

Please note that the decision arising from Minute 133 was taken as a result of the call-in process and cannot be called in.

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 19 JANUARY 2022

Present: Councillors Mrs Blackmore, Brice, Burton (Chairman), Cooke, Cox, English, Harper, Khadka, Kimmance, Munford, Parfitt-Reid, Perry, Purle and Round

Also Present: Councillors Clark, Cooper, Mortimer, Robertson and M Rose

125. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Ring and de Wiggondene-Sheppard.

126. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Councillor Purle was present as a Substitute Member for Councillor Ring.

127. **URGENT ITEMS**

The Chairman informed the Committee that he had accepted an urgent update to Item 9 – Park & Ride Service – Call-In, which provided additional information for the Committee to consider.

128. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

Councillors Cooper and M Rose were present as Visiting Members for Item 9 – Park & Ride Service – Call-In.

Councillors Clark, Mortimer and Robertson were present for the debate on Item 9 – Park & Ride Service – Call-In, as the Members that had signed the call-in referral form.

129. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

130. **DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING**

All Committee Members had been lobbied on Item 9 – Park & Ride Service – Call-In.

131. EXEMPT ITEMS

The Chairman informed the Committee that except for the legal advice contained within the restricted papers, consent had been given from the relevant parties to discuss the information in open session.

RESOLVED: That at least in the first instance the Committee remain in open session, unless any Member of the Committee wished to refer to the legal advice contained within Item 9 – Park & Ride Service – Call-In.

132. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

Councillor Mortimer introduced the petition received and highlighted the number of signatories from across the Borough.

RESOLVED: That the petition be considered during the Committee's consideration of Item 9 – Park & Ride Service – Call-In.

133. PARK & RIDE SERVICE - CALL-IN

The Director of Regeneration and Place introduced the report and referenced the original report and subsequent decision made following its presentation to the Strategic planning and Infrastructure (SPI) Committee on 7 December 2021. Officers had recommended that the initial subsidy requested be agreed, however an increased amount had been requested by the Operator prior to the issue's consideration which could not be met through Covid-19 relief monies in their entirety.

The Operator had formally served notice to the Council that the Park and Ride Service would end on 19 February 2022, due to the significant impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the service's viability which was further affected by the recent Omicron variant of Coronavirus. The urgent update, which contained further information on the usage and the uncertainty of the financial support required by the Operator, was referenced.

Councillor Cooper addressed the Committee as the Chairman of the SPI Committee and outlined the contributing factors to the original decision made, which was that no further subsidy be provided.

The Councillors that had signed the call-in referral form were invited to address the Committee and outlined the content of the petition.

Several Members reiterated the benefit of the service to all residents and that an equality impact assessment had not yet been conducted. It was felt that further public consultation should have taken place before the operator's request for further financial support was initially considered by the SPI Committee. As the Government's guidance to 'Work from Home' had been withdrawn as part of the continued recovery from Covid-19, it was possible that the number of service users would increase.

There were concerns expressed that the service's end would negatively impact air quality, the achievement of the Council's carbon neutrality target, congestion and the ongoing Local Plan Review.

In response to questions, the Director of Regeneration and Place reiterated that formal notice was served to the Council and that no other potential operators had been contacted. The Chief Executive confirmed that the Council's staff were able to use the service for work purposes, but that alternative methods to assist staff no longer able to use the facility, would be considered in the future if required. The Council's commitment to carbon reduction was emphasised.

During the debate, it was felt that individuals were unlikely to return to the office full-time due to the benefits of home working, which would prevent the service from recovering fully. Given the consistent decline in service users alongside the likelihood that the operator required additional medium-to-long term financial support, the service was felt to be nonviable. The Committee were of the view that in the circumstances the service's continued provision would not deliver value for money for local residents and taxpayers across the borough.

The importance of promoting adequate provision of local commercial bus services was referenced. Officers were encouraged to consider alternative options for the park and ride sites, as included within the decision made by the SPI Committee.

RESOLVED: That the original Strategic Planning and Infrastructure Committee decision be endorsed.

Note: Councillor Parfitt-Reid left the meeting between 7.33 p.m. to 7.36 p.m.

134. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

135. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

136. EXEMPT APPENDICES (A-D) TO ITEM 9 - PARK & RIDE SERVICE - CALL-IN

RESOLVED: That the item be considered alongside Item 9 – Park & Ride Service – Call-In.

137. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.04 p.m.