

Minutes of the Meeting of Full Council held in Rickards Hall on 6 July 2026 at 7:30 pm

Present: Cllrs. Jon Aldridge (*Vice-Chairman*), Angela Baker (*Chairwoman*), Sarah Compton, Carey Jacques, Alan Layland, Margot McArthur, Stuart McGregor, Angela Read, Bob Todd
In attendance: Town Clerk. There were no members of the public or press.
19:00 The meeting opened.

1 To Receive Apologies for Absence

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

2 Declaration of Interests or Predetermination

None.

3 Public Questions and Statements

19:30 The Chair closed the meeting.

None.

19:30 The Chair reopened the meeting.

4 To receive, adopt and sign the minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 11 May 2026 (pages 2023-137/1-15).

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Council meeting held on 11 May, and that they be signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record, 137/1-15.

5 To receive County and District Councillors Reports

5.1 County Councillor

Received at 19:37, after item 9.1 (recorded here in sequence of agenda).

Cllr Mayall, provided an update on Kent County Council (KCC) matters. He mentioned KCC were setting up a water resilience group for Kent and Medway to oversee the resilience of the water supply across the County. It will examine the supply, infrastructure, cleanliness and future investment in things such as water storage across the County. It will have the ability to summon officials from water companies and the environment agency.

A decision has been made to raise the price of Kent Travel Saver for school travel. Outside London this remained one of the most generous schemes on the country despite significant cost to the Council. Without this subsidy, the cost would exceed £1,000 per child. The price increase for low-income families will amount to £35 or 18p per day.

Ringway, which has taken over the contract for maintaining Kent roads, had purchased some new gritting vehicles for winter-time. This should be a big improvement on the ones that have been used up to now.

On 10 July KCC was hosting a conference on fly tipping with a number of county-wide organisations including local councils, the Environment Agency and farmers. Hopefully some good policies and actions would come out of this. He asked if the Town Council had been consulted. The Chair replied no, and was not aware if SDC had been.

KCC was asking for people's views for what they want to see in the 2027/2028 budget, and advise members and residents to visit KCC website to respond: <https://letstalk.kent.gov.uk/budget-consultation-2027-28>.

5.2 District Councillors

Cllrs Baker, Layland and McArthur had nothing to report other than the main subject was currently the Local Plan Regulation 19 consultation (already covered in the meeting papers).

6 To adopt the following reports/minutes of committee meetings

6.1 To receive and adopt the minutes of the Planning and Transport Meetings held on 1 September 2025 (pages 2023-104/1-3) and 18 May 2026 (pages 2023-138/1-3).

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Planning Committee meetings held on 1 September 2025 (pages 2023-104/1-3) and 18 May 2026 (pages 2023-138/1-3).

6.2 To receive and adopt the minutes of the Emergency Planning Meeting held on 21 May 2026 (pages 2023-139/1-3).

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Emergency Planning Meeting held on 21 May 2026 (pages 2023-139/1-3).

6.3 To receive and adopt the minutes of the Complaints Committee Meeting held on 9 June 2026 (pages 2023-141/1-3).

Resolved: adopt the minutes of the Complaints Committee Meeting held on 9 June 2026 (pages 2023-141/1-3).

6.4 To receive and adopt the minutes of the Open Spaces Meeting held on 15 June 2026 (pages 2023-142/1-8).

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Open Spaces Meeting held on 15 June 2026 (pages 2023-142/1-8).

6.5 To receive and adopt the minutes of the Personnel Meeting held on 30 June 2026 (pages 2023-144/1-6).

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Personnel Meeting held on 30 June 2026 (pages 2023-144/1-6).

7 To receive recommendations from Committees

7.1 Personnel Committee

Members noted the Personnel Committee minutes which included further details for the following recommendations.

7.1.1 Medical Insurance Scheme – to confirm eligibility review noting Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000 and that eligibility should continue to apply consistently to all qualifying employees

Members unanimously,

Resolved: the recommendation to confirm eligibility for the Council's Medical Insurance scheme being two years from 1 April, and noting Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000 and that eligibility should continue to apply consistently to all qualifying employees.

