

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 2 FEBRUARY 2021

Present: Councillors Garten, Joy, Khadka, Mortimer (Chair), Powell, Mrs Robertson, D Rose, M Rose and Young

Also Present: Councillor Parfitt-Reid

125. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor M Burton.

126. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Garten was present as a Substitute Member for Councillor Burton.

127. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

128. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor Parfitt-Reid was present as a Visiting Member for Item 19 – Maidstone In Bloom Boroughwide Competition 2021.

129. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

130. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

131. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

132. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 JANUARY 2021

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 5 January 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed at a later date.

133. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

134. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Ms Maureen Cleator asked the following question of the Chairman:

'In the last year there has been an increase in anti-social behaviour including violent attacks which have been centred in and around Star House Pudding Lane.

Local residents and businesses have reported increased drug and alcohol use which have resulted in and not limited to:

- *people under the influence of suspected substance abuse, gathering outside our salon promoting a very uncomfortable atmosphere.*
- *One chap who was walking with his head down by his waist decided to rest his head on our salon window and subsequently fell asleep with his head on the window for around 15 minutes. He then snapped out of it and ran down the road to Star House. 2 days later he did almost exactly the same but wasn't quite so lucky and fell into our shop doorway. I had to pick him up and get him outside.*
- *A man under the influence who entered Farg Barbers and proceeded to attack a dummy in front of clients and staff who has to man handle him out of the shop.*
- *Residents observing numerous incidents requiring the attendance of emergency services.*
- *Local residents and businesses being subject to verbal abuse.*
- *Rubbish being thrown out of Star House windows which landed in Royal Star Arcade car park.*

To help improve the area we would like to know what agencies (including London boroughs) and actions are Maidstone BC working with to reduce anti-social behaviour (including county lines gang activity) that are operating in Maidstone Town Centre which we believe are a contributing factor to what residents and businesses are experiencing which is having a negative impact on health and well-being of residents and businesses?'

The Chairman responded to the question.

Ms Cleator asked the following supplementary question:

'Would you be willing to meet virtually with local residents to come up with a solution?'

The Chairman responded to the question.

The full responses were recorded on the webcast and made available to view on the Maidstone Borough Council website.

To access the webcast recording, please use the link below:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2_2Olay-7s

135. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were two questions from Members to the Chairman.

Question from Councillor Adkinson to the Chairman of the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee:

'On the 10 September 2018 a questionnaire was sent out to all members of the council asking for an indication of any local sites that would potentially meet the criteria for creation of a Local Nature Reserve. A report was presented to the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee for its meeting 6 weeks later on 30 October 2018.

Eventually, more than a year after this, a report came to Communities, Housing and Environment Committee on 16 December 2019 recommending that CHE recommends to Policy and Resources Committee that funding and resources be considered to bring the agreed programme for LNRs forward.

Everything went very quiet after that. In fact, LNRs vanished from the CHE committee work programme completely. It wasn't until Cllr M Rose asked a question at CHE at its meeting on 5 January 2021 that the issue was resurrected, with the minutes for that meeting noting "It was noted that the Local Nature Reserves Report would be presented to the Policy and Resources Committee, before being presented to the Committee (i.e. CHE), due to the additional funding necessary for the sites."

Can the Chairman please let members know which meetings of P&R and then CHE will be receiving the report?'

The Chairman responded to the question.

Councillor Adkinson asked the following supplementary question:

'In view of the fact that the Fant wildlife area is oven ready for receiving this status and the funding required is therefore minimal and could possibly be funded from Section 106 monies, can the chairman please confirm that the Fant wildlife area will be given the go ahead and when this will happen?'

The Chairman responded to the question.

Question from Councillor M Rose to the Chairman of the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee:

'As MBC have excess of 200 rental properties can I ask if MBC propose an 'In House' housing management strategy rather than using MBC money on an outside property management company?'

The Chairman responded to the question.

The full responses were recorded on the webcast and made available to view on the Maidstone Borough Council website.

To access the webcast recording, please use the link below:

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136. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

137. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

RESOLVED: That Councillor English be nominated as the Council's representative to the Cutbush and Corral Charity.

138. REFERENCE FROM LICENSING COMMITTEE - DRAFT BUSKING GUIDELINES

The Head of Housing and Community Services introduced the reference that had been considered by both the Licensing Committee and the Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee. The Council had been approached by local businesses following difficulties with local buskers, and the draft guidelines attached at Appendix 2 to the report were developed as a result. The Business Improvement District (BID) had been involved in the guidelines creation, with the comments received from the public consultation considered and applied to the guidelines.

RESOLVED: That the proposed Draft Maidstone Busking Guidelines as set out in Appendix 2 to the report be approved.

139. 3RD QUARTER FINANCIAL UPDATE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT 2020/21

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement introduced the 3rd quarter financial update, stating that whilst Covid-19 had contributed to a significant loss of income experienced by the Council, the Committee was projecting a favourable variance of £471,000.

It was highlighted that amendments had been proposed to crematorium charges following the decision that there should not have been increases to interment fees for residents of the Borough.

The Senior Business Analyst introduced the performance monitoring report, explaining that 8 of the 15 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) had missed their target mainly due to Covid-19. The KPI for Percentage of unauthorised encampments on Council owned land removed within 5 working days missed its target due to the Community Protection Team being unable to remove the encampment due to Covid-19 restrictions, but

the site had been monitored for anti-social behaviour. Since the data was produced, the unauthorised encampment had moved from Council land.

