

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 15 FEBRUARY 2022

Present: Councillors Cannon, Forecast, Harper, Hinder, Newton, Round (Chairman), R Webb and S Webb

124. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Naghi.

125. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

126. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

127. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

128. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

129. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

130. TO CONSIDER WHETHER ANY ITEMS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION.

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

131. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 JANUARY 2022

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2022 be agreed, subject to the additional wording to Minute 116 – 'Minutes of the Meeting Held on 14 December 2021', to read:

'The committee commended the Clerk on the quality of the Minutes produced.'

132. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

133. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

134. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

135. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development updated the Committee that the 'Future of Maidstone Leisure Centre' item would be moved back to the April meeting, and that the 'Decommissioning Public Art Policy' would be brought to the March meeting. The 'Carriage Museum Report' would be amended to 'TBC' as legal advice relating to the report was required. 'Economic Development Programme: Council's role within Partnership Arrangements' would be removed from the work programme and circulated to the Committee as a briefing paper.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

136. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

137. 3RD QUARTER FINANCIAL UPDATE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement introduced the report and explained that there was a small overspend for the year to date with an overspend of £292,000 projected for the year. This was largely due to losses incurred at the Leisure Centre and the reduced income generated from the market, however the target for the following year would be adjusted to reflect the market's performance.

Within the Capital budget, the bus station redevelopment had been completed and the Mote Park visitor centre and dam works were underway. Although key performance indicators (KPIs) continued to improve they had not met their targets for the quarter. Progress on the recovery and renewal projects were reported.

In response to questions, the Director of Finance and Business Improvement confirmed that savings had been made throughout the year due to vacancies not being filled, and that the salary slippage may resolve by the year end. The position taken on the compensation claim from Serco was supported by legal advice, and negotiation was ongoing.

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development explained how footfall data was collected and alternative methods of capturing footfall data using anonymised mobile phone data. The new business park planned at Woodcut Farm had the potential to create over 1000 jobs and Mid-Kent College were building a new centre on the Oakwood site. The delay in opening MidKent College Skills Hub in the Mall was due to work needed to improve the condition of the unit being used, and it was confirmed that monies allocated to the project through Recovery and Renewal funding would not all be paid upfront.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 3 for 2021/22, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted;
2. The Capital position at the end of Quarter 3 be noted;
3. The Performance position as at Quarter 3 for 2021/22, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified, be noted; and
4. The Recovery & Renewal Update be noted.

Note: Councillor Cannon arrived during this item.

138. **ADDITIONAL RESTRICTION GRANT AND TOP UP PAYMENT**

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development introduced the report and explained how the scheme would be delivered for businesses adversely affected by the pandemic. The deadline for awarding the grants was 31 March 2022, and following further allocations since publication of the report, the funding remaining was £240,000. Letters of thanks were appended to the report from businesses who had benefited from the Maidstone Business Boost.

In response to questions, the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development explained that businesses were required to re-complete paperwork for the second round of funding due to strengthened checks put in place, and would also capture any change in circumstances since the initial bid for funding was submitted.

RESOLVED: That

1. The progress on the delivery of the Additional Restrictions Grant Scheme be noted;
2. The Government's additional funding allocation, announced in December 2021, to support businesses severely impacted by the Omicron variant, be noted; and

3. The team be thanked for their work throughout the pandemic to effectively support local businesses through their efficient administration of the grant schemes.

139. TIMELINE FOR GALLERY AND GOVERNANCE UPDATE

The Museum Director introduced the report and explained that the time estimate for completing refurbishment of the Archaeology Gallery was three-and-a-half years. Assumptions made included that the current opening hours and staffing levels at the museum would be retained.

The timeline outlined in the report was explained in further detail and it was highlighted that the programme would need to be revised throughout the project. The first action for the governance review was underway, and would identify any changes that could affect the decision made by the Committee in 2017 to retain direct governance of the museum.

In response to questions, the Museums Director confirmed that visitors to the museum would be able to pass through the gallery for as long as possible while work was carried out to maintain visibility of the refurbishment. The design work should start in March 2022, which would enable a more detailed project plan to be written. A project steering group would be recruited to include Committee Members and updates could be reported back regularly.

RESOLVED: That the timescales for the gallery refurbishment and the museum's governance review be noted.

Note: Councillor Forecast arrived during this item.

140. MAKING MAIDSTONE MORE ACTIVE CONSULTATION

The Leisure Manager introduced the report and explained that the focus groups would identify priority projects for each service centre. Separate focus groups would be held for schools to facilitate participation, and the relevant education teams at Kent County Council would also be consulted.

In response to questions, the Leisure Manager explained that the improvements to the leisure centre would have a greater impact on those living closer to the town centre, and so as part of the Making Maidstone More Active project, the areas furthest away had been prioritised. Projects would then be identified in other parts of Maidstone, working from the outer areas of the Borough towards the centre.

RESOLVED: That focus groups be undertaken in the five rural service centres identified.

141. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30pm to 7.55pm.