

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 26 JANUARY 2021

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

Also Present: Councillors Grigg, Naghi and Perry

204. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Fort and Webb.

205. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Perry was present as a Substitute Member until Councillor Fort arrived.

Councillor Joy was present as a Substitute Member for Councillor Webb.

206. URGENT ITEMS

An urgent item in the form of a briefing note had been distributed to the Committee in relation to Item 14 – Report of Licensing Committee held on 14 January 2021 – Draft Busking Guidelines.

207. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillors Grigg, Naghi and Perry were present as Visiting Members for Item 17.

Councillor Naghi was also present as a Visiting Member for Item 14 – Report of the Licensing Committee held on 14 January 2021 – Draft Busking Guidelines.

208. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

209. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillor Cox had been lobbied on Item 14 – Report of the Licensing Committee held on 14 January 2021 – Draft Busking Guidelines.

Councillor Round had been lobbied on Item 15 – Strategic Plan – Proposed Areas for Focus 2021-2026 and Key Performance Indicators for Covid-19 Recovery.

Councillors Cox, Fort, Mrs Gooch, Harper, Hinder, Joy, Purle and Round had been lobbied on Item 17 – Hazlitt Arts Centre Options.

210. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public as proposed unless any member of the Committee indicated a wish to refer to Item 18 – Exempt Appendix – Hazlitt Arts Centre Options.

211. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 DECEMBER 2020

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed at a later date.

212. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

213. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There was one question from a member of the public.

Question from Rebecca Roberts to the Chairman, read by the Democratic Services Officer

'Whilst I'm really pleased that I understand a decision has been made to save The Hazlitt, I'd be interested to know why the u-turn?'

The Chairman responded to the question.

The full responses were recorded on the webcast and made available to view on the Maidstone Borough Council Website.

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-G2ttYzqQ1k>

214. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

215. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development informed the Committee that the Draft Economic Development Strategy would be delayed until April 2021, due to the resource-intensive administration of Covid-19 related business grants.

It was confirmed that two further items would be added to the work programme; an update on the Innovation Centre and an update on the Making Maidstone More Active review.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

216. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

217. REPORT OF THE LICENSING COMMITTEE HELD ON 14 JANUARY 2021 - DRAFT BUSKING GUIDELINES

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager introduced the report, informing Members that the Licensing Committee were seeking support for the Draft Busking Guidelines, in respect of the use of the Bandstand in Brenchley Gardens for Buskers.

In response to questions, the Head of Housing and Community Services would provide confirmation to the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee on whether the Business Improvement District (BID) were consulted during the public consultation process.

It was felt that the Bandstand was not an appropriate location for busking due to the area's low footfall and the management implications that would arise from busking at the location.

RESOLVED: That the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee be recommended to approve the draft Busking Guidelines, as attached at Appendix 2 to the report.

218. STRATEGIC PLAN – PROPOSED AREAS FOR FOCUS 2021-2026 AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR COVID-19 RECOVERY

The Policy and Information Manager introduced the report, stating that the Policy and Resources Committee had begun the process of refreshing the Strategic Plan in July 2020. The proposed areas of focus relating to the Committee had been drafted in accordance with the Member feedback received in the Summer of 2020 and were shown in Appendix C to the report. The information contained within the other appendices to the report was outlined.

The Policy and Information Manager stated that, if agreed, the proposed Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) would replace the current KPI set against which progress was measured.

In response to questions, it was confirmed that reference to individual projects such as 'Go Green Go Wild' would be replaced under the wider strategic focus of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Emergencies.

In discussing Appendix A, the Committee felt that the milestones completed under the 'enabling events' section of 'A Thriving Place' were not truly reflective of the project's scope.

In discussing Appendix C, it was requested that 'using the cultural sector as an agent of regeneration' be added to the proposed areas of focus description attached to delivering the refreshed Economic Development Strategy. The proposed areas of focus relating to Maidstone Museum could be enhanced by including 'adjust the museum transformation plan to match resources obtainable from both the council land and external sources' and further emphasise the Museum's transformation plan.

It was felt that there should be greater emphasis on increasing pride in the borough, with an 'aim to work with the arts and cultural officer on a sense of place and looking to setting up a Maidstone arts and culture forum' to be included, given the importance of place-making.

The updated KPIs would be presented back to the Committee quarterly.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Committee's feedback and recommendations on the proposed refreshed areas of focus for the Council's Strategic Plan for the period 2021-2026 be provided to the Policy and Resources Committee; and
2. The Committee's feedback and recommendations on the proposed Key Performance Indicators for Covid-19 Recovery set out in Appendix D to the report be provided to the Policy and Resources Committee.

219. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND BUDGET PROPOSALS

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement introduced the report which built upon the Medium-Term Financial Strategy presented to the Committee in December 2020. The Council's budget gap had been reduced from £2.4 million to £1.6 million, with the proposals outlined designed to fill the budget gap over a three-year period.

The transformational nature of the savings proposed were highlighted, with specific attention drawn to the previously agreed savings of £152,000 from Maidstone Museum and that the work undertaken by the Economic Development Team in relation to the Capital Programme would be charged as capital rather than revenue expenditure.

The Committee expressed support for retaining an Economic Development Officer post given the impact of Covid-19 on the local economy. The Director of Finance and Business Improvement stated that the £860,000 provided was a one-off payment, with the Local Government Spending Settlement postponed until 2022. It was confirmed that the Policy and Resources Committee could be requested to release capital funding if a capital scheme was ready earlier than expected.

RESOLVED: That

1. The revenue budget proposals for services within the remit of this Committee, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be agreed for submission to Policy and Resources Committee subject to the Policy and Resources Committee being requested to use part of the £860,000 Covid-19 Recovery Fund Grant to pay for a two-year fixed term Economic Development Officer; and
2. The capital budget proposals for services within the remit of this Committee, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be agreed for submission to Policy and Resources Committee, subject to the Policy and Resources Committee being requested to progress the Maidstone Museum capital programme scheme and that reports be presented to the Committee on timings, with appropriate recommendations made.

220. HAZLITT ARTS CENTRE OPTIONS

The Leisure Manager introduced the report, informing the Committee of progress made since the Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 25 November 2020 where four key areas of work were identified: external funding; engagement activities; Covid-19 related developments; and future sustainability.

The unsuccessful application to the Culture Recovery Fund (CRF) could not be appealed, however Parkwood Leisure were planning a further bid for the second round of funding from the CRF. Engagement activities included a Member briefing, and consultation with stakeholders including the Arts Council and user groups of the Hazlitt Arts Centre. Covid-19 related restrictions had been significant, however it was possible that an easing of restrictions could occur in Spring 2021 with the roll-out of the vaccine. Future sustainability was seen within the eight-year business plan shared by Parkwood Leisure, considering changes to service delivery such as live-streaming shows and open-air options.

Mr Keith Nicholson addressed the Committee.

The Committee recognised the importance of the Hazlitt Arts Centre to Maidstone Town Centre, and felt that it should be supported in returning to its usual functions. The importance of building upon the working relationship between the Council and Parkwood Leisure was noted.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Council continues to pay its agreed contract fee to Parkwood Leisure for the provision of services at the Hazlitt Arts Centre;
2. Officers continue to monitor Parkwood Leisure's performance with respect to the delivery of the requirements of the Hazlitt Arts

Centre Services Contract as defined by the Key Performance Indicators and make further recommendations in April 2021; and

3. Officers prioritise the continuity and capability of Hazlitt operation and ensure, with key partners, that the Hazlitt returns to life when Covid allows it to do so.

221. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.22 p.m.