

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE SERVICES POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 13 MARCH 2024

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors Bartlett (Chairman), Cannon, Conyard, Cooke, Harper and S Thompson
Cabinet Members:	Councillors Perry, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services

95. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gooch, Hinder and Webb.

96. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

97. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

98. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

99. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

100. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

101. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

102. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 FEBRUARY 2024

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed.

103. 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.

104. DRAFT KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services introduced the report and stated that the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the Council were proposed to be updated to reflect the Office for Local Government's metrics, which facilitated comparisons of local authorities' performances. The current and additional KPIs for the Committee were outlined, and it was stated that an online dashboard of the Committee's KPIs would be created, with additional reports on these to be brought to the Committee in future.

In response to questions the Information and Analytics Manager stated that the amount of KPIs recommended was a baseline and that additional KPIs could be recommended. Previous feedback included that the number of KPIs had become excessive and mitigated their impact. The Council had provided feedback in a consultation to OFLOG on the KPIs recommended, and the results had not yet been published, but that the KPIs on complaints had been commissioned directly from OFLOG.

The Committee welcomed the report and stated that additional reports and a dashboard on KPIs to the Committee would be beneficial for oversight. Concerns were expressed that an additional KPI for Freedom of Information requests was required and that the KPIs related to complaints could be Ombudsman complaints could be differentiated between spurious and genuine complaints.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET: That

1. The draft Performance Indicators at Appendix A of the report be agreed;
2. The changes to reporting arrangements be noted; and,
3. An additional Key Performance Indicator relating to Freedom of Information Requests be added to the Corporate Services draft Performance Indicators.

Note: Councillor Tom Cannon arrived during the item's consideration at 6.41 p.m. and had no disclosures or disclosures of lobbying.

105. 3RD QUARTER FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND RISK MONITORING REPORT

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services introduced the report and stated that:

- The Council had projected an overspend by the end of the financial year of £239,000, which had been accounted for in the 2024/25 budget;
- There was an underspend to the services within the Committee's remit of £960k, which was largely due to interest income on cash balances, offset by negotiating low borrowing rates;
- The Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for collection of business rates collection had exceeded its target, but the KPI for council tax collection had marginally missed its target;

- It was proposed to update the contract procedure levels for procurement and increase the approval level at the higher level from £75,000 to £100,000; and
- Write-offs were proposed on three cases where it was considered unlikely that the Council would recover the monies.

During the discussion the Committee referenced Maidstone Property Holdings (MPH) overspend, the cost of Temporary Accommodation (TA), decarbonisation of the Council's property portfolio, and the procurement partnership between Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone Borough Council.

In response to questions the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement stated that:

- Work was underway to refurbish Granada House which was expected to be completed in the Summer. A shortfall in income in 2024/25 would arise, as tenants would not come back into occupation until after 1st April;
- The cost of TA was considered a risk and it was difficult to predict demand, but new properties were becoming available as part of the Council's portfolio, which was more cost effective than nightly paid accommodation;
- There had been a £3 million slippage in the Capital Programme on the 1,000 Affordable Homes Programme due to the amount of preparatory work required before construction could start;
- The decarbonisation project on Maidstone House and the Link would be carried out in the 2024/25 financial year after receiving grant funding; and,
- The changes to the contract levels for procurement would allow the procurement partnership to be more aligned between the two authorities, and that Maidstone council had received good value from the partnership.

RESOLVED: That

1. That the Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 3 for 2023/24, 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 3 for 2023/24 be noted;
3. That the Performance position as at Quarter 3 for 2023/24, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified, be noted;
4. That the UK Shared Prosperity Fund update, attached at Appendix 3 be noted;
5. That the Risk Update, attached at Appendix 4 be noted;

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET: That

6. The uncollectable Business Rates (NNDR) listed at Appendix 5 be approved for write-off; and,
7. The new contract approval levels shown at Appendix 6 to the report be approved. These changes will then need approval by Democracy and General Purposes Committee before final approval by Council.

106. MAIDSTONE PROPERTY HOLDINGS LIMITED

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services introduced the item and stated that to avoid a potential perception of a conflict of interest, it was proposed that the Director of Regeneration and Place, and the Head of Housing and Regulatory Services resign from Maidstone Property Holdings Limited. To replace them the Head of Finance and the Head of Property Licence would be appointed.

In response to concerns, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services stated that as Shareholder of the company it was their responsibility to ensure the Council's interests were protected and that this would avoid a potential conflict of interest.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET MEMBER: That the resignations of William Cornall and John Littlemore as directors of Maidstone Property Holdings limited be accepted and that Adrian Lovegrove and Katie Exon be appointed in their place.

107. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.31 p.m.