

## Council

### Minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2024 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Layland (Chairman)

Cllr. Ball (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Abraham, Barnes, Bayley, Clack, Clayton, Penny Cole, Perry Cole, P. Darrington, Dyball, Edwards-Winser, Esler, Hudson, Kitchener, Maskell, McArthur, Purves, Reay, Streatfeild, Thornton, Waterton, Williams, Alger, Camp, Granville, Haslam, Horwood, Lindop, Manamperi, Manston, Robinson, Shea, Silander, Varley, White, Skinner, Baker, Barker, Ferrari, Gustard, Leaman, Malone, James Morgan and Scott

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Barnett, Bulford, G. Darrington, Grint, Harrison, Hogarth, Roy, Williamson and Cathy Morgan

40. To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 14 November 2023

Resolved: That the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 14 November 2023, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

41. To receive any declarations of interest not included in the register of interest from Members in respect of items of business included on the agenda for this meeting.

Councillors Dyball and Maskell declared for reasons of transparency that they were the Council's representatives on the Citizen's Advice.

42. Chairman's Announcements.

The Chairman started his announcements by stating that it gave him great joy in being able to announce that the Council, and its UK Shared Prosperity Fund Project Officer Aidan Kiely, had been named Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Champion of the Year at the Institute of Economic Development Annual Awards. Further celebratory news was that Sevenoaks District Council was a finalist in the 'Working Together' category for the 'Better Together' community mobilisation project in the iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards 2024. The winner would be announced on 6 March 2024, but what an honour it was to make it to the list of finalists. It was a fantastic submission by the team, he gave thanks to Margaret, Kelly and Yulia.

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The Chairman drew attention to his upcoming Charity Dinner Dance, which would be held on Saturday 27 April 2024 at Hever Castle Golf Club at 7pm. Monies raised from this event will go to the Sevenoaks Area Dementia Friends. He reminded Members to get their tickets as soon as possible.

In ending his announcements, he reminded Members that 'Run, walk or push against dementia' was happening again on 19 May 2024. There was a choice of doing 3K, 5K and 10K, which made the event ideal for all ages and fitness levels.

43. To receive any questions from members of the public under paragraph 17 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution.

Three questions had been received from Members of the public, Sue Caskey, Anthony Judge and Kevin O'Brien-Wheeler, in accordance with paragraph 17 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution. The Chairman took each of the questions in turn and the Portfolio Holder responded to all of the question en bloc.

Question 1: Sue Caskey

"I recognise the hard choices that you are having to make in the current financial climate. However, the Council's grant support for the Citizens Advice general advice service is critical in equipping, training, supporting and covering the expenses of a volunteer plus maintaining our two office locations. For volunteers, the office is where we meet, access technology and work stations, and receive support from supervisors and colleagues that is essential for training and guidance. This is a vital part of the volunteering experience, without which our capacity and delivery would be severely damaged. My question is whether Council Members understand the impact on its most vulnerable residents and Citizens Advice volunteers that will result from the substantial reduction proposed to the level of grant?"

Response: Portfolio Holder, People and Places

"Thank you for your question.

Although a difficult decision, the change in funding to Citizens Advice has been made with the utmost care and consideration. You are quite right in stating that some difficult choices have had to be made in order for the Council to achieve a balanced budget. Budget setting and savings discussions have been ongoing since last year, with cross-party member views and input being sought through the Council's advisory committees, Cabinet and full Council.

You ask if Members appreciate the impact of the funding reduction and I would respond, that yes, we do. Members and officers have sought to prioritise internal savings, which has seen the Council and notably our staff bear this impact and burden directly, as staffing posts have sadly been cut, services reduced, whilst customer demand only increases.

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Then, and only then, have we considered external partners and funding. Citizens Advice, like many other voluntary sector organisations, provides a valued service and even in these difficult times, the grant, will remain the largest grant the Council provides to any voluntary sector organisation.

Both myself and Cllr Maskell are Member representatives for Citizens Advice in North and West Kent and Edenbridge and Westerham. We understand first-hand the services and support offered. However, we are also acutely aware that the finances of Citizens Advice are now at the most stable that they have been for many years. Indeed, we, amongst other funding bodies including Central Government and other local authorities, have been very pleased to contribute to their financial stability over many years and would wish this to continue.

It is evident from your original contact with the Council ahead of tonight's meeting that office space is important to volunteers in terms of training and guidance, but also places a high-cost burden to Citizens Advice as they lease a number of offices across the District, including Bligh's Meadow in Sevenoaks. As portfolio holder, I am happy to support and instruct Council officers to enter into conversations with Citizens Advice in terms of utilising and leasing space at our Argyle Road offices, if appropriate, as this may alleviate some of the expensive office and overhead costs, whilst promoting joint working and helping to provide wheelchair access and parking for vulnerable customers."

Question 2: Anthony Judge

"Do Members appreciate the depth of advice and assistance that is provided by Citizens Advice volunteers? Volunteers are required to train to a high level relating to each area of advice. For example, volunteers have extensive training on the full range of benefits and other support that may be available to clients. In a case I was heavily involved with last year we helped a Sevenoaks resident through numerous interactions over a 6-month period through two stages of appeal on a PIP claim. This resulted in a backdated payment of over £6,000 and an ongoing award of nearly £5,000 p.a. We provide essential advice and practical help not otherwise available to clients – not just sign posting - often representing those with a range of educational, medical, social or age-related challenges."

Response: Portfolio Holder, People & Places

"Thank you for your question.

I do appreciate the work undertaken by Citizens Advice volunteers and the wider voluntary sector, notably, as on a daily basis, I see how as a Council we support residents and businesses with a range of problems, some which at first may seem complicated, even intimidating.

The impact of inflation and energy prices has exposed just how precarious many people's housing situation and household finances are, with Council officers providing statutory support around homelessness, resettlement

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and refugees, domestic abuse, benefits support, disability adaptations in the home and healthy lifestyles, whilst continuing to deliver those Council services that are most important to residents such as feeling safe and clean streets, alongside maintaining our leisure centres, protecting the environment and the need to provide more housing.

I know only too well that Council staff, including our Housing, HERO, Community Safety and Benefits teams, have, like Citizens Advice worked tirelessly and courageously through what can only be viewed as a relentless 3 years since the pandemic and more recently the cost of living.