7.1.2 Medical insurance - to note and confirm the additional premiums for qualifying employees

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm the recommendation for the enrolment on to the scheme for two employees with immediate effect and note the additional premiums for qualifying employees. It was noted, both employees would be invited to join the scheme.

7.1.3 Community Warden - to approve a further six-month extension to the Community Warden's fixed-term contract at 11 hours per week, to 31 March 2027, to provide continuity of service while the review is completed

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to approve the recommendation to provide a further six-month extension to the Community Warden's fixed-term contract at 11 hours per week, to 31 March 2027, this would help to provide continuity of service while the review is completed.

7.1.4 HR and H&S consultancy services provision and agreement: To authorise the Town Clerk to continue discussions with WorkNest regarding a reduced early termination arrangement at an appropriate time following the November 2026 renewal; and to note that a potential termination cost may need to be considered as part of the 2027/28 budget process.

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm the recommendation for HR and H&S consultancy services provision to move towards a transition with Peninsula, and to authorise the Town Clerk to continue discussions with WorkNest regarding a reduced early termination arrangement at an appropriate time following the November 2026 renewal; and to note that a potential termination cost may need to be considered as part of the 2027/28 budget process.

7.1.5 Personnel Committee vacancy

Members received noticed that Councillor Gemmell Smith was to stepping down from the Personnel Committee. Cllr Compton nominated herself, Cllr Layland seconded, members unanimously,

Resolved: to appoint Cllr Compton on to the Personnel Committee.

8 To receive reports and recommendations from the Town Clerk and Officers; Working Groups; and Delegated Reports

8.1 Clerk's report

Members received the Town Clerk's report. Of note:

Bandstand project: Following the tender process, Open Spaces committee (April) confirmed the two contractors. Since the appointment of the contractors, preparatory work had commenced to support a planning application for the bandstand. The architecture is preparing the necessary planning documentation, including site plans, scaled drawings and supporting planning and design statements, as well as a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and Habitat Condition Assessment (HCA). It was hoped to submit the application early August.

Cyber Security, Data Management, and Remote Meeting Technology: Following the update in the May Clerk's report, remote and hybrid meetings had been expected in the Kings Speech to allow for legislation for councils to have discretion regarding whether, and to what extent, they adopt remote or hybrid meeting arrangements for town and parish councils and local authorities. NALC were disappointed by the omission, saying it represents a missed opportunity to modernise local democracy and remove unnecessary barriers to public service.

There was the introduction of the Public Office (Accountability) Bill, commonly known as the Hillsborough Law, and its proposed statutory duty of candour for public officials. NALC are keen to engage with the government on the details of these proposals and, in particular, to understand any implications for parish and town council councillors and staff. Therefore, we will be pushing for the bill to deliver reform of the local government standards regime, alongside its wider focus on accountability.

First Aid Training: All office and grounds staff successfully completed the First Aid at Work training in May.

Highways Improvement Plan: Kent Highways had confirm progression of feasibility assessments for two of the pedestrian crossing improvements identified in the Highway Improvement Plan (HIP).

These assessments will include updated traffic and pedestrian surveys.

Marsh Green replacement playground: The tender for the new playground closed 29 May. Open Spaces Committee confirmed the successful tender at its June meeting. Works were scheduled to commence in August.

Kybo Solar Farm – Community Benefit Fund: The legal agreement had been received and signed in accordance with the Council's previous resolution.

8.1.1 Leases update

Members received the updates in the meeting papers.

Forge Musical Theatre Group: A recent meeting with the Forge Musical Theatre Group (FMTG) confirmed that they intend to proceed with registering as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). Whilst we had understood this to be their preferred approach, it became apparent that they had been exploring an alternative option. Following discussion, we all agreed that becoming a CIO would be the most appropriate route and would provide a number of benefits for both the organisation and its trustees. It was unlikely that the Charity Commission would complete the registration before September, so the net meeting will be early Autumn. Overall, the meeting was positive and encouraging, and it is hoped that the lease can now move forward.

WI Hall Lease: The Land Registry title and lease arrangements for the WI Hall have long been somewhat confusing. It is understood that the Town Council is the custodian Trustee and registered owner, Edenbridge Women's Institute was the leaseholder, and the Village Hall Charity are the management committee. Over a number of years, however, there has been conflicting information regarding the responsibilities of each party.

