

SWANLEY TOWN COUNCIL

ANNUAL REPORT

2015 - 2016



Swanley is a town and civil parish in the Sevenoaks District of Kent, England. It is located approximately 15 miles (24 km) southeast of central London, adjacent to the Greater London boundary and within the M25 motorway. The population at the 2011 census was 16,226. Swanley Town Council formed in 1974. Between 1974 and 1999 Swanley Town Council was Independent controlled, from 1999 the Town Council was Labour controlled with Conservative/Independent minority. In May 2011 the Conservatives took control with 10 Councillors to the 6 held by Labour. In 2015 the Conservatives made further gains and now hold 14 of the 16 town council seats. At the Sevenoaks District Council the town is represented by 5 Conservative Councillors and one Labour. The town and its environs has two Kent County Councillors, both of whom are Conservative.

SWANLEY TOWN COUNCILLORS

Christchurch Ward

Cllr Laurence Ball (Conservative)
Cllr John Barnes (Conservative)
Cllr Shanker Gaire (Conservative)
Cllr Ray Morris (Conservative)
Cllr Victor Southern (Conservative)

St Mary's Ward

Cllr Clare Barnes (Conservative)
Cllr Lesley Dyball (Conservative)
Cllr Michael Hogg (Labour)
Cllr Elizabeth Komolafe (Labour)

Swanley Village

Cllr Tony Searles (Conservative)

White Oak Ward

Cllr Robert Brookbank (Conservative)
Cllr Laxmi Gaire (Conservative)
Cllr Jim Halford (Conservative)
Cllr Joyce Hulton-Scott (Conservative)
Cllr Nina Scott (Conservative)
Cllr Harry Willingale (Conservative)

Swanley Town Council elects a Mayor and Deputy Mayor annually at its annual general meeting.

The Mayor for 2015/16 is Cllr John Barnes.

The Deputy Mayor for 2015/16 is Cllr Shanker Gaire



COMMITTEES AND MEMBERSHIPS

Swanley Town Council operates its powers and duties through a committee system. These committees, wherever possible, reflect the political balance of the Council. The Council and its committees make the policy decisions of the Council, the Town Clerk carries out the decisions of the Council and has some delegated powers under Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972 to ensure the smooth day to day running of the Council.

<p>Development Control Committee Considers responses to planning applications on behalf of the Council</p>
Cllr Laurence Ball
Cllr Jim Halford
Cllr Robert Brookbank
Cllr Lesley Dyball
Cllr Ray Morris
Cllr Tony Searles
Cllr Michael Hogg

<p>Finance and Audit Committee Reviews the financial performance of the Council and considers monthly expenditure</p>
Cllr Victor Southern
Cllr Tony Searles
Cllr Laurence Ball
Cllr John Barnes
Cllr Lesley Dyball
Cllr Ray Morris
Cllr Elizabeth Komalafe

<p>Estates and Facilities Committee Oversees parks, open spaces and assets of the Council</p>
Chairman: Cllr Tony Searles
Vice Chairman: Cllr Southern
Cllr Clare Barnes
Cllr Jim Halford
Cllr Shanker Gaire
Cllr Joyce Hulton-Scott
Cllr Michael Hogg

<p>Personnel Committee Oversees staffing matters</p>
Cllr Robert Brookbank
Cllr Lesley Dyball
Cllr Tony Searles
Cllr Ray Morris
Cllr Nina Scott
Cllr H Willingale
Cllr Elizabeth Komolafe

<p>Swanley Banqueting Board Oversees the performance of the Alexandra Suite and Olympic</p>
Cllr Ray Morris
Cllr Laurence Ball
Cllr Clare Barnes
Cllr John Barnes
Cllr Laxmi Gaire
Cllr Nina Scott
Cllr Harry Willingale



COUNCIL ASSETS

Swanley Town Council owns a variety of open spaces and buildings in Swanley. The Council, as a 'corporate body' is also the Trustee of Swanley Recreation Ground. A large proportion of official's time is spent managing the large portfolio of open spaces and land assets owned and maintained by the Town Council.

