

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE
POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 NOVEMBER 2022

Present:

Committee Members:	Councillor Garten (Chairman) and Councillors Brindle, English, Fort, Mrs Gooch, Harper, Hastie, Hinder and S Webb
Lead Members:	Councillors Burton (Leader of the Council) and Russell (Lead Member for Leisure and Arts)

48. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Bryant, Forecast and Naghi.

49. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following Substitute Members were noted:

Councillor Brindle for Councillor Bryant
Councillor English for Naghi
Councillor S Webb for Councillor Forecast

50. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

51. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

52. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

53. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillor English stated that he had been lobbied on agenda items 14 (Carriage Museum Options) and 15 (Framework for Research into Demand for Extending Opening Hours at Maidstone Museum).

54. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That the items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

55. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 OCTOBER 2022

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 October 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed.

56. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

57. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS

There were no questions from local residents.

58. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members.

59. FORWARD PLAN RELATING TO THE COMMITTEE'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan relating to the Committee's Terms of Reference be noted.

60. RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND INVESTMENT PLAN

Councillor Burton, the Leader of the Council, introduced a report setting out a plan for spending the Rural England Prosperity Fund money which had been allocated to the Council as an addendum to the UK Shared Prosperity funding received earlier this year. The Leader of the Council explained that:

- The Council's fund allocation was £539,728 to be spent on capital projects over two financial years 2023/24 and 2024/25. The deadline for the submission of the plan for spending the allocation to Government was 30 November 2022.
- The proposed approach was to invite partners across the rural areas (Parish Councils and community groups etc.) to apply for grants to improve community facilities such as village halls and community assets with a view to creating a greener and more sustainable community infrastructure. This could involve the installation of battery energy storage systems, solar PV systems, EV charging points and air source heat pumps. This would have a direct benefit in reducing energy bills and showcase new technologies.
- It was also proposed to place a cap of £50,000 on the value of applications, although schemes costing above or below this figure would be considered on their merits.
- The aim was to support projects that would deliver best value for money, maximum impact, greening and a positive impact on local communities.
- The views of the Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee would be sought on the proposals.

In response to questions, the Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance advised the Committee that it was understood that the funding would be profiled

over two years with a smaller amount in the first year. The scoring matrix attached to the report would be developed further and the decision-making process finalised before launching the scheme. The Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager and the Biodiversity and Climate Engagement Officer would be able to provide advice and support to applicants to help maximise the potential of their projects.

Members were supportive of the proposals. They considered that there should be flexibility regarding scheme size and there should be an inclusive approach. Applications should be asset based for a community and assessed on their merits. A business directory of green solution providers should be developed to give advice and support to applicants.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL:

1. That the Intervention for the Rural England Prosperity Fund, as set out in the report, be approved, and submitted to the Government by the Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance.
2. That there should be a guideline figure of £50,000 on the value of applications, but schemes which are significantly above or below this figure be considered on their merits.
3. That a business directory of green solution providers be developed to give advice and support to applicants.

Note: Councillor Hastie entered the meeting during consideration of this item (6.45 p.m.). She said that she had no disclosures of interest or of lobbying

61. CARRIAGE MUSEUM OPTIONS

Councillor Russell, the Lead Member for Leisure and Arts, introduced a report setting out options for the future of the Carriage Museum and recommending an approach which offered the opportunity for organic growth in opening hours and the number of visitors. The Lead Member explained that:

- The Carriage Museum had been closed during the pandemic, but it had opened on three Saturdays so far in 2022, on each occasion attracting over 100 visitors with positive feedback. The Museum had been opened in conjunction with other events taking place in the town such as the River Festival.
- The former Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee agreed at its meeting held on 19 April 2022 that the Member of the Executive with responsibility for the Carriage Museum under the new governance arrangements be asked to review the opening hours of the Museum to ensure that it is accessible to the public. Subsequently, this Committee, at its meeting held on 5 July 2022, approved the Maidstone Museums' Forward Plan which included as a priority a review of the Carriage Museum and its operation with a short-term goal to open the Museum using volunteer staff. The purpose of the report was to respond to these commitments.
- Four options had been identified as follows:

- Option 1 – Do nothing
- Option 2 – Close the Museum and Disperse the Collection
- Option 3 – Revise the Operational Model for the Museum
- Option 4 – A New Carriage Museum for Maidstone

- Option 3 was the preferred option as it provided a sustainable and realistic model for the future of the Carriage Museum. Volunteers would be used to open the Museum more regularly, starting with regular Saturday opening in the summer. This would contribute to the wider cultural offer of the Borough. Making space and improving the quality of the displays would create a more exciting and visitor-friendly offer. This option would require only a small spend, using some existing resources.

Members considered that Option 3 represented a realistic solution at the present time and indicated that they would like all elements of that option to be addressed in a timely manner. The Museums' Director confirmed that the first step would be to have the Museum open more often with the assistance of volunteers.

