

DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL

MINUTES of the proceedings of the meeting of the General Assembly of the Council held on Monday 25 July 2022.

PRESENT:

The Mayor

Councillor P Cutler

Councillor A E D Barham
Councillor E H Ben Moussa
Councillor S H Brown
Councillor S P Butterfill
Councillor L A Canham
Councillor L H K Edie
Councillor B Garden
Councillor A Gaskin
Councillor K J Grehan
Councillor D A Hammock
Councillor P M Harman
Councillor G R Holt
Councillor D E Hunnisett
Councillor J A Kite, MBE
Councillor A R Lloyd

Councillor D J Mote
Councillor D T Nicklen
Councillor V Oguntope
Councillor T Oliver
Councillor Mrs J A Ozog
Councillor R S L Perfitt
Councillor M I Peters
Councillor D J Reynolds
Councillor A S Sandhu, MBE
Councillor C J Shippam
Councillor Mrs R F Storey
Councillor K Stealey
Councillor D Swinerd
Councillor R J Wells

ABSENT:

Councillor J Burrell
Councillor D Butler-Ruhle
Councillor R M Currans
Councillor M J Davis
Councillor R Gosine
Councillor S N Gosine
Councillor R A S Jones
Councillor M B Kelly
Councillor T A Maddison
Councillor A J Oakley-Dow
Councillor E E Palmer
Councillor Mrs P A Thurlow

26. PRAYERS: REVEREND KENNETH CLARK

The Mayor's Chaplain, Reverend Kenneth Clark, led the Council in prayer.

27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Burrell, Butler-Rhule, Currans, R Gosine, S Gosine, Kelly, Maddison and Mrs Thurlow.

28. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interests.

29. MINUTES

The General Assembly of the Council considered the minutes of the Annual Meeting which took place on 11 May 2022.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Annual Council Meeting held on 11 May 2022 be confirmed as an accurate record.

30. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor said that he had been busy attending many local events and was enjoying meeting people from different communities and backgrounds. He reminded Members of his forthcoming Charity Bar-BQ which would take place at The Malt Shovel public house on Thursday 28th July and the outdoor bowls event on Friday 12th August at Stone Lodge.

The Mayor advised Members that Councillor Swinerd had asked for permission to address the Council to pay tribute to the late former Councillor Derek Parsons.

Councillor Swinerd spoke about Derek Parsons who he said he had known towards the latter part of his life, mainly at the pub. He said that there were those people who became Councillors for the politics and others that stood for office because of their desire to serve the community and that Derek Parsons fell into the second category. Although he had worked for Shell for 44 years in a very senior executive position, dealing with trademarks and intellectual property, he had still found the time to serve as a councillor. He was first elected to the Council in 1966 and formed an administration in 1968 when the conservatives first took power, becoming the first substantive leader of the council and during this time the Council became twinned with Hanau, began to refurbish council homes and started development work in the town centre. He remained on the Council when Labour regained power. He had been a great example to many people, and in particular had 'mentored' Councillor Pat Coleman. Councillor Swinerd also mentioned Mr Parsons great friendship with Lawrence Buckingham and some of their adventures together. In addition to serving on the Council Mr Parsons served on many other community bodies including the Dartford Civic Society and Dartford Grammar School, and was also very cultured and a gifted artist. In short he had been a great citizen of the borough.

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The Leader of the Council added his own personal tribute to Mr Parsons and also commented on his strong friendship with Lawrence Buckingham and said that they were both wonderful people, who had continued to take an interest in Dartford beyond their membership of the Council, regularly attending concerts at the bandstand in Central Park and had been very supportive.

31. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader of the Council made the following announcements:

- Queen's Platinum Jubilee

The Jubilee weekend had seen over 80 street parties and community events which had been supported by the Council. The Leader, Mayor and many Councillors had attended the vast majority of these and it had been a privilege to celebrate the Queen's outstanding achievement.

- Dartford Pride

The Leader said that he had also attended the Dartford Pride celebrations at The Orchard Theatre which had been a wonderful day attended by a range of people across the whole community from diverse backgrounds.

Councillor Stealey thanked the Leader of the Council, the Cabinet, Council colleagues, the artists and the Orchard Theatre for organising and supporting the event, which was a tribute to Dartford and that he looked forward to attending future events.

The Leader of the Council said that the overwhelming feedback from the public had been highly complimentary but that he also felt that it had also been important to engage with the wider community.

- Big Day Out

The Leader paid tribute to the Director of Growth & Community, Caroline Hicks, and her team for their hard work on the Big Day Out. This had been another wonderful event which people had enjoyed, the more so in the current challenging economic situation as it was free of charge, which had enabled families to enjoy a fun day out together. The format of the day had worked well and might be used for future events rather than returning to a full-blown festival operation. Feedback would be sought from Members, delivery partners and the public.

- Free School Meal Voucher Scheme

The Leader of the Council informed Members that the Council had decided to fund a scheme to assist families whose children normally received 'free' school meals so that the children could continue to be fed during the school holidays. The scheme provided a £50 voucher for qualifying families. He

recognised that this was not a Council responsibility, and could not become a regular scheme, however he felt that the current challenging economic situation was unprecedented and that people who were struggling to cope had not been able to adjust to this and it was right to provide some short term assistance in these circumstances. The Council had also made a financial contribution to every school to aid the provision of school uniform for those who would be otherwise unable to afford it.