Archer Way & Newland open space	Title Deed Number	K518904
Bus shelter - Azalea Drive	Title Deed Number	K465342
Civic Centre, Alexandra Suite, Clocktower	Title Deed Number	K980832
Football pitches	Title Deed Number	K532178
Footpath from Nightingale to Rec	Title Deed Number	K979730
High Firs Open Space 2	Title Deed Number	K527988
High Firs Open Space 1	Title Deed Number	K527989
Kettlewell allotments	Title Deed Number	K755155
Lower over flow car park	Title Deed Number	K505609
Open Space on Beechenlea Lane 1	Title Deed Number	K211877
Open Space on Beechenlea Lane 2	Title Deed Number	K486133
Petham Allotments & Open Spaces	Title Deed Number	K579699
Petham Court Farm	Title Deed Number	K600884
St Marys Recreation Ground (Trustees)	Title Deed Number	K980833
10 Station Road	Title Deed Number	TT18411
Swanley Paddling Pool	Title Deed Number	K504137
Swanley Park	Title Deed Number	K407898
Swanley Park Bungalow & Swanley Park (Yard)	Title Deed Number	K520500
The Oaks Clinic	Title Deed Number	K282317
The Oaks Clinic Ground floor	Title Deed Number	TT17049
The Olympic, Bowls Pavilion & Golf Range	Title Deed Number	K304959
The Woodlands	Title Deed Number	K555857
West View Open Space	Title Deed Number	K36203



SWANLEY TOWN COUNCIL EVENTS AND SERVICES

Swanley Town Council is committed to building and maintaining open communication lines with the residents of the Town. The website, Facebook and Twitter pages are constantly being developed and all meeting documents are available from the Town Council's website or in hard copy on request at the Link. The 'Town Crier' is a regular newsletter delivered to residents giving news from the Council. The Town Council organises and supports many community events throughout the year including:

January	February	March
New Years Party	Valentines at the Olympic	Raising the Commonwealth flag
April	May	June
School Cluster Meeting Just Bin It Competition	Mayor Making	Armed Forces Day
July	August	September
Swanley In Bloom Outdoor Cinema Nights	1812 Open Air Concert in the Park	Mayor At Home
October	November	December
Halloween Family Party	Fireworks on the Rec Remembrance Day Parade	Meet Santa & Light Switch On Christmas Panto Christmas Day Lunch

Swanley Town Council also offer subsidised theatre and seaside trips throughout the year to Swanley senior citizens under its 'Senior Passport to Leisure' scheme.

Sevenoaks District Council contract Swanley Town Council to deliver its services in Swanley Link and Kent County Council contract Swanley Town Council to manage Swanley Link.

SWANLEY TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL REPORTS 2015/16

The Mayor Cllr John Barnes

We as a council have a number of statutory duties to perform, such as the allocation of allotments, but we also provide many additional functions and events throughout the community, such as the ever popular 1812 Night. Swanley Town Council is also responsible for a number of buildings and a significant amount of green open spaces, such as the various parks that are enjoyed by all residents. Councillors and officers regularly receive enquiries from residents where faults or concerns are raised that are not the responsibility of the Town Council. We pass such enquiries to other tiers of local government at district and/or county level. Our webpages are useful tools that are informative about the work done by the council and the events that will be held throughout the town within the year. Every year the council provide a yearly grant scheme that allows us to award grants to the various local organisations in the town. As mentioned we have many events throughout the year, the most prominent being the 1812 Night in Swanley Park, where we had a full orchestra playing to the fireworks. Also every year, we hold the town's firework display on Guy Fawkes Night, and even though the weather was a big let-down, many people came out to enjoy the fireworks, just showing the strong community spirit in the town. As always the results were spectacular. Swanley is known best for its fabulous flower displays around the town, and this year was better than the last. The standard of the 'In Bloom' was again very high, and the winners came to the chamber to receive their awards. It was a great honour to present Horizon School with their award, which I personally delivered in front of a school assembly. Keeping on the topic of schools, it was great to attend The Orchards Academy Awards Ceremony, seeing how the young people of Swanley are thriving and flourishing. It was also a great honour to present awards at the annual Just Bin competition, and dropping in to see the children who were on their work experience placements at the town council. I still have the privilege of meeting some of the youngest members of our town at the Town Cluster meeting next month. For me the most important event in the calendar will always be Remembrance Sunday, where I and other dignitaries, most notably the Secretary of State for Defence, Michael Fallon MP, march from the town centre to lay a wreath at our war memorial, to remember those in Swanley and across the nation who gave their lives in the conflicts of WW1 and WW2. The council have carried out a strategic review of staff and council services this past year, having streamlined the way the council works, which has led to savings of approximately £800,000 in the last year alone. One of the most important changes to our town has been the opening of The Link, which is not just a library. This is a project that has been dear to the heart of many councillors, where residents can find joined-up public and voluntary services in the convenience of the town centre. Finally, I would like to round off that it has been an experience being mayor, but an enjoyable experience. It has been a busy year, representing Swanley in neighbouring parishes, districts and boroughs at formal events, but also more importantly in this town, where I have worn my robes on numerous occasions. I will have very fond memories of being the Mayor, and it has been a privilege and an honour to represent you the residents, who gave me the opportunity to be your Mayor this year. Thank you.