As a Council we are doing what we can to help meet as much of this demand as possible. That might be through innovating and adapting our customer journey, building on successful joint partnerships and securing external funding. However, difficult choices have still had to be made and as I referred to in my previous response, it is Council staff and services that have been most impacted by the recent budget savings.

Through the budget process, we have also had to be mindful to significant savings and service reductions being made by Kent County Council in terms of withdrawing some children's and youth services, community transport, support to care leavers and other support services, which will have far reaching impacts on the District Council and our resources.

Therefore, we have fought hard to minimise, wherever possible, any impact to our grant commitments to the District Sports and Arts Councils, family and youth activities, the wider voluntary sector through our Community Grant scheme and of course, Citizens Advice. Our Service Level Agreement with Citizens Advice will provide an annual grant of £81,540 from 1 April this year and will remain the largest grant the Council provides to any voluntary sector organisation.

If I may, I thought it would be helpful if I put the grant reduction to Citizens Advice into some broader context against the Council budget setting for 2024-25 being presented to Members and notably how the £1.4m annual impact on our 10-year budget has been addressed. Nearly £350k of the savings required comes from deleting existing Council staff posts and restructures, with the remainder being made up from removing, reducing or changing Council services, activities and events.

Therefore, I would sincerely hope that these savings are neither marginalised or dismissed by any Member of this Council, as it should not be forgotten that they have come at a significant cost, impacting every service and staff member within the Council. In comparison, the grant reductions contribute a total of £63k to the overall £1.4m savings required, with Citizens Advice in North and West Kent and Edenbridge and Westerham seeing their collective grant reduced by a total of £35k, equating to nearly 2.5% of the total savings required to achieve a balanced budget."

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Question 3: Kevin O' Brien-Wheeler

"The presence Citizen's Advice maintains in both Swanley and Sevenoaks is critical for service delivery. For residents and those with greatest needs our local offices provide a place for appointments, reviewing and scanning their documents, and help with online applications. For volunteers, it is where we access technology, work stations and the support that trains, supports, mentors and guides us. This is a critical part of the volunteering experience and service delivery, without which our capacity and delivery would be severely impaired. Do Members appreciate the impact of the proposed grant cut will have on a service which has been calculated to delivery more than £9 in hard benefit secured for residents for every £1 of support invested?"

Response: Portfolio Holder, People & Places

"Thank you for your question.

I have already covered some of the points you raised in your initial contact with the Council ahead of tonight's meeting regarding office space and opportunities to discuss alternative and possibly more cost-effective solutions with officers, so I will not repeat my earlier response. A key element of a Council's work, like the hard benefits provided by Citizens Advice, is the social value we provide to our colleagues and the people we support.

Our services work in many ways to promote good health and wellbeing among the people we support, which can be seen through our investment of over £20 million into a new leisure centre in Swanley and by providing £1.83 million to ensure our leisure facilities in Edenbridge, Swanley and Lullingstone remain open to the public and with an improved leisure offer. The social value of such investments was reported late last year to the People and Places Advisory Committee by our leisure operator, Everyone Active, and demonstrated that in a three-month period, the Council's leisure sites generated social value of £914,270, equating to 11,360 participants and a social value of £80 per person.

However, such investment has come at a cost. If we cast our minds back to last year, cross-party members were resounding in their support for the Council's leisure facilities to re-open when the leisure company, Sencio, sadly became another casualty of the pandemic, inflation and rising utility costs. Whilst this Council approved an allocation of £1.83m (and might I add, under the current Administration, reopened the facilities within 5 weeks of closure), it must not be forgotten, that this was money not budgeted for and the difficult choices we have had to make in our 2024/25 budget, including staffing cuts, service reductions and other savings, are as a direct consequence of ensuring much-valued leisure services continue to be provided.

Lastly, I mustn't forget our HERO service, which continues to provide customers with advice and support on housing, benefits, training, employment, energy efficiency, budgeting and much more. Since April last year, the service has supported over 1,600 customers across the Sevenoaks District and continues to be innovative in delivering a

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service against a total core budget of only £64k. The service operates across community venues, including children's centres, community halls and food banks, providing support directly to communities. In the next few months, I understand from the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder, it will be launching a new partnership project with Kent County Council and DWP seeking to identify and prevent homelessness at the earliest stages, helping to stabilise future budget pressures on the Council, notably the cost of homelessness and emergency accommodation.

Many of the Council's services and support, similar to Citizens Advice, add much value to our District. However, it would be irresponsible to ignore that we are facing unprecedented demand for services and the money available to pay for them is under increasing pressure. In common with many councils across the country, we are not immune to national, unprecedented financial and service pressures.

Representing just over 2% of the £1.4m savings being presented tonight, I would sincerely hope that our commitment to provide an annual grant of £81,540 per annum for the duration of our 3-year Service Level Agreement with Citizens Advice in North and West Kent and Edenbridge and Westerham from 1 April demonstrates the value we place on this relationship.

As a financially responsible authority, we have worked proactively to balance our budget, with much of the identified savings only being achieved through savings directly impacting our Council staff and services. I truly hope all Members in attendance tonight and our voluntary sector partners, including Citizens Advice, fully grasp and comprehend this, as it is evident in the savings put forward by our own Council staff and members, that sacrifices have been made to protect the voluntary sector at the detriment and significant cost to our own staff and services."

### CHANGE IN ORDER OF AGENDA ITEMS

#### **The Chairman, with the Council's agreement, brought forward consideration of Minute 44.**

44. To consider any questions by Members under paragraph 19.3 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution, notice of which have been duly given.

One question had been received from Members in accordance with paragraph 19.3 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution.

#### Question 1: Cllr Purves

"Before we commit ourselves to borrowing £3.635 million we need to know: Have any cafes / drive throughs committed to take a lease or just shown an interest?"

Direct Services equipment. 4 trucks and a great mass of wheely bins, bottle banks and other associated material stored here. Where is this to go if Dunbrik depot is full and no room at Hollybush lock up depot?

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Is the contingency percentage (as specified in the Gold pages) sufficient, bearing in mind the increased costs due to unforeseen circumstances at Farmstead Drive and White Oak Leisure centre?

Is this the time to take out more loans bearing in mind the current financial situation with many local councils with over investment? What assurances can be given that we are not going down the same path?"

Response: Leader of the Council

"There is a report in front of Members, where I believe some of these matters have been addressed but, as you've raised them specifically at this point in the proceedings. Your first question was regarding the borrowing and whether any café or drive-through had already committed to the lease or just shown an interest. The Council has received firm interest from drive-through operators, who had given an indication as to the lease terms they might be seeking. While generic provision is being made for such an operation for design and feasibility purposes, such an operation will need to be offered to the market on a competitive basis prior to entering into any particular lease arrangement. So basically, yes we've had interest shown. No we have yet to actually sign up with anybody in particular as we're too far away but we know that there is interest.

Your second question, the current site is not being efficiently used and officers are in discussion as to how best to optimise Direct Services' operation on this site and the use of alternative sites. This work is on-going. At the moment this is not a priority because we've yet to approve it but should this scheme be approved this evening then it will go onto the list of priorities to sort, but yet to have a final solution.

Thirdly, the contingency percentage. This level of contingency is quite high given the size, type and scale of the project, but considered sensible and cautious given the early stages of design development we are at. The Council has sought advice on the level of contingency to be applied and the contingency is considered to be appropriate for this particular project. Significant due diligence work including detailed geotechnical site investigation have already been undertaken and these have helped to prepare the contingency levels that we're working on. It is therefore prudent to have high contingencies at early stages of development and as design emerges and become fixed then that contingency can be reduced as the scheme is de-risked through design. So it is deemed that the level we have at the moment is high and considered to be right and appropriate at this stage.

You ask about whether it is right to be taking out more loans, capital and revenue budgets are treated separately by local authorities. This development will be deploying capital, and the financial and development appraisals suggest that the scheme is viable, and that the Council could deploy various exit strategies should it need to. There's a certain amount of flexibility in there. It is also important to bear in mind that the District needs to support its businesses and provide job opportunities and there is a need for such developments.

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Finance & Investment Advisory Committee have recognised the increase in size of the capital programme and the risks that brings. This highlights the importance of the depth of due diligence that our officers carry out for each scheme to mitigate and be aware of risks. Other councils have issued S114 notices for a number of reasons. Where they have related to property it should be noted that the scale has been considerably higher than this councils and the due diligence has not been carried out to the same degree.”

No supplementary question was asked. In accordance with the constitution no follow up discussion was allowed.

45. To receive any petitions submitted by members of the public under paragraph 18 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution.

No petitions had been received.

46. Matters considered by the Cabinet and/or Scrutiny Committee:

- a) 12 Otford Road, Sevenoaks Business Park Development Project

Cllr Thornton moved and Cllr Maskell seconded the recommendation from Cabinet, which sought the approval of £3,635,004 in the Capital Programme for the Otford Road development scheme. It also noted that the scheme would only progress subject to financial viability and planning consent.

Cllr Thornton spoke to the motion stating that this was a regeneration opportunity for a Council owed site for a mixed scheme which would provide economic development which was a key policy objective. The scheme was affordable and viable, although further viability testing would be needed as detailed design works were undertaken. The funding would be from internal and external borrowing and met from future rents to meet loan terms. Close monitoring of the finances would continue to be undertaken, noting that financing was at least 12 months away, and the market was indicating that interest rates would be lower. Early occupier interest had been made and was a positive sign. Concerns previously raised had been taken into consideration and necessary design solutions would be applied during the detailed design stages. Subject to the necessary approval officers would commence the appointment of a project team for detailed designs for a planning application for submission in September 2024, determination by December 2024, work starting in spring 2025 and being completed by 2026.

The Finance & Investment Advisory Committee considered and discussed and endorsed the scheme which was considered further at Cabinet. It was a unique opportunity for the Council to promote business and job opportunities within the district in an underused challenging site.

Members debated the motion. Members were advised that the report had been heavily discussed at the Finance & Investment Advisory Committee with active questioning and debate from Members. The Committee thought it was a good use of

the site, with some issues raised that had since been addressed and further checks and balances would continue for due diligence on the project. Other Members raised points concerning economical conditions and contingency allowances, as well as the impact on local housing, air quality and the Sevenoaks Town Neighbourhood Plan.

In her right of reply, Cllr Thornton advised that under the 2019 Local Plan, the site had been marked as a previously developed site, and was underused. The report requested for funds to be secured, and during the detailed design works, formal consultation would be undertaken.

The motion was put to the vote and it was

Resolved: That the provision of £3,635,004 in the capital programme for the Otford Road development scheme and notes that the scheme will only progress subject to financial viability and planning consent being received, be approved.

**b) Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25**

Cllr Maskell moved and Cllr Thornton seconded the recommendation from Cabinet to approve the Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25.

Cllr Maskell spoke to the motion stating that the report had been considered in detail at the Finance & Investment Advisory Committee in January, and prior training had been provided by Link, the treasury advisors to assist discussions. The increased borrowing requirement was detailed in paragraph 48 and a clarification of the exposure to unrated organisations within treasury portfolio detailed in paragraph 47. The report continued to emphasise the importance of training on Treasury Management to ensure due diligence was maintained to ensure sound management of the financial resources within the level of appetite for risk that Members were comfortable with.

Members debated the motion, stating concern had been expressed regarding where the investments were being made and the cumulative risk on debt and the level of debt the Council would face by the end of 2027.

Cllr Maskell exercised his right of reply.

The motion was put to the vote.

Resolved: That the Treasury Management Strategy 2024/25, be approved.

**c) Property Investment Strategy Update**

Cllr Maskell moved, and Cllr Thornton seconded the recommendation from Cabinet that the Property Investment Strategy criteria be agreed.

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Cllr. Maskell spoke to the motion advising that the document looked at the future direction of the strategy. It helped to support self sufficiency as central government funding had reduced over the years. The report had also been considered the Finance & Investment Advisory Committee who had been advised of the limitations now in place. The report advised on the acquisitions previously made.

Members debated the motion. Some Members expressed concern that interest rates had gone up and where some sites were not making money. It was suggested that the focus should not be on property investments. In debate it was raised that the strategy was generating over £1m a year to deliver essential services to customers. Good investments had been made but it was government who had removed the ability to purchase just for yield, but it was important to keep an eye on what investments the council did still have to make sure they were still delivering.

Cllr Maskell gave his right of reply.

The motion was put to the vote and it was

Resolved: That the property investment strategy criteria, be agreed.

At 8.16pm the Chairman adjourned the meeting for the comfort of Members and Officers

At 8.28pm the meeting resumed.

### **d) Budget and Council Tax Setting 2024/25**

Councillor Thornton moved and Cllr Maskell seconded the recommendation from Cabinet. The report sought approval of the proposed budget and required level of Council Tax for 2024/25, and proposed a net expenditure of £19.445m with the District Council Tax increasing by 2.97% resulting in Band D Council Tax being £243.72. It also sought the one-off funding of £165,000 to be placed into the budget stabilisation reserve.

Cllr Thornton spoke to the motion stating that “when setting the current years budget one year ago and when new councillors joined us in May, we were all made very aware that future years budgets would be considerably more challenging and we're not alone. Councils across the country find themselves in turbulent financial positions. Since 2021, some local authorities have declared themselves effectively bankrupt, and recent research by the Local Government Association revealed that almost one in five council leaders and chief executives think that it is very or fairly likely that they will need to issue a section 114 notices in the next two years. Due to funding shortfalls, thankfully, and largely due to the fiscally responsible approach that this Council has historically and proudly taken, we are a long way from being one of those.

However, with high inflation, escalating utility costs and demand for some of our most important services being at record levels, the difficulty in proposing a balanced

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10 year budget as we do tonight should not be underestimated here. At Sevenoaks, we have a huge amount to be proud of. This is a high performing productive council with some of the highest rates of resident satisfaction in the county. We are one of only two local authorities in the country to hold investor in people's platinum, whilst budgets have been squeezed again beyond all recognition over the past decade, we are 24% more productive than pre pandemic. That's 78,000 extra units of work every year with the same or less staff resource. We process more planning applications than any Council. Our housing waiting list has the lowest number of households applying for a home in Kent, and through our Hero service, we give extra support to around 250 residents every year. With debt income, energy efficiency, housing and benefits advice.

We've delivered a brand new leisure centre for Swanley and we're building new affordable housing. In doing all of this and so much more, we have the lowest employee and running costs per head of population in Kent and through our capital programme, this Council is continuing to invest in the future of our district, providing homes, jobs and the infrastructure that we need. Well, there have been some difficult decisions to make.

The sound financial management of Council taxpayers money is a long standing priority and one that continues in the budget before you tonight, a budget that continues to protect those services that are most important to our residents and businesses within the sensible and sustainable financial. Limits that we must work within a budget that is focused on delivering value for money to every single household in the district with a lower than inflation rise in Council tax, making necessary savings and embracing new ways of working to balance our books. When I became leader back in May, our annual budget gap forecast stood at £1.7 million. After some early interventions, we reduced this gap to £1.3m by September. By December it was £650,000 and today that budget gap is £0.

Our financial pressures have been openly shared throughout our budget setting process and these have included staff pay awards agreed at a national level and critical to retaining our very best staff homelessness pressures and the costs associated with the provision of temporary accommodation. The significant increase in domestic waste and recycling levels post pandemic, with many more people working from home as a normal part of their working week, use of home delivery services with all the outer packaging that comes with it and working at breakneck speed to keep the leisure centres open following the sudden demise of Sencio last spring. Addressing these pressures and removing the budget gap has been achieved. Portfolio Holders initially reviewing their services and making proposals for change, which have been included as SCIA's. Despite the increased demand for our services and the pressure being placed on our staff, we asked officers if they could review every single line of their budgets to make savings with minimum impacts on services. A reduction in staff has been unavoidable, but thankfully limited in number and predominantly within back office services and where we have been able, officers have been redeployed and vacant posts have simply gone unfilled. Stopping some loss making discretionary services is also part of this, where alternative commercial providers can meet the needs of our residents and businesses just as effectively.

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Providing recycling bags for life and asking residents to acquire black refuse sacks with an eye on improving recycling rates and our Environment. A review of fees and charges, including a nationally agreed increase for those that use the planning service and at the last minute, a limited amount of additional funding from government for just one year.

Members have at every turn been given the opportunity to engage productively and proactively in this budget setting and full training was provided. Members were regularly invited to submit their budget, saving ideas, and to engage in the Advisory Committee process to ensure saving options could be considered in detail and in full before being included in the budget presented tonight. I am grateful to those Members. Although few in number, and entirely from this side of the House that chose to engage in the process and support our endeavours to balance our budget and minimise the impact on our residents. A balanced budget is exactly that, carefully balanced. To maximise efficiencies, savings and increased revenue, it has to be looked at as a whole rather than as a sum of its individual parts. Rather like a house of cards, removing one single card from the deck could cause the collapse of the whole lot.

A proposal to change any one single line of the budget would only result in another area of savings being required elsewhere. And that brings me directly to our grants to the Citizens Advice. The proposed saving was brought to everyone's attention in early January and discussed at Cabinet meeting on the 18th of January, which incidentally was attended by 9 guest councillors that night, including six from our opposition colleagues. But not one single question was raised by these members about this particular proposed saving that night, despite there being ample time left during question times from members for them to do so. In fact, no question was raised directly on this subject until February. Setting that aside, we have heard loud and clear the concerns raised by colleagues and members of the public on the proposed reduction to funding for Citizens Advice. This is not a decision we take lightly, and it is no reflection of the high regard that we hold for those that volunteer and provide support to our residents. But we cannot let our own statutory services suffer when difficult decisions are needed. Asking our partners to work within our available budgets is not only prudent, but proportionate, fair and necessary. I have read in the local newspaper that it may be proposed tonight that a single year grant we have received from the government could be used to fund Citizens Advice. Government has said to us that this funding is to be used to address the pressures facing councils and improve performance and that is what we will do. We will use that funding to protect our statutory services and prevent a repeat of the level of savings we were faced with this year. That is the prudent and sensible approach as households across our districts will be doing every day. It is often better to manage our money sensibly, to plan to our future rather than be led by our hearts desire.

The funding we will continue to provide to our local citizen service is comparable to other Councils and is guaranteed for the next 3 years. I remain open minded to reviewing that in the future should our budget position improve in future years. You have a 10 year balanced budget in front of you, it's an award-winning 10 year budget and it remains unique across this country. Other councils across the country can only

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aspire to this. I'm hoping that I can rely on you this evening to support this. Thank you."

An amendment by Cllr Leaman was moved and duly seconded by Cllr Gustard that recommendation (a) include, "provided that the General Advice Grant to Citizens Advice is restored to £98,000 per annum for the years 2024-25, 2025-26 and 2026-27, using £105,000 of the additional £165,000 funding from Government announced in February to offset this amount, with the remainder to be used as proposed."

