

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26 NOVEMBER 2019

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

Also Present: Councillor M Rose and Mr Ken Scott (Kent Arts and
Wellbeing)

67. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Webb and that Councillor Mrs Blackmore would be late in arriving at the meeting.

68. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

69. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

70. VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor M Rose indicated her wish to speak on item 12 (Presentation by Mr Ken Scott on behalf of Kent Arts and Wellbeing) and item 13 (Arts and Culture Strategy).

71. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Councillor Harper said that as Chairman of the Committee he was automatically appointed as one of the Council's representatives on the Maidstone Area Arts Partnership and had attended its Annual General Meeting the previous week.

Councillor Mrs Gooch said that she was a member of the Maidstone Museums' Foundation. She was also a supporter of the work of Kent Arts and Wellbeing particularly in relation to people living with dementia.

72. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

73. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That the items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

74. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 OCTOBER 2019

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 October 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed.

75. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

76. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

77. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman said that he intended to make a change to the order of business and that the presentation by Mr Ken Scott on behalf of Kent Arts and Wellbeing would be taken as the next item.

78. PRESENTATION BY MR KEN SCOTT ON BEHALF OF KENT ARTS AND WELLBEING

The Chairman invited Mr Ken Scott to make his presentation entitled "Using Creative Activities to Improve Wellbeing".

In making his presentation, Mr Scott explained that:

- He was a member of the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Chairman of the Maidstone Area Arts Partnership and a founding director of Kent Arts and Wellbeing, and whilst his presentation primarily related to Kent Arts and Wellbeing, it was relevant to both other bodies.
- He wanted to talk about the importance of art and creative activity to wellbeing. He wanted to make Members aware of areas of activity and persuade them to offer support on a non-financial basis.
- Kent Arts and Wellbeing, which was founded about two years ago, was a not for profit organisation. Its aims were to improve the wellbeing of individuals and communities through the use of creative activities. The initial focus had been on older people.
- The Kent Arts and Wellbeing Network, which was currently supported by about forty different organisations, was focusing on a strategic programme to establish and promote the recognition of the benefits of creative activity on wellbeing. The ambition was for the programme to be well-promoted and to cover a range of creative practices. It was proposed to have four major localities based on the Integrated Care

Partnership areas with Maidstone as the hub for the activity in West Kent.

- There would be a focus on local communities, especially those with high levels of deprivation, and communities of interest (people living with dementia, homeless people etc.). There would be an inter-generational approach and an emphasis on volunteers.
- The Strategic Programme would cost somewhere between £500k and £600k over four years with the expectation that about £100k would be spent in each of the four areas and other money in terms of the co-ordination of the whole area.
- Maidstone had been identified as a hub as it was recognised not only as the most typical area in Kent but also because it was statistically the closest to a typical town in the country. It was the largest area in West Kent and had high levels of relative deprivation. It had substantial arts activity to provide volunteer support and a supportive voluntary sector, but there were big gaps in the provision of arts and cultural activities.
- Consideration was being given to a project involving singing for people who are homeless or who have chaotic lifestyles. It was relevant to Maidstone and there was a proven model ("The Choir with No Name"). The key features of the model were weekly rehearsals to provide a constant level of activity and support; a hot meal after the rehearsal; and performances (a clear statement of the value of the activity) to raise money to become more self-sufficient. An appropriate venue had been identified and a musical director/deputy musical director and/or an accompanist were required together with a project manager to support clients.
- These activities could integrate well with the proposed Arts and Culture Strategy. Kent Arts and Wellbeing was not looking to the Council for funding, but it would be appreciated. Instead, Kent Arts and Wellbeing was looking for a commitment to support it in its funding applications, get involved in selecting areas of activity and to support those areas of activity on a non-financial basis.

