

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 14 FEBRUARY 2023

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors Newton (Vice-Chair in the Chair), Bartlett, Brindle, Fort, Rose, R Webb, Young and Conyard
Lead Members:	Councillor Parfitt-Reid, Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement Councillor S Webb, Lead Member for Housing and Health
Visiting Members:	Councillor Cleator

119. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Khadka and McKenna.

120. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Conyard was present as a Substitute Member for Councillor Khadka.

121. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

122. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman stated that Item 18 – Housing Strategy 2023-28 would be presented before Item 17 – 1000 Homes Update.

123. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor Cleator was in attendance as a Visiting Member for Item 15 – Commissioning Support from the VCS, Item 16 – Review of Housing Assistance Policy (including DFG), Item 17 – 1000 Homes Update and Item 18 – Housing Strategy 2023-28.

124. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Councillor Brindle stated that she had a familial link to Item 16 – Review of Housing Assistance Policy (including DFG), however the family member did not work in Maidstone.

125. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillor Rose declared she had been lobbied on Item 11 – Questions from Members to the Chairman.

126. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

127. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 JANUARY 2023

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting Held on 17 January 2023 be agreed as a correct record and signed, subject to the attendee list being amended to remove both the duplication of Members' names and the Lead Members from the Committee Member section.

128. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

129. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FROM LOCAL RESIDENTS

There were no questions from Local Residents.

130. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There was one question from a Member to the Chairman

Question from Councillor Rose to the Chairman of the Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee

'I've recently seen several young boys riding through Weak Street on bikes at high speed. I've also seen young boys congregating in Maidstone bus station on bikes gathered on road lanes that are used by the buses. I also saw a young boy running by the bus as it was moving off from its stop.

These situations are very dangerous to pedestrians and bus drivers as well as youths themselves. May I also add that I was on the bus at that time, and it was the bus driver that drew my attention to the young boys on the bus lane, and can I take the opportunity of commending this particular bus driver who was very contentious and when we got on the bus to TW we had a passenger who was sadly blind and the bus driver actually got out of the cab and helped the passenger across the road.

Also, to add that bus drivers don't stand a chance when they've got young kids on bikes in front of them in the lane, the bus had to swerve to get out of the way there was about 12 of them on bikes and 1 boy running beside the bus and it's very dangerous. Also going down weak street, hurtling their bikes down weak street when it was full of pedestrians who could be hurt. I think this matter is quite a serious situation'.

The chairman responded to the question.

Councillor Rose asked the following supplementary question:

'What powers do the town security officers have to deal with dangerous situations which can endanger people in the town'

The Chairman responded to the supplementary question.

To listen to the answers to these questions, please use the below link to access the meeting recording:

[Communities, Housing and Environment Policy Advisory Committee - 14 Feb 2023 - YouTube](#)

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

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan relating to the Committee's Terms of Reference be noted.

132. FINANCIAL UPDATE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Head of Finance introduced the report, stating that the current revenue position demonstrated a small underspend of around £340,000, with a forecast overspend of around £290,000 by the end of the financial year. There had been under-or-overspends relating to public conveniences, recycling and the crematorium. The two key areas of overspending related to temporary accommodation of around £730,000 and additional costs to the existing waste collection contract, with further details contained within the report.

There had been slippage of around £7.9 million within the capital budget, which was broadly attributed to the Disabled Facilities Grant, temporary accommodation, private rental sector housing and 1000 Affordable Homes projects.

The key performance indicators (KPIs) showed a comparable performance to the second quarter of the financial year, although the performance achieved had not been as high as hoped. The information contained within the appendices to the report concerning the recovery and renewal funding and UK Shared Prosperity Fund was referenced.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 3 for 2022/23, 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 3 be noted;
3. The Performance position as at Quarter 3 for 2022/23, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified, be noted.
4. The Recovery & Renewal Update, attached at Appendix 3 be noted; and
5. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund update, attached at Appendix 4 be noted.

133. AWARD OF ARBORICULTURAL SERVICES CONTRACT

The Parks and Open Spaces Manager introduced the report and stated that the Council managed an extensive estate of land and associated tree stock.

The opportunity to tender for the work was published on the Kent Business Portal in October 2022, with five submissions received of which three were assess as fully qualifying tenders. It had been determined that Qualitree Services Limited was the company best placed to provide a professional responsive service.

RESOLVED: That the Lead Member for Environmental Services be recommended to award the Arboricultural Services Contract to Qualitree Services Limited for the contract period of 3 years with options to extend the contract for years 4 and 5.

