

MINUTES of the SPECIAL TOWN COUNCIL MEETING of the SWANSCOMBE & GREENHITHE TOWN COUNCIL held on MONDAY 9 FEBRUARY 2026 at 7.15pm

PRESENT:

Councillor Dawn Johnston – Town Mayor
Councillor Emma Ben Moussa
Councillor Denise Butler
Councillor Lorna Cross
Councillor Ann Duke
Councillor Peter Harris
Councillor Lesley Howes
Councillor Richard Lees
Councillor Claire Pearce
Councillor Hazel Stephens
Councillor Graham Taylor
Councillor Elizabeth Wickham

ALSO PRESENT:

Graham Blew – Town Clerk
x2 Members of the public

ABSENT:

Councillor Alan Reach

437/25-26. 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.

438/25-26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

There were none.

439/25-26. 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.

440/25-26. TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 JANUARY 2026.

The attendance list was amended to delete the RFO and a numbering error was also amended.

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 29 January 2026, with the above amendments, and be confirmed as a true record and be signed.

441/25-26. ITEMS DEEMED URGENT BY THE TOWN MAYOR / MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES AND THEIR POSITION ON THE AGENDA.

There were none.

442/25-26. ANNUAL ESTIMATES 2026 – 2027

Further to minute 378/25-26 (*Special Town Council 8 January 2026*) and in accordance with Standing Order 16 b), members were advised of the proposed amendments/increases to the Annual Estimates for the 2026 - 2027 financial year.

Councillor Graham Taylor detailed the reasoning behind the current financial situation of the Town Council and the contents and the rationale behind the proposed amendments to the Annual Estimates 2026 -2027 including the items that would need to be cut from the budget.

Members discussed in depth the implications of the proposed amendments and whilst the speed with having to make such an uncomfortable decision was a concern the need to address the issue was paramount. Whilst shocked and disappointed about the position the Town Council faced members were unanimous that the Town Council should be looking at the problems and showing they are taking steps to put things right even if this meant taking very difficult decisions now as well as throughout the coming year.

MOVED BY Councillor Graham Taylor, seconded by Councillor Richard Lees, and put to a vote with nine in favour, and three abstentions.

RESOLVED:

1. That the proposed amendments/increases to the Annual Estimates for 2026 – 2027, as detailed, be approved.
2. Training be provided to Members relating to financial affairs and reporting.
3. The presentation of accounts to the Finance & General Purposes Committee be reviewed to ensure full; sight of all expenditure, variations to budget and the balance of all accounts is available at each Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting.
4. A formal request be made to Dartford Borough Council for an advance of £50,000 from the 2026/2027 precept in the first week of April 2026.
5. A review of accounts (last 5 years) is undertaken by a suitably qualified person.

443/25-26. COUNCIL TAX BASE & PRECEPT 2026 – 2027.

Further to the previous item Councillors discussed the proposed amendment/increase for the level to set the Council Tax Base for Band D properties and the precept figure for 2026 – 2027.

MOVED BY Councillor Graham Taylor, seconded by Councillor Lorna Cross, and put to a vote with nine in favour, and three abstentions.

RESOLVED:

That the Council Tax Base for Band D properties, as detailed in the amended Annual Estimates, and the precept figure be set at £680,610 for 2026 - 2027.

Councillor Hazel Stephens left the meeting at this point.

444/25-26. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC.

MOVED BY Councillor Richard Lees and seconded by Councillor Peter Harris.

RESOLVED:

That, pursuant to section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, that because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, the public and press leave the meeting during consideration of the following item(s).

No members of the press or public were present during discussion of the following item of business.

445/25-26. TO DISCUSS THE RE-DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITIES WHILST THE LOCUM/RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER IS IN POST.

The Town Mayor updated members on the appointment of a Locum Responsible Financial Officer via the Local Council Consultancy (Society of Local Council Clerks).

Members expressed their concern about how the current situation had occurred and agreed that the biggest issue had been a single point of failure which had to be addressed.

After discussing various options regarding the workload of the Admin Department, it was agreed :

RESOLVED:

That the Locum RFO be asked for his earliest opportunity for a Teams meeting to discuss how he operates and what he can and cannot do in his role.

Contact the Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) to seek their recommendations for companies that could outsource the following functions: payroll, processing invoices, HR (employment contracts etc).

Contact KALC to request if they know of anyone that could review the accounts for the last 5 years and provide recommendations for robust reporting.

That the Admin Office only be accessible from 10am to 12 noon.

There being no further business to transact the Meeting closed at 9.30 pm.

Signed:

(Chairman)

Date: