

COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2023 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. Layland (Chairman)

Cllr. Ball (Vice Chairman)

Cllrs. Abraham, Alger, Barker, Barnes, Barnett, Bayley, Bulford, Camp, Penny Cole, Perry Cole, G. Darrington, P. Darrington, Dyball, Edwards-Winsor, Ferrari, Granville, Grint, Gustard, Harrison, Haslam, Horwood, Leaman, Lindop, Malone, Manamperi, Manston, Maskell, McArthur, Purves, Reay, Robinson, Roy, Scott, Shea, Silander, Skinner, Streatfeild, Thornton, Varley, Waterton, White and Williams

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Baker, C.Morgan, Clack, Clayton, Esler, Hogarth, Hudson, J.Morgan, Kitchener and Williamson

Cllr. Williamson was present via a virtual media platform which did not constitute attendance under the LGA 1972.

18. To approve as a correct record the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 23 May 2023

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of Council held on 23 May 2023, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

19. 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.

No additional declarations of interest, were received.

20. Chairman's Announcements.

The Chairman started his announcements by thanking everyone for the opportunity to serve as Chairman for the year.

On 19 June, Cllr Ball hosted a Flag Raising ceremony to mark Armed Forces Day. It was a pleasure to be joined by the Deputy Lord Lieutenant, the Mayors and Chairmen of the Towns, the Royal British Legion, the Westerham Sea Cadets, the Year 3 class from St. John's Primary School, and many fellow Councillors and staff in celebrating the excellent service the Armed Forces provided.

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The Chairman announced that there were a number of free events organised by the Council this summer. This included the annual Family Fun Days which would begin on Monday 24 July in Seal and would run every weekday until 18 August. Free walking rugby sessions, run by Edenbridge Rugby Club, were being held 6-7pm every Monday at Edenbridge Recreation Ground. There were also free Skateboarding lessons for boys and girls aged 7 – 16 in Swanley, every Monday until 11 September. There are still spaces remaining for the 12-16 year old sessions, which could be booked on the Council's website.

The Chairman informed Members that the Council had recently launched its Hello Lamp Post project in Swanley. The service allowed residents and visitors to “talk” with certain objects around Swanley, and express their thoughts and concerns on the area. The objects would also update users on local information and events, and would give advice on dealing with the cost of living crisis.

The Council had again received a £25,000 grant from the Chewing Gum Task Force to aid in cleaning gum, and reducing gum littering. This project will build upon last year's successful campaign in Edenbridge and Sevenoaks, and will be focused on tackling the issue in Swanley and Westerham. The difference it had made in Sevenoaks and Edenbridge had been amazing, and it would be great to see the improvements in Swanley and Westerham, as well.

Following the Government's Rural England Prosperity fund, the West Kent Rural Grants scheme opened for applications on 4 July, until 15 August. These grants aim to support rural jobs and improve local facilities, and can range from £2,000 to £25,000. It would be administered by the West Kent Partnership on a local level, to build on the successful delivery of the West Kent LEADER scheme. Councillors and rural businesses were encouraged to examine the detailed information available on the Council's website.

Finally, the Chairman requested all Councillors to make a note in their diary for the 22nd September, when the Chairman would be hosting his first Chairman's event – a tour of the Eden Valley Museum, followed by drinks and canapés. Further information and formal invitations would be issued closer to the event.

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

No questions had been received.

22. 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.

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

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a) Conservation Area Appraisal

Cllr. Thornton moved and Cllr. Perry Cole seconded the recommendation from Cabinet. The report sought adoption of three updated conservation area appraisals, designates the proposed boundary amendments and agrees to making a focused Article 4 direction.

Resolved: That

- a) the three updated conservation area appraisals for Eynsford, Farningham and Kemsing, be adopted;
- b) the proposed boundary amendments to each of the above conservation areas, be designated and;
- c) a focused Article 4 direction to remove limited permitted development rights, that protects boundary treatments and front gardens in the Kemsing Conservation area; be agreed.

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

a) **Appointments to Other Organisations 23/24 – non executive**

Cllr. Thornton moved and Cllr. Perry Cole seconded the recommendation for the appointment to the Outside Organisation Compassion Sevenoaks.

Resolved: That Cllr. Leaman be appointed, as the Council's representative on the Outside Organisation Compassion Sevenoaks for the municipal year 2023/24.

25. 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.

Two questions 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 Leaman

“Following the commitment of considerable public money, what arrangements has or will the Council put in place to ensure that it monitors and reports regularly to all Councillors on the levels of use and the financial performance of the District's leisure centres and golf course, now operated by Everyone Active?”

Response: Leader of the Council

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“Thank you Councillor for your question. I’m very pleased to reassure you that Officers are monitoring the performance of Everyone Active closely across all the sites that they operate on our behalf. Each quarter meetings are in place to ensure that all performance and financial information is shared and scrutinised. And to that regard it is pleasing to report that Everyone Active and our leisure facilities are performing strongly. In the month of June some 23,000 people used the facilities at the three sites which were previously managed by Sencio and in the last two months of their operation at these three sites, Everyone Active have managed to gain back 73% of the previous membership levels for their fitness offering, 74% of swimming lessons and 78% of the golf user-ships from an absolutely outstanding start.

