuk, Terry Thompson, Carrie Pollard, Mike Baldock and Peter MacDonald. Total equals 8.

Abstain:

Councillors Rich Lehmann, Pete Neal and Lee-Anne Moore. Total equals 3.

Resolved:

(1) To approve the changes to the proposed housing and employment allocations as set out in table I and paragraphs 2.2 – 2.6;

(2) To delegate to the Head of Planning, in consultation with the Planning and Transportation Policy Working Group (PTPWG) Chair, any required updates to and/or deletions of sites with extant planning permissions;

(3) To delegate to the Head of Planning, in consultation with the PTPWG Chair, any required updates and/or deletions to policies (Development Management, Strategic or Allocation) if required, once the transport and air quality modelling, Sustainability Appraisal and Habitats Regulation Assessment are complete;

(4) To delegate to the Head of Planning, in consultation with PTPWG, the inclusion of any required mitigations within policies (Development Management, Strategic or Allocation) if required, once the Level 2 Strategic Flood Risk Assessment is complete;

(5) To approve the Local Plan Regulation 19 document in Appendix I, the draft Sustainability Appraisal in Appendix II, the draft Habitat Regulation Assessment in Appendix III and the Draft Infrastructure Delivery Plan in Appendix IV for consultation purposes; and

(6) To approve delegation to the Head of Planning, in consultation with the PTPWG Chair, any minor amendments and corrections to the Local Plan Regulation 19 document prior to the start of the consultation period.

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 Council