

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 15 DECEMBER 2020

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

187. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

188. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

189. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman agreed to take a verbal update on the provision of Business Grants as an urgent item, as the information was not available at the time of publication of the agenda. This update would be provided by the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development, and would be taken before Item 13 – Reports of Outside Bodies.

190. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

191. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

192. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

193. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

194. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 NOVEMBER 2020

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed at a later date.

195. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

196. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

197. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development informed the Committee that the draft Economic Development Strategy (EDS) would be delayed until February 2021 and the EDS until June 2021, due to the team's focus being on the design and administration of business grants throughout the second lock-down and the tier 3 restrictions. Additional burden funding would be used to recruit temporary staff, enabling the draft EDS to be produced.

It was requested that an additional Member briefing be scheduled for late May 2021, prior to the EDS presentation in June 2021.

An additional request for a report outlining the possible capital expenditure works on Maidstone Museum was made, to be presented in either February or March 2021.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

198. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

199. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

200. BUSINESS GRANT UPDATE

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development referenced the business grants administered throughout the first and second lock-down periods.

A suite of grants had been designed for tier 3 restrictions, consisting of a local restrictions support grant for businesses still required to close; a local restrictions support grant for businesses within the hospitality and leisure sector that were open, to be introduced in the near future; a Christmas wet pub grant consisting of a one-off payment in December; and a new additional restrictions discretionary grant that consisted of a one-off payment.

The additional restrictions discretionary grant had been designed to support businesses that had not yet benefited from any other support, for example micro-businesses, and businesses that were not required to close but had closed due to inability to open in a Covid-secure way.

The Committee were informed that the time limits for the grants varied and that different grants would be available if Maidstone was placed within Tier 2 restrictions.

RESOLVED: That the update provided be noted.

201. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2021/22 - 2025/26

The Head of Finance introduced the report, which had been prepared in the context of the continued impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the proposed re-prioritisation of the Strategic Plan objectives as reported to the Policy and Resources Committee in July 2020.

The Committee were informed that Council Tax charge would likely increase by 2% and that the same level of income would be retained under the business rates retention scheme as in the previous year. It was noted that the Local Government Finance Settlement was to be released in the near future.

The cost of borrowing for the capital programme would be reduced by around 1%, providing that the Council was not investing solely for yield.

The results of the resident's survey were highlighted, with the two most important services identified as waste collection and parks and open spaces. The proportion of residents that believed the Council's services represented value for money remained similar to previous years, with a smaller proportion reporting dissatisfaction in Maidstone as a place to live.

The strategic revenue projections would be updated to reflect the announcement of the spending review and the local government finance settlement, with further detailed budget proposals to be presented to the Committee in January 2021.

In response to questions, the Head of Finance confirmed that the projected reduction in business rate income arose from the projected reduce growth in the monies retained through the business rates pool and retention scheme. It was likely that the Council would enter the business rates pool for the next financial year. The use of the New Homes Bonus to bridge the Council's budget gap over the next few years was referenced.

RESOLVED: That the Medium-Term Financial Strategy be noted and the Committee's comments be taken into account.

202. FEES & CHARGES 2021-22

The Head of Finance introduced the report which set out the outcomes of the annual review of fees and charges. It had been considered inappropriate for any of the fees and charges to be increased at this point.

It was highlighted that the Maidstone Museum works would be reported separately and were therefore not incorporated into this report.

Members expressed agreement regarding the fees and charges freeze. The Committee expressed support for the fees and charges freeze

proposed and thanked officers for their hard work in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Committee observed a period of reflection for those that had been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

RESOLVED: That the proposed discretionary fees and charges set out in Appendix 1 to the report be agreed.

203. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.27 p.m.