

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Economic and Commercial Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 25 MARCH 2014

Present: Councillor Barned (Chairman), and
Councillors Ash, Cox, Cuming, Naghi, Newton,
Paterson and Mrs Stockell

80. THE COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER WHETHER ALL ITEMS ON THE AGENDA SHOULD BE WEBCAST

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda should be webcast.

81. APOLOGIES

It was noted that apologies were received from Councillor Hogg.

82. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members present.

83. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS/WITNESSES

There were no Visiting Members.

Emily Hirons, General Manager, and Natalie Kirk, Events Manager, of Kent Life, were present to speak on item 8 of the agenda.

Natalie Price, General Manager of the Hazlitt Arts Centre, was present to speak on item 9 of the agenda.

Jennifer Hunt, Local Economy Project Officer, was present to speak on item 10 of the agenda.

84. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

85. TO CONSIDER WHETHER ANY ITEMS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

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

86. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 FEBRUARY 2014

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the meeting of 28th January 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to the following changes:

- That apologies be noted for Councillor Barned; and
- Laura Case's job title, on page 6 of the agenda, be changed to 'Cultural Services Manager' rather than 'Culture and Leisure Manager'.

87. EVENTS REVIEW- KENT LIFE

Emily Hirons, General Manager, and Natalie Kirk, Events Manager of Kent Life were invited to speak on item 8: Events Review- Kent Life.

Emily Hirons explained to the committee that Kent Life was an open air heritage museum. Kent Life had a target audience of families with young children and received 125,000 visitors last year. Kent Life ran 21 events at the museum throughout the year last year. Each event was themed seasonally and structured around the four themes of the museum:

- Fun and Family
- Vintage Village
- Gardens
- Farmyard and Nature

It was explained to the committee by Emily Hirons that structuring events around the seasons helped to bring visitors to the attraction throughout the year. Profits from events subsidised other activities on the site, for example keeping the Oast House lit. Events made up more than half of Kent Life's revenue, but accounted for less than half of its days open.

Emily Hirons informed the committee that the Safety Advisory Group- a body made up of representatives from Maidstone Borough Council as well as emergency services to advise events organisers around safety- had been very helpful.

In response to a question from the committee, Emily Hirons reported that Kent Life's Events budget was £38,000 and the marketing budget was £20,000. Most of this was spent with local businesses. The PR value of the events that Kent Life runs has been estimated at around £1.4 million.

Emily Hirons highlighted the value to the local area that their events brought. Emily Hirons made the following observations:

- On event days local transport and hotels were busy;
- Local catering businesses did well with their on-site stalls, some taking up to £4,000 a day;
- Other local stallholders had an opportunity to make money at these events;
- Cobtree Young Farmers were paid to assist with car parking;
- Reciprocal arrangements were in place with local businesses. For example a local brewery brewed their yearly hop harvest;
- Scout Troops and St John's Ambulance helped out on the day; and

- At peak season in the summer the number of staff employed at Kent Life increased from 20 to 50, providing a source of local employment.

Natalie Kirk observed that Maidstone Borough Council's commercial events had sometimes competed with Kent Life's. For example, Maidstone Borough Council held a Peppa Pig event on Mote Park in summer 2013. Kent Life had held a similar event during a similar period. Emily Hirons indicated that greater co-ordination between events organisers, to prevent competing events being held, would be helpful.

Emily Hirons considered who valued the events run by Kent Life and gave the following examples:

- Members of Kent Life valued the events as they gained free entry.
- Different audiences valued different events. For example, Senior citizens groups valued the 'Christmas on the Home Front' event. Around 10 coach loads of senior citizens attend, mainly from the East End of London.
- Volunteers valued the events. For example, Kent Life had a retired Hop Stringer who volunteered to string the hops in their hop garden.

The committee asked whether there were any links with Maidstone Museum. Emily Hirons responded that there were no links but this was definitely something that Kent Life would like to explore further.

In response to a question asked by the committee, Emily Hirons reported that Kent Life received 10,000 visits from schools. Emily Hirons also explained that Kent Life run tailor made events for school parties that are specialised and based around the curriculum.

A member enquired how engaged Maidstone Borough Council had been with Kent Life's events. Emily Hirons reported to the committee that since the governance structure and leaseholder arrangements had been simplified it had enabled Kent Life to be more engaged with the council. Emily Hirons also stated that since this re-organisation of arrangements, which had provided a more direct link with Maidstone Borough Council, it had become clearer who they needed to contact within the council for support.

