

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 14 JULY 2020

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

Also Present: Councillor Adkinson

119. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Fort.

120. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor Young was present as a Substitute for Councillor Fort.

121. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

122. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor Adkinson was present as a Visiting Member for Item 14 – Bus Station Improvement Project.

123. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

124. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillor Cox had been lobbied on Item 15 – Update on Covid-19 Business Grants.

125. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

126. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 JUNE 2020

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed at a later date.

127. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

128. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

129. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

130. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

It was noted that the Member Consultation as shown on the Committee Work Programme, related to the Member Briefing concerning the Economic Development Strategy Review, as agreed at the previous meeting of the Committee.

The finance reports to be delivered to the Committee later in the year would be added to the work programme.

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development confirmed that the feedback arising from the public consultation process in relation to the bus station improvement project would be brought to the Committee in October 2020.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

131. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

132. BUS STATION IMPROVEMENT PROJECT

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development introduced the report and highlighted that the Council had been working with Stakeholders which included Kent County Council, Arriva and Capital and Regional throughout the design process.

It was noted that an eight-week public consultation process would take place, with the provision of display boards and a comment box within the Mall for one week. The public consultation was due to start on the 22 July 2020, however in order that advertising could be maximised, this would likely start in early August 2020. The use of additional poster sites would be considered. The Over 50's forum and numerous Disability groups would be consulted.

It was confirmed that an online survey, that would be compatible with screen assisted technology, would be available on the Council's website as part of the consultation process. An officer would be able to provide assistance over the phone to residents unable to complete the survey online. The project would be promoted by the Council's Communication Team through multiple channels.

Mr Felix Lewis gave a presentation to the Committee on the designs for the bus station improvement project, as a representative of CF Architects. During the presentation, particular attention was given to the use of colour and lighting to improve the overall attractiveness of the bus station, the cleaning and improvement of surfaces and concourses and that cosmetic improvements rather than structural changes would be pursued. A public art piece would be commissioned for placement near the north entrance of the bus station.

An animation of the bus station with the proposed works included within the report and presentation was then shown to the Committee. This would be distributed to Members.

Questions were raised about using a one-way system within the bus station. The Head of Regeneration confirmed that a one-way system was ruled out earlier in the project process as it was not feasible in this space and without significant wider work on the road network beyond the scope of the project.

In response to questions, Mr Lewis confirmed that the timber would be replaced in order that a softer appearance be achieved. It was confirmed that an insect hotel could be included in the designs and that actions would be taken to allow the placement of digital boards to display live bus times retrospectively. It was noted that numbers would be placed on the portals to highlight each bus stop and that bins and disabled seating would be included within the final designs.

Several members expressed a wish to have planters within the bus station, however it was confirmed that there would not be enough natural light to sustain their growth.

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development informed the Committee that there was a contingency of £70,000 within the budget.

RESOLVED: That the draft designs be approved for public consultation.

133. UPDATE ON COVID BUSINESS GRANTS

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development introduced the report which included a list of the initiatives undertaken by Central Government in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In the implementation of those initiatives, the Council had commissioned Kent and Medway Growth Hub to provide advice and guidance to businesses in accessing the initiatives. This was done in conjunction with other Local Authorities and Kent County Council.

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development explained the basis of the Business Rates Relief Scheme, the Small Business Grant Fund and Retail Hospitality and Leisure Fund and the Discretionary Grant Scheme. The conditions for both grant schemes included that a business had to have been trading on 11 March 2020, had been solvent and had made the relevant state aid declarations.

In relation to the Small Business Grant Fund and Retail, Hospitality and Leisure Fund, it was confirmed that over 2100 grants had been paid to local businesses, which totalled 98% of the original and additional funding allocated to the Council by Central Government. The Council was originally allocated £27.5 million in funding with a further sum of over £800,000 provided due to the level of approved applications received.

In relation to the Discretionary Grant Scheme, over 300 applications had been received with 247 grants having been provided by the Council. A total of £1.4 million in funding was provided, with 82% having been paid out to applicants.

It was noted that any businesses which applied to one of the schemes, that would have better suited the criteria of a different scheme, were directed as such. Of the applications received, there had been 14 appeals which were being overseen by the Director of Finance and Business Improvement.

A request was made that a written update be provided to the Committee at an appropriate opportunity, with regard to the economic recovery of the Borough.

RESOLVED: That the content of the report be noted, and the Committee express their thanks to the officers involved in the provision of business grants.

134. UPDATE ON THE MEDTECH INNOVATION PROGRAMME

The Compliance and Projects Manager introduced the report and gave a short presentation to the Committee regarding the MedTech Innovation Programme which had been funded in part by the European Regional Development Fund.

The Compliance and Projects Manager noted that the programme was expected to support 270 jobs and contribute £120 million in growth value to the economy within the next decade. It was noted that £390,000 of the funding had been designated to the MedTech Innovation Business Support Programme that aimed to increase the competitiveness of small and medium sized businesses over the South East Local Enterprise Partnership Area. The programme's objective would be to support 185 businesses within the next three years, create 159 new jobs and introduce 133 products to the market.

It was noted that NCL Technology Ventures, a company that has invested in technology start-ups, had been selected to deliver the MedTech Innovation Programme. During the Covid-19 pandemic, NCL had experienced continued high demand and it was felt that the Health Sector would be a growing industry.

It was confirmed that the workshops proposed would now take place via webinar in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. A ranking system would be

introduced, dependent on the stage of development achieved by the small and medium sized enterprises. The 'Atom' stage would involve a higher number of workshop-based support; the 'Electron' stage would be divided equally between workshops and one-to-one support; the 'Nucleus' stage would have the most bespoke one-to-one sessions. Once each company had completed the 12-hour programme they would be able to perform a pitch to NCL on numerous topics that included sales, market analysis and financial planning.

The Compliance and Projects Manager confirmed that the Innovation Centre was due to open in early July 2021.

RESOLVED: That the content of the report be noted.

135. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8 p.m.