- Dartford Local Plan

The Leader of the Council informed Members that the new iteration of the Dartford Local Plan had passed the first stage of its public examination which was a considerable achievement. He thanked the Chairman of the Development Control Board, Councillor Hunnisett, and the Planning Policy Manager, Mark Aplin, and the Planning Team for their outstanding work on this.

- Recent Heath Fires

The Leader of the Council thanked the Parks Department and other Council staff for their endeavours during the recent heatwave when record temperatures had resulted in a spate of fires, including a major fire on Dartford heath along the A2 slip road. He paid tribute to the bravery of the firefighters, who were assisted by Claire Russell and the team, in tackling the fires and the other emergency services and the members of the public who attended to help.

- Charity 'Zip wire' Challenge

Finally the Leader of the Council informed Members that he would be completing a charity 'zip wire' challenge at Bluewater in early August, despite being afraid of heights. The Deputy Leader of the Council had also agreed to join the challenge as had Councillor Wells. He hoped that Members would support this charity event.

32. QUESTIONS FROM POLITICAL GROUP LEADERS

The following questions were submitted by the Shadow Leader of the Council:

Question 1

'The Grants Committee has been abolished yet has not met since 2018. Can the leader please explain why this committee has ceased to meet?'

Question 2

'The census revealed that Dartford experienced the second highest growth in population with a rise of 20%. This is higher than the overall increase for England (6.6%) and includes an increase of 14.7% in people aged over 65. Does the leader believe Dartford is coping with this increase?'

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Question 3

‘Dartford’s population has become more diverse, both in terms of race, ethnicity and age and with an increasing number of residents with a disability. What steps have the council taken to ensure all staff have the skills and competencies to communicate and work with people with such diverse needs?’

In accordance with Standing Order 14 the questions and answers, including any supplementary questions and answers, are recorded in a book kept for this purpose in the Members’ Area.

33. MOTIONS

The Mayor informed Members that two motions had been submitted by the Shadow Leader of the Council in accordance with Standing Order 10:

(1) Motion proposed by Councillor A Gaskin

Councillor Gaskin introduced, and proposed the following motion:

‘That this council notes that:

- The term night-time economy is used to describe a wide range of activities from a trip to the theatre or a family meal to a night out at a club.
- Night-time economies are an important part of our towns and cities and are estimated to bring in over £60 billion to the UK economy every year.
- The vast majority of people enjoy a night out safely and sensibly. However, the night-time economy can be associated with issues, predominantly around alcohol fuelled violence and crime and anti-social behaviour which often result in negative perceptions. Latest statistics from 2016 showing that in over half of all violent incidents, the victim believed the perpetrator to be under the influence of alcohol.
- Alcohol was identified as a major driver of crime in the Government’s Modern Crime Prevention Strategy (MCPS), published in 2016. As well as including a number of proposals for additional tools for councils to better manage problem areas at the local level, the strategy focused on partnership working.
- Dartford town centre had experienced some issues with alcohol related anti-social behaviour, and suffered from negative perceptions in the past with the town having a narrow, alcohol-led offer. Now, with many new restaurants in the town there is an opportunity for the town to become a place of choice for visitors from elsewhere.

This council further notes that:

- Drink spiking is when someone puts drugs or alcohol into a person's drink without their knowledge or consent. It can include putting alcohol into a non-alcoholic drink, adding extra alcohol to an alcoholic drink or slipping prescription or illegal drugs (such as tranquillisers, amphetamines or GHB—also called liquid ecstasy) into an alcoholic or non-alcoholic drink. It can be difficult to tell whether a drink has been spiked, as substances used for spiking usually have no taste, odour or colour.
- Needle spiking (sometimes referred to as injection spiking) is where someone surreptitiously injects, with a hypodermic needle, (or other form of administration e.g. combi-pen) a victim with a substance.
- There was a sudden increase in the number of spiking incidents across the country in October 2021 and reports of a new form that involved individuals being spiked with a needle.
- Police data show that 93% of needle spiking incidents where a venue was recorded occurred in the evening and night-time economy, most frequently in pubs and clubs.
- Nightlife Crew is being offered to local authorities and BIDs, through a 'train the trainer' course delivered by Drinkaware. Delegates who successfully complete the course are then accredited by Drinkaware to deliver the training in their areas, incorporating it into their existing night-time safety initiatives.
- The Covid pandemic has resulted in around 850,000 18-year-olds coming of age without having experience of the night-time economy.