The committee enquired whether Kent Life had experienced any problems around licensing. In response to this question Emily Hirons stated that Kent Life had all of the relevant licenses and had no criticism of the process of obtaining these licenses.

The committee was interested to know whether Kent Life was self-funding. Emily Hirons responded that Kent Life was indeed self-funding and relied financially entirely on admissions to the attraction.

Emily Hirons informed the committee that they currently did not have access to giftaid. However it was explained that Kent Life would like to explore this now that they were working closer with the council.

RESOLVED: That the evidence given by Emily Hirons and Natalie Kirk in relation to the review topic be noted.

88. EVENTS REVIEW- THE HAZLITT ARTS CENTRE

Natalie Price, General Manager of the Hazlitt Arts Centre was invited to speak on item 9: Events Review - The Hazlitt Arts Centre.

Natalie Price informed the committee that the management of the Hazlitt Arts Centre was taken over by Parkwood Leisure on the 1st October 2013. Once Parkwood Leisure started running the Hazlitt, Natalie Price established a Hazlitt User Group for organisations that used the Hazlitt Arts Centre. Not all Hazlitt users had chosen to get involved in this group, however.

Natalie Price explained to the committee that there were some initial problems with changes in procedures, for example around ticket sales. However, Natalie Price reassured the committee that she had sought one to one meetings with those users with concerns and subsequently taken steps to address the issues raised.

In response to a question from the committee, Natalie Price conveyed to the committee that there had been an increase in the amount of groups that used the Hazlitt. Examples included:

- A new youth theatre group;
- A yoga group;
- A choir;
- A writer's group;
- A dance group; and
- A craft group.

Natalie Price summarised events that the Hazlitt were organising over the following few months. These included:

- A collaboration with the Museum to show some of the collections in unusual places around the town. This would happen in collaboration with the youth theatre;
- An A-Z of Englishness event for St George's Day, which will be held in collaboration with the Town Team;
- Proms in the Park; and
- The youth theatre's summer festival.

A member of the committee asked Natalie Price whether there had been any changes around ticket sales or increases in charges for the use of the Hazlitt Arts Centre since Parkwood had taken over. Natalie Price responded by conveying to the committee that there had not been any increase in charges, however there had been some changes to the way

tickets were sold. The reason for this was that there needed to be greater transparency in the ticket selling process due to the new management contract. The contract stipulated that the council will get a profit share after a certain number of ticket sales; therefore it needed to be clear how many tickets had been sold. Additionally, the new ticket sales process would allow the Hazlitt to gather more marketing information in order to reach target markets better.

Natalie Price explained the new arrangements for selling tickets at the Hazlitt. The new arrangement was that the Hazlitt would sell all the tickets, with the Hazlitt keeping 10% commission, and would charge users £25 to print the tickets. However following consultation with users of the Hazlitt, the commission had been reduced to 5% and the tickets would be printed for free. The Hazlitt had also offered free publicity to users selling tickets through the Theatre.

After hearing Natalie Price's evidence, the committee were reassured that the new ticket selling arrangements were contributing to a more professional approach to running the Arts Centre. The committee were also reassured that this professional approach would not be to the detriment of the community of voluntary groups that use the Hazlitt Arts Centre.

The committee asked Natalie Price whether she had considered using the Amphitheatre or Brenchley Gardens for putting on events. In response to this question, Natalie Price informed the committee that she had met with Jason Taylor, Parks and Leisure Manager, to discuss similar opportunities.

A member of the committee asked whether there was any beginning of the year event organisers meeting for organisations that put on events in the borough.

Natalie Price responded that to her knowledge there wasn't such a meeting in existence. However if there was one then this would help with coordination of events and enable organisations to see where they could work together.

RESOLVED: That evidence given by Natalie Price in relation to the review topic be noted.

89. EVENTS REVIEW- MAIDSTONE TOWN TEAM

Jennifer Hunt, Local Economy Project Officer, was invited to speak on item 10: Events Review- Maidstone Town Team.

The committee considered a presentation from Jennifer Hunt about Maidstone Town Team; the key points of which are summarised below:

- Maidstone applied to be a 'Portas Pilot' town, but did not receive funding;
- The momentum from the bid was used to create the Maidstone Town Team;

- Maidstone Town Team had two key sponsors- Town Centre Management and Maidstone Borough Council;
- There were three subgroups within the town team that covered:
 - Marketing
 - Regeneration
 - Events
- The Town Team had access to the following funds:
 - A £10,000 grant from the Department for Communities and Local Government
 - An initial £30,000 from Maidstone Borough Council underspend
 - A additional £40,000 from the Maidstone Borough Council underspend
 - £40,000 of Section 106 money from the Next development at Junction 7 of the M20
- Most of this funding had already been allocated to projects via the various subgroups; and
- Maidstone Town Team were unincorporated at the time, which had led to difficulties in obtaining insurance and entering into contracts. However it had been decided that the Town Team would become a Community Interest Company (CIC) which would operate at arm's length from the council.