At the next meeting of People & Places Advisory Committee on 30 November there will be a report on the interim contract arrangements and I’m sure that all members will have a keen interest in that report. Financial information is also included in the regular financial monitoring reports which go to Finance & Investment Advisory Committee and then to cabinet. Furthermore, I understand that the Scrutiny Committee will be inviting Everyone Active to attend a future meeting to present and take further questions from Members.”

Supplementary question: Cllr Leaman

What confidence does the Council have, that there is proper accountability for this expenditure, if we’re not kept informed, month by month in a fast moving situation upon the return of this investment of financial position and the use of these facilities?

Response: Portfolio Holder for People & Places

Cllr Dyball replied stating that Everyone active was a very different organisation to Sencio. There was an open dialogue between Officers and Everyone Active and performance monitoring and financial information was regularly fed back. Currently they were very happy with the contract arrangements with Everyone Active and it was appreciated that it was a lot of money but that there was no other option at the time. Shortly, future contractual arrangements would be commenced for a permanent operator for the Sevenoaks, Edenbridge and Lullingstone golf course as Everyone Active’s contract for those sites was for only two years. The performance monitoring and financial information provided was scrutinised to ensure that there was value for money.

In accordance with the Constitution, no further discussion was allowed.

Question 2: Cllr Gustard

“High land costs make new affordable homes hard to build in Sevenoaks District. Will the council agree that in future any land it sells for development, or any development undertaken by the Council itself, should be conditional on meeting its own policy requirement of 40% affordable homes?”

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Response: Leader of the Council

“The Council has a statutory requirement to seek best price for its assets under S.123 of the Local Government Act and should not fetter any sale by making conditions or requirements about the future use of that land after sale, beyond those set out in existing constraints or planning policies.

The amount of affordable housing provided on any site would be determined through the planning process and the Council’s planning policies.

The District-wide Affordable Housing policy is set out in Policy SP3 of the Core Strategy Policy and accompanying Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document, most recently updated through an Addendum in March 2023.

The Council’s policies require that developments should include between 0 to 40 per cent, i.e. up to 40% of affordable homes dependent on the total number of homes being provided and these policies would apply to any site seeking planning permission including any land owned, or previously owned by the Council.

In bringing forward its own development proposals the Council will always seek to be policy compliant where it is viable to do so and these schemes are only progressed on the approval of Members and the Development Management Committee.”

No supplementary question was asked.

26. 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. Purves proposed the following motion, which was seconded by Cllr. Granville:

“The Council make a Compulsory Purchase Order to acquire the site of the former Farmers public house so as to bring it into productive use at an early date.”

Speaking to the motion Cllr. Purves set out that a petition and motion by the Sevenoaks Society had previously been received by the Council for a compulsory purchase order (CPO) of the site. Following its approval for planning permission at appeal, the site had remained derelict for 17 years and minimal development had taken place. It was stated that by a CPO, the Council could bring the site back into productive use and could bring forward a better development plan with more affordable housing by working with developers or housing associations to crease the Council’s housing stock.

Members debated the motion noting the Sevenoaks Neighbourhood Development Plan focused on redevelopment of sustainable sites and the Farmers Site central location and a site which was not located within the Green Belt. It was stated that

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work was ongoing looking at the wider area and the emerging local plan, which would secure the policy framework and compliment the Sevenoaks Neighbourhood Town Plan.

Concerns were expressed that to CPO the site, would come at considerable expense to taxpayers money. Over the years Officers have spoken to developers and housing providers to look at the viability and options of working together to take it forward. It was unfortunate that no one had seen the site as a viable option and the expenditure could not be justified to secure a CPO. Further concerns were raised that no detailed financial analysis had taken place. Members noted that the budget setting process would be starting shortly, and if Members felt strongly about a CPO for it the monies to be identified through the process. Members were reminded that many attempts had been made by officers for a timetable of development from the site owners and CIL payments had been made to the Council.

Cllr. Purves exercised her right of reply. A vote was taken on the motion as set out above, and was lost.

Cllr. Streatfeild proposed the following motion, which was duly seconded by Cllr. Shea.

“Sevenoaks District Council supports the five outcomes of the Care Leavers Covenant.

Sevenoaks District Council agrees to become signatories to the Care Leavers Covenant.

The Council notes the four stages to becoming signatories to the covenant.”

Speaking to the motion, Cllr Streatfeild set out that by following a campaign for the care leavers covenant, the outward signal it demonstrates to those leaving care is important. Stories heard in wards – with resilience and great hardship which they bear no responsibility but impact. National campaign to be on the side of the vulnerable.

Members debated the motion giving consideration to the statistics surrounding care leavers and the anticipated difference it could make to the care leavers lives, by building opportunities. It was noted that Kent County Council (KCC) were the corporate parent and therefore were responsible. The Council's Hero team worked closely with KCC. Members debated the responsibility of the covenant and what it demonstrated. It was mooted whether an amendment could be put forward for consideration for referring to the Advisory Committee.

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Cllr. Streatfeild exercised his right of reply. A vote was taken on the motion as set out above, and was lost.

27. 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 Annual Council held on 23 May 2023. The Leader took the opportunity to highlight that the Council had achieved the highest level of Platinum Investors in People Accreditation earlier this year. It was the fifth time in a row that Council had achieved the highest rating from IIP, and she applauded staff for the outstanding achievement.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.15 PM

CHAIRMAN