

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRACY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 8
SEPTEMBER 2021**

Present: Councillors Bartlett, Mrs Blackmore, Cooke, English, Hastie, McKay, Perry, Purle (Chairman) and R Webb

40. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Cooper and M Rose.

41. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Bartlett was present as a Substitute for Councillor Cooper, and Councillor McKay was present as a Substitute for Councillor Rose.

42. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

43. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

44. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

45. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillor English had been lobbied on Item 14 – Request for an Additional Outside Body.

46. EXEMPT ITEM

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public as proposed.

47. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 JULY 2021

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 27 July 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed.

48. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

49. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

50. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

51. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

52. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

53. REQUEST FOR AN ADDITIONAL OUTSIDE BODY

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report which outlined the request from the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee for the Kent Downs Line Partnership to be added as an additional outside body, with appointments to fall within that Committee's remit. The Committee were informed that, upon the review of the Constitution, it was advised that full Council should be recommended to make the decision.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to approve that the Kent Downs Line Partnership be added as an additional outside body within the remit of the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee.

54. NEW EXECUTIVE MODEL

The Head of Policy, Communications and Governance introduced the report and outlined the executive model proposed by the Committee's working group and the response to the survey sent to Members. The model included four Policy Advisory Committees (PACs) to carry out pre-decision scrutiny, and one Overview and Scrutiny Committee in accordance with the legislative requirements. The survey of Members showed that 68% of respondents agreed in principle with the model outlined in the report.

In response to questions, it was confirmed that regulatory Committees had not been considered or changed when the new executive model had been developed. It was acknowledged that there would be resource implications within the Democratic Services Team. A fixed-term contract had been approved for a Democratic Services Officer to support the development of the model and the local government boundary review project. The Constitution would be created using a previous version the 2014 when the Council had an executive model in place, and the Legal Team with external expert advice would lead this work.

Concern was raised that the PACs would have limited powers to influence decisions made, and that Councillors without a Cabinet position would have limited influence in decision-making.

It was argued that the proposed model was designed to be inclusive and encourage engagement from Members who did not hold Cabinet positions.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Executive Model outlined at 3.3 of the report be recommended to Council for adoption at the next Annual Meeting of the Council in 2022;
2. Council be asked to approve the next steps as per the timetable set out in paragraph 2.4 and section 7 of the report;
3. Council be asked to approve the use of reserves to fund the work required to review and redraft the constitution; and
4. The working group continue to operate and review the redrafted significant parts of the constitution prior to the Committee's consideration for recommendation to the Council for adoption.

Note: Councillor Cooke joined the meeting during this item.

55. WHOLE COUNCIL ELECTIONS - DECISION STAGE

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager introduced the report which outlined the outcomes of the public consultation on whole council elections. 3,130 responses were received and of the respondents who expressed a preference, 71.6% were in favour of whole council elections, and the result was within the margin of error that would be expected for a survey of that scale.

In response to questions, the Democratic and Electoral Manager explained that the questionnaires were sent to 15,000 households chosen at random following sampling methodology as previously used by the Council, and analysis had shown the result to be statistically significant.

Concerns were expressed that whole council elections risked a large turnover of Councillors, which could lead to poor decision-making, with financial implications for the council. Additionally, groups had historically been unable to put forward enough candidates when whole council elections had occurred, which led to seats not being contested in some wards.

It was also expressed that a similar survey undertaken previously had yielded similar results, with a majority of respondents in favour of whole council elections. The financial saving that would be made was highlighted, and also the pre-election period would be reduced to once every four years. Continuing with elections by thirds would lead to the loss

of single- and two-Member wards as the Local Government Boundary Review would be affected by the election cycle.

RESOLVED: That

1. Council be recommended to pass the following resolution at an Extraordinary meeting:

“That the Maidstone Borough Council hereby adopts a scheme of whole council elections, meaning an electoral cycle of one election every four years with all councillors being elected, with the first such election being 2024”

2. In the event that Council does not accept the recommendation, a report be brought back to the Committee on further options such as a referendum.

Councillors English, Hastie, McKay and R Webb requested that their dissent be noted.

56. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30pm to 7.43pm.