

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE
POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 JANUARY 2023

Present:

Committee Members:	Councillor Garten (Chairman) and Councillors Brindle, Forecast, Fort, Mrs Gooch, Harper and Hastie
Lead Members:	Councillors Burton (Leader of the Council) and Russell (Lead Member for Leisure and Arts)

82. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Bryant, Hinder and Naghi.

83. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor Brindle was substituting for Councillor Hinder.

84. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

85. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

86. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members and Officers.

87. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

88. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That the items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

89. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 DECEMBER 2022

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed.

90. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

91. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR LOCAL RESIDENTS

There were no questions from local residents.

92. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

93. FORWARD PLAN RELATING TO THE COMMITTEE'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 1 December 2022 to 31 March 2023 in so far as it related to its terms of reference.

Councillor Russell, the Lead Member for Leisure and Arts, advised the Committee that she wished to add an update report on the gallery project at the Museum to the work programme.

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan relating to the Committee's terms of reference, as amended, be noted.

94. STRATEGIC PLAN REFRESH 2023-28

Councillor Burton, the Leader of the Council, introduced the report proposing refreshed areas of focus for the Council's Strategic Plan for the period 2023-2028 highlighting that:

- The proposed areas of focus reflected the long-term ambitions of the Council whilst also responding to the current national and local environment including recovery from the pandemic, increased housing need, financial insecurity and the climate crisis.
- The wording of the current area of focus relating to the implementation of the biodiversity and climate change strategy and action plan had been amended to emphasise that the impact on climate change and biodiversity would be central to all decisions.
- The shortage of temporary accommodation for homeless families was recognised together with the need to increase supply and work towards long-term housing solutions.
- The commitment to identify and deliver 1,000 affordable homes was now included together with the commitment to improve the quality of housing through the consistent use of the Council's statutory powers to promote good health and wellbeing.
- The commitment to the development of an ambitious Town Centre Strategy, which was now underway, was also referenced together with the use of various funding streams supporting leisure and culture.

During the discussion:

- Members expressed support for the changes to include identification and delivery of 1,000 affordable homes as an area of focus and the commitment to biodiversity and climate change.

- The Committee noted that when '*Working with community groups and parish councils to develop more sustainable community resilience and to encourage pride in our borough*' had been merged into a new action under Homes and Communities at 4.3, '*pride in our borough*' had not been included and requested this be added.
- The Officers confirmed that presentational issues identified by Members would be rectified in the version of the document to be submitted to the Executive, including the use of abbreviations.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO THE EXECUTIVE: That subject to the points raised in the discussion, the proposed refreshed areas of focus for the Council's Strategic Plan for the period 2023-2028, set out in Appendix A to the report, be approved.

Note: Councillor Hastie entered the meeting during consideration of this item (6.47 p.m.). She said that she had no disclosures of interest or of lobbying.

95. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND BUDGET PROPOSALS (ERL PAC)

The Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement introduced his report setting out budget proposals for services within the remit of the Committee. It was noted that:

- When the Committee last considered budget matters in November 2022, the Council had been faced with a budget gap of £2.5 million in 2023/24, mainly due to the impact of inflation on the Council's costs, with a steadily increasing budget gap in subsequent years.
- Since then, savings proposals totalling £1.1 million for 2023/24 had been developed across the Council and there had also been positive news arising out of Government announcements.
- In the Chancellor's Autumn Statement 2022 the Council Tax referendum limit was increased from 2% to 3% so if the Council agreed to a 3% Council Tax increase, this would raise more money. Business rates would also be frozen in 2023/24, but Councils would be compensated for the loss of income arising.
- Whilst the longer-term position remained challenging, these recent developments had had a positive impact, such that it was now anticipated that the Council would be able to set a balanced budget for 2023/24, provided that the savings proposals were adopted, and Council Tax was increased up to the referendum threshold.
- In the Local Government Finance Settlement 2023/24, there were changes to the one-off funding received by the Council, predominantly New Homes Bonus (NHB). This did not affect the proposals set out in the report because the Council had always treated NHB as one-off funding, not part of the revenue budget. Although the Government was reducing NHB in 2023/24, this was broadly compensated for by a new one-off Funding Guarantee.
- Three revenue budget proposals had been identified in respect of the services falling within the remit of the Committee: the funding of Economic

Development in future, new income arising from the re-opening of the Mote Park Café and a reduction in income from the Market.

- In terms of the Capital Programme schemes falling within the remit of the Committee, the major change was that the proposal in relation to the Leisure Centre was now £7 million over five years which would fund the practical improvements discussed at the last meeting rather than a replacement facility within the Five-Year plan. However, this did not mean that there would not be further capital expenditure in the future.

In response to questions:

Mote Park Café

The Lead Member for Leisure and Arts explained that, in terms of achieving income targets in respect of the Café, the operator was fitting out the kitchen and the work was nearing completion which would enable the facility to re-open.

One-off Funding Guarantee

The Leader of the Council confirmed that choices would need to be made about the use of the one-off Funding Guarantee considering the plans in relation to the 1,000 Affordable Homes Programme and demands in relation to the staff budget.

Business Rates Pool

The Leader of the Council confirmed that there was potential for growth in Business Rates income with the business park at junction 8 off the M20 and the Yalding enterprise park coming forward.

Market Income

The Lead Member for Leisure and Arts explained that it was proposed that there be a reduction in market charges to encourage the take-up of pitches. This would be accompanied by a marketing strategy to increase footfall.

Leisure Centre

The Lead Member for Leisure and Arts explained that it would be necessary for the Council to borrow to fund a new Leisure Centre and pay for that borrowing. The budget strategy was based on the fact that now was not the best time to be borrowing capital for a facility such as a Leisure Centre. However, provision was made in the Five-Year Plan for improvements as it was recognised that the building was ageing. It was hoped that 2027/28 would be the optimum time to build a new facility and work was continuing in the background on the location, design and facilities to be included. Further details would be provided in the report to the next meeting. The aim was to develop a proposal that would be ready to commence if funding became available.

The Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement explained that the Capital Programme was updated every year so this was a fresh set of Capital Programme proposals. Taking the funding previously proposed for leisure provision out of the Capital Programme allowed more capacity for the 1,000

Affordable Homes Programme because it was known that the costs of construction were increasing.

The Leader of the Council reiterated that the resources previously proposed for leisure provision had never existed in cash terms. It was always an intention to borrow and not borrowing for the Leisure Centre made it easier to borrow for the 1,000 Affordable Homes Programme.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO THE EXECUTIVE:

1. That the revenue budget proposals set out in Appendix A to the report of the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement be approved.
2. That the capital budget proposals set out in Appendix B to the report of the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement be approved.

96. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.