

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 16 MARCH 2021

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

238. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

239. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

240. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

241. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

242. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

243. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillor Round had been lobbied on Item 16 – Making Maidstone More Active Update.

244. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

245. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 FEBRUARY 2021

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 February 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed at a later date.

246. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

247. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

248. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN (IF ANY)

Councillor Brice asked the following question of the Chairman:

'What prioritisation can you give to a Southern Sports Hub in Staplehurst, to ensure that there are a range of sporting facilities in the South of the Borough, as well as close to the town centre?'

The Chairman responded to the question.

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

To access the recording, please use the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNOaaal-XWQ>

249. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development updated the Committee that the Economic Development Strategy would be delayed to allow for public consultation to take place outside of the restricted publicity period.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

250. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

251. GUIDE TO EVENT MANAGEMENT DURING COVID-19

The Visitor Economy and Events Development Manager introduced the report which refers predominantly to events held on Council land, with reference to other events. The capacity for events at Mote Park from June 2021 had been reached, although some events may be cancelled.

When applying to run an event, organisers would need to provide a risk assessment specifically regarding COVID-19, additional to the Health and Safety and Fire Safety risk assessments usually provided. Smaller events that had not previously needed to seek approval from the Safety Advisory Group (SAG) would be required to do so, and the Visitor Economy and Events Development Manager confirmed that the team would assist event organisers with this process where possible.

New legislation would be acted upon as it was published, and the MBC guide to event management would be updated as appropriate.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the report be noted.

252. UPDATE ON THE MEDTECH INNOVATION PROGRAMME

The Compliance and Projects Manager introduced the report and noted that the report provided an update on the Innovation Centre rather than solely the MedTech Innovation Programme.

£7.6 million of the total budget had been spent, with £2.6 million having been reimbursed through European Regional Development Fund grants, and a small overspend was noted. A delay in construction was anticipated due to the site closing in January following an outbreak of COVID-19.

The perspective occupants for the Innovation Centre had not been negatively impacted by the pandemic, being predominantly in the fields of health, life science and medical technology, and occupancy rates in the first year were predicted to be higher than originally projected.

In response to questions, it was confirmed that marketing materials could be designed for both colour printing and greyscale.

Members expressed their excitement at the progress made and were optimistic to see the building open for use.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the report be noted, and the Committee express their thanks to the Officers and building partners involved.

253. MAKING MAIDSTONE MORE ACTIVE UPDATE

The Leisure Manager introduced the report, summarising that the project had begun in 2019, but was paused in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Following involvement in the pandemic response, Sport England would support the project and had approved the diagnostic report. A verbal funding commitment had been given by Sport England for the project to move on to the next diagnostic stage encompassing three key areas: technical aspects of Maidstone Leisure Centre; community consultations; and future populations in line with the Local Plan Review. Online workshops were planned to facilitate community consultations, and the results of the three areas would enable business plan modelling to be carried out.

The Committee were informed that the all-Member briefing date had changed to 19 April 2021.

In response to questions, the Leisure Manager explained that the collaboration with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council was due to their undertaking a similar exercise in terms of future provision of leisure facilities. Kent Sport had been consulted, and discussions with schools and the Local Education Authority could be included in the next stage.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the report be noted.

254. COVID-19 BUSINESS GRANTS

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development introduced the report outlining the grants that had been made available to support businesses since March 2020. A team was set up across the Council to facilitate the administration of the support grants, and delegated authority was used to introduce the discretionary streams of the grants to enable them to be distributed promptly.

The Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) totalled £3.4 million to fund discretionary business grants and wider business support activity and following each round of discretionary grants, intelligence was collected from local businesses which then informed the categories included in subsequent rounds. Over 7,000 grants had been awarded since March 2020, and new mandatory grants were expected in April 2021. The ARG would continue to be distributed and further opportunities to benefit from additional grant allocations was expected.

Positive feedback from local businesses was noted, and the responsiveness of the cross-departmental team was acknowledged.

RESOLVED: That the progress in the administration of business support grants be noted, and the Committee express their thanks to the staff involved in the provision of the business grants.

255. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.45 p.m.