

MINUTES of the TOWN COUNCIL MEETING of the SWANSCOMBE & GREENHITHE TOWN COUNCIL held on THURSDAY 24 OCTOBER 2024 at 7.00pm

PRESENT: Councillor Ann Duke – Town Mayor
Councillor Dawn Johnston – Deputy Town Mayor
Councillor Peter Harris
Councillor Lesley Howes
Councillor Richard Lees
Councillor Elizabeth Wickham

ALSO PRESENT: Graham Blew – Town Clerk
Martin Harding – ATC/RFO
x2 Members of the public

ABSENT: There were none.

203/24-25. ARRANGEMENTS AND CONSTRAINTS REGARDING FILMING OR RECORDING THE MEETING.

The Town Mayor explained the arrangements and constraints relating to the filming or recording of the meeting.

204/24-25. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Emma Ben-Moussa, due to other commitments.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Lorna Cross, due to other commitments.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Claire Pearce, due to other commitments.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Alan Reach, due to other commitments.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Hazel Stephens, due to other commitments.

An apology for absence was received from Greenhithe Dartford Borough Councillor David Mote.

An apology for absence was received from Greenhithe Dartford Borough Councillor Carol Gale.

An apology for absence was received from Rev. Charlie Lloyd-Evans.

RESOLVED:

That the reason/s for absence, for the above Town Councillor(s), be formally accepted and approved.

205/24-25. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN ITEMS ON THE AGENDA.

There were none.

As per Standing Order 34 c) the Chairman adjourned the meeting at this point to allow members of the public to address the meeting in relation to the business being transacted at the meeting.

206/24-25. TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 25 JULY 2024 AND THE SPECIAL TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2024.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Town Council Meeting held on 25 July 2024 and the Special Town Council meeting held on 12 September 2024 be confirmed as a true record and be signed.

207/24-25. ITEMS DEEMED URGENT BY THE TOWN MAYOR / MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES AND THEIR POSITION ON THE AGENDA.

There were none.

208/24-25. MINUTES OF THE PLANNING, MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS, TRANSPORTATION AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETINGS HELD ON 4 SEPTEMBER 2024 AND 25 SEPTEMBER 2024

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Planning, Major Developments, Transportation and Environment Committee Meetings held on 4 September 2024 and 25 September 2024 be confirmed and the recommendations made therein be adopted.

209/24-25. MINUTES OF THE RECREATION, LEISURE & AMENITIES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 18 SEPTEMBER 2024

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Recreation, Leisure & Amenities Committee Meeting held on 18 September 2024 be confirmed and the recommendations made therein be adopted.

210/24-25. MINUTES OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2024

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee Meeting held on 12 September 2024 be confirmed and the recommendations made therein be adopted.

211/24-25. **MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETINGS HELD ON 2 OCTOBER 2024.**

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Community Safety Committee Meetings held on 2 October 2024 be confirmed and the recommendations made therein be adopted.

212/24-25. **RESIGNATION**

Councillor A E Barham had submitted a written letter of resignation, to the Town Mayor, on 10 October 2024 which had resulted in vacancies on Committees, Working Groups etc.

As per the Local Government Act 1972 Section 87 (2) a notice of Casual Vacancy for Swanscombe Parish Ward had been posted/ displayed with a deadline of 29 October 2024.

RESOLVED:

That the item be noted

213/24-25. **CO-OPTION.**

Following the passing of Councillor Peter Harman and in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972 Section 232 the Electoral Services Manager at Dartford Borough Council had been informed and a notice of Casual Vacancy for the Greenhithe Parish Ward had been posted with a deadline of 11 October 2024.

At the end of the notice period the Electoral Services Manager at Dartford Borough Council had confirmed that there had not been sufficient requests received for the Greenhithe Parish Ward and that the Town Council were now able to fill the vacancy by co-option.

