

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 14 SEPTEMBER 2021

Present: Councillors Cannon, Cox, Forecast, Harper, Hinder, Naghi, Round (Chairman) and S Webb

Also Present: Councillor Kimmance

33. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Newton.

34. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

There were no Substitute Members.

35. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items.

36. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

Councillor Kimmance was present as a Visiting Member for Item 18 – Appointment to Maidstone Twinning Association.

37. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

38. **DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING**

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

39. **EXEMPT ITEMS**

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

40. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 JULY 2021**

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed.

41. **PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS**

There were no petitions.

42. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

43. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

44. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development commented that the report on Capital Expenditure Proposals for Maidstone Museum would require a decision.

It was requested that clarity be provided at the next meeting of the Committee on whether the Pump Track Development report would be presented at any other Committees.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

45. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

46. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY CONSULTATION REVIEW

The Regeneration and Economic Development Manager introduced the report and confirmed that the comments previously raised by the Committee had been incorporated into the draft strategy. The majority of the changes proposed were minor due to previous engagement of stakeholders, however it was noted that the wording of Priority 5, Destination Maidstone Town Centre, had been changed to refer to '*a welcoming economy*' rather than '*a thriving day and night time economy*'.

Lucie Bailey, Economics Director at Lichfields, presented a summary of the work carried out to finalise the Economic Development Strategy (EDS). The consultation responses were largely positive, with eight organisations and individuals providing comments. The three key changes highlighted were the change in emphasis across the strategic priorities in response to feedback; the addition of specific references and examples; and the addition of specific actions to the action plan accompanying the EDS.

In response to comments, the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development confirmed that the Committee currently received regular reports on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) such as employment rates, but that the further KPIs referred to within the report would be more specific to the local area and utilise more current data.

RESOLVED: That the Economic Development Strategy and action plan be approved for full adoption, and that an initial review be presented to the Committee six months after adoption, with annual reviews thereafter.

47. RECOVERY AND RENEWAL ACTIONS

The Head of Policy, Communications and Governance introduced the report which had been developed following the release of a significant amount of government funding for recovery and renewal. The actions outlined in the report fell within the remit of the Committee, and an amended agenda had been published to include an additional appendix.

Jodie Stevens, representing MidKent College, presented the proposal of a skills and community hub to be piloted for six months, using an empty unit in The Mall and enabled by the prospective grant. Care would be taken to complement existing services from partners rather than creating competition. As this would be a new service, there would not be any historical data to aid analysis. However, a target had been set to support five adults per week on short courses, and to engage 25% of the local young people currently not in employment, education or training (NEETs) within the first three months of the pilot, supporting them into education, employment or apprenticeships. It was acknowledged that some outcomes may take longer than six months to present, however the aim would be to track the progress of those supported through the hub over a longer period.

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development added that communication from Kent County Council (KCC) had been received, confirming that they would be supportive of the initiative. It would not duplicate work undertaken currently by KCC, and data showed that there had been a significant reduction in provision for NEETs and young people.

In response to questions, Ms Stevens agreed to ensure the wording of the proposal clearly set out that it would be open to adults as well as young people. Marketing via social media and around the town centre was proposed to attract young people to the hub, and work would continue with existing partners to cross-refer into relevant services.

The Head of Policy, Communications and Governance confirmed that data could be reported to the Committee to measure the outcomes of the pilot.

In response to suggestions that the pilot scheme be extended if successful, the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development advised the Committee to consider the budget allocation at the proposal stage, as the funding may be fully allocated by the time the pilot was reviewed.

In response to questions, the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development agreed that there was often a short turnaround time between funding being released and the deadline for bids to be submitted. Technical support would enable bids to be prepared, including design and planning permission, so that when funding become available the bid would be ready for submission within the timeframe.

RESOLVED: That the Committee

1. support the Community and Skills Hub proposal from MidKent College, and recommend to Policy and Resources Committee that £60,000 be allocated to the project subject to a review taking place at four months;
2. endorse the support of the Visitor Economy including retail, hospitality and leisure sectors following the impacts of the pandemic to assist with the return of business as usual;
3. endorse the action to invest in industrial and warehouse premises to help de-risk new employment sites coming forward as this will support the Economic Development Strategy Priority 1 - Open for Business;
4. endorse the capacity to develop projects and bids for bidding through technical support for the levelling up fund; and
5. support the initial concept of the Maidstone Riverside Light Walk to improve links between Archbishops Palace, Lockmeadow and the Town Centre, and recommend to the Policy & Resources Committee that this concept be developed and brought back to this Committee at their meeting on 14 December 2021.

48. **SPEND OF FURTHER ALLOCATION OF ADDITIONAL RESTRICTIONS GRANT**

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development explained that, due to the short turnaround time of the multiple business support grants available during the pandemic, it was not feasible at that point to reflect on the administration process. However, the newly-released discretionary grant would be running for a longer period and therefore allowed time for a policy to be created and approved.

The Economic Development Officer introduced the report, which proposed the addition of four fixed-term Burden Support Coordinators to be funded through the new burdens fund, who could then reach out to businesses and signpost to relevant schemes. Businesses would be individually assessed so that appropriate support could be identified, and data would be collated and monitored so that regular reviews could be undertaken. A target was proposed of 50% of the spend to be achieved by the end of November 2021, when a review would take place with an opportunity to adapt the process if necessary. A second review would take place in January 2022.

RESOLVED: That the Additional Restrictions Grant Top Up Policy, at Appendix 1 to the report, be approved and a report brought back to the Committee in 6 months for review.

49. APPOINTMENT TO MAIDSTONE AREA ARTS PARTNERSHIP

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report, outlining that two nominations had been received for the two vacancies on the Maidstone Area Arts Partnership (MAAP). The length of term was one year, however MAAP were open to this being extended.

RESOLVED: That Councillors Harper and M Rose be appointed to the Maidstone Area Arts Partnership, each for a term of three years.

50. APPOINTMENT TO MAIDSTONE TWINNING ASSOCIATION

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the item, explaining that no written nominations had been received for the two vacancies on the Maidstone Twinning Association.

Councillor Kimmance expressed interest in being reappointed to the role and outlined his reasons for this.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Kimmance be appointed to the Maidstone Twinning Association, and that the further vacancy be readvertised.

51. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30pm to 9.32pm.