

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 19 OCTOBER 2021

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

Also Present: Councillor English

52. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Cox.

53. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor R Webb was present as a Substitute Member for Councillor Cox.

54. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

55. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor English was present as a Visiting Member for Item 16 – Application for a Historic Plaque at Wrens Corner, Maidstone.

56. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

57. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillor Round had been lobbied on the following Items:

Item 15 – Historic Plaques Scheme Review

Item 16 – Application for a Historic Plaque at Wrens Corner, Maidstone

Item 17 – Maidstone Museums savings and restructure progress report.

58. 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 as proposed.

59. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14/09/2021

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed.

60. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

61. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

62. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

63. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair informed the Committee that two items would be added to the Work Programme; firstly to review the economic development programme and the Council's role within partnership arrangements, and secondly to provide an update on the education and arts programme at Maidstone Museum.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

64. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

65. 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 £19,000 was forecast for the Committee, and an underspend of £144,000 for the Council as a whole.

The capital budget showed a spend for the first quarter of £543,000, the most significant spend being on the Mall Bus Station Redevelopment. The Mote Park visitor centre and estate services building was expected to be completed in 2022.

The performance monitoring report reflected the recovery from the pandemic. Although footfall in the town centre missed its target by less than 10%, it was the highest recorded since pre-pandemic and the Economic Development team expected to see this continue to rise. Number of youths unemployed missed its target by more than 10%, but the numbers were seen to be decreasing. House prices in Maidstone had seen a significant increase of 10.2% on average.

In response to questions, the Head of Finance explained that the amount allocated for the final round of funding under the sales, fees and charges compensation scheme was not likely to have a significant impact on the Committee.

The Chief Executive Officer advised that calculations would come forward comparing earnings to property prices as an indicator of the challenge faced in the borough with regards to accommodation. The Interim Chief Executive Officer of Heart of Kent Hospice had provided a report on the economic impact of Elmer's Big Heart of Kent Parade, and arrangements could be made for the report to be presented to the Committee.

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 Quarter 1 for 2021/22, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified, be noted.

66. HISTORIC PLAQUES SCHEME REVIEW

The Museum Director introduced the report and explained the changes which provided more clarity to the administration of the Commemorative Plaques Scheme. The processing of the first two applications highlighted inefficiencies in the administrative process which the updates sought to address. A maximum of three applications would be processed per year, and research into the individual being marked would be carried out by staff to prevent reputational damage. A guide of six months from application to decision was added to allow time for the application to be administered and presented at Committee for decision.

In response to questions, the Museum Director explained that the responsibility for seeking consent to attach a plaque to a listed building would sit with the applicant, who would also be responsible for any repairs or replacements.

RESOLVED: That the proposed updates to the Commemorative Plaques Scheme be approved.

67. APPLICATION FOR A HISTORIC PLAQUE AT WRENS CORNER, MAIDSTONE

The Museum Director introduced the report and outlined the application made by Golding Homes for an historic plaque at Wren's Corner, the former Kent County Constabulary headquarters. The applicant had acknowledged their responsibilities under the scheme, including the

permission to affix a plaque to a listed building, and felt the building was significant to Maidstone's local history.

It was requested that additional wording was added to the plaque to further explain the significance of the site as the first county-wide police force.

RESOLVED: That the application to erect a Commemorative Plaque at Wren's Cross be approved, subject to the inclusion of additional wording, to further explain the significance of the site as the first county-wide police force, to be formulated by the Museum Director in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee.

68. MAIDSTONE MUSEUMS SAVINGS AND RESTRUCTURE PROGRESS REPORT

The Museum Director introduced the report which reviewed the first six months of the new service arrangements at Maidstone Museum. Amendments had been made to the opening hours of the museum and the staffing to achieve the savings target. To increase the museum's capacity for the May to September 2022 season a dedicated group of volunteers would be recruited and trained, in addition to those currently volunteering at the museum.

The Chief Executive Officer explained that the report on capital expenditure at the museum would give the Committee an opportunity to look at enhancements that could be made, with resources that had already been secured. A visitors' survey would be included in the further report on the review of the revised opening hours and working arrangements which would be used as part of the evaluation of the changes. It was acknowledged that the current governance of the museum was complicated and suggested that could be revisited.

In response to questions, the Museum Director explained that the turnover of objects in museums tended to be slow, due to the time required to research and prepare for a new exhibition, and some artifacts were unsuitable for display. The Transformation team had started to explore how the museum might use digital methods and technology to increase efficiency in the gift shop, and whether the gift shop could be managed by another organisation. A visit to Brighton Museum would be planned for Members to discuss with the curator the innovative ideas used to modernise the displays.

RESOLVED: That

1. The progress made in achieving the Medium Term Financial Strategy targets and restructure be noted;
2. Officers of the Museum be thanked for their efforts during the period of uncertain times;

3. The current operations of the Museum be reviewed against the Maidstone Museum 20 Year Plan and presented to the Committee for feedback;
4. A report be brought forward on the planned use of the £400,000 capital expenditure allocation; and
5. A report be brought forward on the museum's current governance arrangements, including options for simplification.

Note: Councillor Forecast joined the meeting during this item.

69. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30pm to 8.44pm.