This council resolves to:

- Ensure that all staff working at licenced premises be given compulsory safeguarding training, and that this be a requirement that licensing authorities consider when approving licencing.
- Call on the Home Office to increase education and awareness about spiking and welcome its considering whether a specific new offence of spiking is required.
- Set up a Night Time Economy Task Force including an aim to achieve Purple Flag, an accreditation recognising a well-managed night-time economy. This prompted a greater focus on the town at night.
- Set up a scheme awarding bars etc for safety'.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Grehan who said that Dartford had changed for the better in recent years and that there were now many nice venues and she was proud to invite people to an evening out in town centre, which had not always been the case. However she was also the mother of a fifteen year old, part of a generation whose development had been impacted by lockdown and had not been able to build up experience of the night-time-economy. Consequently they were more vulnerable when venturing out than previous generations and there was a greater responsibility to ensure that people could safely enjoy going out, which was the objective of the motion which she was supporting.

The Mayor opened the motion for debate.

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The Leader of the Council said that, once again, the Opposition had submitted a motion without checking facts and without consulting the relevant and hard working officers, which he regarded as a discourtesy. Had they done so they would have found out that most of the aspirations contained in the motion were already being addressed. The motion suggested setting up a Night Time Economy Task Force and a scheme awarding bars for safety but the Council already promoted the Best Bar None scheme via the Dartford Town Against Crime (DTAC) partnership, which regularly met at the ATIK venue. Officers had put a lot of effort into launching and promoting this on social media, Kent online and Radio Kent and it was insulting that the Opposition was suggesting creating a new group to do what was already being done by DTAC. Officers deserved and needed Members' support for their efforts, as did the Community Safety Unit, the police, venue owners and responsible operators who were also looking to address safety and other issues in the night-time-economy, rather than being told to start again by uninformed Opposition Members. He drew attention to the agenda of the Crime & Disorder (Overview & Scrutiny) Committee which had met on 27th February 2022 which had considered an item on the night-time-economy and had been attended by the local police commander, Chief Inspector Jenner. He noted that neither the Shadow Leader, nor the Deputy Shadow Leader, who were both members of that Committee, had attended the meeting which had been a pity as they would have been able to better understand the current issues and how these were being addressed, although he noted that Councillor Ben Moussa had been present. He said that he would not 'go back to the beginning' and that it would be welcome if the Opposition avoided 'cut and paste' motions. However he said that he would propose an amendment to the motion which he believed preserved the aspirations behind the motion to improve the safety of the night-time-economy for local people and visitors.

The Leader of the Council proposed the following amendment to the motion, deleting the proposed wording of the resolution in the original motion and replacing this with the wording below:

~~'This council resolves to:~~

~~Aid that all staff working at licenced premises to be given compulsory safeguarding training, and this be a requirement that licensing authorities consider when approving licencing.~~

Recognises the importance of maintaining a safe and vibrant Night Time Economy and commits to continue the many initiatives already underway within the Council, and in collaboration with partners, to deliver a safe environment for staff and customers during evening and night time trading.

It will continue to insist upon high standards among licensees and continue to use all appropriate measures available to it including licensing powers, communication, enforcement and direct investment to support the creation of safe venues, spaces and events across the Borough. It will embed best

practice and recognise investment in training and skills in the awards and programmes it sponsors for local venues.

~~Call on the Home Office to increase education and awareness about spiking and welcome its considering whether a specific new offence of spiking is required.~~

Welcomes the Government's reclassification of GHB and associated drugs used in drink spiking and the increase in sentences for those in possession of up to five years in prison and up to fourteen years for those involved in distribution and supply. It encourages the Government to press ahead with introducing a specific offence of spiking.

~~Set up a Night Time Economy Task Force included an aim to achieve Purple Flag, an accreditation recognising a well-managed night-time economy. This prompted a greater focus on the town at night.~~

~~Set up a scheme awarding bars etc for safety.~~

Will continue to support the work of DTAC, the long standing and accredited forum bringing together essential town centre partners including operators in the Night Time Economy, police, local authority and local stakeholders.

Welcomes the launch of the Best Bar None awards and accreditation scheme encouraging the highest standards for operators in the Night Time Economy'.

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Shippam and opened for debate.

The Leader of the Alliance Group said that her concern with the original motion was that there would be duplication of work by the Police and the Community Safety Unit and that she supported the revised proposal.

The Leader of the Council asked for a recorded vote to be taken on the amendment and the request was supported by five members as required under Standing Orders.

Members voted on the amendment as follows:

FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAIN
Councillor A E D Barham		
Councillor E H Ben Moussa		
Councillor S H Brown		
Councillor S P Butterfill		
Councillor L A Canham		
Councillor L H K Edie		
Councillor B Garden		
Councillor A Gaskin		
Councillor K J Grehan		
Councillor D A Hammock		
Councillor P M Harman		
Councillor G R Holt		
Councillor D E Hunnisett		

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Councillor J A Kite, MBE Councillor A R Lloyd Councillor D J Mote Councillor D T Nicklen Councillor V Oguntope Councillor T Oliver Councillor Mrs J A Ozog Councillor R S L Perfitt Councillor M I Peters Councillor D J Reynolds Councillor A S Sandhu, MBE Councillor C J Shippam Councillor Mrs R F Storey Councillor K Stealey Councillor D Swinerd Councillor R J Wells The Mayor, Councillor P Cutler		
Total: 30	Total: 0	Total: 0

The amendment was carried.

The substantive motion was put to the vote and carried.