Following a recent discussion with a representative of Wellers Solicitors, they had offered to review the documentation held by the Council and provide an overview of the current legal position, together with advice on the issues that needed to be resolved. The quoted fee for this work is £500. The matter was discussed with the Chair, who agreed that the review should proceed. A comparable quotation has also been requested from the Council's solicitors, Wilkin Chapman, but was considerably more than just for an overview. Members were asked to ratify the expenditure and unanimously,

Ratified: the expenditure of £500 to commission a review of the WI Hall documentation, to clarify the current legal position, identify any outstanding issues and provide recommendations for the way forward.

9 Emerging Local Plan - update

Members noted the updated as in the meeting papers:

Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) had considered the revised Local Plan for the forthcoming Regulation 19 consultation at its Development and Infrastructure Advisory Committee (DIAC) meeting on 30 June 2026. The revised Plan reflected changes to a number of proposed development sites following the Regulation 18 consultation and subsequent updates to national planning policy.

DIAC had recommended that Cabinet approve publication of the Regulation 19 Local Plan for consultation. The recommendation was closely contested and, following a tied vote, the Chairman exercised his casting vote, resulting in the recommendation being carried by seven votes to six.

Cabinet meeting was on 7 July 2026. Subject to approval, the Regulation 19 consultation would take place between 23 July and 17 September 2026. The consultation period had been extended from the statutory minimum of six weeks to eight weeks to accommodate the summer holiday period. Following the consultation, the Local Plan was expected to be submitted for independent examination by a government-appointed Planning Inspector later this year.

The emerging Local Plan is required to meet the Government's revised housing requirement of 17,460 dwellings over the next 15 years, representing an increase of approximately 63% compared with the previous target. In preparing the Plan, the Council had also had to take account of changes to national planning policy affecting Green Belt land.

The Regulation 18 consultation generated over 28,000 representations from more than 5,000 residents, businesses and organisations. Following consideration of these representations, SDC had amended a number of proposed site allocations. Some sites had been removed because they were no longer considered suitable for development, while others had been withdrawn by the landowners.

For Edenbridge, the proposed changes included the removal of the following sites:

- EDEN2 – Land rear of Stanholm, Mill Hill (5 dwellings)
- EDEN6 – 78–80 and 82–84 High Street, Leathermarket (14 dwellings)
- EDEN7 – Gabriels Farm House, Mill Hill (10 dwellings)
- EDEN15 – Land east of Mead Road (Philippines' Close) (120 dwellings)
- EDEN16 – Land at Swan Lane (600 dwellings)

Members should note:

- EDEN6 (Leathermarket) remains identified within the emerging Local Plan; however, it no longer includes a housing allocation or supporting site policy.
- EDEN15 (Mead Road/Philippines' Close) has since received outline planning permission from SDC's Development Management Committee (23 June 2026) for residential development of up to 135 dwellings (Use Class C3), with all matters reserved except access.

The revised Local Plan proposed a total of 1,539 dwellings for Edenbridge, including 77 C2 (residential institution) units. Whilst a number of sites had been removed, the housing numbers on several remaining allocations had increased. The cumulative level of development has continued to increase since the Regulation 18 consultation. Homes already built, under construction or with planning permission had increased from 670 to at least 805 dwellings (including Mead Road/Philippines Close 135 dwellings). This figure excludes more recent windfall developments and sits alongside the further housing proposed through the emerging Local Plan.

In its Regulation 18 consultation responses, the Town Council stated: "The emerging Local Plan allocates 2,131 new homes to Edenbridge. This is an increase of 789 dwellings compared with the 1,534 proposed in Regulation 18 (2). The Town Council considered both figures unsuitable for a town of Edenbridge's scale, character and infrastructure capacity."

The Town Council's detailed Regulation 19 consultation response will be prepared following publication of the consultation documents and presented to Members for consideration prior to submission. Once the consultation had commenced, Members could also consider holding public drop-in sessions, similar to those held during the Regulation 18 consultation, together with promoting awareness of the consultation through the Council's website, social media, noticeboards and information leaflets.

