

## Minutes of the Meeting of Full Council held in Rickards Hall on 12 January 2026 at 7:30 pm

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Present: Cllrs. Jon Aldridge (*Vice-Chairman*), Angela Baker (*Chairwoman*), Bill Cummings, Carey Jacques, Alan Layland, Margot McArthur, Angela Read, Michael Stockdale, Stephen Sumner  
 In attendance: Town Clerk; and one member of the public. There were no representatives from the press.  
 19:30 Meeting opened.

### 1 To Receive Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received, noted, and accepted, from Cllrs Compton, Gemmell Smith, McGregor, Parker, Streets and Todd.

### 2 Declaration of Interests or Predetermination

Cllr Jacques declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 10.2 as a volunteer of the Food Bank. Cllr Layland declared a personal, non-pecuniary interest, in item 11.2 as a trustee of Eden Valley Museum and a volunteer with the Volunteer Drivers. Cllr Baker declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 11.1 as one of the quotes was known to her.

### 3 Public Questions and Statements

19:33 *The Chair closed the meeting.*

A resident said they had recently moved to the area and was interested in attending council and committee meetings. The Chair welcomed them and confirmed meetings are held in public, and that they were welcome to attend any of these meetings.

19:34 *The Chair reopened the meeting.*

### 4 To receive, adopt and sign the minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 8 December 2025 (pages 2023-119/1-11).

**Resolved:** to adopt the minutes of the Council meeting held on 08 December 2025, and that they be signed by the Chairman as a true and accurate record, 119/1-11.

### 5 To receive County and District Councillors reports

#### 5.1 County Councillor

Cllr Mayall had sent his apologies and the following report: Kent County Council (KCC) draft budget had been published. This sets an increase in the KCC Council Tax of 3.99%. This had been made possible through £100 million in savings. There were no cuts to Council services. At the same time the Council's debt had been reduced by £67 million. The increase in council tax inherited from the previous Conservative administration was anticipated at being 4.99%. Despite detractors in the media and elsewhere claiming Reform didn't know how to run a council and there was managerial chaos, we believe our performance contrasts well with other councils.

In the case of Labour run Medway Council, the Council tax was most probably going to have to go up by 4.99% and they were having to ask the Government to bail them out. Borrowing had risen by £81 million and their debt has increased from £552 million to £634 million in one year.

#### 5.2 District Councillors

Cllr Layland provided a report from the recent Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) Scrutiny Committee which he sits on. He mentioned that they invited agencies to provide updates, and the recent one from the Police had been very interesting - he had passed on Edenbridge's appreciation for recent improved presence from the Neighbourhood Team. Cllr Baker mentioned the work of the SDC officers currently reviewing the 5,000 Local Plan responses. Cllr McArthur said that as Vice-Chair of SDC she received a lot of invitations from across the district but was unfortunately unable to attend all of these due to travel time and other commitments, but had been attending some very interesting organisations and events.

**6 To adopt the following reports/minutes of meetings**

**6.1 To receive and adopt the minutes of the Planning and Transport Meeting held on 15 December 2025 (pages 2023-120/1-4).**

**Resolved:** to adopt the minutes of Planning Committee meeting held on 15 December 2025 (pages 2023-120/1-4).

**6.2 To receive and adopt the minutes of the Charities & Grants meeting held on 1 December 2025 (pages 2023-116/1-2).**

**Resolved:** to adopt the minutes of Charities & Grants meeting held on 1 December 2025 (pages 2023-116/1-2).

**6.3 To receive and adopt the minutes of the Community Infrastructure Board meeting held on 1 December 2025 (pages 2023-117/1-7).**

**Resolved:** to adopt the minutes of the Community Infrastructure Board meeting held on 1 December 2025 (pages 2023-117/1-7).

**6.4 To receive and adopt the minutes of the Buildings and Leases Committee meeting held on 8 December 2025 (pages 2023-118/1-4).**

**Resolved:** to adopt the minutes of the Buildings and Leases Committee meeting held on 8 December 2025 (pages 2023-118/1-4).

**7 To receive reports and any recommendations from working groups; delegated reports; clerk's and officers' reports**

**7.1 Clerk's report**

Members received the Town Clerk's report. Of note, and particularly the activity for the up coming year:

**Buildings and Leases Committee:** Held its first meeting on 8 December.

**Leases - Forge Theatre Group:** Amendments to the draft Lease had been viewed by the solicitor and an updated clean draft had been issued. The FMG had a show in January so we hope to meet in February/March once they have had the opportunity to view this.

**Personnel:** Appraisals would be happening in January. All training records were being reviewed and new monitoring records created. Some job descriptions were being updated.

