

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Communities, Housing and Environment Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 2019

Present: Councillors M Burton, Joy, Khadka, Kimmance, Powell, Purle, D Rose, M Rose and Young

Also Present: Councillor McKay

39. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

It was noted that apologies for absence were received from the Chairman, Councillor Mortimer.

In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman, Councillor Powell, took the chair.

40. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

It was noted that Councillor Powell was in the chair for the meeting as Vice-Chairman.

It was also noted that Councillor Kimmance was substituting for Councillor Mortimer.

41. **URGENT ITEMS**

The Chairman informed the Committee that he had agreed to take an urgent update to Item 11 – Committee Work Programme. The reason for urgency was that several changes had been made to the document after publication of the agenda. It was important that the Committee were aware of the changes to ensure that they were kept fully informed of when reports would be coming to the Committee.

42. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

It was noted that Councillor McKay was present as a Visiting Member, and indicated that he reserved his right to speak on Items 13 – Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024 and 14 – Affordable Housing Partnership Update.

43. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

44. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

45. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

46. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 JULY 2019

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 July 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed

47. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

48. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

49. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the updated Committee Work Programme and noted that:-

- **Weaving** – As the lawyer assigned to the case had departed from the Service, this casework had been reassigned to another lawyer. A report was to be forwarded to the Committee in December outlining potential next steps and implications.
- **Bio-Diversity** – The report was to be taken to the newly established Climate Change Working Group, prior to the Committee considering the item in October.

The Chairman urged Officers to adhere to the schedule outlined in the Committee Work Programme to ensure that Members were able to effectively plan for the consideration of future items.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

50. 1ST QUARTER PERFORMANCE AND BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

The Committee considered a report which set out the financial position for the Committee at the end of Quarter 1 2019/20 against the revenue and capital budgets. It also set out the progress of Key Performance Indicators that related to the delivery of the Strategic Plan 2019-2045.

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement stated that the revenue budget was underspent by £0.234m. This was expected to reduce to £0.115m by the end of the financial year. A capital expenditure of £0.583m had been incurred in Quarter 1 for the projects within the Committee's remit. Slippage of £4.270m was projected across a range of projects which would be carried forward into 2020/21.

Additionally, the Information and Corporate Policy Officer informed the Committee that 82% of the key performance indicator (KPI) targets were achieved in Quarter 1. 58% had improved in comparison to Quarter 1 last year and 64% of KPIs showed an improvement in performance compared to Quarter 4.

In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Environment and Public Realm advised that the criterion used to determine acceptable levels of litter and detritus was based on gradings set by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

RESOLVED: That

1. The revenue position at the end of Quarter 1 and 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.
3. The Summary of Performance for Quarter 1 for Key Performance Indicators is noted.

51. HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPER STRATEGY 2019 - 2024

The Housing and Inclusion Manager introduced a report which set out the final Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024. This followed a public consultation that took place in the summer of 2019.

It was noted that the majority of the 500 respondents agreed with the four key themes/priorities. These were:-

1. Prevent homelessness
2. Provide accommodation
3. Supporting vulnerable people
4. Tackling rough sleeping

In response to questions from the Committee, Officers said that:-

- It was likely that central government would continue to fund the Council's rough sleeper programme. However, the Council did have some reserves that could still be utilised if required.
- A Members' Briefing would be held on 7th October 2019 which would provide Members with further information about Housing Allocations

Scheme and how these impacted on homelessness.

- Informal discussions with housing providers had been undertaken but a formal consultation was to commence in the new year.
- Funding had been withdrawn for Trinity Foyer and Lily Smith House as KCC had recommissioned their service delivery.
- Although the Council was reducing the amount of face to face contact at the Link, it would still support those who did not have access to digital devices.
- The waiting times for 3 and 4 bedroomed properties was dependant on what properties were coming through from housing association partners. However, the Council was working with private rented landlords to offer incentives and had made some headway in promoting access for clients.
- The housing triage team provide support in many ways. This included face to face assistance at the Link, as well as house visits and a dedicated outreach team tasked with assisting those in the rural areas.
- The last survey to identify street homeless was undertaken in July and revealed that 6 people were sleeping rough. The next survey would be undertaken this month.
- The Public Space Protection Order in place in the Town Centre did not ban alcohol, but it did cover incidents where persons were drinking alcohol and causing a disturbance.
- The proposed Staying Put Incentive encouraged persons to stay in their current accommodation rather than needing temporary accommodation by providing greater opportunity to resolve their housing issues through the Housing Register.
- A glossary of terms would be added to the Strategy.
- A section was to be added to the Strategy, as stated in 3.5 of the action plan of the report, to ensure that the Council works with partners to bring forward improved health services.

In response to a Councillor's account of her recent experience at the Link, the Head of Housing and Community undertook to look into the matter with the relevant Heads of Service.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy 2019-2024, attached as Appendix 1 to the report, be approved subject to the following amendments as identified by the Committee:-

- a) A glossary of terms be included.
 - b) That 3.5 of the action plan be included in the Strategy to ensure that the Council works with partners to bring forward improved health services.
- 2) The Housing Team be thanked for all their hard work in delivering the homelessness programme.

52. AFFORDABLE HOUSING PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

The Director of Regeneration and Place presented his report which would finalise the strategy to enable the Council to recommence the delivery of affordable housing within the Borough.

The Committee noted that following approval from Members of this Committee and Policy and Resources Committee in November 2018 and 13 February 2019 respectively, Officers had commenced a soft market testing exercise where registered providers were approached to gauge their appetite for such a venture. The results of which affirmed that although the registered providers were keen to work with the Council, they were content to continue receiving Section 106 contributions rather than borrowing from the Council.

In response to questions from Members, the Director of Environment and Place advised that:-

- In order for the Council to manage its own affordable housing stock, a considerable investment was required.
- Lending money to a smaller registered housing provider was considered to be a greater risk.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The creation of a Housing Delivery Partnership be delayed, pending further information relating to a garden community proposal.
- 2) Officers seek direction from the Secretary of State to acquire up to 200 no. social rented homes on smaller developments (at a value of not more than £30m over the 5 year MTFS period).
- 3) The services of a Registered Provider (RP), as a managing agent, be explored together with an in-house housing provider to acquire up to 200 no. social rented homes.
- 4) The required financial hurdles for a positive investment decision be 5% Internal Rate of Return and a positive Net Present Value, as per the Council's current investment criteria for private rented sector housing (for Maidstone Property Holdings).

53. NOMINATIONS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

The Committee considered the report of the Principal Democratic Services Officer in regard to nominations to outside bodies.

Members were advised that there was an amendment to paragraph 2.4 which should read – “Action for Rural Communities – 1 vacancy (2 positions)”.

It was noted that Members received an email recently which advertised all vacancies for outside bodies within the responsibility of this Committee. Only one nomination was received. This was from Councillor Harper for the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Members made the following comments:-

- That outside body organisations where vacancies still existed should be invited to attend a future meeting to give a presentation to the Committee on the work of their organisation.
- That where a vacancy still existed within a month of a presentation, the Committee would make a recommendation to Council that the vacancy is advertised to the wider community.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The appointment of Councillor Harper to the position on the Citizens Advice Bureau be approved.
- 2) The Chairman invites organisations where vacancies exist to give a presentation to a future meeting.
- 3) Where a vacancy still existed after one month following the organisation’s presentation to Committee that a recommendation be made to Council to advertise the vacancy out to the wider community.

54. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.15 p.m.