Due to the other vacancy detailed in the previous item, Members, following a vote, agreed that it would be more practical/appropriate not to publicise to fill this vacancy by co-option until such time that it was known whether the other vacancy resulted in a by-election or whether the Town Council would be able to fill that vacancy by co-option too.

RESOLVED:

1. That it be agreed to wait for the result of the other Notice of Casual Vacancy before filling this vacancy by co-option.
2. That a deadline date for Expressions of Interest for both vacancies, should they both be able to be filled by co-option, be set as 20 November 2024.

214/24-25. VACANCIES ON COMMITTEES, SUB-COMMITTEES, OUTSIDE BODIES REPRESENTATIVES, WORKING GROUPS, BANK SIGNATORIES AND SWANSCOMBE AND GREENHITHE RECOGNITION AWARD PANEL.

Following discussion members agreed to fill some of the vacancies on Committees, Sub-Committees, Outside Bodies, Working Groups, Bank Signatories and the Recognition Award Panel.

RESOLVED:

That the vacancies on Committees, Sub-Committees, Outside Bodies, Working Groups, Bank Signatories and the Recognition Award Panel be filled as per the annexed list.

215/24-25. KENT COMMUNITY WARDEN SERVICE REVIEW – GEOGRAPHICAL ALLOCATION POLICY (GAP).

Members considered the report regarding the Kent Community Service Review, which has resulted in the Kent Community Warden Service no longer being able to provide cover for Greenhithe.

Members were advised that the recent meeting of the KALC Dartford Area Committee had agreed to table a motion for the upcoming KALC AGM putting forward the dissatisfaction of the Parish & Town Councils of Kent with the allocation of Wardens following the review. Comments to form part of this motion were being collated by Councillor Lesley Howes.

RESOLVED:

1. That any members wishing to provide comments in support of the proposed motion for the KALC AGM, send these directly to Councillor Lesley Howes.
2. That Officers approach the Kent Community Warden Service to find out the proposed costs associated with funding an additional Warden for Greenhithe.
3. That Officers request further detail on how the implementation and management of any volunteer Warden scheme would work.
4. That Officers request further detail as to why Greenhithe would no longer be covered by a Community Warden.

216/24-25. DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING REVIEW 2024.

Members discussed the mandatory review of Polling Districts being carried out by DBC and which had a deadline for comments of 4 November 2024

RESOLVED:

That no comments be made, and the item be noted.

217/24-25. EXTERNAL AUDITOR REPORT AND CERTIFICATE 2023 – 2024.

To comply with statute full Council are required to consider, and minute, the external auditors' annual letter and report.

RESOLVED:

That, as required by statute, the external auditors' report and certificate 2023 – 2024 be noted.

218/24-25. CAS COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS CIC.

The Town Council had been notified by Sue Hart that a decision had been made to close CAS at the old Fire Station building and that they would not be returning in September 2024.

RESOLVED:

That the item be noted.

219/24-25. YOUTH SERVICES PROPOSAL – SWANSCOMBE AND GREENHITHE COMMUNITY HUB (S&GCH).

Further to the above item the Town Council had been contacted by a new constituted volunteer led group (entitled the S&GCH) who had formed to try and retain the services previously provided by CAS.

Members considered the proposal from S&GCH to deliver the remainder of the Homework Heroes commissioned Youth Service from November 2024 to March 2025 along with a verbal update on the group's constitution and operation.

RESOLVED:

That the proposal by S&GCH to deliver the previously commissioned Homework Heroes Youth Service from November 2024 to March 2025 be agreed subject to:

1. Confirmation being received that the legal agreement for use of the building has been secured from Dartford Borough Council.
2. That S&GCH agree to have a representative of the Town Council sit on their committee.

