

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 18  
SEPTEMBER 2019**

**Present:** Councillors Mrs Blackmore, M Burton, Chappell-Tay, Clark, Cox (Chairman), English, Garten, Mrs Gooch, Harvey, McKay, Newton, Perry, Round and Wilby

55. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Mortimer, Purle and Springett.

56. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following Substitute Members were noted:

Councillor Garten for Councillor Springett; and

Councillor Wilby for Councillor Mortimer

57. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman informed the Committee that, as they related to items under consideration, he had decided to accept the Part II Minutes of the meeting held on 23 July 2019 under item 8 'Minutes of the Meeting held on 23 July 2019', and an updated Committee Work Programme for item 11. 'Committee Work Programme' as urgent items.

58. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

Note – Councillor Blackmore arrived during consideration of this item.

59. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

60. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillors Cox, English, Harvey and Newton declared that they had been lobbied on item 18. 'Council Led Garden Community'.

61. EXEMPT ITEMS

**RESOLVED:** That all items be taken in public, as proposed, but it was noted that as there were Private Appendices to items 17. 'Innovation Centre' and 18. 'Council Led Garden Community' it might be necessary to enter into private session.

62. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 JULY 2019

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes (Part I and Part II) of the meeting held on 23 July 2019 be agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and signed.

63. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS (IF ANY)

There were no petitions.

64. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (IF ANY)

There were no questions from members of the public.

65. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

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

66. DIGITAL STRATEGY UPDATE

The Transformation and Digital Services Manager presented the Digital Strategy Update 2019, setting out the six key themes of Digital Customer, Place, Design, Workforce, Infrastructure and Data. The report set out the Actions that were due for completion in 2018/19, of the nineteen projects undertaken in the year, four were still in progress, two had been rescheduled for 2019/20 with the rest completed. The report also set out the actions planned for 2019 to 2021.

The Committee raised question on digital inclusion, accessibility and the use of bots on webchat and for robotic process automation. In response officers informed the committee that they were working on delivering a joined up network in Kent to tackle digital exclusion, that they consider accessibility extensively in providing online services, with the digital team accredited in accessible design. A full accessibility audit was also due next month which could be shared with Members. With regard to bots the Committee were told that they were being piloted to look at automating high volume but simple tasks that staff currently undertook, and to help with webchat, an area where other local authorities were increasingly using bots.

The Committee also highlighted the importance of testing, and sought and received assurances around the proposed Local Plan microsite.

**RESOLVED:** That

1. Progress made in the first year of delivering the Digital Strategy be noted; and
2. The revised action plan for 2019-21 be agreed.

67. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2020-21

The Head of Mid Kent Revenues and Benefits Partnership presented the report on the Council tax Reduction Scheme 2020-2021. The report proposed no change to the scheme at this time.

**RESOLVED:** That

1. Council be recommended to carry forward the 2019-2020 Council Tax Reduction scheme to 2020-2021 with no changes to the scheme; and
2. In the absence of any proposed change, it be noted that no public consultation will be undertaken.

68. COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY 2019-24

The Head of Policy, Communication and Governance presented the Communications and Engagement Strategy 2019-2024. The purpose of the strategy was to support the delivery of the Council's priorities through communicating and engaging with the Council's key stakeholders. The Strategy set out the key messages, the channels used to deliver them and a high level action plan.

The Committee asked questions of the Kantar Precise media service which measured the impact of communications activity and the Council's audience reach. The information was updated daily and could identify any media coverage for the Borough Council. Members felt that being provided quarterly by email would be sufficient for them.

Feedback was also given from the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee on the need to demystify some of the terms used in the Homelessness and Roughsleeping Policy and it was felt that the principle could be applied to all policies.

It was noted that the Communication Strategy group for Members still existed.

**RESOLVED:** That the Communications and Engagement Strategy 2019-2024 be approved.

69. 1ST QUARTER PERFORMANCE AND BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

The Interim Head of Finance and the Head of Policy, Communication and Governance presented the report on first quarter performance and budget monitoring. The Head of Finance set out that the Council forecast came in on budget and outlined the Committee variances in the report. The main

items to note were an income shortfall at the adventure zone that meant that Economic, Regeneration and Leisure Committee budgets had overspent by £54k, and that the main area of budget pressure was in Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee which had an overspend of £108k, predicted to be £459k by year end. This was due to underperformance on major planning application income and pay and display income.

