

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 11 OCTOBER 2022

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors McKenna (Chairman), Newton, Bartlett, Brindle, Fort, Rose, R Webb, Young and Conyard.
Lead Members:	Councillors Burton (Leader of the Council), Parfitt-Reid (Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement), Round (Lead Member for Environmental Services) and S Webb (Lead Member for Housing and Health).
Visiting Members:	Councillors Jeffery

37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received by Councillor Khadka.

38. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Conyard was present as a Substitute Member for Councillor Khadka.

39. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

40. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor Jeffery was in attendance as a Visiting Member for Item 13 – Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan – Verbal Update and 14 – Proposed Changed Change to Maidstone AQMA and Request to Consult on New Air Quality Action Plan.

41. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members and Officers.

42. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

43. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That All items be taken in public as proposed

44. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 JULY 2022

Councillor Round thanked the Committee and Officers for the message of condolence contained within the Minutes.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed.

45. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

46. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FROM LOCAL RESIDENTS

There were no questions from local residents.

47. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

48. 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.

49. BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN - VERBAL UPDATE

The Leader of the Council provided a verbal update on the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan (BDCCAP). Specific attention was drawn to the categorisation of the actions within the plan, which was felt to be too optimistic and not reflective of the actions' current status; the examples given included the date given to the Design and Sustainability Development Plan Document and the District Heating System.

The importance of the BDCCAP and of conducting effective scrutiny into its progression was emphasised. Therefore, a formal update report on the BDCCAP would be provided at the Committee's next meeting, to include suggested methods for greater transparency and accountability in demonstrating the Council's commitment to the Climate Change emergency.

RESOLVED: That the verbal update be noted.

50. PROPOSED CHANGE TO MAIDSTONE AQMA AND REQUEST TO CONSULT ON NEW AIR QUALITY ACTION PLAN

The Lead Member for Environmental Services introduced the report and outlined the historical context of the Council's current Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) and Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP); the former had been implemented due to the exceedance of the annual mean objective of nitrogen dioxide in that area.

The Lead Member for Environmental Services stated that air quality had improved within much of the original AQMA, and it was therefore proposed that its boundary be reviewed to ensure that the AQAP was targeted towards the relevant areas. The boundaries of the proposed new AQMA had been modelled by air quality

consultants using air quality data from 2019, to exclude the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic. The annual mean objective of nitrogen dioxide levels had been met in all areas of the original AQMA, except for Upper Stone Street.

The Lead Member for Environmental Services stated that whilst the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on air quality levels remained unclear, air quality levels were expected to show continued improvement. The modelling undertaken suggested that it was possible for there to be no exceedances within Upper Stone Street by 2028. A public consultation on the actions taken within the proposed AQAP would take place.

Several Members of the Committee expressed concern at the air quality levels and prevalence of vehicle idling within and around the East Farleigh areas, including East Farleigh School, Farleigh Bridge and East Farleigh Station. In response, the Lead Member for Communities and Engagement stated that whilst displaying anti-idling signs within those area had been considered, no suitable locations could be identified. The Senior Scientific Officer further advised that displaying the signs required permission from Kent County Council. The Committee were advised to contact the Officers, if they wished to suggest a suitable location. Further reassurance was given that the East Farleigh area was monitored and had low levels of air pollution, in part due to the open space that allowed the pollution to diffuse.

In response further questions, the Senior Scientific Officer confirmed that the proposed AQMA and associated AQAP had been drafted in accordance with the legislative requirements, including the 40-microgram per 1m³ nitrogen dioxide limit, and the information required by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The Environmental Protection Team Leader advised that it would be outside of both the applicable legislation and good practice to have an AQMA declared across areas that had air quality readings below the 40-microgram per m³ limit. It was reiterated that the Council would continue to work towards lowering air quality levels generally, including continued monitoring across areas that demonstrated air quality readings below the 40-microgram per m³ limit. As the Council continued to work with schools in relation to anti-idling and active travel, the Committee were encourage to contact the Environmental Protection Team Leader if further schools could be identified.

The Leader of the Council highlighted that whilst beneficial, the provision of euro six engines to improve the efficiency of local public transport services was outside of the Council's control. The significant funding required, alongside the financial difficulties faced by many operators was referenced. Specific attention was drawn to the importance of the Council considering measures, such as electric car charging points, that it could assist with.

RESOLVED: That the Executive be recommended to:

1. Agree the revocation of the old AQMA in Maidstone, requiring an Air Quality Management Area Revocation Order to be issued;
2. Agree the declaration of the proposed new AQMA in Maidstone, covering Upper Stone Street as outlined in the report, requiring a new Air Quality Management Area Order to be issued; and

3. Agree that permission is granted to hold a public consultation on the proposed actions given in the report to be included in a new Air Quality Action Plan

51. COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022-2025

The Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement introduced the report, stating that the Communication and Engagement Strategy attached at Appendix 1 to the report assisted in the support and delivery of the Council's priorities, and the protection and enhancement of its reputation. The number of press releases, press enquiries and interviews supported by the Council's Communications Team across the last year were briefly outlined.

The Strategy focused on the Council's four strategic priorities, with emphasis given to the 'Pride in Place' through the delivery of projects associated with the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The delivery of the Safer Streets fund was also highlighted, with the Committee informed that the Statement of Community Involvement would be added into the Strategy, under the 'Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure' Strategic Priority.

The associated Action Plan would be reviewed in 2023.

RESOLVED: That the Communications and Engagement Strategy for 2022-25 and Action Plan for 2022-23, at appendix 1 be recommended to the Executive for approval.

52. FINANCIAL UPDATE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Lead Member for Environmental Services introduced the report which related to the portfolios of the Lead Members applicable to the Committee's Terms of Reference.

There was a projected overspend against the revenue budget of £406,000, which was due to the £659,000 cost associated with Temporary Accommodation. However, the overspend could be offset through underspends in relation to other Lead Member portfolios. Capital expenditure had been lower than expected, due in part to the progression of site acquisitions as part of the Affordable Homes Strategy. Further property acquisitions could be identified should there be changes in the housing market that allow for more realistic property valuations for the Council to consider.

A total of £1.3 million had been built into the 2022/23 budget to allow for inflation, which would continue to be monitored with action taken as required if a council-wide overspend was likely.

RESOLVED: That,

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 1 for 2022-23, 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 1 be noted; and

3. The Performance position as at Quarter 1 for 2022-23, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified, be noted.

53. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.14 p.m.