

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 22 JANUARY
2020**

Present: Councillors Mrs Blackmore, Chappell-Tay, Cox (Chairman), English, Garland, Mrs Gooch, Joy, McKay, McLoughlin, Mortimer, Newton, Perry, Purle and Springett

Also Present: Councillors Brindle, Hinder and J Sams

115. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies for absence were received from Councillors Burton, Clark, Harvey and Round.

116. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that the following members were present as substitute members:

- Councillor Garland for Councillor Burton
- Councillor Joy for Councillor Clark
- Councillor McLoughlin for Councillor Round

117. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

118. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

It was noted that:

- Councillors Brindle and B Hinder were present as visiting members for item 14 – Request for Village Green Application; and
- Councillor J Sams was present for item 10 – Questions from Members to the Chairman.

119. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

120. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillors Blackmore and Mortimer stated that they were both lobbied in relation to Item 14 – Request for a Village Green Application.

121. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

122. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 NOVEMBER 2019

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2019 be agreed as a correct record and signed, subject to the correction of Bishop's Corridor to Bishop's Way under Item 112.

123. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

124. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

Councillor J Sams asked the following question of the Chairman:

'Following on from September full council meeting when the leader of the Council said he thought it was a good idea to hold a youth forum, and numerous emails written for progress an update on this with suggested dates in November 2019. Can I now for an assurance that invites will be sent to the secondary schools to facilitate a Borough organised youth forum my suggestion would be Friday March 6th. 4pm at the town Hall. As Greenpeace say, Tick Tock, time is passing!'

Councillor J Sams asked the following supplementary question:

'How is that engagement with 16-24-year olds being facilitated?'

The Chairman responded to both the question and supplementary question. The full response was recorded on the webcast and was made available on the Maidstone Borough Council Website.

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

<https://www.maidstone.gov.uk/home/primary-services/council-and-democracy/primary-areas/meetings,-minutes-And-agendas/tier-3-primary-areas/live-webcast>

125. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were 3 questions from members of the Public.

Question to the Chairman of the Committee from Mr Richard Proctor

'Your proposals for a Garden Community at Lenham Heath rely heavily on third parties to deliver new infrastructure with substantial investment to 'unlock' this site for 5,000 homes. Do you think this Council is placing too

much reliance and taking too much of a gamble on this 'housing windfall' at the expense of a more realistic and achievable housing growth approach that that has a far greater chance of being acceptable to the Planning Inspector at examination?'

The Chairman responded to the question.

Mr Richard Proctor asked the following supplementary question:

'The current funding budget for the Lenham Heath proposals appear to be forecast at circa £3.32million, it's not unreasonable to expect that that might increase in the next few years after further appraisal, with this being funded or at least underwritten by Council Taxpayers. Is this an appropriate project given the risk of failure and the risk of losing control of the plan process that is so feared by this borough?'

The Chairman responded to the supplementary question.

Question to the Chairman of Policy and Resources Committee from Ms Kate Hammond

'Members of this committee were appointed a mere 24 hours before the meeting last May which took a significant decision behind closed doors to proceed with Lenham Heath as the preferred location for a Garden Community. The Leader of the Opposition Group wrote to you raising concern following this meeting about the culture of 'secrecy and subterfuge' in the Council. He followed by asking you to 'come clean' and release a full account of this meeting. Why have you not done this?'

The Chairman responded to the question. Ms Kate Hammond did not ask a supplementary question.

Question to the Chairman of Policy and Resources Committee from Mr Steve Heeley

'The 'Heathlands Garden Community' Vision document published in November 2019 proposes a High Speed rail station at Lenham Heath despite our Freedom of Information enquiries concluding that this Council has had no discussions with Network Rail, Southeastern Railways, nor High Speed 1 Ltd to find out whether this is even operationally feasible. On reflection, does the Chairman of this Committee think it was naive to include this new station in what has become more of a utopian vision dreamed up by master planners rather than a realistic and deliverable vision by a responsible local authority?'

The Chairman responded to the question.

Mr Steve Heeley asked the following supplementary question:

'Ebbsfleet International cost £100million in 1997 prices and it took over 5 years to build, at today's prices this would cost £183million. Cardiff Parkway Station is due to begin construction this year with an estimated

cost of £120million and four years to build. Assuming that a new station at Lenham Heath would be in this ballpark, along with the cost of a new motorway junction estimated to be over £100million too – it would be prudent to assume that your proposals would need at least a quarter of a billion pounds of transport investment alone that works out at approximately £50,000 per property assuming that you’re going to build 5,000 homes at Lenin Heath. Is this scheme ultimately dead in the water if you can’t secure these two critical transport improvements?’

The Chairman responded to the supplementary question.

To view the full responses from the Chairman of the Committee, please use the below link to access Webcast:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zsPNNWZ1tnI>

126. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement spoke on the updates that had been made to the Committee Work Programme, explaining that the risk management update for March was a duplicate of the same issue that was to be presented in February, so it was removed from the February Agenda.