Several reported cases of Covid-19 within the Depot Team affected the two KPIs related to fly-tipping. It was also highlighted that the Waste Team had experienced delays in receiving data, and so the report had captured data up until October 2020. However, the data which informed percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting for November 2020 had been received and was 50.49%. It was stated that updated outcomes would be circulated when data for December 2020 was available.

It was highlighted that the KPIs relating to gas safety certificates and electrical safety certificates were missed due to contractors being refused entry to homes due to Covid-19 concerns. This had since been rectified. Although the KPI for the percentage of successful Relief Duty outcomes was missed, it was highlighted that the outcome was better than the national average.

In response to questions, the Waste Manager confirmed that results of the communications campaign regarding recyclable waste had not yet been evaluated.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 3 for 2020/21, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances had been identified, be noted;
2. The Capital position at the end of Quarter 3 for 2020/21 be noted;
3. The Performance position as at Quarter 3 for 2020/21, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues had been identified, be noted; and
4. The revision to the agreed fees for interment, detailed in paragraphs 1.5-1.7 of the report, be noted.

140. MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL TENANCY STRATEGY 2021 - 2026

The Head of Housing and Community Services introduced the report, explaining that it was a legal requirement for all housing authorities to publish a tenancy strategy. As Maidstone Borough Council had its own portfolio of temporary accommodation as well as the ambition to deliver its own housing stock, it was felt that the Tenancy Strategy required an update.

In response to questions, the Head of Housing and Community Services explained that the Tenancy Strategy was intended as a high-level document, and not to capture all obligations of landlords and tenants. It would be used by external partners and so would not capture individual

policies. Assurance was given that the Pet Policy previously agreed would remain in place.

RESOLVED: That

1. The draft Tenancy Strategy 2020-2026, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved for consultation with local Registered Providers of Social Housing; and
2. A further report be brought back to Committee by the Head of Housing and Community Services, with comments by Registered Providers of Social Housing, to enable the Tenancy Strategy 2021-2026 to be adopted.

141. ASSISTING INELIGIBLE ROUGH SLEEPERS

The Head of Housing and Community Services introduced the report and explained that current housing legislation sets out certain persons not eligible for assistance, which largely relates to immigration status. While Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) were prevented from providing housing support to ineligible EEA nationals, there had been encouragement to ensure accommodation for those who are street homeless during the Covid-19 pandemic. The Rough Sleeper Initiative and Homelessness Flexible grants could not be applied to ineligible persons, however a new grant for the containment of Covid-19 could be used to fund housing assistance.

In response to questions, it was clarified that there was no central policy that could be adopted, and that Maidstone Borough Council would be one of the first LHAs locally to create a document specifically relating to EEA nationals in this period.

Specialist advisors from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had been consulted regarding the assistance to ineligible rough sleepers as proposed.

RESOLVED: That option 2 set out in the report be adopted.

142. STRATEGIC PLAN – PROPOSED AREAS FOR FOCUS 2021-2026 AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR COVID-19 RECOVERY

The Policy and Information Manager introduced the report which set out the refreshed areas of focus for the Strategic Plan. The need for resources to be in place was highlighted in order for the Council to respond to the local impact of the pandemic which was reflected in the changes made to the areas of focus for 2021-2026.

The proposed areas of focus relating to the Committee had been drafted in accordance with Member feedback received in the Summer of 2020.

The KPIs had also undergone changes to enable progress towards recovery to be monitored, with amendments made to two KPIs in

response to feedback from the Head of Housing and Community Services; firstly that Reports of Domestic Abuse be amended to Number of Cases where Cause of Homelessness is Domestic Abuse, as the data could then be collected internally rather than relying on partners to submit data. The second proposed amendment was to the frequency of reporting on the Community data set changing from monthly to quarterly, which would match the data return provided to Government.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Committee's feedback and recommendations on the proposed refreshed areas of focus for the Council's Strategic Plan for the period 2021-2026, set out in Appendix C to the report, be provided to the Policy and Resources Committee; and
2. The Committee's feedback and recommendations on the proposed Key Performance Indicators for Covid-19 Recovery set out in Appendix D to the report be provided to the Policy and Resources Committee.

143. MAIDSTONE IN BLOOM BOROUGHWIDE COMPETITION 2021

The Parks and Open Spaces Manager introduced the report, explaining that Maidstone Borough Council had been approached by a local business about the Britain In Bloom competition, organised by the Royal Horticultural Society. Maidstone in Bloom presented an opportunity for the Council to encourage people to engage in horticultural, environmental and community-positive projects, and would be coordinated by the local business and a local resident.

The Committee felt that Maidstone in Bloom would be a positive community project.

RESOLVED: That

1. An In-Bloom competition be provided for businesses and residents to showcase their talents in floral displays and environmental projects;
2. The opportunity to promote and communicate a positive image for the borough be utilised; and
3. The Council collaborate with a local business as competition co-ordinator and administrator.

144. DURATION OF MEETING

6.40 p.m. to 8.07 p.m.

Note: Due to technical difficulties the meeting commenced at 6.40 p.m.