The Capital programme expenditure was set out in the report and had started slowly but was expected to pick up over the course of the year.

The Head of Policy, Communication and Governance set out the performance element of the report. No indicators were 'red' so there were no exceptions to report to the committee and all indicators had been provided.

In response to questions it was noted that underspends were not always positive and by presenting finances and performance together it was hoped that linkages between underspends and impacts on performance (if any) would be highlighted.

**RESOLVED:** That

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

#### 70. MEDWAY (FLOOD RELIEF) ACT CONSULTATION

The Corporate Property Manager presented the report on the Medway (Flood Relief) Act Consultation. The Environment Agency were consulting the Council as they were named as a specified interest in the Medway (Flood Relief) Act 1976. The Environment Agency were leading a project to increase the capacity of the Leigh Flood Storage Area by raising the maximum impoundment level.

The Committee supported the proposal but raised concerns about potential unintended consequences of increasing the capacity. Previous floods in 2002 had in some part been attributed to the management of the barrier and the release of water from it. There was concern that an increased volume may exacerbate that risk.

In order to manage that risk the Committee requested that the Environment Agency provide the Committee with their management plan for the barrier and kept the Council up to date with any changes to it.

**RESOLVED:** That

1. The proposed change to the stored water level within the Leigh Flood Storage Area be supported;
2. A letter be written to Defra supporting the new scheme; and
3. The Environment Agency be requested to provide the Council with a copy of their management plan for the barrier and provide any future updates to it when they arise.

71. INNOVATION CENTRE PROJECT

The Interim Innovation Centre Manager presented the report on the proposals for the Council's investment in the construction of the Innovation Centre at the Kent Medical Campus. Since the last report officers had worked to commence delivery of the project through obtaining planning permission and working on leases. European Economic Development Fund grant approval had been received and the Council needed to enter into a funding agreement.

The additional borrowing requirement set out in the exempt appendix was the difference between the predicted costs presented in 2018 and the actual costs of delivery that would be secured once a contract had been entered into.

The Committee supported the proposal and requested more information on the contingencies that were in place due to the uncertainty caused by matters such as Brexit. In response the Committee were informed that as the contract to be signed was a design and build contract it was the actual cost of delivery. A 10% performance bond was in place in case the need arose to change contractor midway through delivery. Officers were also taking specialist legal construction advice on how to manage the unknown of Brexit.

**RESOLVED:** That

1. The revised total scheme cost as set out in the Exempt Appendix to the report for the development of the innovation centre be approved;
2. Delegated authority be granted to the Director of Finance and Business Improvement to sign the Funding Agreement with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; and
3. Delegated authority be granted to the Director of Finance and Business improvement to approve additional borrowing for Capital expenditure for the project budget.

72. COUNCIL LED GARDEN COMMUNITY

The Director of Regeneration and Place introduced the report on a Council-Led Garden Community. The report followed on from

consideration of a Garden Community at the Committee meeting on 22 May 2019. The Director set out that it was important to note that the Council would have 'two hats' for the development – one as the planning authority and another as the master-developer for the site.

Officers had commissioned specialist advice on possible locations for the community and all areas had been explored. The target location had not been the only one considered and the proposal was for the Council to act as a master-developer – to take a control in the land, develop proposals, and oversee the community.

The committee questioned whether additional homes above the 5,000 figure could be built on the site and it was noted that as master-developer the Council would look at what was deliverable on the site whilst setting a standard the Council would want to achieve. The major consultees would be consulted and discussions would take place as with all developments of this size and nature, but with the Council leading on them.

It was felt that the Local Plan process should consider all options and it would be remiss to not put this proposal forward too without prejudicing the Council's planning position. Questions were raised about the timing of the decision and it was noted that the timing meant that the proposal could feed into the Local Plan process with more details on the location to be set out in a press statement once approved for submission. The Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee would then be able to consider the proposal in full along with other sites.

**RESOLVED:** That

1. The business case for a Council-Led Garden Community to the East of Lenham be noted;
2. A Council-Led Garden Community to the East of Lenham be pursued with a view to acting as master-developer;
3. The Council should issue a media statement concerning a Council-Led Garden Community which amongst other things, identifies the location; and
4. The Council should explore potential partners for its role as master developer as set out in paragraph 2.9 of the Council-Led Garden Community report.

73. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.15 p.m.