In response to questions, Mr Scott explained that:

- The Choir project was not just for homeless people; it was also for people with chaotic lifestyles who would also benefit from this sort of activity.
- To move the project forward, Kent Arts and Wellbeing would work with a number of voluntary organisations in Maidstone and with the Council. It was his expectation that people for the singing group would be found through organisations that exist already.
- To run a series of activities around Maidstone would cost approximately £25k a year (£100k over four years). However, the

Choir for people who are homeless or have chaotic lifestyles would not be a cheap option. With two music directors, hire charges and a project manager, it would cost more than that.

- To fund the Strategic Programme, an application would be made initially to Reaching Communities and other grant making bodies such as the Esme Fairburn Foundation had been identified. A progressive approach was being looked at rolling forward over the three to four years.

During the discussion it was suggested that consideration could be given to securing developer contributions and external sponsorship and using Members' devolved budgets towards the cost of these activities.

Councillor M Rose addressed the Committee in support of the proposed Choir for people who are homeless or have chaotic lifestyles.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked Mr Scott for the presentation. He indicated that a report would be submitted to the meeting of the Committee scheduled to be held on 28 January 2020 looking at the proposals outlined in the presentation, research into how creative activity benefits individuals and disadvantaged groups and how the Council might work with Kent Arts and Wellbeing on Maidstone based projects.

Note: Councillor Mrs Blackmore entered the meeting during the discussion on this item (7.10 p.m.).

79. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its Work Programme for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2019/20.

The Chairman said that only one item was listed for consideration at the meeting of the Committee scheduled to be held on 17 December 2019 so it was proposed to cancel the meeting and have a series of short briefings instead as follows:

- Cohesion Plus (Maidstone Mela);
- Mote Park Café New Build Project and Estate Services Building;
- Refurbishment of the Bus Station Project;
- Update on the Opportunity Sites Work; and
- Maidstone Museum Redevelopment Plans and Bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund.

RESOLVED:

1. That the meeting of the Committee scheduled to be held on 17 December 2019 be cancelled and replaced by a series of short briefings as outlined above instead.
2. That the Committee Work Programme as amended be noted.

80. ARTS AND CULTURE STRATEGY

The Arts and Culture Officer presented her report setting out an Arts and Culture Strategy for 2019-2024 and an Action Plan for its delivery. She explained that:

- In October 2015, the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee agreed to support further work on culture and heritage in the Borough following a consultation carried out by Nick Ewbank Associates. Heritage had largely been addressed by the Museum's new 20 year Transformation Plan but arts and culture had not been equally considered.
- In order to change that, and to understand the current arts and culture offer in the Borough, extensive research had been carried out, including a full SWOT analysis, an audit of all existing arts and cultural organisations in the Borough and conversations with local artists, arts organisations and collectives. Combining this with the results of previous research and looking at the wider regional and national context, a new Arts and Culture Strategy had been developed which would help the Council to establish its aims and priorities for arts and culture in the Borough and ensure that it capitalises on all the benefits they can bring to society, the economy and the health and well-being of local residents.

The Chairman thanked the Arts and Culture Officer for her work on the development of the Arts and Culture Strategy and advised Members that if they were to approve the Strategy, Arts Council Officers would be invited for a discussion to find out how they might assist with applications for additional resources.

Councillor M Rose (Visiting Member and one of the Council's representatives on the Maidstone Area Arts Partnership) addressed the Committee in support of the new Strategy.

During the discussion:

- It was suggested that, with regard to the SWOT analysis, Cobtree Manor Park should be added to the list of Strengths as a key visitor attraction together with the aim, possibly in connection with the Business Terrace, for Maidstone to be the Business Capital of Kent. In terms of Weaknesses, there was a need for an up to date, managed, data base to enable people to access information on arts and cultural groups/activities Kent-wide. In terms of Opportunities, there was a possible need to mention the Business Improvement District either coupled with One Maidstone or separately.
- Reference was made to the lack of information relating to arts and cultural activities taking place in the rural areas and it was pointed out that information could be obtained from Parish magazines and Parish Council websites. It was also suggested that the potential to work

with churches, community halls and local charities and to obtain sponsorship from local businesses should be examined.

