

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 27 MARCH
2019**

Present: Councillors Mrs Blackmore, M Burton, Clark, Cox (Chairman), Field, Mrs Gooch, Harvey, McKay, McLoughlin, D Mortimer, Perry and Purle

182. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies were received from Councillors Boughton, Newton and Springett.

183. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor Purle was present as a substitute for Councillor Boughton.

184. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

185. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no visiting members.

186. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

187. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

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

RESOLVED: That item 16 – Property Acquisition be taken in private due to the possible disclosure of exempt information.

189. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 FEBRUARY 2019

RESOLVED: That the minutes be agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and signed.

190. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS (IF ANY)

There were no petitions.

191. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (IF ANY)

There were no questions from members of the public.

192. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

It was noted that the item relating to the Kent Medical Campus (KIMS) would not be coming to the next meeting, and that depending on the Committee Structure Review being approved at Council on 10 April 2019 the items relating to Economic Development could move to another committee.

The Committee were informed that the next stage for KIMS was an application going to Planning Committee, with a report coming back to service committee in the Autumn on the appointment of a contractor.

It was also noted that there is a Members' briefing on 3 April 2019 on the Committee Structure Review in the Town Hall.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme is noted.

193. REFERENCE FROM COUNCIL - MOTION - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

RESOLVED: That the consideration of the reference from Council – Motion – Economic Development Strategy, be moved to the second meeting of the relevant committee after the annual meeting.

194. KPI UPDATE QUARTER 3 2018/19

Mr Munden, Information and Corporate Policy Officer introduced the report by outlining the structure of the reporting and summarising KPI performance. 9/13 KPIs achieved target, two were within 10%, with the final two missing by more than 10%. Seven had improved with performance declining for six. The officer highlighted good news stories, including highways litter, and brought to the committee's attention that whilst affordable housing delivery had dropped in the quarter this was expected with more completions expected before the end of the year.

In response to questions from the Committee it was clarified that for indicators below more target by more than 10% this quarter (affordable housing delivery, and households housed through the housing register), the year to date position was still on track due to good Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 performance. For indicators where performance was expected to fluctuate in identified quarters it was possible to look at seasonal targeting that would take this into account.

The Committee sought clarification on how 106% of reported clearances could be completed, and after receiving the explanation, that it included clearances that had not been reported too, felt it might be beneficial to have the indicator split between those reported and those the Council found itself.

Mr Cornall, Director of Regeneration and Place, responded to the questions on the recycling rates. The Committee were informed that recycling had been discussed at Communities, Housing and Environment Committee, and though the Council was doing well, with the 2nd highest recycling rate in Kent, performance had plateaued and it might be necessary to review the target next year.

RESOLVED: That the summary of performance for Quarter 3 of 2018/19 for Key performance Indicators (KPIs) be noted.

Voting: Unanimous

Note: Cllr Mrs Blackmore arrived during consideration of the item.

195. 3RD QUARTER REVENUE & CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

Mr Mark Green, Director of Finance and Business Improvement, presented the item by first introducing Chris Hartgrove, Interim Head of Finance to the Committee. Mr Green corrected the tables on p31 of the report by highlighting that whilst the net result was the same in all the tables the totals in the individual tables were not consistent. The overall figures in the bottom two tables were the correct ones. Crucially they showed a balanced budget for the year.

The officer drew the Committee's attention to Development Control spending on staffing and informed the Committee that whilst it did not present a good picture in Quarter 3 this spend had been targeted at reducing the backlog of applications which had now been addressed. The positive position in housing from previously significantly overspending to now within budget had been achieved through the approach of investing in, and housing people in, our properties.

Mr Green highlighted that the Capital programme, which was significantly underspent in the report for Quarter 3, was due to make up significant ground in Quarter 4 due to capital expenditure on Lenworth House, Union Street and Brunswick Street. The Maidstone Property Holdings (MPH) element of the report was being presented to the Committee as part of the proper governance of the company.

The Committee praised the report, and requested an update on Planning Enforcement staffing and the usage of agency staffing in Planning. Mr Cornall responded that there was a framework of planning consultancies in place to provide temporary resource for dealing with applications ensuring value for money and recruitment and retention was a key area of focus for planning. An emailed response would be provided on Enforcement staffing.

In response to a question regarding the vacant youth apprenticeship posts Mr Green agreed to respond separately on the details of plans to fill the posts.

Comparisons were drawn between the operation and VAT requirements for MPH and Cobtree and whether VAT was an issue for MPH. Mr Green responded that they were fundamentally different entities and would provide detail outside of the meeting, but VAT was not a concern.