The Director also informed the Committee that there would be four additional reports in the March Committee Meeting including:

- Garden Communities
- Lockmeadow Property Management
- Options for Archbishop’s Palace
- Medway Street Barrier

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme is noted.

127. BECOMING A COMPASSIONATE BOROUGH

The Policy and Information Manager introduced her report and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Heart of Kent Hospice, who was in attendance to answer any questions from Members regarding the Compassionate City Status.

The Policy and Information Manager highlighted the following points:

- Applying to Become a Compassionate Borough built on the legacy of Elmer, a Heart of Kent Hospice initiative operating in Maidstone, to raise awareness of dying, death, bereavement and loss across the borough;
- Compassionate status would only be achieved through adopting the Compassionate City Charter of which there were 13 principles;
- These principles would build upon, rather than replace, the existing support networks in place within Maidstone;
- Section 2.7 of the report highlights the places which already have, and those in progress of achieving, Compassionate City Status;

- A Joint Action Plan would need to be delivered by partner organisations across the borough, of which some work has already started, as shown in Appendix 2;
- The project would require support and commitment from across the council, however no extra resources in the form of additional staff would be required, as support will mainly come from the Policy and Information Team through their existing networks and relationships to promote the 13 principles; and
- The 'Next Steps' were outlined in Section 6.

Members were asked to endorse the position and for officers to support the action plan.

In response to questions from Members, the following answers were given:

- Organisations, such as schools, have welcomed greater attention to the issues of death, dying, bereavement and loss, as it forms part of a wider approach to encourage individuals to talk about these issues and their impact within society;
- These discussions have enabled individuals to become aware of the options available to them in advanced care planning, such as Living wills;
- Rather than enforcing the thirteen principles, actions would be taken to actively encourage organisations to meet the requirements of the Charter; and
- Not every locality can achieve all thirteen principles, but a majority should be achieved to retain Compassionate Status.

There were some concerns from the Committee regarding the practicality of adopting Compassionate City Status. Whilst the principles and values that would be formally endorsed were positive values, some members felt that the resources used should go directly into frontline services. It was suggested that it was unrealistic to assume that no additional resources would be needed to support this initiative. The Policy and Information Manager responded that compassion was necessary in being able to deliver better services and recognise the impact of such events on our residents. It was confirmed that implementation of the principles would require the time and energy of officers, but no additional staff would be needed.

The CEO of Heart of Kent Hospice also spoke in reference to these concerns. The CEO gave an example of the work that had been carried out in Schools through the Charity's Elmer initiative. A 120-page learning pack on death, dying and bereavement had been created which could be adapted for use for Compassionate Maidstone. The CEO also mentioned that visiting schools within the Maidstone Area would be a natural next step for this initiative and would help in creating a network.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Council endorse the ambition to become 'Compassionate Maidstone'; and
2. Officers and Members will provide support in the delivery of the action plan leading to the adoption of the 13 principles of the Compassionate City Charter.

128. REQUEST FOR VILLAGE GREEN APPLICATION

The Corporate Property Manager introduced her report in response to a request for Weaving Heath to be registered as a Village Green.

Two members of the public spoke on this issue, Mr Richard Coward and Mr Keith Clark, with their main points summarised below;

- That Weaving Heath is threatened by building developments within the Maidstone area;
- Weaving Heath is not identified as a valid open space within the Local Plan and has been listed as one of four possible sites for a new school;
- Some residents have lost faith in Maidstone Borough Council's planning process;
- The application for Village Green status would be more effective and shorter if submitted by the landowner;
- Over 200 residents signed the petition for Weaving Heath to become a Village Green; and
- Weaving Heath provides protection to local wildlife and a place for individuals to meet through both informal and organised use.

The Committee expressed support for the residents in having petitioned the Council to submit an application of Village Green status for Weaving Heath and felt the Council should support them by applying as landowner to register Weaving Heath as a Village Green.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Committee endorse the petitioners' aspirations for Weaving Heath be endorsed; and
2. The Council applies as landowner to register Weaving Heath as a Village Green as requested by the petitioners.

129. ASSET REVIEW UPDATE

The Corporate Property Manager introduced her report, to update the Committee on the latest work that had been done as part of the Workstream Property Asset Review.

RESOLVED: That the progress made on the effective use of the Council's property assets over the last three months and in response to the Property Asset Review report be noted.

130. FEES & CHARGES 2020/21

The Interim Head of Finance introduced his report, summarising the following:

- Fees and Charges Reports had already been provided to both the Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee and the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee for noting;
- The Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee was to consider the proposals at a Committee Meeting scheduled for the following week;
- Fees and Charges were set out in Appendix 1, with an overall summary in Appendix 2; and
- 95% of the charges within this Committee are statutory and the only increase was for hourly legal rates to match inflation at 1.4%

RESOLVED: That

1. The proposed discretionary fees and charges set out in Appendix 1 are agreed;
2. The externally agreed fees and charges set out in Appendix 1 be noted; and
3. The overall fees and charges position presented in Appendix 2 be noted.

131. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND BUDGET PROPOSALS.

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement introduced his report, summarising the following points:

- Appendices A and B demonstrated the budget proposals;
- There have been savings within this Committee, which have been used to offset shortfalls arising from the ongoing appointment of a Climate Change Officer (Communities, Housing and Environment Committee) and savings originally envisioned with planning and parking fees that were not achievable (Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee); and
- Appendix C detailed the results of the Budget Survey that had been carried out, highlighting that residents were prioritising investment in infrastructure, in the Street Scene and Flood Defences.

In response to a question concerning funding for the Local Plan, the Director of Finance and Business Improvement responded that there has been an annual allocation of £200k from the Revenue Budget towards funding the Local Plan and that this will continue. The funds allocated were used, amongst other things, for the public examinations in relation to the Local Plan. The £500k funding when the current Local Plan was created was not ongoing and originated from the New Homes Bonus.

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement also highlighted that local government funding position for 2021/22 was unknown, and as such the figures presented in the report for 2012/22 onwards were subject to change.

RESOLVED: That

1. The revenue budget proposals for services within the remit of this Committee, as set out in Appendix A, be agreed; and
2. The revenue budget proposals for services within the remit of the other Service Committees, as set out in Appendix B, be noted.

132. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY – CAPITAL PROGRAMME

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement introduced his report, making specific reference to the Council's purchase of Lockmeadow and the allocation of £1 million to Biodiversity and Climate Change funding.

In response to questions from Members, the Director of Finance and Business Improvement answered as follows:

- The Council will look for the best value option when borrowing funds;
- The figures presented within the report may change, however the Committee will be expected to approve any changes should this happen; and
- Updates on the five-year programme would be provided to each individual Service Committee.

In response to a question from a Member regarding the planned development to Granada House, the Officers clarified that the results of the pre-construction services agreement are yet to be published. The Committee had previously granted delegated authority to the Director of Finance and Business Improvement to enter into this and Stage 2 (construction phase) agreements, if the scheme was viable.

It was noted that the programme proposed involves prudently borrowing money as and when it will be needed. This involved paying attention to the current markets which the Council officers were doing.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Capital strategy principles as set out in paragraph 2.6 be agreed;
2. The Capital funding projection set out in appendix B to this report be agreed;
3. The Capital programme 2020/21 onwards as set out in Appendix C to this report be agreed; and

4. It was noted that in agreeing recommendations 2 and 3 above a prudential borrowing limit of £81.418 million is set over the period of the programme which will be recommended to Council as part of the Treasury Management Strategy 2020/21.

133. COUNCIL TAX BASE AND COLLECTION FUND DISTRIBUTION 2020/21

The Interim Head of Finance introduced his report and particular focus was given to the following points:

- The necessary Council Tax calculations were summarised in Table 1;
- The proposed Council Tax Base had increased, reflecting the 1.5% proxy growth rate in the number of domestic properties in Maidstone;
- Individual parish tax bases were shown in Appendix 2; and
- Collection fund distribution represents estimated surplus or deficit available for distribution at the Council Tax Year end, between Maidstone, the County Council, the Police and the Fire Authorities. A surplus of £130,000 between the billing and precepting authorities was summarised in table 3.

RESOLVED: That

1. In accordance with the Local Authority (Calculation of Council Tax Base) (England) Regulations 2012:
 - The amount calculated by Maidstone Borough Council as its Council Tax Base for the year 2020/21 shall be 63, 319.8 (as presented in Paragraph 2.7); and
 - The amount calculated by Maidstone Borough Council as the Council Tax Base for each parish area for the year 2020/21 shall be as identified in Appendix 2.
2. The 2019/20 Council Tax projection and proposed distribution summarised in Paragraphs 3.7 to 3.8 (and detailed in Appendix 3) is approved.

134. BUSINESS RATES RETENTION (PILOT) PROJECTS UPDATE

The Interim Head of Finance introduced his report on the Business Rates Retention Pilot, stating the following:

- 13 projects were agreed in 2018/19, with the completed schemes shown in Appendix 1; and
- The success of the pilot scheme led to additional funds being made available and further schemes were agreed in July 2019, leading to a total of 16 schemes.

In response to a question from a Member, Director of Finance and Business Improvement replied that in appraising the Archbishops Palace,

the stables may be considered if necessary, but that it was not a primary purpose of the appraisal.

RESOLVED: That

1. The further progress with the 2018/19 BRR pilot projects (Paragraph 2.5, including Appendix 1) be noted; and
2. The progress with the 2019/20 BRR pilot projects (Paragraph 2.14, including Appendix 2) be noted.

135. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.52 p.m.