Members were reminded that the Regulation 19 consultation differs from the previous consultation stage. Representations should address the statutory planning tests that will be considered by the Planning Inspector. Further information regarding the consultation process and the proposed public engagement arrangements is provided in the following report.

It was noted that some Members had that morning (6 July) met with the Council's planning consultant to discuss the sites going forward in the Regulation 19 and infrastructure (IDP) policy. At this stage there wasn't much more to report, other than discussions and considerations for the sites and responses had started.

9.1 Regulation 19 consultation - resident engagement

Members were asked to consider to approve a budget for promoting the Local Plan to residents. Last year, the Town Council produced a leaflet for door-to-door distribution to raise awareness of the Regulation 18 Local Plan consultation, the public drop-in sessions, and how residents could submit representations. The forthcoming Regulation 19 consultation is the final statutory consultation stage before the Local Plan is submitted for independent examination. It will run for eight weeks. Unlike earlier consultations, representations submitted at this stage are forwarded directly to the Planning Inspector.

Following discussions with the planning consultant, he had emphasised the importance of public responses at the stage, and especially as they are submitted to the independent inspector as part of the examination process.

Members should note that this consultation differs from the earlier Regulation 18 consultation. Repeating previous comments or objections without explaining how they relate to the statutory planning tests is unlikely to assist the Planning Inspector. Residents wishing to raise concerns about individual site allocations or policies should explain why they consider the Plan is not legally compliant, is unsound, or has otherwise failed to meet the statutory requirements for plan-making.

Representations should relate to whether the Local Plan is legally compliant, sound and has been prepared in accordance with the Duty to Co-operate. In simple terms, this means considering whether the Plan has been prepared in line with legal requirements, is supported by appropriate evidence, is justified and deliverable, and whether the District Council has worked appropriately with neighbouring authorities and prescribed bodies. These are the statutory planning tests that the Planning Inspector must consider when deciding whether the Local Plan can be adopted. Whilst representations may refer to individual site allocations, they should explain how those matters affect the Plan's compliance with these tests.

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to approve a budget of up to £1,500 for the printing and distribution of information leaflets (budgeted in legal & Professional fees (1151)) to promote and raise awareness of the Regulation 19 consultation.

Once the consultation timetable has been confirmed by SDC, public drop-in session dates and venues will be co-ordinated by the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and officers. Councillors were asked to make every effort to attend and support these sessions where possible.

19:43 County Councillor Mayall joined the meeting.

The Chair proposed to revert back to item 5 on the agenda to allow for the County Councillor's report. Members unanimously agreed. The report recorded in the minutes numerically to agenda.

19:50 Cllr Mayall left the meeting.

10 Service Level Agreements (SLA) payments for 2027-28: to confirm release of funds

The Council currently had two ongoing Service Level Agreements (SLAs), both of which have been provided for within the approved budget. The Council reaffirmed its ongoing commitment to these agreements at the Annual Meeting of the Council in May. Members were now asked to approve the release of the budgeted funds to each organisation.

10.1 Eden Valley Museum £6,500

Resolved: to confirm the annual SLA payment of £6,500.

10.2 HOUSE £13,500

Resolved: to confirm the annual SLA payment of £13,500.

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

11.1 Spatial Settlement Plan - to approve the expenditure of £6,000

At its July 2025 meeting, the Council had considered the potential benefits of preparing a Spatial Settlement Plan (SSP). An SSP is a strategic land-use planning document that helps guide how an area should develop over time. It provides an evidence-based framework to support planning decisions, infrastructure planning and future growth. A SSP can assist the Council in responding to planning applications and strategic planning matters, including the emerging Local Plan. It also provides a strong evidence base should the Council decide to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan in the future.

Cllr Aldridge mentioned he had spoken with ONH Planning at the recent NALC Conference and asked what an SSP would entail. Growth for a town we know is inevitable, whether it is through the Local Plan sites, or developer planning applications, but the extent of that and what it may look like is to be determined. An SSP will start to look at different scenarios including:

- Land use and future development opportunities.
- Infrastructure requirements, including transport, utilities, education and healthcare.
- Walking, cycling and transport connections.
- Environmental considerations, including landscape, biodiversity, flood risk and heritage assets.