220/24-25. **STAFF / MEMBER TRAINING – UPDATE.**

The following training has been scheduled / undertaken: -

Town Clerk	Standards Conference – 10 October 2024	KALC - Lenham
Town Clerk	Clerks Conference – 12 November 2024	KALC - Sevenoaks
Town Clerk	Parish Seminar – 20 November 2024	KHS - Maidstone
RFO	Finance Conference – 17 September 2024	KALC – Sevenoaks
RFO	Cyber Security Insight Session – 14 October 2024	MPR IT - Lenham
Trainee Groundsman / Gardener	Play Parks Inspection Training – 24 September 2024	KALC (RoSPA) – Sevenoaks
Cllr Lorna Cross	Planning implications for Parish and Town Councils – 21 August 2024	KALC - online
Cllr Ann Duke	Planning implications for Parish and Town Councils – 21 August 2024	KALC - online

RESOLVED:

That the item be noted.

221/24-25. **REPORTS OF OUTSIDE REPRESENTATIVES.**

Members were advised that this item provided an opportunity for Members appointed as representatives on outside bodies to provide a report at the meeting.

London Resort Company Holdings Ltd Community Liaison Group (LRCHCLG).
The Town Council currently had a vacancy for its representative on the LRCHCLG.

Ingress Park (Greenhithe) Management Limited (IPGM).

Councillor Peter Harris and “vacancy” are the Council’s representatives on IPGM. IPGM had indicated that, although unable to provide documentation, they would like to submit verbal updates to the Town Council.

Councillor Harris confirmed that the budget had been completed for this year but was late again due to a challenge with Firstport.

Following a further inspection of the Follies, the main tunnel had been closed for Health & Safety reasons.

Kent Association of Local Councils Dartford Area Committee (KALCDAC).

The Town Mayor and Town Clerk are the Town Councils representatives on the KALCDAC). As previously agreed, the agenda for the 7 October 2024 meeting, including the minutes from the 15 July 2024 meeting, were available for inspection.

Dartford Young People's Partnership Conversation (DYF)

Councillor Hazel Stephens is the Town Councils representative on the DYF. The last meeting had been held on 16 September 2024 with the focus being on brainstorming problems in the area and hearing a case study on an inspirational young man and his journey to becoming a Youth Leader.

Bluewater Forum (BF)

The Town Mayor is the Town Councils representative on the BF. The last meeting had been held on 26 September 2024 with the focus being around transport and foodbanks, with both Fastrack and the Lower Thames Crossing discussed.

Whitecliffe Community Liaison Group (WCLG).

The Town Council currently had a vacancy as representative on the WCLG. As previously agreed, the agenda and minutes from the 24 September 2024 meeting were available for inspection.

Joint Transportation Board, Dartford Borough Council (JTB).

Councillor Lesley Howes is one of the x2 Parish Representatives on the JTB. The last meeting was held on 3 September 2024.

Councillor Howes advised that the details of the new contractor for Fastrack was confirmed as Go Coaches, who had a licence to operate up to 37 routes in the area and that they would be investing in electric buses.

In addition, a contract had been issued to roll out smart shelters, which provide updates on services, and would also have advertising space for local charities.

Borough and Parish Forum (BPF).

The Town Mayor and Town Clerk are the Town Councils representatives on the BPF. As previously agreed, the agenda for the 1 October 2024 meeting was available for inspection.

222/24-25. REPORT FROM KENT COUNTY COUNCILLOR.

There is currently a vacancy for the Kent County Councillor representing Swanscombe and Greenhithe with an election taking place on 21 November 2024.

RESOLVED:

That the item be noted.

223/24-25. REPORT FROM DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCILLORS.

The Dartford Borough Councillors updated members which included:

A General Assembly of the Council (GAC) scheduled for Monday 14 October 2024 was cancelled due to a lack of substantive business.

Cabinet Advisory Committee had recently considered new policies in relation to tenants' safety and put forward a recommendation to cabinet for the demolition of the buildings in Leonard Avenue that were suffering with subsidence

The community garden in Gunn Road had been cut back and discussions were underway to offer this land as allotments.

A new gardener had been appointed to assist with the outside spaces for the most vulnerable and elderly in the community.