In response to questions, the Lead Member indicated that she was willing to look at the potential in the longer term to develop the Carriage Museum as a Transport Museum to reflect more generally the science and technology of vehicles and present a more STEM-based alternative to the main Museum. The Leader of the Council sounded a note of caution that, in the present economic climate, the priority was to focus on the delivery of objectives in relation to Maidstone Museum.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO THE LEAD MEMBER FOR LEISURE AND

ARTS: That all elements of Option 3 for the future of the Carriage Museum, as set out in the report, be adopted.

62. **FRAMEWORK FOR RESEARCH INTO DEMAND FOR EXTENDED OPENING HOURS AT MAIDSTONE MUSEUM**

Councillor Russell, the Lead Member for Leisure and Arts, introduced a report setting out how it was proposed to respond to the motion moved at the meeting of the Council on 28 September 2022 requesting that the Museum should open for an extra hour on one evening a week to allow access for those secondary school pupils unable to get there before it closes at 4.00 p.m.

Councillor Russell explained that there was no current evidence of what pupils would want, use, or expect from the Museum. It was therefore proposed to carry out a short survey of people between the ages of 11 and 18 in education to inform decisions going forward. It was noted that:

- The survey would ask questions about:

The current accessibility of the Museum in terms of opening hours, whether homework or course work required visiting the Museum and whether Saturday was a suitable day to visit for this age group;

The appetite for extended hours and how many hours/which days would be desirable; and

What other offers such as dedicated workspace, Wi-Fi, access to refreshments would encourage use.

- The survey and a link to an on-line survey would be disseminated via social media, directly to secondary schools and through other groups such as the Maidstone Youth Forum. The survey would be carried out during term-time to encourage participation.
- There would be no cost to the Council in conducting the survey.
- Using the results of the survey, staff would be able to identify what was really wanted and needed. They would then implement a solution to meet the needs of the audience in consultation with the Lead Member, with a target date for implementation of February 2023.

During the discussion, it was suggested that the matter be raised with the Maidstone Museums' Foundation which had links with local secondary schools.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

63. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2023 - 2028

The Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement introduced a report setting out the updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) explaining that:

- Before drawing up detailed budgets every year it was the practice to update the Council's five-year rolling MTFS. The idea of the MTFS was to show how the Council would deliver its strategic objectives in financial terms, paying attention to the economic context, which was challenging at present with high inflation and an impending recession. It was not yet known how exactly the Government would respond to the situation, but the position would become clearer with the Chancellor's Autumn Statement on 17 November 2022.
- Given that uncertainty, as in previous years, several possible scenarios had been considered for the future. The draft MTFS attached to the report used Scenario 4 as the base case and it also included a worst case, Scenario 5. Under Scenario 4 there would be a budget gap of £2.5m for 2023/24 making assumptions such as a 2% Council Tax referendum limit, a staff pay increase of 5% and general price and contract cost inflation of 5%. Allowance had also been made for a higher than expected spend on the provision of temporary accommodation, which was likely to continue. An approach to addressing the budget gap was set out in the MTFS and detailed budget proposals would be brought forward in January 2023.
- The MTFS also addressed the Capital Programme which amounted to £230m over the next five years. With inflation, this £230m would buy less, so some prioritisation of schemes would be required.

During the discussion, the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement and his team were thanked for their work on the MTFS given the current economic situation and uncertainty.

RESOLVED:

1. That the issues and risks associated with updating the Medium-Term Financial Strategy be noted.

2. **TO RECOMMEND TO THE EXECUTIVE:** That the Medium-Term Financial Strategy be approved, and the proposed approach outlined to development of an updated Medium-Term Financial Strategy for 2023/24 – 2027/28 and a budget for 2023/24 be approved.

Note: Councillor S Webb, a Substitute Member and Member of the Executive, abstained from the voting on this item.

64. SECOND QUARTER FINANCIAL UPDATE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT 2022/23

The Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement introduced a report setting out the financial and performance position for the services reporting into the Committee as at 30 September 2022 (Quarter 2). It was noted that:

- For this Committee, an overspend was currently projected against the Revenue Budget for this financial year. This was because there were potential areas of overspend relating to the Innovation Centre, the Business Terrace and Lockmeadow Market.
- In terms of the Capital Budget, there was a projected overspend in relation to the Mote Park Visitor Centre, but this was partly offset by an underspend on the Mote Park Lake dam works which were now complete.
- For the Council as a whole, a balanced position was projected for the current financial year with underspends elsewhere offsetting the overspends by this Committee.
- Performance indicators showed that footfall in the town centre and unemployment rates were still failing to achieve targets. However, there was now a different approach to measuring footfall, using mobile phone data, which was showing an improvement on the last quarter and the same quarter last year.

During the discussion, concerns were expressed about the accuracy of footfall figures calculated using mobile phone data.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 2 for 2022/23, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted.
2. That the Capital position at the end of Quarter 2 be noted.
3. That the Performance position as at Quarter 2 for 2022/23, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified, be noted.

65. DURATION OF MEETING

6:30 p.m. to 8.20 p.m.