He mentioned that the scope of the work can be tailored to include varying levels of stakeholder and public engagement, with additional consultation increasing the overall cost by approximately £1,000–£1,500. The approved 2026–27 budget had already included £5,000 (Budget Code 1152) towards the preparation of a Spatial Settlement Plan.

Now that the Regulation 18 consultation had concluded, representations have been published and the District Council has identified its preferred site allocations within the forthcoming Regulation 19 consultation, Members are asked to consider whether the time is now right to commission a Spatial Settlement Plan.

He added that an SSP describes how growth should happen for Edenbridge. It would be a step in the right direction to help with providing supporting evidence and the Local Plan Examination Hearing, and would be a useful evidence document should Council proceed with a neighbourhood plan.

Members discussed, and agreed that an independent evidence base SSP could be helpful with the Town Council's submissions for the Local Plan Examination hearings; and a future Neighbourhood Plan, as well as with responding to planning applications. It would also be a helpful document to evidence future infrastructure requirements for the town. There was some discussion as well about wider community engagement.

Members,

Resolved: to approve expenditure of up to £6,000 for the preparation of an independent Spatial Settlement Plan, allowing for updated quotations and flexibility in the level of local stakeholder engagement where appropriate, whilst ensuring the final document reflects the Town Council's agreed position and objectives.

The Town Clerk will liaise with ONH planning regarding the likely programme for preparing an SSP, particularly whether it could realistically be completed in time to support the Examination hearings, and the potential for stakeholder engagement.

11.2 Pavilion update on project for new hot water boilers and heating

Members received an update on the completed works at the Pavilion for the replacement hot water new boilers and heating. Last week, the Town Clerk and the Open Spaces & Buildings Officer attended the project handover meeting with Intrinsic (the independent project engineers) and MPM (the contractor) for the new heating and hot water systems at the Pavilion.

The project had been completed to a high standard. The works included the installation of new boilers, upgraded heating and hot water systems, replacement pipework, new shower feed pipework, an upgraded control management system, improvements to the gas installation to ensure full regulatory compliance, and replacement pipework within the loft space. Overall, the project has delivered a modern, efficient and fully compliant heating and hot water system, representing a significant improvement on the previous installation.

In addition, improvements have been made to the water supply infrastructure, which will facilitate the next phase for future conversion to a fully mains-fed water supply and are expected to deliver operational efficiencies and future cost savings.

The total project cost was:

- Professional fees: £11,000
- Heating and hot water installation: £143,084.93.

Members discussed how well the project had gone and agreed it had been good value to the project designed and managed by a professional engineering consultancy.

11.3 Council Insurance - to receive the annual renewal, confirm the insurance level, and expenditure of £16,848.94 plus adjustment for buildings reinstatement values

Members received and noted an update on Council's insurance and this year's premium. Details of the policy and insurance cover levels are published on the Council's website. Council's annual meeting in May had noted that it was in the second year of a three-year long-term agreement with Hiscox Insurance Company Limited (via Gallagher) and confirmed the renewal, together with the annual premium increase and any adjustments arising during the policy year.

The updated building reinstatement valuation report has since been received, and the adjusted insurance policy provides total building reinstatement cover of £7,756,325. The updated valuation has increased this to £7,923,060, an insurance increase of £166,735. The Clerk advised the annual premium was now £17,125.73.

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm the Council's insurances and the annual premium of £17,125.73.

11.4 Ratify expenditure for a new door fire shutter at the Museum, and the expenditure of £818.77

One of the fire door shutters at the Museum developed a fault and required repair to ensure it continued to operate correctly as part of the building's fire safety measures. Following two quotations received, the Clerk and Chair had approved the expenditure and works for the installation of an Integrated Electromagnetic Slide Arm Closer. Members,

Ratified: the expenditure of £818.77 plus VAT, payable to E-Tech Group.

11.5 To consider a McMillian coffee morning

At its September 2025 meeting, the Council had considered hosting a Macmillan Coffee Morning, to be organised and run by councillors, but due to another booking they decided to defer to this year. Macmillan Coffee Mornings encourage people to come together over a cup of coffee, with guests making a voluntary donation in support of Macmillan Cancer Support.