A member of the committee asked whether there was scope for other groups to join the Town Team CIC. In response to this, Jennifer Hunt stated that this was a possibility.

The committee enquired what the meaning of 'Regeneration' was in terms of the Town Team sub group. The committee questioned the value of spending money on regeneration when Maidstone town centre had performed strongly compared to other competing high streets. Jennifer Hunt explained that whilst Maidstone town centre had performed strongly; it was important to continuously improve the town centre in order to prevent stagnation and eventual decline. An example of a project undertaken by the Regeneration sub group was 'Light Up Maidstone'; a project to light up the Town Hall using floodlights.

A member of the committee wanted to find out how, when putting on events, Jubilee Square can be viewed as a 'containable area' by the Police and the SAG. Jennifer Hunt responded to the committee that for events held by the Town Team this was not an issue. This was because the numbers of people involved in events were relatively low and events were generally held between 1030 and 1730 when access roads to Jubilee Square are restricted. However it is more of a problem if the council is holding events, for example the Christmas lights switch on event, as roads have to be closed due to the numbers of people attending in the event.

A member of the committee asked whether there were any plans to organise activities throughout the town, for example at County Square. Jennifer Hunt conveyed that the Town Team were looking at other locations to hold events as they are trying to develop footfall to other areas of the town.

As this was the final piece of evidence to be received for the review, Clare Wood, Policy and Performance Officer, confirmed the draft recommendations that would be in the review. These were as follows:

- That the Committee supports the compiling of an Events Calendar by the Cabinet member for Economic & Commercial Development.
- That once in place the Events Tool-kit be used for all regular events that happen in the borough that receive funding from the Council.
- That, once in place, the tool-kit be publicised to event promoters and those who have held events in the borough in the past three years.
- That a debriefing should happen with the relevant Head of Service following each Council funded event to capture feedback and understand what lessons can be learnt.
- That the Events Manager works with Maidstone Area Arts Partnership to create a tool-kit for smaller events including a matrix to determine which tool-kit should be used for each event.
- That the event documents should be reviewed with the aim of creating an Events Pack for anyone wishing to hold an event which includes a checklist.
- That where MBC provide funding for an event, it should take on the role of Event Organiser (and the legalities set out above involved in this) and delegates the event management to a responsibly persons.
- That an Event forum is set up to facilitate better sharing on information between the relevant event organisations/partners.
- That consideration is given to resurrecting the database of leisure and cultural based organisations, including the possibility of sharing the maintenance and administration of this database with another agency.
- That the possibility of sending out an Events Pamphlet with the Annual Council Tax bill be investigated for 2015 and beyond.
- That the feasibility of extending sharing arrangements with items from Maidstone attractions and events used at different locations/events to promote and signpost to the attraction is investigated, for example having a piece from Kent Life displayed at the Hazlitt.
- That a mechanism for signposting people in the Town Centre to events happening elsewhere in the borough be introduced.
- That arrangements for hiring event equipment, when it is not in use, to partners and other event providers in the borough be investigated; and
- That the council should compile a list of all the event equipment it holds and publish this list accordingly, and encourage other event organisers/providers to do the same.

RESOLVED: That

- a) The evidence given by Jennifer Hunt in relation to the review topic be noted.
- b) The initial recommendations (listed above) be used to draft the final report for the events review.

90. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The committee considered the future work programme.

Sam Bailey updated the committee that the following items would be coming to the 22 April 2014 meeting:

- An update to the committee on the Enterprise Hub;
- Cabinet Member of Economic and Commercial Development's Review of the Year 2013/2014;
- Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee Review of the Year 2013/2014;
- Skills and Employability update; and
- Draft Events Review.

Sam Bailey confirmed with the committee that the date for the visit to the Museum was scheduled for the 8th April at 1300. The visit to the museum would be to view the collection ahead of the cabinet member decision on the museum's collections policy that (due to be taken on 30th May 2014).

RESOLVED: That the committee note the future work programme.

91. DURATION OF MEETING

18:30 to 21:12