

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 14 DECEMBER 2021

Present: Councillors Burton, Cannon, Forecast, Harper, Naghi, Newton, Round (Chairman) and S Webb

88. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hinder and R Webb.

89. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Burton was present as a Substitute Member for Councillor Hinder.

90. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman informed the Committee that an urgent update had been provided to Item 17 – Fees and Charges 2022-23 to correct an error within the charges for Maidstone Museum in Appendix 1 to the report.

91. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

92. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

93. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

94. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

95. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 NOVEMBER 2021

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed.

96. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

97. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

98. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

99. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Head of Regeneration and Economic Development confirmed that Economic Development Programme: Council's role within Partnership Arrangements would be a briefing paper circulated to the Committee in January 2022. The Review of Revised Museum Opening Hours and Working Arrangements was planned to take place after one year of the revised arrangements, and legal advice was required before the Governance Arrangements to deliver the Museum's 20-Year Plan could be presented.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

100. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

101. PRESENTATION - ECONOMIC IMPACT OF ELMER'S BIG HEART OF KENT PARADE

Rachel Street, Chief Executive and Ann-Marie Kelly, Income Generation Director of the Heart of Kent Hospice gave a presentation on the economic impact of Elmer's Big Heart of Kent Parade. The routes organised guided participants on heritage, nature and river trails through the placement of the 50 large Elmer sculptures, and the economic model was based on participants returning to Maidstone to complete the trail in sections. Results of the survey conducted following the auction of the Elmers showed that 37% of respondents visited the trail over six days or more. 78% of respondents reported spending more time in Maidstone due to the installation, and 98% said they were proud to have the trail in their local area.

An evaluation of the economic impact showed that local day visitors to Maidstone spent on average £20.16 per person during their visit, and non-local day visitors spent £30.58 on average per person. Using the Sustrip event impact model, the total event impact was estimated to be £7,384,972.

In response to questions, the Income Generation Director explained that another event could be considered in the future but would be dependent on support to ensure a similar level of success and engagement from the Council, local businesses and the public.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be noted and the Committee extend their thanks to the Heart of Kent Hospice.

102. 2ND QUARTER FINANCIAL UPDATE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Head of Finance introduced the report and explained that an underspend of £8,000 was forecast against the revenue budget for the Committee with some anticipated shortfalls at the leisure centre, business terrace and the market. The total capital expenditure for the year was predicted at £2.9 million, with £1.5 million slippage forecast on the capital programme which was largely attributed to the Mote Park Visitor Centre and Estate Services Building.

The Senior Business Analyst introduced the performance monitoring report and explained that both targetable key performance indicators (KPIs) missed their target by more than 10%. Footfall in the Town Centre was 11.5% higher however than the same quarter the previous year, and the number of youths unemployed (18-24) was slowly decreasing.

In response to questions, the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development confirmed that although there had been multiple vacancies during the pandemic, there was currently one vacant unit in the business terrace.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 2 for 2021/22, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted;
2. The Capital position at the end of Quarter 2 be noted; and
3. The Performance position as at Quarter 2 for 2021/22, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified, be noted.

103. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Head of Finance introduced the report for the Committee's consideration and comment. It was highlighted that the Strategic Plan was still considered to be relevant, although emerging priorities had been identified including the Town Centre Strategy and the proposals for 1000 additional affordable homes. Key assumptions included a council tax increase of 2% and inflation of 2%, with some higher inflation assumptions for items such as energy costs. A further £500,000 had been allocated to cover any unforeseen pressures caused by high inflation.

The Committee considered the importance of providing premises for local businesses, particularly small industrial or commercial premises where a shortage currently existed.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted and the Committee request that the capital programme contains sufficient scope to speculatively bring forward employment property such as b2 and b8 classifications in support of the Economic Development Strategy.

104. FEES AND CHARGES 2022-23

The Head of Finance introduced the report and explained that this would contribute to the setting of the following year's budget. There was a requirement for charges to be reviewed annually, and information around income budgets had been included for context. It was highlighted that charges had been increased for some museum activities, and an urgent update had been provided to the Committee which corrected errors to the museum charges listed in Appendix 1 to the report.

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

105. PRESENTATION - MAIDSTONE MUSEUM EDUCATION AND ARTS PROGRAMME

The Public Programming Manager and the Learning and Events Officer presented Maidstone Museum's programme for education and arts, which was funded by the Arts Council. There was usually a provision of themed tours for schools to book, however during the pandemic virtual lessons and learning boxes had been developed in order that education programmes could continue remotely. Several initiatives had been developed to improve access to the museum's resources for those with special educational needs, including the roll-out of fidget backpacks and an online walk-through of the museum.

The museum had engaged with schools throughout Kent and Medway, with 86% of schools within Maidstone Borough having used the museum's services, and 48% of schools in the county. The museum also promoted engagement with people who were at risk of social isolation. A successful funding application to Golding Vision had allowed a programme to be developed whereby museum objects were taken into care homes, and a grant from Involve had enabled object-handling events for those aged over 55 or with a long-term health condition.

The Committee felt strongly that the education and arts programme should continue, and it was acknowledged that funding was essential. It was important that opportunities were taken to increase income options and ensure the continuation of the team's work.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be noted and that the Committee extend their thanks to the museum team.

106. MAIDSTONE LEISURE CENTRE

The Leisure Manager introduced the report and explained that the future of Maidstone Leisure Centre was a key part of the Making Maidstone More

Active initiative. Social, environmental and financial factors needed to be considered, and the three core options identified were to repeat, which would involve keeping the current arrangements in place; refurbish the building; and redevelop the centre.

The Committee provided feedback on the options presented within the report, and suggestions included bringing in other services to the sports centre, for example health and community facilities, which had been a successful model in other areas. It was acknowledged that centres which had been redeveloped had increased their footfall dramatically, but more detail was requested on the financial impact of the options. Further options were proposed including the use of land in Mote Park to build a new sports centre with the current leisure centre site used for a theatre and distributing facilities more widely across the Borough to improve access to leisure activities.

In response to comments, the Leisure Manager agreed that further modelling on borrowing costs would be included in the next report outlining the balance between revenue and capital costs. As swimming facilities were expensive to run, it was considered more financially viable to have them on the same site as gym facilities.

RESOLVED: That the feedback be used to inform a further report to the Committee with more detailed proposals on the future of Maidstone Leisure Centre.

107. PRESENTATION - MAIDSTONE RIVERSIDE LIGHT WALK PROGRESS UPDATE

Felix Lewis, Architect, presented ideas for the river light walk proposed within the Council's Recovery and Renewal programme. The initial concept was to raise the walkway and allow the river to ebb and flow underneath, which would both increase biodiversity by creating new habitats and also mitigate the risk of the footpath flooding. Better access to the river would be created from Maidstone Bridge and other areas of interest along the river would be linked, such as the memorial park and Archbishop's Palace. Subtle and creative lighting would increase safety and reduce antisocial behaviour.

In response to questions, the Leisure Property Manager explained that the timescale for this project would need to factor in surveys of the land, involvement from the Environment Agency and applications for funding.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be noted and further proposals be brought forward to a future meeting of the Committee.

108. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30pm to 10.28pm.

Note: The meeting adjourned between 9.06pm and 9.17pm.