Members discussed and agreed that they would like to support this event and would organise a coffee morning on the official McMillian Friday of 25 September 2026, from Rickards Hall. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to support the official Macmillan Coffee Morning, hosting an event of Friday 25 September, in Rickards Hall. The event will be organised and run by the councillors, with an organising group led by Cllrs Baker, Compton, Jacques, and Read; and all councillors to provide the cakes.

11.6 Councillor vacancy - to consider whether to co-opt

At its May meeting, the Council noted the vacancy in the Edenbridge South and West Ward following the resignation of Councillor Bill Cummings. As no request for a by-election was received within the statutory period, the vacancy may now be filled by co-option.

Whilst there is no statutory requirement to fill the vacancy by co-option, it is considered good practice to seek to restore the Council to its full complement of elected Members where possible. Members were asked to consider whether they wish to commence the co-option process and, if so, agree the timetable for inviting applications.

However, it was noted that Cllr Stephen Sumner had resigned in the past week, and so creating a new Casual Vacancy. This would need to be advertised in the noticeboard.

Members agreed to wait until the outcome of the Casual Vacancy Notice to see if a bye-election is called, before considering whether to co-opt noting the new council elections in May.

12 OTHER BUSINESS including items referred from Committees for decision

12.1 SDC requests to provided the Council with food waste bags to sell

SDC has asked whether the Town Council would be willing to sell food waste bags from the Council Office on its behalf for 50p a roll. The proposed arrangements are the same as those previously operated for refuse sacks. SDC had agreed to supply the bags free of charge to the Town Council in return for continued use of the Mess Room by the District Council's street cleaner and equipment storage. Income generated from the sale of the bags would contribute towards the Council's office administration costs.

Members considered, and discussed at length. It was noted that the bags were being sold considerably cheaper than the supermarkets, which were in the region of £2 per roll of 20. This would likely generate many residents coming to the office. Members were concerned about the practical implications for the Council Office. The office previously sold refuse sacks on behalf of the District Council, and experienced a significant number of additional residents visits each day - some days could reach 50. Although the food waste bags are only 50p per roll, the low cost was likely to encourage a high volume of purchases, with many residents choosing the Council Office over retail outlets. Experience had shown that each visit often extends beyond a simple transaction, resulting in considerable staff time being diverted from core Council business. Members therefore concluded that the likely administrative impact would outweigh the modest income generated. It was also commented that the administrative burden of providing this service was, in effect, was being passed to parish and town councils, which have limited staff resources.

Members were keen to explore alternative ways of supporting the scheme so as not to disadvantage residents, and assuming that the bags would be supplied on the same arrangements. For example, selling the bags from the Thursday Market, where transactions could be managed more efficiently, and maybe the Edenbridge Food Bank may be willing to make bags available on Tuesdays. In addition, other local community organisations, such as Bridges, to see whether they would be interested in acting as stockists.

Members unanimously,

Resolved: the Council Office should not act as a stockist for the food waste caddy bags, that the low revenue would not compensate against office costs. However, Council would be willing to help SDC identify alternative local outlets for the sale of the bags, for example Thursday Market, the Edenbridge Food Bank and other community organisations, such as Bridges, on the basis the bags would be provided on the same basis to the Council, free of charge.

12.2 Chairman's Reception 2026

Members were asked to consider whether to hold a Chairman's Reception during the current financial year. At the time the budget was set, it was decided not to make provision for a reception. Since then, a number of residents have commented that they found previous receptions valuable, particularly as an opportunity to network with local organisations and community groups. Officers have also identified the potential to combine the reception with the presentation of the Gardens in Bloom awards, providing a single community event.

Members discussed, and were all keen to see another Chairman's Reception, but only if the current budget would allow. The Town Clerk said there was already a Chairman's budget, a small allowance for the Gardens In Bloom awards, and a contingency budget. Members,

Resolved: to support a Chairman's reception 2026, combined with the Gardens In Bloom awards presentations; and for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman to work with the Town Clerk considering the budget and date.

