

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

RECORD OF DECISION OF THE EXECUTIVE

Decision Made: 26 October 2022

Town Centre Strategy - Procurement of Professional Team

Issue for Decision

To secure agreement to the allocation of funding for a professional team to support the Council in the preparation of its Maidstone Town Centre Strategy and authority for the appointment of the preferred supplier.

Decision Made

1. That the existing resources contained in Exempt Appendix B to the report of the Chief Executive be allocated for funding professional expertise needed for development of the Maidstone Town Centre Strategy.
2. That, following the procurement evaluation process, delegated authority be given to the Chief Executive for appointment of the professional team in consultation with the Leader (who is the Lead Member with responsibility for Economic Development).
3. That delegated authority is given to the Head of the Mid-Kent Shared Legal Service to enter into a contract with the preferred supplier.

Reasons for Decision

Reports concerning the Town Centre Strategy were presented to the Policy and Resources Committee in September and October 2021 and March 2022. These led to discussions around the principle and scope of an ambitious Town Centre Strategy for Maidstone designed to establish and provide clarity on the Council's long-term vision for the town centre to 2050, complemented by a comprehensive delivery plan to achieve this. Following engagement with the service committees in the late part of 2021, the scope and workstreams of the proposed Strategy were amended. In March 2022, the Policy and Resources Committee agreed the scope and workstreams for the Town Centre Strategy, the governance structure, and principles for engagement with the public and key stakeholders.

Delivery of the Strategy needs a wide range of expertise and significant capacity. To put this in place the Council has established a project team with expertise from policy and engagement, economic development, spatial planning, development management and property teams. Our experience with other projects has demonstrated the benefits of complementing the internal team with external professional expertise to provide specialist knowledge, skills and capacity.

Informal engagement with the Executive and market engagement has taken place to inform, amongst other things, the scope of the brief for external professional advice and strategy production and information requirements. The brief has been established and is set out in Appendix A to the report of the Chief

Executive. The brief includes greening and lighting as identified in the UK Shared Prosperity Fund Local Investment Plan with a financial contribution from this source of £20,000. It is envisaged that this work will take approximately 12-14 months commencing in December 2022 and spanning the financial years 2022/3 and 2023/4.

Market engagement has provided a range in the cost of expertise and capacity to produce the Strategy and a delivery plan which varies quite widely dependent on a number of factors including the extent of public and stakeholder engagement, the amount of additional information (beyond that already held by the Council) needed and the range/depth of options appraisals e.g. for opportunity sites and elements of the spatial framework that is needed – with all these dependent on feedback including from Members generally and decision makers. The former Policy and Resources Committee made financial provision for the Town Centre Strategy on two occasions. In October 2021 the Committee agreed to allocate £175,680 from the Covid Recovery and Renewal Fund for year 1 costs to develop the Town Centre Strategy. In February 2022 the Committee and subsequently Full Council agreed that the first £1 million of 2022/23 New Homes Bonus be allocated for strategic policy and plan making. This includes work on the Town Centre Strategy.

Procurement services at this scale require the Council to apply the “Find a Tender Service” methodology; this has replaced the OJEU/TED methodology from 31 December 2020 as a result of Brexit. The cost quality ratio of this process is key to securing a professional team of the best calibre that the Council can achieve within its allocated budget.

The allocation of funding and engagement of a professional team to support delivery of the Town Centre Strategy will positively contribute to the Council’s aspiration to create a town centre which responds to current and future challenges. This is a key pillar in the Council’s Economic Development Strategy, to delivering the policies in the Local Plan and for the quality of life for the town centre community.

Consultation Results and Previous Committee Feedback

The former Policy and Resources Committee has considered and agreed both the need for, scope and workstreams of a Town Centre Strategy, and in doing so considered the input from the three service committees in place until May 2022.

Engagement with stakeholders and anchor institutions to inform the Strategy took place on 26 September 2022; engagement and consultation is a key element of the production of the Strategy.

Market engagement has been undertaken as part of the preparation for procurement of a professional team.

The issue was considered by the Economic Regeneration and Leisure Policy Advisory Committee on 4 October 2022 and the Committee supported the recommendations set out in the report.

Alternatives Considered and Why Rejected

Not to continue with the process of securing external expertise to support the creation of a Town Centre Strategy; the impact of this includes potential adverse consequences for the quality of the work and pace at which the Strategy is progressed.

The merit of accepting the recommendations is that the Town Centre Strategy can be progressed quickly, drawing on expertise and capacity that the Council would otherwise not have access to, whilst equally ensuring a good quality Strategy.

Background Papers

None

I have read and approved the above decision for the reasons (including possible alternative options rejected) as set out above.



Signed: _____
Leader of the Council – Councillor David Burton

Full details of the report for the decision and any consideration by the relevant Policy Advisory Committee can be found at the following area of the [website](#).

Call-In: Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call-in form signed by any three Members to the Proper Officer by: **5pm 4 November 2022**