

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRACY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 27 JULY 2021

Present: Councillors Mrs Blackmore, Cooke, Cooper, English, Hastie, Joy, Perry, Purle (Chairman) and M Rose

21. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Webb.

22. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

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

23. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

24. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

25. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

26. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillor English had been lobbied on Item 18 – Parliamentary Constituencies – Boundary Commission for England Consultation.

27. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

28. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 30 JUNE 2021

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed.

29. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

30. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

31. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

32. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Policy, Communications and Governance gave an update on the governance review working group. The first meeting had taken place and a model in principle had been put forward. A survey had been planned for all Members, and an all-Member briefing scheduled for 2 September 2021 to facilitate wider engagement in the governance review.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

33. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

34. MEMBER AGENDA ITEM REQUEST - FULL COUNCIL MEETING ARRANGEMENTS

Councillor Cooper introduced the Member Agenda Item Request, expressing concern that the alternative venues used for full Council meetings had not been adequate, and requested a report on future arrangements including consideration of County Hall.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager explained that feedback from Members regarding the alternative venues used would be incorporated into future plans. The two options currently being explored by the Democratic Services team were County Hall, although it might not currently be available for hire, and Maidstone Leisure Centre with alternative seating arrangements designed to provide what Members had requested. Additional costs incurred for the hire of the venue and audio and webcasting equipment could be charged to Covid-19 funding.

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager noted the feedback from the Committee including that both options being considered would be acceptable and that consideration needed to be given to when arrangements could return to normal. It was noted that bringing a report to the next meeting of the Committee would not be appropriate due to timescales.

RESOLVED: That the request not be taken forwards on the Committee Work Programme and officers make arrangements for the next full Council meeting, taking into account feedback from the Committee and Group Leaders.

Note: Councillor Hastie joined the meeting during this item.

35. WORKFORCE STRATEGY UPDATE REPORT

The Head of HR Shared Services introduced the report, highlighting the key themes of the Workforce Strategy and the progress made across each. Guidance for managers had been developed to support flexible working throughout the Covid-19 outbreak, and an engagement group had been created to improve staff engagement. Recruitment levels, which had fallen at the beginning of 2020, were returning to pre-pandemic levels, and the training plan for 2021-2022 had been agreed with a combination of virtual and in-person sessions. Wellbeing events had been conducted virtually throughout the year, and the annual wellbeing week took place virtually in February 2021.

The significant decrease in working days lost due to mental health was noted, having fallen from 871 for the period July 2019 to June 2020, to under 300 for the period July 2020 to June 2021.

RESOLVED: That the progress of the actions set out in the Workforce Strategy be noted.

36. HONORARY ALDERMAN - EXCEPTIONAL AWARD OF STATUS

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager introduced the report, explaining the protocol surrounding the award of Honorary Alderman status, and the exception proposed to allow former Councillor Wendy Hinder to be posthumously appointed as an Honorary Alderman. A date had not been set for the special meeting of the Council, however it was acknowledged that a memorial had been planned for October 2021 and this would be taken into consideration when scheduling the proposed meeting.

Discussion took place around the protocol and whether it should be reviewed. The Chairman agreed to consider whether this was appropriate for the work programme.

RESOLVED: That

1. Council be recommended to agree that exceptional circumstances apply in the case of former Councillor Wendy Hinder's consideration for Honorary Alderman status and be recommended to grant an exception to protocol in this particular case; and
2. Ahead of the Council decision, officers take practical steps forwards for an award on an exceptional case basis such that it is ready for consideration at a special Council meeting held for that purpose in late 2021.

37. LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY REVIEW - COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager introduced the report and explained the proposal for two facilitated sessions to be undertaken with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. Proposed dates for the sessions

were 7 and 30 September and would be physical meetings, however this could be supplemented with remote access. Determining the council size would be significantly impacted by the work on executive arrangements and both pieces of work would need to run alongside each other, as demonstrated in the proposed timetable. The Committee Work Programme would be amended to reflect this.

In response to questions, the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager explained that it is possible for officers to draft the submission and bring it to the Committee to agree, however it was important that Members were involved throughout the process as it would be their submission.

RESOLVED: That the approach and timetable outlined in section 2 of the report be agreed and that the Head of Policy, Communications and Governance liaise with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman on questions that arise requiring Member input before the Committee meeting on 13 October 2021.

38. PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES - BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND CONSULTATION

The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager introduced the report, explaining the proposals set out by the Boundary Commission for England to create three constituencies that cover the Borough of Maidstone, which based on electorate the Council would be the lead authority for all three. A consultation response was suggested to with four main areas of feedback: election complexities; community identities; political engagement; and the Ward boundary review.

Concerns were raised about the ability to achieve consensus on what the alternative proposal should look like. The Democratic and Electoral Services Manager acknowledged that agreement on where parliamentary boundaries should lie would be difficult to achieve, but that the principles outlined in the report could be agreed and put forward in response to the consultation. If the Committee decided not to respond to the consultation, the Returning Officer would submit a response independently which would set out the election difficulties of the proposed boundaries.

RESOLVED: That option 3 of the report, whereby a consultation response is not submitted, be agreed.

39. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30pm to 7.49pm.