Councillor Leaman spoke to his amendment, acknowledging the commitment of Councillors and Officers who had worked hard on the budget. However, he did not think that it was a budget that he could support as over time there were a number of future issues which could affect the position. He expressed his thanks to the Citizens Advice for their work within the District and expressed concern that their grant could be cut. Noting that the local government finance settlement, of which £165,000 was unplanned and unexpected and in Michael Gove's speech it was said that the additional funding is for services which communities relied upon. He presented figures to the meeting, detailing the amount in reserves and questioned why an additional grant was also going into reserves when it could be used for the residents. Members debated the amendment and in discussion concerns were raised that the cuts would have an impact and around 900 residents could miss out on advice and services provided as a result of the cut. It was further raised that being in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis, demand had increased by 14% and many of the users required specialist skills and the £165,000 would be able to support local services.

It was raised that the amendment would support the most deprived in the district. Concerns were raised that as the Citizen's Advice was the first contact point for people in difficult circumstances to propose a cut was ill-advised, when considering the skilled advice that was provided. Some Members felt as if the proposed cut had not been well debated through the committee process and that by reducing the grant, Officers at the Council would have more demand on their time.

In response to some of the points raised in debate, other Members also recognised the invaluable service provided by the Citizen's Advice and that they too regularly referred residents to them for advice and so it was not an easy decision to make. However, it was noted that the Portfolio Holder in response to the public questions earlier in the meeting had shared other ways that the Council was helping them and the reasoning. The HERO service which the Council provides was highlighted, and credit should be given, for the number of people who had been helped through the Council's own services.

It was raised during debate that the additional funding through the Local Government Finance Settlement would help ensure the Council's statutory services were maintained, and so it was unfortunate that the grant funding to Citizen's Advice was not a statutory activity. It was further raised that the reduction in funding, was only a reduction and that there was still funding being provided to support the service. It received more funding than any other charity from the Council. The decisions taken were to ensure that a balanced budget was met, and it was not an easy decision,

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noting the number of residents who were helped. It was brought to Members' attention that there was a wealth of other free support available to residents in the district including KCC, Age UK, Imago, West Kent Housing Tenancy support. The HERO service supported residents in a number of areas and everyone had a part to play in helping residents. It was unfortunate that given the cost-of-living crisis which was affecting businesses as well, that cuts had to be made.

It was moved that the amendment be put.

In Cllr Leaman's right of reply, he put forward that core funding was critical to organisations such as the Citizen's Advice and therefore felt the right decision was to vote for the amendment.

The amendment was put to the vote and it was taken by all those present in the Council Chamber.

<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstention</b>
	Abraham	
Alger		
	Baker	
	Ball	
	Barnes	
	Bayley	
Camp		
	Clack	
Clayton		
	Cole, Penny	
	Cole, Perry	

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	P. Darrington	
	Dyball	
	Edwards-Winser	
	Esler	
	Ferrari	
Granville		
Gustard		
	Haslam	
	Horwood	
		Hudson
		Kitchener
	Layland	
Leaman		
Lindop		
	Malone	
Manamperi		
Manston		

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	Maskell	
	McArthur	
Morgan. J		
Purves		
	Reay	
Robinson		
	Scott	
Shea		
Silander		
Skinner		
Steatfeild		
	Thornton	
Varley		
Waterton		
	White	
	Williams	
19	24	2

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The amendment was lost.

Cllr Leaman moved an amendment, which was duly seconded to add to recommendation (a), “with the addition that the Expenses of the Chairman and Deputy Chairman be reduced by 50% in 2024-25 and £8,000 used to provide black waste bags free of charge to those who need them, distributed via food banks, charities and other voluntary organisations.”

Cllr Leaman spoke to his amendment expressing that the amendment was a result of the decision in the budget to end free black sacks for residents and many would be affected by this, as another expense in the cost-of-living crisis. As this money was not being used, it would benefit those in need whilst cutting the cost of distribution by making them available via food banks, and other voluntary organisations.

The amendment was put to the vote, and it was taken by all those present In the Council Chamber.

For	Against	Abstention
	Abraham	
Alger		
	Baker	
	Ball	
	Barnes	
	Bayley	
Camp		
	Clack	
Clayton		
	Cole, Penny	

Council - 20 February 2024

	Cole, Perry	
	P. Darrington	
	Dyball	
	Edwards-Winser	
	Esler	
	Ferrari	
Granville		
Gustard		
	Haslam	
	Horwood	
	Hudson	
	Kitchener	
	Layland	
Leaman		
Lindop		
	Malone	
Manamperi		

Council - 20 February 2024

Manston		
	Maskell	
	McArthur	
Morgan. J		
Purves		
	Reay	
Robinson		
	Scott	
Shea		
Silander		
Skinner		
Steatfeild		
	Thornton	
Varley		
Waterton		
	White	
	Williams	

19	26	
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The amendment was lost.

Debate continued on the original motion.

It was indicated that as part of the budget process, suggestions which had been proposed were not fully considered for full cost analysis and that the early payment of a penalty charge for fly tipping was not increasing. If those were increased, they could off-set savings from other services. Concerns were raised about the number of Family Fun days being cut and staff vacancy rates. In addition, that the £165,000 from the Local Government Financial Settlement was being proposed to go into reserves.

It was stated that it was never easy to put a budget together, especially when savings were required, and every budget line had been scrutinised to reduced expenditure. It was important to be realistic and provide services for residents, whilst noting the amount of work that had gone into the budget and the enviable position the Council was in.

Cllr Thornton gave her right of reply, thanking Councillors for their comments, noting the vast amount of work which had gone into the budget at every single level. She stressed that achieving a balanced budget in the current economic climate was not simple and by making the difficult decisions now and closing the gap, it would leave the Council on a firm footing for whatever may come. Coping with a pandemic and being able to open the leisure centres because of their strong financial position the Council was in.

She further stated that the award-winning, forward-thinking strategies that were in place such as the property investment strategy provided independence from government funding. She further noted that with cuts being made in other services, it was likely that the Council would have to have resilience to support those affected. The £165,000 would be to go in the Council's reserves as there was still a financial shortfall for the year 2023/24 to deliver the essential services. Noting comments raised regarding staff vacancies, she advised that most of the vacancies and agency staff were used for the waste collection services and the team was under a lot of pressure with the volume of waste and recycling that was collected. In closing she reminded Members that thanks to this process the Council was in a stronger financial position than many others who could only aspire to be in and commended the budget for approval.

