

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 5 OCTOBER 2021

Present: Councillors Bartlett, Joy, McKay, Mortimer, Newton, Purle (Chairman), S Webb and Young

Also Present: Councillor English

67. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors McKenna and Rose.

68. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Councillor McKay was present as a Substitute Member for Councillor Rose.

69. **URGENT ITEMS**

The Chairman informed the Committee that an urgent item request had been received in relation to the Public Spaces Protection Order which covered areas including the Brewer Street cemetery and Trinity Park, where incidents had occurred the previous week. The item would be accepted as urgent due to the pressing nature of the issue and would be taken after Item 17 – 1st Quarter Financial Update & Performance Monitoring Report 2021/22.

70. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

Councillor English was present as a Visiting Member for Item 15 – Draft Housing Strategy for Consultation, and to speak on the urgent item.

71. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

72. **DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING**

Councillors McKay and Mortimer had been lobbied on Item 14 – Resettlement from Temporary Accommodation with Pets Update.

73. **TO CONSIDER WHETHER ANY ITEMS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION.**

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public, unless any Member of the Committee wished to refer to Item 19 – Exempt Appendix 1: Cost Comparison Table.

74. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 31 AUGUST 2021

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 31 August 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to the spelling correction of the word 'Visiting' at Minute 49.

75. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

76. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

77. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

78. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

In response to a request, the Director of Regeneration and Place agreed that a report on Heather House and Pavilion would be added to the Committee Work Programme.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

79. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

80. RESETTLEMENT FROM TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION WITH PETS - UPDATE

Ms Dee Bonnet addressed the Committee.

The Housing and Inclusion Manager introduced the report which outlined the impact of the twelve-month pilot policy. Although individual households had an extended stay in temporary accommodation following refusal of a landlord to accept pets, the amount spend on nightly accommodation had reduced, and there had been no impact on the strategic aspiration.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Pet Policy, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be approved; and
2. The Policy be named the "John Chadwick Pet Policy".

81. AFGHAN RELOCATION AND ASSISTANCE POLICY

The Head of Housing and Community Services introduced the report and noted that changes had been made since the report was published, including the removal of the requirement for applicants under the Afghan LES scheme to satisfy the Habitual Residency Test. An additional scheme had been announced, the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) which was not included within this report. The majority of those accommodated would require a three- or four-bed property and the first four-bed unit would be available soon, subject to Committee approval.

In response to questions, the Head of Housing and Community Services confirmed that the Home Office had not requested a specific number of units to be provided by each local authority, and that as any housing provided would be in addition to the usual provision, there would not be an impact on homelessness provision. Five units would be a realistic number to deliver.

The Committee suggested to aim for six units to be acquired in order to be aspirational.

RESOLVED: That

1. The approach to acquiring private rented accommodation to support Afghan Locally Employed Staff under the government's Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy be approved; and
2. A target of six units be set for acquisition by the Council to assist with the Afghan Relocation and Assistance Policy.

82. DRAFT HOUSING STRATEGY FOR CONSULTATION

The Head of Housing and Community Services introduced the report and explained that the Housing Strategy would work together with the Local Plan to deliver the housing needed in Maidstone. Key stakeholders and members of the public would be consulted on the draft document, with feedback requested on the Council's delivery of its own housing stock, the utilisation of smaller sites not prioritised by Housing Associations, and work with Parish areas to bring forward rural exception sites. The strategy also addressed issues such as fire safety and energy efficiency.

RESOLVED: That

1. The draft Housing Strategy, at Appendix A to the report, be approved for consultation, with the results reported back to the Committee; and
2. A report be presented to the Committee on options for achieving the delivery of 1000 new homes in Maidstone.

83. 1ST QUARTER FINANCIAL UPDATE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Head of Finance introduced the report which looked back at the period to the end of June 2021. Regarding the revenue budget, a year-end underspend of £316,000 was forecast for the Committee, and an underspend of £144,000 for the Council as a whole. Positive variance had been seen from the crematorium, however operating costs were expected to rise following the increase in gas prices. An underspend was expected for temporary accommodation following the increased use of the council's own stock rather than nightly paid accommodation. The capital budget showed £1.7 million spent in the first quarter, with the most significant spend on the acquisition of flats at Spring Mill. A slippage of £16.3 million was anticipated and was largely attributed to the private rented sector housing and affordable housing programmes.

The Senior Business Analyst introduced the Performance Monitoring report which showed two of the three key performance indicators (KPIs) had met their target. Percentage of successful relief duty outcomes had missed its target by more than 10%, having achieved 38.04% compared to the target of 60%. However, the national average for this indicator was 40.4% and the target would therefore be revised to a more realistic figure. The percentage of successful prevention duty outcomes and number of households prevented or relieved from becoming homeless were more critical indicators of homelessness and had both exceeded their targets by more than 20%. KPIs had been added to assist with monitoring the borough's recovery from Covid-19. Short-term trends would be identified within the second quarter report.

In response to questions, the Head of Housing and Community Services explained that the removal of the Covid regulations and the introduction of the Domestic Abuse Act would impact on the number of people coming forward for housing assistance. Although it would be possible compare the Council's performance to other authorities, this may have limited value as it would not be comparing like with like due to the diversity of initiatives across authorities.

RESOLVED: That

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

84. MEMBER AGENDA ITEM REQUEST: PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDERS

Councillor English explained that there had been a growing frequency of antisocial behaviour in High Street Ward and East Ward, notably at Trinity Park, the cemetery at Brewer Street, Brenchley Gardens and Len Valley Nature Reserve. All areas were covered by the Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO), and it was requested that a report be brought to the Committee to review the effectiveness and enforcement of the PSPO.

It was highlighted that the Community Protection Manager had been communicating regularly with Kent Police and the Parks Team about how to address the issues raised, and cluster meetings were being held with local Police Officers and Ward Members.

The Head of Housing and Community Services advised that the report on Brenchley Gardens – Costings for Safety Measures being presented to the Committee in November would incorporate a risk analysis of the dispersal from Brenchley Gardens into other areas, and this issue could be addressed within that report. A second report scheduled for January to review the use and enforcement of ASB powers with a view to procuring a pronounced tightening could incorporate the issue raised around the effectiveness and enforcement of the PSPO.

RESOLVED: That the issues identified be incorporated into the existing reports on the Committee Work Programme.

85. PROPOSED REFURBISHMENT OF THE COUNCIL OWNED STILEBRIDGE LANE & WATER LANE G&T SITES

The Director of Regeneration and Place introduced the report which provided revised costings for the refurbishment of the Stilebridge Lane and Water Lane mobile home sites. A report had been presented to the Policy and Resources Committee on 15 September 2021 recommending additional funding for the works, and it had been resolved to refer the matter to this committee for consideration.

The projected cost had increased from £1 million to £1.9 million, which was due to the increase to the scope of the project and the significant rise in material costs and pressures within the sector. Both sites required significant expenditure to bring them up to a modern standard which the Council had an obligation to provide.

In response to questions, the Director of Regeneration and Place explained that Kent County Council (KCC) managed most of the gypsy and traveller sites in Kent and had the expertise and staffing resources to do so. If the transfer of ownership of the sites to KCC was being considered in the future, the Committee could be involved in the decision. It was confirmed that the excess cost would be funded through the affordable housing allocation, and the contractors surveying the sites had not reported concerns about flooding.

RESOLVED: That the revised scope of the project be endorsed, and the Policy & Resources Committee be requested to make the requisite funds available within the Council's capital programme.

86. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30pm to 8.08pm.