Swanley Banqueting Board – Cllr Ray Morris

The hard work and commitment of all Swanley Banqueting staff has been exemplary this year and I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to everyone. All tiers of local authority are experiencing budget reductions requiring challenging changes and difficult decisions and Swanley Town Council is no exception. As the commercial arm of the Council, Swanley Banqueting has experienced a particularly demanding year but risen to the challenge and we go into the next 12 months streamlined and positive.

The Woodlands is the oldest of our three banqueting suites and faced with spiralling maintenance costs the council reluctantly had to accept that it had become uneconomic to continue. Another contributing factor was that large banqueting venues used for dinner dances and weddings are not the current fashion and we had business for two such venues but not three. The decision was taken at full council to close and secure the Woodlands and accept a very good offer for the site subject to planning. I am delighted to report that over the past couple of months economies of scale have resulted in an increase in profit generated from the two remaining venues.

Officers and staff have concentrated their efforts at the Olympic and changed the opening times slightly to focus on times that patrons prefer and the venue is already showing increased returns. The food is also the best in town.

The Alexandra suite has seamlessly absorbed the Woodlands bookings including weddings for this year and next. The difficult decision had to be taken to channel small groups of subsidised users into The Link or other local venues rather than the large Alexander banqueting suite for their meetings etc We delayed the increases until The Link opened as this has a Community Room for groups and clubs to use, it also has full disabled facilities and access. It was expected that local groups and clubs would be better suited and prefer to use the new Link rather than a Banqueting Suite. Commercial users were offered the opportunity to pay the non subsidised rate. A full account of this situation is available in my November statement.

The staff are our greatest asset and they particularly shone when marketing Swanley Banqueting at recent exhibitions and fairs. They work as a team and are most impressive with outstanding literature/marketing expertise and enthusiasm.

In a previous statement I made during the year I stated the full extent of the burden to residents of the financial subsidy to Banqueting was not known until recently when open and clear accounting was presented to council for the first time. Previously the accounts had always shown an 'In Kind' amount making the books balance. This is false accounting and gave the impression there was no problem when in fact there were huge concerns. Now it is the end of the year I would like to repeat my thanks to the Town Clerk and her officers as well as Cllr Southern for their financial work in this regard.

So now we have stemmed the flow of inherited losses and appear to be heading towards a breakeven point which we will be able to build upon. Swanley Banqueting is better equipped to embrace the demands of the commercial world within the umbrella of the council and we look forward to 2016/17.

Personnel Committee – Cllr Robert Brookbank

A busy year for the committee with many changes taking place. Fortunately the dedicated staff have taken the changes in their stride and so far there have not been any redundancies other than on a voluntary basis

With the closure of the Woodlands there was a transfer of staff to other venues again accomplished without any reduction in staff the work being transferred to the Alexandra Suite.

A new organisation chart showing the names ,grades and location of all staff has been reported to Committee and a completely revised Staff handbook will be available shortly which will reflect the continuing complexity of the law relating to this area.

New Technology continues its onward march and provides opportunities for a streamlining in staff numbers over the coming year.

Development Control Committee – Cllr Laurence Ball

Development Control is traditionally one of the more busy Committees and this year was no exception.

The recommendations that this Committee makes are forwarded to Sevenoaks where the final decisions are made. Several of the members here are also on the Committee at Sevenoaks. Not all of the recommendations made by Swanley are necessarily agreed to by the Officers or Panel at Sevenoaks.

Several efforts to have a Mast erected by the Shard were fought off – though the final word may yet not have been spoken. Two efforts were fought off to have Housing projects built at Birchwood school, which were in conflict with our strictly adhered to Greenbelt policy. Much time has also been spent on the United House project, including Highway, air and noise pollution matters.