RESOLVED:

That this council:

Recognises the importance of maintaining a safe and vibrant Night Time Economy and commits to continue the many initiatives already underway within the Council, and in collaboration with partners, to deliver a safe environment for staff and customers during evening and night time trading.

It will continue to insist upon high standards among licensees and continue to use all appropriate measures available to it including licensing powers, communication, enforcement and direct investment to support the creation of safe venues, spaces and events across the Borough. It will embed best practice and recognise investment in training and skills in the awards and programmes it sponsors for local venues.

Welcomes the Government's reclassification of GHB and associated drugs used in drink spiking and the increase in sentences for those in possession of up to five years in prison and up to fourteen years for those involved in distribution and supply. It encourages the Government to press ahead with introducing a specific offence of spiking.

Will continue to support the work of Dartford Town Against Crime, the long standing and accredited forum bringing together essential town centre partners including operators in the Night Time Economy, police, local authority

and local stakeholders.

Welcomes the launch of the Best Bar None awards and accreditation scheme encouraging the highest standards for operators in the Night Time Economy.

(2) Motion proposed by Councillor E H Ben Moussa

‘That this Council Meeting notes:

- The detrimental impact that violence against women and girls (VAWG) by men has on individual women, their dependents, their communities and society as a whole.
- ONS figures show that almost one in three women aged 16-59 will experience domestic abuse in their lifetime, that two women a week in England and Wales are killed by a current or former partner, that over half a million women are raped or sexually assaulted each year. YouGov poll shows that a third of girls have experienced sexual harassment in schools; 80% of women of all ages have been sexually harassed in public.
- According to the British Crime Survey and other government data, victims disproportionately come from those groups which already experience inequality and additional challenges in our society. Women from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, deaf and disabled women, and LGBT+ women are even more likely to experience harassment, discrimination and abuse. Women from diverse backgrounds experience abuse differently and male power is used against them differently.
- Women living in poverty are particularly vulnerable to experiencing violence and face disproportionate challenges in accessing the necessary support to make them safe. Lack of access to secure housing, precarious employment, difficulty accessing social security and poverty work to keep women in abusive situations.

This Council Meeting further notes that:

- That male violence against women and girls is part of a broader culture of misogyny in society.
- Perpetrators of serious violence usually have a history of inflicting abuse and harassment against other women and girls. Tackling violence against women and girls means dismantling this culture.
- The seeds of violent behaviour are often sown at a young age and if the right interventions are not made in time then the problem continues to perpetuate.
- The current conviction rate for rape is 1.3% and the average time for those that make it to Court take an average of 1000 days from the

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report being made and the verdict. A justice system that allows one of the most heinous crimes to be effectively decriminalised is not fit for purpose. Sustained cuts to all elements of the justice system, as well as institutional misogyny, mean that crimes against women and girls that are reported are not effectively investigated by the police. The decision to fail to resource this work is a political choice.

- Women from all communities have specific needs. Agencies that serve diverse communities have a responsibility to educate their service providers about the people they are designated to protect and not rely on standard White-British customs as the norm. Sistah Space is a community-based non-profit initiative created to bridge the gap in domestic abuse services for African heritage women and girls have identified that many relevant agencies have a severe knowledge gap when it comes to the black community and its domestic violence victims and it is important that the professionals designated to deliver assistance and aid all areas of our community who may be in crisis are required to be fully trained in cultural competency, so misunderstandings do not lead to life threatening situations.
- White Ribbon UK is the leading charity with a mission to end male violence against women and part of the global White Ribbon movement which arose from a campaign started by men in Canada in 2004.
- White Ribbon Day is marked annually on 25th November, the International Day for the Eradication of Violence Against Women, by encouraging men and boys to pledge never to take part in, condone or stay silent about violence against women and to mark this by wearing a white ribbon on the day.
- White Ribbon UK operate a system of male Ambassadors, female Champions and Youth Advocates, as well as having specific materials to support primary and secondary schools, all with the aim of encouraging men to take the pledge and help to eradicate male violence against women.

This Council Meeting believes male violence against women can never be condoned and Dartford Borough Council should do everything in its power to ensure all women are safe. As part of this, the council should facilitate and encourage participation by councillors, staff and schools in the White Ribbon Campaign.

This Council Meeting therefore resolves to:

- encourage all male Councillors to take the White Ribbon pledge, never to take part in, condone or stay silent about violence against women.
- undertake the steps necessary to achieve White Ribbon accreditation, joining the large number of public sector bodies which have already done so; and

- as part of this, appoint a male Councillor as an Ambassador; mark White Ribbon Day on 25th November each year and encourage participation among council staff and local primary and secondary schools.
- For mandatory Cultural Competency training that accounts for the cultural nuances and barriers, colloquialisms, languages and customs that make up the diverse black community for all Dartford Borough Council staff and councillors.
- Call for increased investment in the whole justice system when it comes to VAWG
- To promote the Our Streets Now campaign to make street harassment a crime, and encourage all elected members, and residents to sign their petition.
- Call on the government to ratify the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combatting VAWG, to ratify the International Labour Organisation's No.190, recognising the right of everyone to work free from gender-based violence and harassment and to make street harassment a criminal offence'.

