

There shall be no call-in period associated with Minutes 238 and 240 as following the election on 5 May 2022, the Council will not be meeting formally until its Annual Meeting on the 21 May 2022 and will be moving to its new Governance Arrangements.

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 28 APRIL 2022

Present: Councillors Burton (Chairman), Cooke, Cooper, Cox, English, Garten, Harper, Khadka, Munford, Parfitt-Reid, Perry and Round

228. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Blackmore, Brice and Kimmance.

229. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Cooper was present for Councillor Brice.

Councillor Garten was present for Councillor Blackmore.

230. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman stated that he intended to take Item 12 – Property Acquisition as an urgent item as a decision was required to enable progress on the matter. The matter related to the Council’s Affordable Homes Strategy.

231. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no visiting members.

232. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

233. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

234. EXEMPT INFORMATION

RESOLVED: That Item 12 – Property Acquisition be taken in private due to the possible disclosure of exempt information.

235. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 MARCH 2022

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 March 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed.

236. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

237. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

238. DISCRETIONARY ENERGY REBATE SCHEME

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement introduced the report and explained the difference between the mandatory and discretionary energy rebate schemes applicable to Council Tax. The Council had been given £396,300 to distribute to those individuals that were not eligible for a payment under the former and targeted top up payments to the most vulnerable households in bands A-D.

Reference was made to the tables shown at points 2.5 and 2.7 of the report, which outlined the proposed scheme and its associated financial impacts. Initial payments would be made to those in receipt of Council Tax Support (CTS) across Bands E-H and those in receipt of a disabled band reduction across Bands F-H. The remaining funds would be allocated to provide £30 each to those in Bands A-D in receipt of CTS.

The context of the ongoing cost-of-living crisis was highlighted, with the Council's other actions to provide support noted.

In response to questions, the Director of Finance and Business Improvement confirmed that the funding had to be distributed by 30 September 2022 and would be applicable to those residents that lived in the borough on 1 April 2022.

The Committee expressed support for the proposal but felt that further information on other types of support should be provided to recipients in managing the cost-of-living crisis. This included energy saving measures that could reduce the amount spent on utilities and contribute to Biodiversity and Climate Change ambitions to reduce carbon emissions. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Council was working co-operatively with its partners to disseminate similar information through various channels.

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement confirmed that an individual's council tax account would be credited with the financial award if they were eligible but unable to be contacted. It was requested that the Scheme attached at Appendix A to the report be amended to reflect that no cash payment would be made in such cases.

The Council would receive 'New Burdens' funding to support the scheme's administration however the amount to be received was currently unknown.

RESOLVED: That

1. The distribution methodology for the Discretionary Energy Rebates Scheme set out in paragraph 2.7 of the report, be agreed;
2. The Scheme's details as set out in Appendix A to the report, subject to the insertion of the word 'cash' in point 4.8 to read:

In all cases, the Council must ensure that payments are made correctly and where appropriate, require households to verify that they are eligible for the payment. Where no such verification can be made or where a household fails to respond to the Council's request, no *cash* payment whatsoever shall be made'.

3. The Committee requests that the opportunity of correspondence with recipients is used to suggest energy saving measures and further signpost them to other schemes.

239. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business because of the likely disclosure of exempt information for the reason specified, having applied the public interest test:

Head of Schedule 12A and Brief Description

Item 12 – Property Acquisition	Paragraph 3 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular individual (including the authority holding that information)
--------------------------------	---

240. PROPERTY ACQUISITION

The Housing Acquisitions Consultant introduced the report and outlined the timeline of events leading to the proposed acquisition. The proposed rental arrangements were outlined.

The Director of Regeneration and Place answered questions relating to the properties' purchase, structural integrity and relevant insurance policies.

The Committee expressed support for purchasing the properties for the benefit of the borough's residents.

RESOLVED: That

1. The financial returns for the scheme shown at Appendix 1 to the report, in support of the Housing Development and Regeneration Investment and overall Development Strategy, be approved;

2. The Director of Finance and Business Improvement be given delegated authority to:
 - a. Negotiate terms for the purchase of the properties at an agreed location for the sum of an agreed amount from the properties' owner;
 - b. Procure and enter into any contracts with consultants (including but not limited to) any related appointments; and
 - c. Negotiate and finalise and complete all legal formalities, deeds and agreements which may be required to facilitate the purchase, subject to satisfactory conclusion of all due diligence.
3. The Head of Mid Kent Legal Services be authorised to appoint the Solicitors required to negotiate and complete the necessary contract documentations, deeds and agreements associated with the purchase on the terms as agreed by the Director of Finance and Business Improvement.

241. DURATION OF MEETING

9.00 a.m. to 9.49 a.m.