12.3 Rickards Hall fees review

A review of local hall hire charges had been undertaken, with comparisons made against neighbouring venues. A summary of the findings, together with the Council's current hire charges, was presented. No increase to Rickards Hall hire charges was made at the beginning of 2026 pending the outcome of this review.

Comparable hourly hire charges ranged from £15.00 to £30.00 per hour. Rickards Hall was the only venue identified as operating separate youth and commercial hourly hire rates. As part of the review and recommendations, officers had concluded the reduced Youth Rate be retained and extended to include local charitable organisations. As no comparable venues were identified as operating a separate commercial hire rate, the recommendation was to remove this and have a single standard hourly rate.

Members were also asked to consider introducing revised weekend hire options, together with a dedicated wedding package. The proposed wedding package would provide exclusive use of Rickards Hall from 3.00 pm on Friday until 12.00 noon on Sunday, allowing sufficient time for set-up and clear-down. Whilst comparable venues charge between £360.00 and £750.00, many offer larger facilities and outdoor space. To reflect the facilities available at Rickards Hall, whilst remaining competitive and encouraging bookings, a package price of £250.00 was proposed.

Members discussed the proposed fees, including the wedding package. They recommended a cleaning fee be added. Members unanimously,

Resolved: the following new fees, with effect from 01 September:

1. **Youth Rate and local charitable organisations £12.00 per hour.**
2. **Standard Hire Rate of £23.00 per hour.**
3. **Wedding/Events Weekend Package at £250.00, plus cleaning charge £55.**
4. **Weekend hire charges:**
 - **Community Weekend Hire (9.00 am to 5.00 pm): £50.00**
 - **Standard Weekend Hire (9.00 am to 5.00 pm): £75.00**
 - **Weekend Evening Hire (6.00 pm to midnight): £150.00**

Note: A cleaning charge maybe added for large events, this includes where the Hall is hired for community events.

All fees are reviewed annually, with increments considered to the nearest 50p, and implemented 1 January.

12.4 Independent Advisory Group (IAG) - To receive a request for Edenbridge to host one of its meetings and free use of Rickards Hall

The Independent Advisory Group (IAG) is made up of community volunteers who work with Kent Police as critical friends to help improve policing services across the county. The Group provides an independent community perspective on policing issues and works in partnership with Kent Police to help inform service improvements. The Town Council's Community Warden has attended IAG meetings in the past.

The IAG had approached the Town Council to request the use of Rickards Hall for one of its meetings. The Group seeks to hold its meetings at different venues across the district and has requested a Thursday, ideally towards the end of November or the beginning of December. Alternatively, it would be happy to hold its spring meeting in Edenbridge. Rickards Hall is normally booked on Thursday evenings; however, it may be available during the school holiday period or on another mutually agreed date.

Members,

Resolved: to support complimentary use of Rickards Hall to IAG for one of its meetings, subject to availability and the Town Clerk agreeing a suitable date.

12.5 Unpaid invoices over 6-months

Members received and noted the Clerk's report: A former market trader had an outstanding balance of £308.40, relating to unpaid market pitch fees for the period October to December 2025. The Council's Responsible Financial Officer had made a number of attempts to recover the outstanding debt, including issuing invoices, reminder correspondence and further follow-up communications. The most recent response from the trader, dated 20 April 2026, indicated that payment would be made during their next payment run in May. A further email was sent by the RFO on 13 May 2026 requesting confirmation of a payment date; however, no response has been received.

Members were reminded of a similar situation that arose in 2024. At its meeting on 18 November 2024, the Finance & Governance Committee recommended that, should the debt not be settled by the agreed date, the Council would consider recovery through the Small Claims Court and the trader would no longer be permitted to trade. The outstanding balance was subsequently paid, and was not as a result of formal recovery proceedings.

In accordance with the Council's previous decision, the trader is not permitted to trade at the Council's market unless all outstanding monies have first been settled.

Members considered how to proceed with recovery of the outstanding debt. They agreed that it would not be appropriate to write-off this debt as this would set a precedent, and was not fair to other traders. They discussed the outstanding charges and agreed they were properly due as pitch fees related to market trading undertaken during October to December, from which the business had benefited, and the Council had incurred the associated costs of operating and administering the market. Members were satisfied that the market pitch fees represent a reasonable contribution towards those costs.