The motion was seconded by Councillor Grehan and opened for debate.

The Leader of the Council said that he was proud that the Council had a Lead Member for Women & Girls, which reflected the importance that the Council gave to the issues referred to in the motion, but that he could not accept the motion in its current form but hoped that the amendment that he would propose would be more acceptable. He said that the Council already had a programme of events throughout the year, including proposals for a White Ribbon Day and the International Women's Day. He had no problem with seeking White Ribbon accreditation but the accreditation itself obviated the need to appoint an 'ambassador'. He recognised that there were attitudes that did need to be addressed among some men and boys and that it was important that there should be a united stand against discrimination in all its forms and thanked the opposition for raising the issue. He also pointed to the recently created Leaders Advisory Group on Equalities which would be an important forum for addressing such matters.

The Leader of the Councillor proposed the following amendment to the motion, deleting the proposed wording of the resolution in the original motion and replacing this with the wording below:

'That

This _____ Council _____ Meeting _____ therefore _____ resolves _____ to:

This Council welcomes the leadership's commitment to participate in White Ribbon Day in November and encourages residents to support the aims of the

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global White Ribbon movement to end men's violence against women. The Council commits to raise awareness of the need to change the cultures that lead to violence against women and girls and to promote the responsibility to never use, excuse or remain silent about violence against women.

The Council welcomes the opportunity of this General Assembly to make a commitment to be among the many women and men, supporters, local authorities, organisations, ambassadors, champions and policy makers raising awareness and campaigning to bring about change. It will seek to gain White Ribbon Accreditation.

~~encourage all male Councillors to take the White Ribbon pledge, never to take part in, condone or stay silent about violence against women.~~

~~undertake the steps necessary to achieve White Ribbon accreditation, joining the large number of public sector bodies which have already done so; and~~

~~as part of this, appoint a male Councillor as an Ambassador; mark White Ribbon Day on 25th November each year and encourage participation among council staff and local primary and secondary schools.~~

~~For mandatory Cultural Competency training that accounts for the cultural nuances and barriers, colloquialisms, languages and customs that make up the diverse black community for all Dartford Borough Council staff and councillors.~~

In the run-up to White Ribbon day and beyond, this Council commits to engage especially with men and boys with the clear message that they should not only take responsibility for their own actions, but call out harassing, sexist and violent behaviour when they see it in others. It will continue to develop staff awareness and skills to ensure we meet the needs of our diverse community

~~Call for increased investment in the whole justice system when it comes to VAWG~~

~~To promote the Our Streets Now campaign to make street harassment a crime, and encourage all elected members, and residents to sign their petition.~~

~~Call on the government to ratify the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combatting VAWG, to ratify the International Labour Organisation's No.190, recognising the right of everyone to work free from gender-based violence and harassment and to make street harassment a criminal offence.'~~

The amendment was seconded by Councillor Ben Moussa who said that the key point was to seek White Ribbon accreditation.

The Leader of the Alliance Group said that women should be able to go about their lives without fear or the need to carry alarms. She welcomed the creation of the Leader's Advisory Group and for more localized and focused action to be taken.

A Member said that equality should be intrinsic, that violence against women in any form was unacceptable and supported seeking White Ribbon accreditation. Another Member explained that he had attended a White Ribbon event previously and had signed up to the White Ribbon pledge, however he was pleased that the compulsory sign-up element of the motion had been removed as he felt that this was wrong. He cited the good work already being carried out by youth groups and via Salute to Youth to promote equality on a co-educational basis.

The Lead Member for Equalities, Cohesion & Society said that he was happy to support the amendment and to work closely with the Lead Member for Women & Girls. He also reminded members that violence was not only limited to women and that violence against members of the LGBT+ community was also widely under-reported and that there was a need to make Dartford a safer and more welcoming place for everyone.

The amendment was put to the vote and carried.

The substantive motion was put to the vote and carried.

RESOLVED:

This Council welcomes the leadership's commitment to participate in White Ribbon Day in November and encourages residents to support the aims of the global White Ribbon movement to end men's violence against women. The Council commits to raise awareness of the need to change the cultures that lead to violence against women and girls and to promote the responsibility to never use, excuse or remain silent about violence against women.

The Council welcomes the opportunity of this General Assembly to make a commitment to be among the many women and men, supporters, local authorities, organisations, ambassadors, champions and policy makers raising awareness and campaigning to bring about change. It will seek to gain White Ribbon Accreditation.

In the run-up to White Ribbon day and beyond, this Council commits to engage especially with men and boys with the clear message that they should not only take responsibility for their own actions, but call out harassing, sexist and violent behaviour when they see it in others. It will continue to develop staff awareness and skills to ensure we meet the needs of our diverse community.

34. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

35. COUNCIL IN COMMITTEE

It was moved by Councillor P Cutler, seconded by Councillor J A Kite and

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RESOLVED:

That in accordance with Standing Order 11(13) the General Assembly of the Council go into Committee and the rules of Procedures for Committees do apply.

THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, COUNCILLOR J A KITE MBE, IN THE CHAIR

36. REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES (IF ANY)

There were no references from other committees.