In response to questioning Mr Cornall provided an update on the Mote Park improvements and the adventure zone. The delivery of the adventure zone had been delayed until May due to difficulties with the groundworks, however other elements of the improvements would be opening sooner.

The Committee questioned why there were charges for refuse collection at the market and why there had been delays in the leisure centre profit share being paid to the Council. Mr Green responded that the market was treated as a commercial customer for the waste service but it was an internal charge. With regard to the leisure centre profits Mr Green informed the Committee that improved arrangements had been put in place for monitoring the arrangement such that the 2016 and 2017 payments had now come through and the 2018 payment could be expected more quickly. It was also stated that this issue was unrelated to the solar panels at the leisure centre.

RESOLVED:

1. That the third quarter budget monitoring report attached at Appendix 1 to the report be noted;
2. That the asset value of Christmas Lights (£36,000) as detailed in Appendix 1 to the report be written-off when they are transferred to the BID company; and
3. That the write-off of overpaid housing benefits as set out at Appendix 2 to the report be approved.

Voting: Unanimous

196. ICT STRATEGY 2019-2024

Mr Chris Woodward, Head of ICT Shared Service, introduced the strategy as a shared partnership strategy that had been written taking into account the strong message that it needed to be as simple as possible and digestible. The strategy had been broken down into six overarching themes to aid with this.

The success of the ICT shared service was shown by 75% of platforms being jointly procured with little or no impact on services. In order to

deliver the strategy consensus was required across the partnership and a joint timetable of work was set out in the document.

The Committee raised concerns about the website and beta testing, and requested whether members could be involved in that process. Suggestions for improvements in areas such as planning, linking agendas to public access, were also made. Mr Woodward agree to take these on board and recognised that, though the website fell outside of ICT, close working with partners was essential to deliver the strategy.

Concerns were also raised by the Committee regarding the impact of data loss and how this risk was managed and properly captured in the corporate risk register. In response to questioning Mr Woodward outlined the range of back-ups and protections put in place in order to protect the Council's network and data, and that Mid Kent ICT advanced compared to other authorities. However, the Committee felt that the impact of the corporate risk relating to loss of systems and data needed to be adequately covered and presented in the corporate risk register.

In response to further questions Mr Woodward highlighted the issues with datasets in silos and the need for good information management and crossworking. He also addressed concerns around Artificial Intelligence and protecting data, including meeting GDPR requirements.

The Committee noted that many of the proposed improvement activities, including automation, could free up staffing resource and were informed that would be a steady process with a view to looking at how that resource could best be redeployed, the aim was for automation and business intelligence to deliver better outcomes for the Council and residents.

Mr Woodward informed the Committee that the partnership had 297 Windows 2008 servers which were being upgraded and reviewed, but were serviceable until January 2020 and running on reliable hardware. The Committee were also informed that due to the fast paced nature of change in ICT that the strategy would be reviewed halfway through its life.

Mrs Broom, Chief Executive, highlighted that the action plan set out how the strategy would be delivered and was the element that provided flexibility and agility to the Council and the partnership, with the partnership element bringing advantages by providing a wider breadth of challenge to the strategy and approach. Mr Steve McGinnes, Director of Mid Kent Services added that Member updates and briefings would be provided as the Strategy, and action plan, progressed.

RESOLVED: That the 2019-2024 ICT Strategy be approved.

Voting: Unanimous

197. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded for the items set out in Part II of the Agenda because of the likely disclosure of exempt information for the reasons specified in the report for item 16 – Property Acquisition, having applied the public interest test.

198. PROPERTY ACQUISITION

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement relating to the acquisition of the long leasehold for a property.

RESOLVED:

1. That authority be delegated to the Director of Finance and Business Improvement to negotiate and agree terms for the property acquisition as detailed in the exempt report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement;
2. To borrow from the Public Works Loan Board to contribute towards the funding of the acquisition;
3. That authority be delegated to the Director Finance and Business Improvement to undertake a procurement process for the role of managing agent for the property and to procure and award such contracts for any services, including building and environmental surveys, covenant review and repairs and maintenance contracts as necessary;
4. That authority be delegated to the Head of Legal Services to complete the necessary legal formalities and all agreements and deeds arising from or ancillary to the acquisition of the property on the terms agreed by the Director of Finance and Business Improvement or to appoint solicitors to complete such legal formalities and documents if considered necessary; and
5. That authority be delegated to the Director of Finance and Business Improvement to grant such leases, accept surrenders and to enter into such property transactions in respect of any part of the property on terms to be agreed in order to maximise the economic benefits from the property and that the Head of Legal Services be authorised to complete the necessary legal formalities and all deeds agreements arising from or ancillary to such property transactions.

Voting: For – 10 Against – 1 Abstentions – 1

199. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30pm to 8.34pm