Members noted, that a number of requests for payment had previously been issued and despite assurances that payment would be made, the outstanding balance remained unpaid. They concluded and,

Resolved: to provide one final opportunity for the matter to be resolved before considering any further formal recovery action, and to issue a final letter advising that unless payment is received within 28 days, the Council will consider its options and may commence formal recovery proceedings.

13 Formal Complaint – KTreatz - update

Members noted that the Complaints Committee had met on 9 June 2026 to consider the formal complaint relating to the alleged disclosure of personal data.

Following consideration of the complaint, supporting correspondence, investigation findings, the complainant's additional submission and a confidential personnel and governance report, the Committee concluded that no personal data breach had occurred and upheld the Council's original decision. The Committee was satisfied that the Council had followed its Complaints Procedure appropriately and that no further action was required. The outcome had been communicated to the complainant.

14 To note: Status Access Request

Members noted as part of the recent formal complaint follow-up, the complainant had also submitted a Subject Access Request (SAR) under the UK General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018.

To ensure that the Council fulfilled its statutory obligations, the Town Clerk had requested that the Council's IT provider undertake a search of Council email accounts, including inboxes, sent items and deleted items, for correspondence relating to the complainant and their business. In addition, searches had been undertaken of relevant electronic records held within the Council's finance, market and complaints files, together with other relevant folders held within SharePoint.

The disclosure pack consisted of 232 pages plus and extract from an Excel spreadsheets. As part of this process, each document was considered as to whether it was within the scope of the request and whether any information required redaction or withholding in accordance with the UK GDPR, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the rights of third parties.

The full response was issued within the statutory timeframe.

15 Devolution and local government reorganisation

No announcement had yet been made by Government regarding its preferred option for local government reorganisation in Kent and Medway. An announcement had been anticipated during the summer, no timetable has yet been confirmed. Any delay may have implications for the current implementation programme, which anticipates the new authorities being established in 2028. Cllr Baker said that SDC thought that an announcement may be made just before Parliament recess,

but it was also noted with the changes of an impending new Prime Minister, this may delay any announcement.

The recent NALC Annual Conference also considered local government reorganisation and devolution. The overall message was that town and parish councils should continue to engage positively with the process, whilst recognising that the detail of Government's proposals and implementation arrangements remains uncertain.

In relation to asset transfer, delegates at the Conference heard a number of examples where principal councils had worked proactively with town and parish councils to transfer community assets, often through long leases or freehold transfers at nominal value, in order to secure their long-term community use. By contrast, SDC has previously advised that, based on professional advice received from its auditors, transfers should generally be made at best consideration (market value) unless there is a lawful basis for an alternative approach.

The Town Council will continue to monitor developments and update Members as further information becomes available.

16 To resolve delegated powers to Planning and Transportation Committee for July and August

Resolved: to delegate the Council's powers to the Planning and Transportation Committee during the summer recess (July and August), where decisions cannot reasonably await the next meeting of the Council.

17 Consultations

17.1 National Highways and Transport Surveys 2026-27 - closes 28 February 2027

Noted.

18 To receive reports from councillors who have attended meetings of outside bodies

Cllr Aldridge provided a summary of the recent NALC Annual Conference he had attended along with the Town Clerk, the RFO/Deputy Clerk and the Open Spaces Officer. It was a valuable event, with presentations focusing on the national reforms arising from devolution and local government reorganisation, and how these are reshaping the local government landscape. Case studies from town councils that had experienced local government reorganisation highlighted both positive outcomes and the challenges associated with asset transfers and service delivery.

The conference also included a presentation on climate action, demonstrating how parish and town councils can make a meaningful contribution to local environmental ambitions. Afternoon sessions covered planning reform, finance, audit and transparency, together with further discussion on asset transfers and the increasing role of parish and town councils within local government.

19 Press release

Local Plan Regulation 19 consultation and Town Council drop-in sessions (once dates were confirmed).

20 Date of Next meeting - 07 September

Noted.

20:43 The meeting closed.