37. WORK PLAN FOR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL 2022/23

The General Assembly of the Council considered its proposed Work Plan for 2022-23.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Plan, attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved as the General Assembly of the Council's Work Plan for the 2022-23 Municipal Year.

38. INTERIM REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES 2022

The General Assembly of the Council considered a report which detailed the outcome of the interim review of polling districts and polling places which was conducted between 7 March and 30 May 2022. The responses and proposals were reported to the Electoral Provisions Sub-committee on 30th June 2022 including comments from the (Acting) Returning Officer both prior to the review and following its conclusion. In conducting the review consideration had not only been given to the accessibility, lighting and location of the polling places but also to the additional requirements of the Elections Act 2022, including the need for electors to present ID when voting at polling stations from May 2023 and the desirability for there to be a suitable area where staff would be able to check documents and hold confidential conversations with electors. If adopted by the General Assembly of the Council the revised arrangements would take effect following the republication of the register of electors in December 2022 and would be used at the next local elections in May 2023. The General Assembly of the Council was also asked to grant delegated authority to the Chief Officer & Director of Corporate Services to amend a polling place if the designated polling place was unavailable and to adjust the relevant polling districts, detailed in Appendix B to the report, following a Community Governance Review.

The Deputy Leader of the Council explained that he had Chaired the meeting of the Electoral Provisions Sub-committee which had considered the review of polling districts and polling places in some detail, including responses

received from Members. He commended the report and the recommendations to the Council.

RESOLVED:

1. That the recommendations following the review of polling districts and polling places for the borough, as detailed in Appendix A to the report, be approved; and
2. That the Chief Officer & Director of Corporate Services be granted delegated authority to:
 - (a) amend a polling place, if the appointed place becomes unavailable; and
 - (b) if required, adjust the relevant polling districts, detailed in Appendix B to the report, following the outcome of the Community Governance Review.

39. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW - SWANSCOMBE TOWN WARD

The General Assembly of the Council considered a report which asked Members to consider whether a Community Governance Review (CGR) should be carried out for the Swanscombe Ward area of Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town Council and whether the boundaries of Swanscombe and Ebbsfleet borough wards should be amended so that they were coterminous. Considerable development was taking place across Swanscombe and Ebbsfleet which would change the character and area of local communities and would result in electoral anomalies. The CGR was a process which allowed the Borough Council to consider whether existing parish arrangements were robust, representative and proving efficient delivery of local services. This process would include consulting electors, the Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town Council and interested parties before completing a Reorganisation of Community Governance Order. As a CGR of all parish arrangements across the borough had been carried out within the last five years, to coincide with the review of Borough wards conducted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE), consent to any changes to the parish ward would also require the consent of the Chief Executive of the LGBCE.

The Electoral Provisions Sub-committee considered the proposals, at its meeting held on the 30 June 2022, and endorsed the commencement of a CGR and that relevant parties should be consulted. Subject to the outcome of the CGR, the Sub-committee also supported the recommendation that the boundaries of Swanscombe and Ebbsfleet borough wards should be amended so they are coterminous which would require the General Assembly of the Council to ask the LGBCE to make an order to confirm the amendment to the borough ward boundaries. This would need to be done by 1 October 2022 in order to stand a chance of an Order being made in time for implementation in the May 2023 local elections.

Councillor Harman said that Swanscombe & Greenhithe Town Council wished to suggest a change to the proposed boundaries so that Alkerden Barn, a historic building, remained in the parished area given that it had

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strong connections with the Heritage Centre which was run by the Town Council. The Leader of the Council suggested that this should be submitted, along with any other comments that Members wished to submit, as part of the consultation which would run until 8th August 2022.

RESOLVED:

1. That, to ensure the governance arrangements continue to reflect the identities and interests of the community and are effective and convenient, the commencement of the Community Governance Review for the Swanscombe Ward of Swanscombe and Greenhithe Town Council, in accordance with the Terms of Reference, at Appendix C to the report, be noted.
2. That it be noted that the Community Governance Review cannot make any changes to the Swanscombe Town Ward or Swanscombe and Ebbsfleet borough ward boundaries, without the consent of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England; and
3. That, to ensure the boundaries are coterminous, subject to the outcome of the Community Governance Review and consultation, the amendment to the boundaries of Swanscombe and Ebbsfleet borough wards, as shown in Appendix B to the report, be approved, and the Chief Officer & Director of Corporate Services be granted delegated authority to ask the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to make an Order, confirming the amendment.

40. FILLING PARISH/TOWN COUNCILLOR VACANCIES AFTER ORDINARY ELECTIONS AND WHERE A PARISH/TOWN COUNCIL IS INQUORATE

The General Assembly of the Council considered proposed procedures to be applied by the Borough Council to fill Parish/Town Councillor vacancies after an ordinary election and where a Parish/Town Council becomes inquorate and is unable to fill vacancies by co-option or election.