The motion was put to the vote and it was taken by all those present in the Council Chamber.

<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstention</b>
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Council - 20 February 2024

Abraham		
	Alger	
Baker		
Ball		
	Barker	
Barnes		
Bayley		
	Camp	
Clack		
	Clayton	
Cole, Penny		
Cole, Perry		
P. Darrington		
Dyball		
Edwards-Winser		
Esler		
	Granville	

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	Gustard	
Haslam		
Horwood		
Hudson		
Kitchener		
Layland		
	Leaman	
Lindop		
Malone		
	Manamperi	
	Manston	
Maskell		
McArthur		
	Morgan. J	
	Purves	
Reay		
	Robinson	

## Council - 20 February 2024

Scott		
	Shea	
		Silander
	Skinner	
	Streatfeild	
Thornton		
	Varley	
Waterton		
White		
Williams		
27	16	1

It was therefore resolved that

- a) The summary of Council Expenditure and Council Tax for 2024/25 set out in the supplementary agenda, be approved;
- b) the 10-year budget 2024/25 to 2033/34 which is the guiding framework for the detailed approval of future years' budgets set out in Appendix C(i) to the report, including the budget changes set out in Appendix E to the report, and that where possible any variations during and between years be met from the Budget Stabilisation Reserve, be approved;
- c) the Capital Programme 2024/27 and funding method set out in Appendix K(i) and Capital Strategy 2024/25 set out in Appendix K(iii), be approved;
- d) the changes to reserves and provisions set out in Appendix L, be approved;

## Council - 20 February 2024

- e) the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2023/24, be rolled forward to 2024/25, with effect from 1 April 2024 (Appendix N), be approved;
- f) the agreement made at Council on 21 February 2023 to shorten the Council Tax premium on long term empty dwellings from the current 2 years (empty) to 1 year from 1 April 2024, be confirmed;
- g) the agreement made at Council on 21 February 2023 to implement the 100% Council Tax premium on all second homes from 1 April 2025, be confirmed;
- h) that it be noted that at the Cabinet meeting on 18 January 2024 the Council calculated as its council tax base for the year 2024/25:
  - (i) for the whole Council area as 52,394.75 being Item T in the formula in Section 31B of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, as amended, (the "Act"); and
  - (ii) for dwellings in those parts of its area to which a parish precept relates as in the attached Appendix P;
- j) that the council tax requirement for the Council's own purpose for 2024/25 (excluding Town and Parish precepts) be calculated as £243.72;
- k) that the following amounts be calculated for the year 2024/25 in accordance with Sections 31 to 36 of the Act:
  - (i) £59,441,384 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) of the Act taking into account all precepts issued to it by Town and Parish Councils.
  - (ii) £41,113,000 being the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(3) of the Act.
  - (iii) £18,328,384 being the amount by which the aggregate at (c)(i) above exceeds the aggregate at (c)(ii) above, calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31A(4) of the Act, as its council tax requirement for the year (Item R in the formula in Section 31B of the Act).
  - (iv) £349.81 being the amount at (c)(iii) above (Item R), all divided by (a)(i) above (Item T), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 31B of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year (including Town and Parish precepts).
  - (v) £5,558,736 being the aggregate amount of all special items (Town and Parish precepts) referred to in Section

## Council - 20 February 2024

- (vi) £243.72 34 (1) of the Act (as per the attached Appendix P).  
 being the amount at (c)(iv) above, less the result given by dividing the amount at (c)(v) above by the amount at (a)(i) above (Item T), calculated by the Council, in accordance with Section 34 (2) of the Act, as the basic amount of its council tax for the year for dwellings in those parts of its area to which no Town or Parish precept relates.

- l) that it be noted that for the year 2024/25 the Kent County Council, the Kent Police & Crime Commissioner and the Kent & Medway Fire and Rescue Authority have issued precepts to the Council in accordance with Section 40 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, for each category of dwellings in the Council's area as indicated in the table below:-

Valuation Bands	Precepting Authority			
	Sevenoaks District Council £	Kent County Council £	Kent Police & C.C. £	Kent & Medway Fire and Rescue Authority £
A	162.48	1,073.88	170.77	59.94
B	189.56	1,252.86	199.23	69.93
C	216.64	1,431.84	227.69	79.92
D	243.72	1,610.82	256.15	89.91
E	297.88	1,968.78	313.07	109.89
F	352.04	2,326.74	369.99	129.87
G	406.20	2,684.70	426.92	149.85
H	487.44	3,221.64	512.30	179.82

- m) that the Council, in accordance with Sections 30 and 36 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the aggregate amounts shown in Appendix R as the amounts of council tax for the year 2024/25 for each part of its area and for each of the categories of dwellings;
- n) that the Council's basic amount of council tax for 2024/25, shown in (c)(vi) above, is not excessive in accordance with principles approved under Section 52ZB of the Local Government Finance Act 1992; and
- o) the additional one-off funding of £165,000 in 2024/25 be placed into the Budget Stabilisation Reserve to reduce the savings required to offset the

## Council - 20 February 2024

expected 2023/24 overspend when setting the 2025/26 budget, be approved.

At 9.50pm the Chairman adjourned the meeting for the comfort of Members and officers.

At 10pm the meeting resumed.

### 47. Matters considered by other standing committees:

#### a) **Local Government Boundary Commission For England Electoral Review**

It was moved by Cllr. Esler and seconded by Cllr. Penny Cole that the recommendation from Governance Committee that the timetable of the electoral review and the formation of a working group to advise Council, be noted.

Cllr Esler spoke to the motion.

Resolved: That

- a) the timetable for the electoral review being undertaken by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, be noted; and
- b) a working group, set up by the Governance Committee had been formed to advise Council on the electoral review as it progresses, be noted.

#### b) **Review of the Scheme for Members' Allowances**

It was moved by Cllr. Esler and seconded by Cllr. Penny Cole that the recommendation from Governance Committee to adopt the Members' Allowance scheme as amended, be approved.

Cllr Esler spoke to the motion. Members discussed the scheme, and thanks was given to the Working Group for their work.