**Projects 2026:**

- Bandstand at Stangrove Park
- GDPR and privacy policies review - priority project for the first part of the year
- Marsh Green playground refurbishment
- Local Plan and appointment of additional consultant for Reg 19 and Hearing phases
- New garden area by Old Police station
- Streetlight replacement programme and new streetlight for Church Street
- Pavilion heating, new boilers and mains water connection
- Quality Council status
- Cyber Security
- Digital conference facilities meeting room and Rickards Hall
- SLAs formal agreements review
- Health and Safety online recording review
- Community Warden review and volunteer projects
- Neighbourhood Plan - review, considering viability, collating data (e.g. potential spatial strategy plan)
- Local List - submissions to SDC for non-designated heritage assets
- Personnel records, files and procedures review and digitalised

- Town Guide

These are in addition to other smaller projects and works, and ongoing work tasks.

## 8 Draft Local Plan - update

The Town Council had submitted its response to SDC on the draft Local Plan as part of the Regulation 18 (phase 3) consultation, which ran until 11 December 2025.

- Detailed comments on the 17 proposed site allocations that affect Edenbridge.
- Feedback on the wider planning policies in the draft Local Plan that have direct relevance to Edenbridge's character, infrastructure and future development.
- Additional comments on 20 policies where the Council felt further clarification or safeguards were necessary.
- Town Council positions on infrastructure needs to support planned growth, as set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP).

SDC had advised that it received around 5,000 responses from across the district; and 1,150 people attended its 30 face-to-face 'Pop-up' sessions that took place at 10 locations in the District where Council staff were on hand to answer questions. SDC would publish all the Local Plan comments (without address information) on its website later in the 2026. All the comments would be analysed and considered before the District Council publishes a final draft of the Local Plan in summer 2026 for further public comments (called the Regulation 19 Publication). This version of the Local Plan will be submitted to Government for examination by the end of 2026.

The Chair once again, thanked the Town Clerk and Cllr Aldridge for their work with the many detailed responses, to officers and councillors who had also assisted, and their help and support with the five Council run pop-in sessions across November and December, allowing residents the opportunity to view and discuss the draft Local Plan and proposals for Edenbridge.

## 9 To approve the Budget and Precept 2026-27

The December Council meeting had received the draft budget which had been scrutinised by the Finance Committee at its November meeting. Details of Council's decision was published on the Council's website with a statement and the draft budget in December. At the time of that meeting, the tax base for 2026-27 had not been confirmed. It was received on 12 December: 3,996.77 (2025-26 was 3,998.66); this was down 1.89 or 0.05%.

Members were asked to reconfirm the budgeted income and expenditure and Precept for 2026-27. There were no questions and unanimously,

**Resolved:** to confirm the 2026-27 budget and Precept:-

- **Budget for 2026-27: Expenditure: £965,056.37 and other Income: £115,569.00**
- **Precept of £849,885. This was a 5.7% increase**
- **Band D charge: £212.64 per year. This is an £11.56 total increase / monthly increase 96 pence. Overall increase: 5.75%**

## 10 Matters arising from the minutes for report and not elsewhere on the agenda

### 10.1 Civic Medallions

At the December Council meeting, four nominees were confirmed for Civic Medallion awards having each received all 15 councillors vote - this was minuted in the December minutes. All had since been written to and a date confirmed for the Civic Medallions presentations, Thursday 19 February. Recipients were:

- Dr Simon Morrison - in recognition of his pivotal role in the campaign to establish the Edenbridge Medical Practice and recognising the future healthcare needs of the community.
- David Pocock - an extraordinary and long-standing contribution to the cultural life of Edenbridge with long-standing leadership of the Town Band.
- Susan Oldfield - in recognition of outstanding and sustained service to the residents of

Edenbridge, particularly mindful of her founding role in The Bridges Centre.

- Anthony Shipwright - for his exceptional service and dedication to the young people of Edenbridge over more than two decades, he had have given time, energy and commitment selflessly to supporting local youth initiatives.

## **10.2 Food Bank: to receive an update on the Food Bank, to confirm Council's ongoing support to the Food Bank and the arrangements to run out of Rickards Hall Tuesday mornings**

The Food Bank was well subscribed, the volunteers were well organised and have signposting services for residents each week; with some weeks attended by representatives offering support such as West Kent Housing, financial and utility advisers. The foodbank continued to operate as planned over the last year using the storage facilities on the Town Council site and Rickards Hall as a centre for receiving clients, distributing food and offering hospitality and advice on Tuesday mornings. It had seen a steady flow of clients over the year, slightly lower numbers than the previous year, but almost every month some new clients visiting for the first time. Clients are referred through Citizens Advice, Crosslight, the primary school, social services, housing services, West Kent services etc. A partnership arrangement with Citizens Advice and Crosslight where they give priority to helping foodbank clients over financial matters continues. This had resulted in a number of clients having their financial problems resolved and no longer needing the help of the foodbank.