The Leader of the Council commented on the number of vacancies arising on parish council's and the need to encourage public spirited people to put themselves forward to serve their communities, whether through election or co-option, and that the current vacancies were a weakness which reflected badly on the parish councils.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Chief Officer & Director of Corporate Services, in consultation with Group Leaders, be authorised to nominate and make temporary appointments to a Parish/Town Council where it is unable to act because it is inquorate, in accordance with the terms of the Order, at Appendix A to the report;

2. That the Procedure for Making Appointments to Inquorate Parish/Town Councils under Section 91(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and Section 39(4) of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (as amended), at Appendix B to the report, be approved for consultation with the Parish/Town Councils and that the Chief Officer & Director of Corporate Services be granted delegated authority to finalise the Procedure; and
3. That the Procedure for Filling Parish/Town Councillor Vacancies following an Ordinary Election, at Appendix C to the report, be approved for consultation with the Parish/Town Councils and that the Chief Officer and Director of Corporate Services be granted delegated authority to finalise the Procedure.

41. DECLARATION OF CASUAL VACANCY - COUNCILLOR FAILURE TO ATTEND MEETINGS

The General Assembly of the Council considered a report which proposed that delegated authority should be given to the Chief Officer & Director of Corporate Services to declare a casual vacancy on the Council where a Member failed to attend a meeting for six consecutive months without prior approval by the Council. Where a person ceased to attend for six months s86 of the Local Government Act 1972 stated that their office should be declared vacant immediately, promptly and without delay. However the Council's current practice was to report the vacancy to the next meeting of the General Assembly of the Council thereby causing a delay between the time when the person ceased to be a Member by virtue of non-attendance and the vacancy being declared. The delegation of authority to declare a vacancy would enable this to happen in the timely fashion envisaged in the law.

RESOLVED:

That, where a Member ceases to be a councillor by reason of their failure to attend a meeting throughout a period of six consecutive months from the date of their last attendance, unless the failure was due to some reason approved by the Council before the expiry of that period, the Chief Officer & Director of Corporate Services be granted delegated authority to immediately declare the office of councillor vacant, under notification to all Councillors.

42. PLAYGROUND REFURBISHMENT PROGRAMME 2022/23

The General Assembly of the Council considered a report which sought agreement to the draft playground refurbishment programme 2022/23 and an increase to the programme's capital budget, to facilitate the programme's implementation. The Council owns and maintains 27 playgrounds at various sites across the borough. The Council's last playground refurbishment programme was carried out between 2009 and 2011. Since then equipment at some sites had degraded and deteriorated over time and was in need of replacement. In 2019 the Council made a commitment to improve the play experience of young people across the Borough and to refurbish existing playgrounds or deliver new facilities where appropriate. A capital budget of £1,000,000 was created in 2020/21 for a playground refurbishment

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programme. Initial scoping and planning works were undertaken but the programme could not be progressed, as the playground industry effectively had to shut down for two years because of Covid-19 and playgrounds had to be closed during lockdowns to help prevent the spread of Covid-19.

In late 2021, it became apparent that the programme would be able to restart in early 2022. It was agreed that trial works would be undertaken at two sites to develop a blueprint for the wider programme. The Council's existing playground at Queens Gardens was identified for refurbishment and The Bridge development was identified as needing an entirely new playground. The works at the two sites were successfully completed in April and May 2022 and it was proposed to build upon this with a programme of works to other playgrounds.

The next phase of the playground refurbishment programme, which was formulated following lead member site visits and discussions, and analysis of equipment condition appraisals would include the following works:

- Central Park – complete removal of existing play equipment (with refurbishment of the water play area) and replacement with an entirely new playground and related facilities – estimate £1,000,000
- Jessamine Place - refurbishment of existing play equipment – estimate £100,000
- Hesketh Park – refurbishment of existing play equipment – estimate £100,000
- Worcester Park - refurbishment of existing play equipment – estimate £100,000
- Central Park – new outdoor gym equipment – estimate £50,000
- Worcester Park – new outdoor gym equipment – estimate £50,000
- Darenth Country Park – removal of remaining play equipment and replacement with an entirely new wooden playground – estimate £100,000

The total cost of the programme amounted to £1.5M. The Cabinet had approved the refurbishment programme at its meeting on 21 July 2022 including a recommendation to the General Assembly of the Council to increase the original playground refurbishment capital budget (M5335) by £514K to facilitate the implementation of the programme.

The Lead Member for Parks, Open Spaces & Heritage thanked the Waste & Parks Manager and his team for their hard work in developing a comprehensive programme of works which would transform the borough's playgrounds, which formed a vital part of every child's upbringing.

The Lead Member for Business supported these comments and said that the refurbished playground at Queens Gardens had been very well received by local residents, along with the new playground at The Bridge. A Member also commented on the quality of The Bridge playground but felt that there should be signage to make it clear that it was a Council playground. He was advised that signage was already being arranged. Another Member enquired as to

whether the Council should consider installing CCTV to try and deter potential vandalism, and a Member voiced concerns for the playgrounds in Darent which had been vandalised in the past. A Member also asked whether the playgrounds would be fully accessible for wheelchair users.

The Lead Member for Finance observed that although spending £1M on the playground at Central Park might seem expensive this would be transformational and in character for a Council accustomed to delivering great things for the local community.