Resolved: That

- a) the recommendations of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel be agreed subject to the following changes:
  - i) The Deputy Leader continue to be remunerated at £14,023 but this allowance be frozen until such a time as the JIRP determines the sum to fall within 10% of the Kent Councils Deputy Leader Allowances mean;

## Council - 20 February 2024

- ii) Opposition Group Leaders continue to be remunerated at £298 per group Member;
  - iii) Subsistence allowances be maintained at the £9.86/£12.21 for lunch/evening meal, subject to the Member being on Council business out of the District; and
- b) The next review of the allowances by the JIRP, be requested to be undertaken in advance of the next election cycle.

### c) Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules

It was moved by Cllr. Esler and seconded by Cllr. Penny Cole that the recommendation from the Scrutiny Committee to adopt the revised appendix C and part 5 of the constitution, be agreed.

Cllr Esler spoke to the motion advising that the revisions were to clarify and update the sections of the constitution so they were less ambiguous when it came to call-in.

It was moved by Cllr. Streatfeild and duly seconded by Cllr. Leaman that the revised appendix C, paragraph 18.4 be deleted and insert with the following wording:

“Members can call-in a decision for one or more of the following reasons:

- (a) The decision is not in line with the Council’s Policy Framework,
- (b) The decision is not in accordance with the Council’s Budget,
- (c) The decision was not taken in accordance with the principles of decision- making set out below, and/or
- (d) The decision was not taken in accordance with the Constitution of the Council.

The relevant principles of decision-making referred to in (c) are:

- (a) Action proportionate to the desired outcome.
- (b) Due consultation and the taking of professional advice from Officers.
- (c) Respect for human rights in all its forms.
- (d) A presumption in favour of openness.
- (e) Clarity of aims and desired outcomes.
- (f) Explanation of the options considered and giving reasons for decisions.”

Cllr Streatfeild spoke to his amendment advising that this was the wording from Kent County Council’s constitution, and in his opinion the Scrutiny system worked well. Debate continued on the amendment, with some Members suggesting that the amendment would change the system for the better and allow non-key decisions to be called-in.

Cllr. Esler in her right of reply to the amendment, reminded Members that the Scrutiny Committee was an important mechanism to ensure the discharge of

## Council - 20 February 2024

functions by the Council. Call-in was not a mechanism that should be used to delay the implementation of decisions, and further stating that the principles of what was being amended had already been proposed in the revised appendix.

The motion was put to the vote and it was lost.

At 10.20 p.m. it was moved by the Chairman that, in accordance with rule 16.1 of Part 2 of the Constitution, Members extend the meeting beyond 10.30 p.m. for as long as was necessary to enable the Council to complete the business on the agenda. The motion was put to the vote and it was

Resolved: That the meeting extend beyond 10.30pm

It was moved by Cllr Leaman and duly seconded by Cllr. Robinson that paragraph 18.6 be deleted and the following be inserted "When considering a decision that has been called-in, the Scrutiny Committee may:

- (a) make no comments,
- (b) express comments but not require reconsideration of the decision,
- (c) require implementation of the decision to be postponed pending reconsideration of the matter by the decision-maker in light of the Committee's comments, or
- (d) require implementation of the decision to be postponed pending review or scrutiny of the matter by the full Council."

Cllr Leaman spoke to his amendment, detailing that it could improve the scrutiny process and be more constructive. Members debated the amendment, noting that government guidance considered scrutiny a healthy part of good governance and its importance of acting as a critical friend. Members discussed other local authorities and their scrutiny functions. It was also raised by some Members that scrutiny was a healthy tool.

Cllr. Esler made her right of reply to the motion reminding Members that reports that went to the Executive for decision had already been through the Advisory Committee process, allowing Members to consider and give their views. In responding to points raised in the debate, amendments a, b and d were already included within the proposal, and any views from a call-in Scrutiny meeting would be detailed in the minutes and provided to Cabinet.

The amendment was put to the vote and it was lost.

Debate continued on the original motion. It was raised that although comparing to KCC's scrutiny procedure could be helpful, it was noted that KCC's Cabinet Committees only advised individual Cabinet Members rather than the Cabinet as a whole and then it could be subject to call-in. Sevenoaks already had a two stage process to advise Cabinet, where KCC was more of a single stage process. The revisions helped to clarify the process and the decisions that could be subject to call-

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in. Other Members were concerned that the process did not fully allow engagement from opposition Members within the Advisory Committees.

Cllr Esler, gave her right of reply stating that the process was not to minimise opposition involvement but clarify the process to enable the Council to function.

As there was no further debate the Chairman moved to take the vote. In accordance with the Council's Constitution, Part 2 paragraph 24.4, five Members of the Council stood and demanded a recorded vote.

<b>For</b>	<b>Against</b>	<b>Abstention</b>
Abraham		
	Alger	
Baker		
Ball		
	Barker	
Barnes		
Bayley		
	Camp	
Clack		
	Clayton	
Cole, Penny		
Cole, Perry		
P. Darrington		
Dyball		

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Edwards-Winser		
Esler		
	Granville	
	Gustard	
Haslam		
Horwood		
Hudson		
Kitchener		
Layland		
	Leaman	
	Lindop	
Malone		
	Manamperi	
	Manston	
Maskell		
McArthur		
	Morgan. J	
	Purves	
Reay		
	Robinson	

## Council - 20 February 2024

Scott		
	Shea	
	Silander	
	Skinner	
	Steatfeild	
Thornton		
	Varley	
	Waterton	
White		
Williams		
25	19	0

Resolved: That Appendix C (Scrutiny Committee Procedure Rules) and Part 5 (Scrutiny Function) of the Constitution, be adopted.

### **d) Protocol on Webcasting and Electronic Voting**

It was moved by Cllr Esler, and seconded by Cllr. Penny Cole that the recommendation from Governance Committee to adopt, as amended the draft protocols on webcasting and electronic voting.

Cllr Esler spoke to the motion, stating she was grateful for the amendment that had been agreed at the Governance Committee. The electronic voting system was actively being tested and would soon be in place.

Resolved: That the draft protocol on Webcasting & Electronic voting (as amended), be adopted.

### **e) Motions on Notice at Full Council**

It was moved by Cllr Esler, and seconded by Cllr. Penny Cole that the recommendation from Governance Committee to authorise the Monitoring Officer to insert a new paragraph 20.6 into the constitution be approved.