In response to these comments and further questions:

- The Officers explained that:

A data base had been developed and was now live on the Maidstone Borough Council website listing about sixty local arts and cultural organisations divided by category with a brief description of what they do, when and where they meet, membership fees and contact details. It was a directory for arts and culture in the Borough, not an events calendar. Discussions would take place with the IT team about promoting the directory through Google.

One of the actions in the Action Plan was to carry out a public consultation to identify the main barriers to participation in arts and cultural activities and if the Council was putting on events and activities people would be consulted on what they would want to do and what would benefit them most. This would involve working in partnership with other Council departments and outside agencies.

More work needed to be done to identify all of the different arts and cultural groups actively operating in the Borough and areas where events are taking place and to add them to the data base.

- The Chairman said that he would be working with the Officers to ensure that the action plan is delivered without putting unreasonable pressure on members of staff. This would involve partnership working and engagement with the Arts Council. Additional support and resources might be available once a comprehensive action plan is agreed.

RESOLVED: That subject to the suggested amendments to the SWOT analysis set out above, the Arts and Culture Strategy and the Action Plan for its delivery, attached as Appendices to the report of the Arts and Culture Officer, be adopted.

81. AMENDMENTS TO THE FESTIVALS AND EVENTS POLICY

The Visitor Economy and Events Development Manager presented her report proposing amendments to the Festival and Events Policy relating to noise levels and the frequency of events and also providing an overview of events in the Council's parks in 2019. It was noted that:

- Maidstone was now recognised as a key destination for large events and festivals comparing favourably with other major towns and cities around the UK. In 2019 Mote Park was booked almost every weekend during the events season. It was calculated that the three largest events in the Park had a combined economic impact of over £3.1m for the Borough.

- It was proposed to amend the Festival and Events Policy to increase the number of category A events in Mote Park from up to 2 to up to 5 per annum and the maximum number of days from 6 to 12 of which a maximum of 8 days can be music events.
- The proposed amendment would allow more flexibility with events. The Ramblin Man Fair was currently a category A event that takes place over 3 days. The second category A event was the Revival and Big Top Live weekend. All other events were category B or C.
- According to the Policy non-music events that had a significant impact on the parks or the surrounding area were classed as category A. The increase in the size and scale of many charity runs and walks required them to be re-classified as category A. They could have a major impact on the roads and the park use. It was now necessary to increase the number of category A events to accommodate the growth of these events.
- One day category A events might lessen the impact to residents rather than two events of up to three days. Ramblin Man was established as a three-day event but the remaining 3 days could be spread out over a longer period rather than another weekend event. A current enquiry for a high-profile one-day music event could not be confirmed as the limit had been reached on Category A events for 2020. This event could attract 10-15,000 people and provide an event for a mature target audience.
- The proposed amendment would provide enough flexibility to allow the natural growth of events whilst still placing limitations on the number of noisier music events. It was not anticipated that all the event days would be used for category A events nor that all permitted to be a category A would reach the higher noise limits. Without the amendment, should any significant opportunities arise, the Council would not be able to respond quickly enough.
- Whatman Park was not suitable for a Category A event and had never been used for an event of that size. It was proposed that the Policy be amended to limit events in Whatman Park to Category B.

In response to questions, the Officers explained that:

- Most event promoters had event insurance as a matter of course.
- The income targets for events were challenging and the proposed amendments to the Policy would help in achieving them.

During the discussion, concerns were expressed that the Festival and Events Policy was out of date and needed to be amended to reflect the current situation and changes to legislation. It was suggested that in the longer term, a Festival and Events Policy was required for the use of the Council's parks and open spaces for events and an Events Strategy that

would sit more comfortably with the Arts and Culture Strategy and the Destination Management Plan.

RESOLVED:

1. That the proposed amendments to the Festivals and Events Policy set out in the report of the Visitor Economy and Events Development Manager be agreed.
2. That the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development be given delegated powers in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee to update the Festival and Events Policy to reflect the current situation and changes to legislation.
3. That the draft version of the updated Festival and Events Policy should be circulated to all Members of the Committee so that any comments they may have can be taken into account when the delegation is exercised.

82. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.25 p.m.