The Leader of the Council said that the catalyst for the programme arose when the Council and its partners had to restore the playground at Eagles Road following works on the cliff face, which had proved to be very successful. This resulted in the Council committing to improving the play experience of young people across the borough following the 2019 local elections, at which it had been a Conservative manifesto commitment, and to make the playgrounds fully accessible and inclusive. Implementation had been delayed by Covid restrictions and later difficulties in sourcing materials. Once restrictions were lifted the Council had moved quickly and carried out trials which resulted in the refurbishment of the existing playground at Queen's Gardens and the building of a new playground at The Bridge which were delivered on time and within budget. These had given the Council the confidence to move forward with a more ambitious programme, including a centrepiece development in Central Park which would deliver a whole play experience and would be an exemplar for the region. He confirmed that the playgrounds would be fully accessible, free from zones and family friendly. He felt that it would not be appropriate to install CCTV as the Council would not have the capacity to monitor the cameras but that it could be possible to install 'passive' CCTV if particular hot-spots for vandalism were identified. It might also be necessary to revise some closing and locking arrangements to try to protect the playgrounds but he hoped that the quality of the facilities would encourage the community to respect and look after the playgrounds. He explained that it was hoped that the playgrounds at Central Park and Hesketh Park would be completed by February/March 2023 and that the programme outlined in the report was the beginning and not the end, with further works taking place once the initial programme had been completed.

RESOLVED:

That the playground refurbishment capital budget (M5335) be increased from £986,000 to £1,500,000 to facilitate the implementation of the programme.

43. CAPITAL PROGRAMME INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS OUTTURN 2021/22

The General Assembly of the Council considered a report which detailed the final pre-audit figures for the 2021/22 Capital Programme, the capital resources that were used to fund it and those that remain available to fund future investment, along with a recommendation from the Cabinet on the carrying forward of the capital budget into 2022/23 as set out in Appendix C to the report.

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RESOLVED:

That the capital budget be carried forward into 2022/23, as set out in Appendix C to the report, thereby increasing the total capital budget by £3.015M.

44. CAPITAL MONITORING 2022/23

The General Assembly of the Council considered a report which detailed progress to date on the schemes in the approved Capital Programme and the latest position on capital resources. Members were also asked to agree an additional £2.2M budget for the Westgate and former Co-Op site following the Cabinet's recommendation at its meeting on 26 May 2022 [Min No. 9].

A Member asked whether there was any update on the Green Homes Delivery Scheme, how this was working and how many applications there had been. The Leader of the Council said that the Council had added a further £638K to match the grant funding under the second scheme to keep it moving forward. Whilst he didn't have the figures on the number of applications so far he was sure that this information could be provided.

RESOLVED:

That an additional £2.2M budget for the Westgate and former Co-Op site be approved, in accordance with the Cabinet's recommendation at its meeting on 26 May 2022 [Min. No.9]

45. APPOINTMENT OF NON-VOTING INDEPENDENT MEMBER TO THE AUDIT BOARD

The General Assembly of the Council considered a report which explained the background to the recruitment of a non-voting 'Independent Member' to serve on the Audit Board. CIPFA guidance and best practice supported the appointment of such members to provide additional independent expertise and specialist knowledge to audit boards and the Audit Board had approved a recruitment exercise for up to two non-voting independent members at its meeting on 26 January 2022 [Min 35]. Whilst current guidance required the appointment of non-voting Independent Members to be considered as good practice, it was announced in June 2022, that the Government proposes to make such roles mandatory as part of the new system for regulating audit, following the Redman Review recommendations.

The role of Independent Member was advertised jointly with Sevenoaks District Council and interviews were held with a joint Panel consisting of Members and officers from each Council.

The Panel recommended one applicant, Mo Chungtai, for appointment as a non-voting Independent Member to the Dartford Audit Board. Mo Chungtai's experience and interest in the Dartford area should serve the Board well. In addition, he is also serving as an Independent Member for Sevenoaks District

Council, which should provide added synergy. Mo Chungtai has provisionally accepted the role.

RESOLVED:

That Mo Chungtai be appointed as a non-voting Independent Member of the Audit Board.

46. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2022-23 - AMENDMENT - SHARED COST AVC

Members considered a report which explained that the Council would be introducing a Shared Cost Additional Voluntary Contributions arrangement for employees in August 2022, which would allow them to build up extra savings for retirement. In order to do this it would be necessary to amend the Pay Policy Statement approved at the General Assembly of the Council (Budget) meeting in February 2022 to reflect the new scheme and to ensure the transparency requirements under the Localism Act 2011 are met.

RESOLVED:

That the Pay Policy Statement amendment, as highlighted in red script at Appendix A to the report, be approved.

47. RE-CONVENING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL

It was moved by Councillor J A Kite, seconded by Councillor C J Shippam and

RESOLVED:

That in accordance with Standing Order 11(14) the General Assembly of the Council now re-convene.

THE MAYOR, COUNCILLOR P CUTLER, IN THE CHAIR

48. RESERVED MINUTES

No Cabinet minutes were reserved for debate.

The meeting closed at 9.03 pm

MAYOR

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