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Cllr Esler spoke to the motion, stating that it was important to keep Council meetings constructive and other local authorities also limited the number of motions.

Members discussed the motion with some expressing concern that opposition groups would be restricted to making proposals to full council only 3 times a year. During debate it was raised that the Advisory Committee process allowed for topics to be added to their work plans, this was debated and some Members' felt they did not have the opportunity to add things to the work plan and by reducing motions would not serve the democratic process. Members further debated the need for good decisions to be taken. Previous motions which had been discussed and voted through was raised and the positive impact they had had.

In response to the debate, Cllr. Esler gave her right of reply.

The motion was put the vote and it was

Resolved: That, the Monitoring Officer be authorised to insert a new paragraph 20.6 into the Constitution, substantially in the terms of the report.

48. To consider the following reports from the Chief Executive or other Chief Officers on matters requiring the attention of Council:

**a) Pay Policy Statement**

It was moved by Cllr. Thornton and duly seconded by Cllr. Perry Cole that the recommendation to adopt the Pay Policy Statement be agreed.

Resolved: That the Pay Policy Statement, be adopted by the Council and be published on the Council's website.

**b) Supplementary Estimates**

It was moved by Cllr Maskell and duly seconded that the recommendation for the approval of supplementary estimates for the cost of planning appeals be agreed.

Cllr. Maskell spoke to the motion.

Resolved: That the cost of planning appeals in excess of the budget in 2023/24 be met from the supplementary estimate of £120,000, be agreed.

c) Changes to Committee Appointments

It was moved by Cllr Thornton and seconded by Cllr Perry Cole that the changes to Committee appointments be agreed.

Resolved: That

a) Cllrs Skinner and Manston be removed from the Development Management Committee and Cllrs. Granville and Barker be appointed to the Committee; and

b) Cllr Manston be removed from Scrutiny Committee and the Standards Committee and Cllr Lindop be appointed to the Scrutiny Committee and Cllr Barker be appointed to Standards Committee.

49. To consider any motions by Members under paragraph 20 of Part 2 (The Council and District Council Members) of the Constitution, notice of which have been duly given.

Cllr. Manston proposed the following motion, which was seconded by Cllr. Lindop.

“This Council pledges to:

Lead by example and remove single-use plastic items from its premises and operations, wherever it has the power to do so;

encourage plastic-free initiatives in Sevenoaks, promoting the campaign and supporting events that aim to raise awareness of single-use plastics and reduce the use of them; and

support Cllr Manston in convening and chairing a cross-party Plastic Free Community Steering Group and establishing appropriate terms of reference, KPIs and reporting.”

Cllr Manston spoke to the motion, highlighting to the meeting that this would be a cross-part initiative using a third party framework to allow focus on shared objectives. As the next big plastic count was on 11 March, she advised it would be an excellent opportunity to launch this type of initiative. If all the objectives were met, the plastic free logo could be used in all of the Council’s communications. She further advised that this had not gone through the committee process, as it was being

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suggested to be a Councillor led initiative within the responsibility of Councillors, without a budget and to save Officer resources. A lot of the work had already been undertaken by Councillors throughout the District and therefore a lot of expertise was already there. Working with the Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee, and where appropriate, to have advice from Officers to provide sound performance indicators. Cllr Manston further detailed that the steering group would have Members from different parties, and would look to have two meetings a year. There would be projects assessing carbon footprints, the big plastic count and supporting the Sevenoaks climate action network climate fair. It was a new approach to create a steering group, not through the normal committee process which would in turn, ease pressure on Officers and financial implications.

The discussion moved into debate, and it was noted the care and thought that had been put into the motion. However it was felt that Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee needed to be more fully involved, with Officer guidance. It was moved by Cllr. Clack and duly seconded that the motion be amended to delete “wherever it has the power to do so, and insert “wherever it is viable to do so. The review and recommendation will be reported at the next available Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee and all members will be invited to give their views to the review.”

On paragraph two to put a full stop after “them” and take out the word “and,” and delete paragraph three.

Members debated the amendment. It was noted that Sevenoaks Town Council had a plastic pledge to which 20 businesses were already signed up, including a pub in New Ash Green, and the Council had also signed up at its conception. The Town Council had been promoting the pledge for a number of years. It was raised in debate that the Council were already taking action to reduce its use of single use plastic. In its role as community leader, it promoted the reduction of single-use plastic. It had made resources available to communities to encourage the reduction in use of single use plastics and during that process had also spoken to Town and Parish Councils, who were better placed to lead this work within their local communities, on supporting local initiatives, rather than taking a top down approach and Sevenoaks Town Council was an example of that.

It was thought that the suggestion of a cross-party steering group would not necessarily be as effective, as there was already the system to do so through the Advisory Committee which also had the Climate Change strategy and action plan.

In debate it was raised that by encouraging businesses and residents to sign up to the pledge it could reduce the amount of recycling going into the system.

In his right of reply, Cllr Clack advised that he thought this was the best way forward by putting it on a future meeting of the Advisory Committee, and from comments raised in debate, it should be relatively easy to make progress on and therefore he was against forming a further cross-party group.

## Council - 20 February 2024

In Cllr Manson's right of reply to the amendment, she thanked the Portfolio Holder for raising the work that was already being undertaken and therefore viewed that it would not be difficult to get the plastic free status. The justification was due to limited financial resources, and officer time. She was pleased that it would go on the agenda, but expressed concern that the next Advisory Committee was not for another three months', and this would delay the process to take action.

The amendment was put to the vote and it was agreed.

Debate continued on the substantive motion.

The substantive motion was put to the vote and it was

Resolved: That this Council pledges to:

Lead by example and remove single-use plastic items from its premises and operations wherever it was viable to do so. The review and recommendation will be reported at the next available Cleaner & Greener Advisory Committee and all members will be invited to give their views to the review;

encourage plastic-free initiatives in Sevenoaks, promoting the campaign and supporting events that aim to raise awareness of single-use plastics and reduce the use of them.

50. To receive the report of the Leader of the Council on the work of the Cabinet since the last Council meeting.

The Leader of the Council reported on the work that she and the Cabinet had undertaken since Council 14 November 2024. She brought to Members attention that it was the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council soon and there would be some communications work on this.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT WEDNESDAY 21 FEBRUARY AT 00:00

CHAIRMAN