

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 16 JUNE 2020**

**Present:** Councillors Mrs Blackmore, Cox, Fort, Mrs Gooch, Harper (Chairman), Hinder, Lewins and Webb

101. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

102. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

103. URGENT ITEMS

The Committee agreed to take an urgent item to provide an update concerning the re-opening of Maidstone Town Centre and the High Street on 15 June 2020. The update would be provided by John Foster, the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development.

Whilst not an urgent item, the Chairman informed the Committee of a correction to the title of Item 16 which should state Key Performance Indicators 2020-21.

104. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

105. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

106. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

107. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

108. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 JANUARY 2020

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed at a later date.

109. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

110. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

111. THE RE-OPENING OF MAIDSTONE TOWN CENTRE AND THE HIGH STREET - URGENT ITEM

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development provided an urgent update on the re-opening of the Town Centre and High Street. It was noted that retailers were responsible for ensuring safe working practices for staff members and the implementation of social distancing measures within their stores. The Council had been provided with £153k in funding to assist with the measures that have been put in place, some of which was given by the European Regional Development Fund.

Multiple organisations had been involved in the re-opening of the area, including Kent Police, Kent County Council, One Maidstone, The Mall and Fremlin Walk. Three key areas of action were summarised as; providing communications to the general public, shops and visitors, a communications package for retailers to inform them of the actions that would need to be taken by themselves and with the Council and its partners and the implementation of temporary changes to the High Street to allow social distancing measures to be enforced. This included signage to explain social distancing measures, the relocation of some street furniture so as to avoid obstructions and daily cleaning of some of this furniture.

It was noted that limited toilet facilities had been reopened. One Maidstone had provided Street Pastors and additional Street Ambassadors to aid the re-opening process. The Council had offered services which included marking up social distancing measures outside retail stores when requested.

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development confirmed that there had been very few policing issues with twice daily Silver Command meetings taking place.

The Committee wished to thank the Officers involved for their hard work.

112. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development noted that there had been progress with the innovation centre and the MedTech business support programme that was being put in place. A presentation could be made to the July Meeting of the Committee to update members on the work undertaken.

In response to an agenda item request the Head of Economic Regeneration and Leisure explained that the Action Plan for 2015-2020, as part of the Economic Development Strategy Review (EDSR), was due to be reviewed prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Lichfields had been commissioned to undertake this work, however due to the economic uncertainty now presented, the brief for the Economic Development Strategy had been changed. The first stage of work would now be to assess the impact of Covid-19 whilst working with the Kent and Medway Economic Regeneration Plan, national ONS data and other data sets to present to the Maidstone Economic Business Partnership at the end of June 2020. An initial document would then be drafted for mid-July 2020 with the next meeting of the Committee after this being September 2020.

The Committee was informed that Lichfields had also provided the Economic Development needs analysis for use in the Local Plan. As such, the consultancy provided to both the Economic Development teams and the Local Plan teams should not present a conflict.

In response to concerns raised by the Committee about the EDSR the Head of Regeneration and Leisure would organise a member consultation with Lichfields, in order that the Committee be involved in the creation of the draft document. All Councillors would be invited to attend.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

113. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

114. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

A report was presented by Councillor Cuming as the Council's representative to the Maidstone Sea Cadets.

**RESOLVED:** That the Reports of Outside Bodies be noted.

115. KENT ARTS & WELLBEING

The Culture and Arts Officer introduced the report which reviewed the proposals outlined in the presentation made by Mr Ken Scott in November 2019. The Arts & Wellbeing company wished to organise activities, including a choir for the homeless and those with chaotic lifestyles, as based on The Choir with No Name. The activities proposed should increase the confidence, skills and relationships, amongst other things, of the participants.

Kent Arts & Wellbeing had requested the Council's support in their funding application and assistance in identifying potential participants for the Choir and areas of the borough in which to hold further creative activities.

In response to questions the Culture and Arts Officer confirmed that given current circumstances, the Council would not be expected to provide any assistance for at least 12-24 months, on the assumption that the funding bid was successful. The Community Support team had been consulted and felt confident that they would be able to identify possible participants and areas for attention in the creative activities that the programme wished to devise, in the long term.

The Committee expressed their support for the activities proposed by Kent Arts & Wellbeing; with particular reference to the possible effects of Covid-19.

**RESOLVED**: That the Council supports Kent Arts & Wellbeing in their funding application and subsequent project delivery.

#### 116. FOURTH QUARTER BUDGET & PERFORMANCE MONITORING

The Head of Finance introduced the report which included the provisional outturn figures for the 2019-20 financial year. The figures presented had not yet been audited and only contained information available up until the 31 March 2020, so the impact of Covid-19 would not be seen.

Performance against the budget was shown in Appendix 1, with particular attention drawn to a net overspend against the revenue budget of £370k and a correction to the figures shown in the first table of Appendix 1 to confirm that the spend of the Committee was £1.89m against the £1.52m budget.

The overspend was caused by issues with the construction and shortfall in income of, the Mote Park Adventure Zone and associated costs of the sewer collapse. Smaller variances were detailed in Table 2 of Appendix 1.

In relation to the Capital Programme, it was noted that the works for Mote Park Dam had started with the proposed visitor centre and estate building having been temporarily put on hold. An overall slippage figure of £124k would be carried into this financial year.

The Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer confirmed that of the seven Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) two had achieved the target, one was within 10% and four had missed the target. It was noted that the impacts of Covid-19 were felt early for those four targets as events had been cancelled which affected the number of visitors across Maidstone. Of the seven annual targets three had achieved their target with the remaining four achieving within 10%.

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development explained that the original budget for waste disposal had not been sufficient to cover the cost of the commercial waste services as provided by the Council, for projects under the remit of this Committee. It was confirmed that the service fee was competitive.

In response to questions the Head of Finance confirmed that options to recover the cost of the sewer collapse had been assessed, however due to the risk of counter claim the Council were not pursuing the £403k costs incurred. It was noted that some costs, including the loss of income from the café and parking, had been recovered.

The Head of Finance informed the Committee that those costs were being held against this Committee in the interest of transparency. Further clarification was given in that although the cost had arisen out of a capital project the cost could not be included under capital as it would not create a capital asset so was classed as a revenue cost.

Several members of the Committee felt that there had not been adequate information given regarding the situation surrounding this cost. As such, the Head of Finance would distribute a briefing note amongst the Committee Members to provide further explanation. It was noted that the figures presented would also be presented to the Policy and Resources Committee for further inspection, should any Members wish to raise the issue further.

**RESOLVED:** That

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 4 for 2019/20, 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 4 be noted; and
3. The Performance position as at Quarter 4 for 2019/20, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified, be noted.

#### 117. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS 2019-20

The Equalities and Corporate Policy officer introduced the report which included the draft KPIs for 2020-21 as shown in Appendix 1.

A motion was moved to request an additional KPI concerning Job Seeker Allowance Claimant figures to be reported to this Committee for information purposes only. The aim of this was to provide an indicator on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the local economy. It was noted that unemployment in Maidstone had risen to 5.7% due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

In response to questions, the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development confirmed that the draft KPIs would provide information that could be used to assess the recovery of both the local and national economy, as the figures would be viewed in comparison with the figures presented by other areas of the country. Specific reference was made to the percentage of vacant retail units and the footfall in the town centre.

**RESOLVED**: That

1. The draft Key Performance Indicators for 2020-21, as attached in Appendix 1, be agreed; and
2. The number of Job Seekers Allowance Claimants be added as a quarterly Key Performance Indicator for information purposes.

118. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.54 p.m.