The Food Bank was also pleased and grateful for the ongoing support from the community especially in food donations received. The level of food donations did drop a little during the year but certainly picked up during the harvest festival season and the Christmas season. The whole team (15 volunteers) expressed thanks for the support of the Town Council in allowing them to use the Council's facilities. Members discussed, and if this could be ongoing or if still needed to be annually reviewed. They unanimously,

**Resolved:** the continued support to the Food Bank and the arrangements to run out of Rickards Hall Tuesday mornings free of charge; and to continue with the annual review.

## **11 OTHER BUSINESS including items referred from Committees for decision**

### **11.1 To appoint new Internal Auditor**

As reported under the Clerk's report at the December Council meeting, the internal auditor, Keith Robertson had advised that he was retiring and would not be available for end-of-year audit. He would however still do the finance training for councillors on 16 February at 5.45pm.

The Town Clerk had approached three potential auditors, two had quoted. It was difficult to compare not knowing the time to allow and how each auditor operated. As an estimate a total of 12-15 hours for two audits and time to write-up the reports.

- Internal Auditor A - Precept below £1m, £75per hour plus VAT plus travel costs. Offer one-year and three-year engagement periods. If commit to a three-year term, hourly rate would remain fixed for the full duration of the agreement. Assuming 15 hours £1,125.
- Internal Auditor B - Two in person visits £975 plus VAT and travel expenses. Based on the hourly rate of £65 per hour allows for 15 hours.

Members discussed and asked questions of the the Town Clerk, who had no preference over the two quotes. Members unanimously,

**Resolved:** to appoint internal auditor B, and to review after one year. (Auditor B was April Skies Accounting - Mike Platten).

### **11.2 Annual Town Meeting - 30 March 2026**

Members were asked to consider the format and presentations for the upcoming Annual Town Meeting. The event would follow a similar format to previous years:

- 6.30pm: Registration - tea and coffee will available and an opportunity to meet your councillors.

- 7.00pm: Presentations will commence promptly.
- Minutes of the last Annual Town Meeting (2025).
- Introductions by Cllr Angela Baker, Chair of Edenbridge Town Council.
- Council Report to include highlights from 2025-26; financial report; overview of what's coming for 2026-27.

External Presentations:

- Update Kent County Councillor - Cllr Robert Mayall
- Update on District matters and the draft Local Plan - Cllr Kevin Maskell, Leader, Sevenoaks District Council
- Local Policing - Kent Police Neighbourhood Beat Team – TBC
- News from Tom Tugendhat MP office - TBC

**Other presentations** to be considered and confirmed. Members agreed that the current county and district councils Reorganisation, and the Local Plan, were topics that would have an impact locally and should therefore be on the agenda. It was noted that that SDC would be covering this, but that a presentation on how this could impact Edenbridge should be included. Cllr McArthur offer to speak on water and flooding matters for Edenbridge.

**Local organisations/groups** already provisionally confirmed were Everyone Active, and the Bonfire Society. It was agreed to invite the Volunteer Drivers to speak. It was suggested to ask West Kent Housing about its older persons services and to either speak or have a table with information provided.

- Public Questions
- 9.00 pm: Light refreshments will be served after the presentations.

Members **agreed** for the Chair and Vice-Chairman to confirm which councillors would provide presentations.

## 12 **Devolution and local government reorganisation**

Members noted, following the Government's published plans to reorganise how councils in 'two-tier' areas operate, such as Sevenoaks District and Kent County Council, SDC had submitted its response in November, to support the "three unitary option" consisting of Dartford, Gravesham, Medway and Swale in the north; Sevenoaks, Tonbridge and Malling, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells in the west, and Ashford, Canterbury, Thanet, Dover and Folkestone and Hythe in the east. KCC supported one unitary authority.

The Government was expected to make a decision on what will happen next in Kent and Medway around April 2026.

The new unitary councils would deliver existing district services such as waste collection and planning and county council services such as education, social services and highways. Town and parish councils would not be affected, although there was uncertainty with the potential of transferring of local assets. However, SDC had started engaging with local councils early 2025. This Council was currently maintaining an open view and monitoring the position, as well as planning for the future with building a new earmarked reserves in the eventuality of possible new service costs and/or assets.

## 13 **Consultations**

### 13.1 **Council Plan Consultation - Sevenoaks District Council - closing date 12 January**

Noted.

### 13.2 **NHS Urgent Treatment Centre (UTC) Patient Survey – West Kent and Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley - closes 2 February 9.00 am**

Noted.

Members also noted that it had been made aware of several incidents were residents had

received unsatisfactory customer service, and in some cases treatment, at the Minor Injuries department based at the Medical Centre. After some discussion, members asked the Town Clerk to write to the relevant NHS department that oversees Minor Injuries services and to also copy in the local MP, Tom Tugendhat.

**14 Date of next meeting - 09 March 2026**

Noted.

20:25 Meeting closed.

Draft Published