The proposed Broom Hill Development has been a bone of contention for some time. We were pleased to announce that the appeal will soon be heard in Swanley. This will give our residents the opportunity to give further input at the Hearing, should they wish to do so. In the past such appeals were held in Sevenoaks and a concerted effort was made to bring the event to Swanley.

Finance and Audit Committee – Cllr Victor Southern

Once again I have chaired this committee during a challenging and varied year. The Committee of 7 Councillors, which will have met 10 times, has three main tasks;

1. It scrutinises all actual and projected expenditure of the Council with the exception of staff remuneration. This includes examining and verifying the Monthly Bank Reconciliation Statements which are signed alternately by the Chairman and Deputy Chairman.
2. It examines the income sources of the Council and all official's reports on such matters.
3. It has the duty, with officials, of setting out the annual budget for consideration by the full Council.

Since these require the examination of many sets of figures I, as Chairman, take up any specific queries with senior officials from their draft reports before those are actually presented to the Committee. In that I am assisted by other councillors from time-to-time. Where greater clarification might be required this is a useful pre-Committee activity.

The reports we receive are of ever-increasing quality and significance and we look forward to that trend continuing at an accelerated rate as the Council is now in the process of retiring the 3 different sorts of accounting and financial recording systems in use and transiting entirely to a commercial Sage package. That will not only eliminate the tiresome and often difficult tasks of transcribing information from one system to another but will also greatly assist officials and my committee by the type of reports that it can produce automatically.

Budget setting for the year we are approaching was not made easier by the total withdrawal of the Government Support Grant for all parishes in the Sevenoaks District. The loss is equivalent to about £100,000 and many councils have increased their precepts accordingly. However, we have greatly increased our rental income over the past 5 years – and expect to continue that way - and reduced many other running costs so we were able to budget for a nil increase in the portion of your council tax that comes to the town council. That is no small achievement when you realise that Hextable's increase was about 11.5% and Sevenoaks Town almost 18%. Nevertheless we continue to be vigilant as there is no excess fat in the Budget to allow careless spending. We did not allow in our projected income for any inflow from CIL – the Community Infrastructure Levy on new dwellings. We have every reason to expect that those funds will start to come in and that will allow us to make a number of improvements to the properties that the Town owns and to look at other possible improvements to local infrastructure.

The Council's accounts for the last financial year were approved by the District Auditor with no adverse or advisory comments at all and again I commend the work of the officials who made that possible.

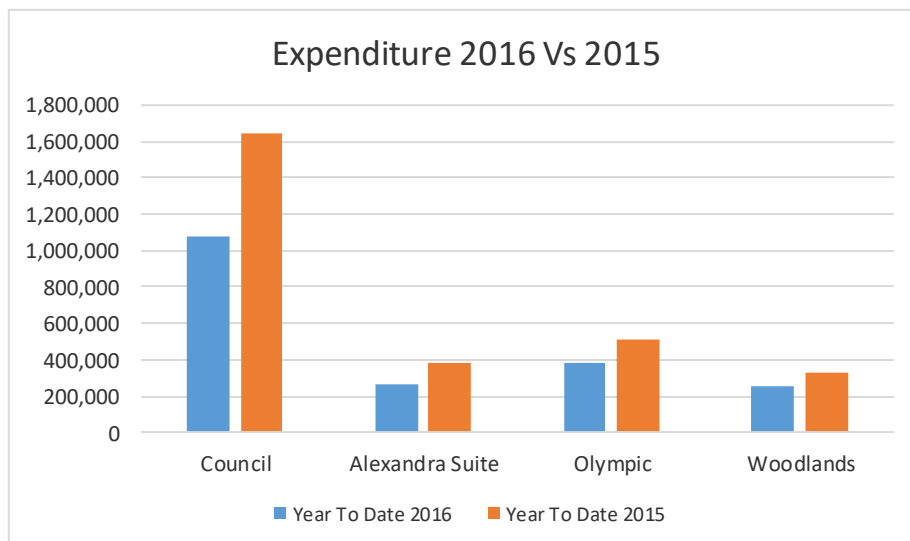
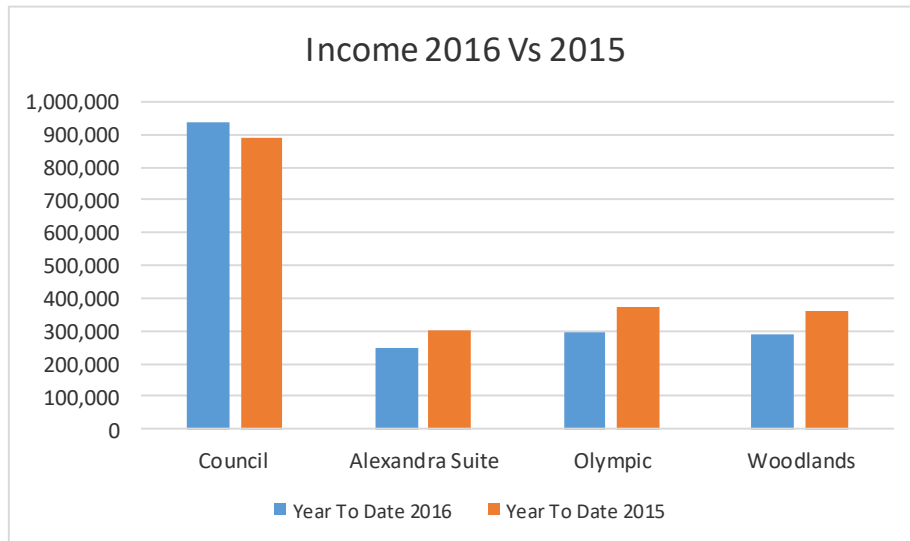
I wish to thank my fellow Committee members for their hard work and support – they are Councillors Ball, Barnes, Dyball, Komolafe, Morris and Searles.