Regular inspections had been undertaken in the area, and an issue around disputed parking on Southfleet Road had been redirected to Kent Police.

A question was planned to be raised at the next GAC regarding enforcement levels for the double yellow lines on Swanscombe High Street.

RESOLVED:

That the item be noted.

224/24-25. SEALING OF DOCUMENTS.

There were none.

225/24-25. TOWN MAYORS ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Town Mayor advised that she was hosting a 'Meditate with the Mayor' session on Tuesday 29 October 2024 at the Town Council Offices Community Hall.

It was confirmed that a Christmas Fair would be held, also at the Community Hall, on Saturday 14 December, with Father Christmas expected to pay a visit.

226/24-25. INGRESS PARK COMMUNITY CENTRE (IPCC) – UPDATE.

Further to the update provided at the 18 September 2024 Recreation, Leisure and Amenities Committee meeting (minute 174/24-25), members were provided with an update that the Senior Planner (DBC) had received from the Technical Director & Deputy Managing Director – Eastern Crest Nicholson.

Members were also provided a verbal update from Officers who had attended a Zoom meeting on 22 October 2024 with the Senior Planner (DBC) and the Technical Director & Deputy Managing Director – Eastern Crest Nicholson and the following had been confirmed:

That progress had been made on the planning application for the additional car park. With the decision and a Section 106 agreement expected to be sent to Crest shortly.

That a discharge application was expected to be submitted by Crest in relation to conditions 10 & 11. This included commissioning the installation of sound limiting equipment, and the same contractor would also undertake the previously noted snagging works.

The bike and bin store had been commissioned with work expected to be undertaken as per the original planning agreement.

That Crest had stated that the expected timeline for completion of the associated works across all outstanding items was May/June 2025.

RESOLVED:

That the update, and current position, be noted.

227/24-25. FORMER COUNCILLOR PETER HARMAN – MEMORIAL / TRIBUTE.

Further to minute 164/24-25 Members considered the report, and additional verbal suggestions, on proposals for a fitting memorial / tribute within the Town, following the sad passing of former Town Councillor Peter Harman.

After discussion it was proposed, duly seconded and agreed unanimously:

RESOLVED:

1. That, with the family's consent, the Town Council would name the new community centre in Ingress Park, Greenhithe "The Peter Harman Centre".
2. That, with the family's consent, a 'Chatter Bench' with a suitable dedication plaque be installed on the grass area outside the Town Council Offices in Swanscombe.

228/24-25. **FINANCE REVIEW – ESTIMATES 2025 – 2026.**

As per minute 123/24-25 Members considered the report regarding the current financial position of the Town Council.

The RFO detailed the report and the financial position of the Council. Members acknowledged that the Town Council had worked very hard to attempt to keep its demands on residents to a minimum but the current pressures the council were under meant that this was no longer sustainable and, as disappointing as it was, the recommendations in the report were reasonable and proportional.

After discussion it was proposed, duly seconded and agreed unanimously:

RESOLVED:

1. That the current financial position of the Town Council be noted.
2. That the proposed timeline for the setting of the budget, including the review of the FRAs, be noted and endorsed.
3. That the precept be increased by a figure of 7% to enable the Town Council to cover the potential shortfall, begin increasing reserves and add resilience to its budget.
4. That the provision of youth services be re-assigned for the 2025 – 2026 financial year directly from the budget. But that funding is sought to try and still commission this service, and that the money allocated for youth provision be redirected to the maintenance of both the Church Road and Grove Halls to resolve the leaking roofs, with Church Road Hall being the priority.
5. That the increase to fees and charges for the 2025 – 2026 be set to 3% across all areas to support the financial stability of the Town Council and to mitigate the increased costs of providing these facilities.
6. That the recommendation of an initial pay rise of 2.5% be set for the 2025 – 2026 financial year, subject to a review by the Personnel Committee at its meeting in May 2025.

There being no further business to transact the Meeting closed at 8.45 pm.

Signed: _____ Date: _____
(Chairman)