

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CORPORATE SERVICES POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 13 DECEMBER 2023

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors Bartlett (Chairman), Cannon, Conyard, Cooke, Mrs Gooch, Harper and S Thompson
Cabinet Members:	Councillor Burton, Leader of the Council on behalf of Councillor Perry, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services

56. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hinder.

57. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

58. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

59. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

60. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

61. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

62. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

63. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 OCTOBER 2023

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed.

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

Several Members expressed concerns that the previously required Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan (BDCCAP) Update was not due to be provided

until February 2024. In response, the Leader of the Council confirmed that two reports were provided on the BDCCAP annually, with the second being an opportunity for the plan to be updated. The Committee was to review upcoming matters as opposed to requesting additional reports.

In response to a question, the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement stated that a report on the Archbishops Palace would be included in the next Forward Plan refresh, for review in January 2024.

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

Note: Councillor Cannon joined the meeting at 6.43 p.m. and did not have any disclosures of lobbying or interest to declare.

65. 2ND QUARTER FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND RISK MONITORING REPORT

The Leader of the Council introduced the report on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, who was unable to attend the meeting at this time. It was stated that:

- The Council had projected an overspend by the end of the financial year, which was mainly due to the cost of temporary accommodation (TA);
- There was an underspend to the services within the Committee's remit, which was mainly due to slippage in the capital programme; projects that had not commenced yet; and
- The majority of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) had met their targets, with the corporate risk register update largely consistent with the previous update provided. It was recommended that the uncollectable Business Rate be written-off.

During the discussion, reference was made to Lockmeadow, Housing provision including the 1000 Affordable Homes Programme and TA.

In response to questions raised:

The Director of Finance, Resources and Business improvement stated that:

- The leases for three of the tenants at Lockmeadow had been due to expire in 2023, which the Council had been aware of and had built into the business case in purchasing the site. Steps were being taken to address the vacancies, including Serco's management of the Lockmeadow Health Club (previously David Lloyd) and the recently let Virtual Reality Unit. It was hoped the centre would be fully tenanted in 2024;
- There had been slippage in the Capital Programme regarding the Heather House Community Centre and Maidstone East Commercial Development Projects, but work continued; Contractors had been appointed to the former, with planning permission to be sought in the near future on the latter; and

- There was £3.216 million in the Council's Housing Investment Fund (HIF), with the Council having allocated an additional £3.5m into the HIF in February 2023. The Council could decide to add further monies to the HIF in February 2024 when considering the budget, if one-off funding was provided through the Local Government Finance Settlement.

The Leader of the Council stated that:

- The Council was exploring a scheme for Archbishop's Palace that would, at minimum, substantially contribute to the significant maintenance cost; the cost's fully recovery, and additional income generation was the preferred option;
- He recognised the concerns expressed relating to the provision housing and TA supply, but that the Council's interventions, including accelerated property purchases to increase the stock available, should be recognised;
- Work continued in delivering the 1000 Affordable Housing Programme, although this was more difficult than originally envisaged; this included selecting sites with regeneration prospects and submitting bids to Homes England to contribute to the subsidy required for the programme.

It was emphasised that the housing should be of good quality, with renewable energy to be used where possible, but that additional features could increase costs and reduce the money available for the project. In response to a concern on the properties environmental sustainability, the Leader stated that Carbon Accounting would allow the Council to review how the funds were spent.

- The Council had selected four bids of the estimated 12-15 bids received for the Rural Fund, arising from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Further confirmation would be given on the figures outside of the meeting.

In response to concerns on the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) concerning town centre footfall, the Information and Analytics Manager stated that many factors impacted the KPI on footfall in the town centre including seasonality, shopping trends and demand for office space and increased working from home, but that it was a national trend for footfall to be declining in town centres. The KPIs being drafted for 2024/25 would include seasonal trends, including the annual August closure of the Market Hall, Lockmeadow.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 2 for 2023/24, 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 2 for 2023/24, be noted;
3. The Performance position as at Quarter 2 for 2023/24, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified, be noted;
4. The Recovery & Renewal Update, attached at Appendix 3, be noted;

5. The UKS Shared Prosperity Fund update, attached at Appendix 4, be noted;
6. The Risk Update, attached at Appendix 5, be noted; and
7. The Cabinet be recommended to approve the write-off of uncollectable Business Rates (NNDR) listed at Appendix 6.

66. FEES AND CHARGES 2024/25

The Leader of the Council introduced the report, outlining the proposal to increase fees and charges by 5% overall, had been changed in all the Council's portfolios and were set on an inflation assumption of 5%.

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

- The Market's financial performance had stabilised which justified a small increase in charges, with the 9% increase;
- The increase in fees for charity event promotions at Jubilee Square was a result of rounding up the fee from £55 to £60;
- The proposed Crematorium fees had been set to reflect increased costs, with the fees for standard services set conservatively. The fees had been benchmarked with other Councils of a similar size, and
- The Fixed Penalty Notices for Waste Crime had increased but were not included in the report; the updated figures would be presented to the Cabinet ahead of its decision.

It was stated that the relevant Policy Advisory Committees had reviewed the Fees and Charges proposed, as relating to their remits. The number of licensed Houses of Multiple Occupation would be confirmed outside of the meeting.

The Leader of the Council emphasised the quality of service provided by the Council's Bereavement Team, with the fee changes proposed having been carefully considered.

RESOLVED: That

1. The report be noted;
2. The Fees and Charges Policy as detailed in Appendix B to the report, be noted;
3. The Fees and Charges for the other Policy Advisory Committees as detailed in Appendices C to E of the report; and
4. The Cabinet be recommended to approve the Fees and Charges for the Corporate Services Policy Advisory Committee as detailed in Appendix A to the report.

67. DURATION OF MEETING

6:30 p.m. to 7.42 p.m.