Estates and Facilities Committee – Cllr Tony Searles

The work to repair and maintain the assets of the Council continues at a good pace. The Civic Centre downstairs office, 10 Station Road and the flat at the Olympic have been refurbished and are on the open market for rent. The Woodlands is currently being negotiated for sale and the Bungalow at the park has been let to increase income during the closed park season. The boiler repairs to the venues have been carried out and all electrical inspections are complete and remedial works done. At Swanley Park the tender process was completed and a new concession announced to run the Park. It's the first time that the Park is expected to achieve a surplus income and this money will be used to make improvements to the park and its upkeep. Vandalism is an increasing problem for our estates and facilities, particularly in the Park where a number of our trees have been damaged in the Golden and Diamond Avenue. The football pitches at Swanley Park have been used by a local team at a subsidised rate to assist us in identifying what is required to achieve Football Association status. The drainage had been a problem in the winter months and we now have a drainage program in place to improve the playability. A tender for the long term use of the pitches is due for next season and the funding for the Changing Facilities and Community Building can then begin. We are now reviewing the contracted estates and facilities services and what is best value for Swanley taxpayers. I'd like to thank the members of the Committee for their input this year and congratulate the officials for obtaining the Green Flag award this year.



BUDGET PERFORMANCE



This year the Council has made savings of almost £1million. Past confidential reports have revealed that the Swanley Banqueting venues owned by the Council had been making a loss since before 2008; a management consultant report of this year gives full details but was never acted upon. The venues continued to be funded with the reserves of the Council. When the administration of the Council changed in 2011 full investigations were ordered. The Council's accounts were independently audited and reviewed for the first time and an action plan put into place to further improve the positions of the venues and the Council in order to prevent further financial implications to the tax payer. Since then the net position of the Banqueting has improved year on year and the Council's expenditure has been reduced substantially.

YOUR COUNCIL TAX EXPLAINED

In 2015/16 Swanley Town Council's element of the Council Tax collected by Sevenoaks District Council was £97.87 per band D property.

This amount is multiplied by the average number of band D properties to give the 'precept' value. The Precept is the amount that the District Council passes onto parish and town councils in order to carry out their powers and duties.

For Swanley in 2015/16 this amount was £514,360. Due to the additional homes being built in Swanley during the year this year's amount will be £519,509.

Swanley Town Council are pleased to confirm a 0% increase in Council Tax for the forthcoming year 2016/17 for residents.

How do we compare to Parish and Town Council's with a similar precept amount?

	Band D Tax	Band D Tax	
	2015/16	2016/17	% Increase
Edenbridge	130.87	133.49	2%
Sevenoaks Town	88.69	105.53	19%
Crockenhill	100.53	103.49	3%
Swanley	97.87	97.87	0%