134. COMMISSIONING SUPPORT FROM THE VCS

The Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement introduced the report and stated that following agreement from the previous Communities, Housing and Environment Committee in November 2021, the service level agreements (SLA) in place with several community organisations had been reviewed. The purpose of the review was to ensure that the services provided met the needs of the Council and its residents and included reviewing performance monitoring and staff consultation; the organisations were the Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Maidstone Mediation and Involve Kent.

It was stated that overall, the Council's staff were satisfied with the services provided through the SLAs with the CAB and Maidstone Mediation, with no changes to the SLA recommended. The Council and the CAB would continue working together to ensure that the performance monitoring data included the information required to enable the Council to improve the support provided to housing clients. The services provided through the SLA with Involve Kent were not a proactive tool to encourage engagement and reach the borough's communities that were currently disengaged, with it recommended that the SLA not be renewed. The positive working relationships with Involve were noted.

The Visiting Member declared that they had an interest in the matter as they worked within the sector.

In response to questions, the Insight, Communities and Governance Manager advised that they did not have data on the housing list wait times. It was reiterated that the Council and the CAB would be reviewing how data was provided, to enable analysis to better understand service demand to take place, to provide proactive and preventative responses where possible. The work between the Council's Housing Team and the CAB specifically was referenced, to resolve any issues arising from transferring clients between the services.

In response to further questions, the Head of Housing and Regulatory Services explained that the Helping You Home project from the Better Care Fund is still in place. The Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement stated that the funding from not renewing the SLA in place would be used to commission engagement with communities.

The Committee expressed that they wished to commend the work completed.

RESOLVED: That

1. The findings of the of the review of Commissioning Support for the Voluntary and Community Sector outlined at paragraphs 2.29-2.32 in the report, be noted;

The Lead Member for Communities and Public Engagement be recommended to approve that:

2. The SLA with Involve Kent is not renewed; and
3. The funding instead be used to commission proactive engagement with seldom heard groups within the community.

135. REVIEW OF HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY (INCLUDING DFG)

The Lead Member for Housing and Health introduced the report, which outlined the Council's approach to delivering housing assistance and the statutory Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG).

The main changes proposed were to provide a discretionary budget to help the most vulnerable residents when the statutory provision was insufficient, and to increase the Home Improvement Agency (HIA) fee to support the increased autonomy proposed for the HIA as part of the DFGs provision, improving the service provided to residents. The fee had not been changed across the past 10 years. The Council's Housing Service would then have increased capacity to tackle poor housing standards and housing safety, to have an active role in housing standards across all tenders. A prioritisation framework would be produced, with an example attached at Appendix B to the report.

In response to questions, the Head of Housing and Regulatory Services stated that the Council had reduced the time to authorise DFG grant applications from 51 to 10 days. The proposed prioritisation framework would highlight the relevant applications and support the Council completing the work on it sooner. Any residents within Housing Associations could submit a DFG application in the same way as a homeowner or private tenant.

If the proposal was agreed, the Council and HIA would have monthly meetings to monitor caseloads, with the Lead Member to receive quarterly reports on the matter. The Lead Member for Housing and Health reiterated their ongoing communications with the housing team in maintaining an overview of the service.

The Committee expressed support for the proposals, with specific reference made to the prioritisation framework to support the most vulnerable residents that required housing adaptations.

RESOLVED: That the Executive be recommended to approve

1. The Housing Renewal Policy 2023 attached as Appendix A to the report;
2. The increase in the Home Improvement Agency fee from 12% to 15%; and

3. The development of a priority framework to process Disabled Facilities Grants by the Head of Housing and Regulatory Services, in collaboration with the Lead Member for Housing & Health.

136. HOUSING STRATEGY 2023-28

The Lead Member for Housing and Health introduced the report, stating that the Housing Strategy provided a framework for the Council to fulfil its statutory housing functions through other more detailed policies, supporting the strategic plan objective of 'Homes and Communities'. The three main priorities of the strategy were the delivery of a range of housing types, ensuring the existing housing in the Borough is maintained and to secure the best support for the vulnerable households.

Following the strategy's adoption, the Lead Member for Housing and Health and the relevant service area would produce an action plan to set out how the priorities would be delivered. The action plan would be shared with the Committee.

During the discussion, the impact to local road and health infrastructure from increased development was mentioned. In response, the Lead Member for Housing and Health explained the use of CIL monies, and the continued work with Kent County Council and the National Health Services to ensure infrastructure was provided.

In response to questions the Head of Housing and Regulatory Services advised that there was an opportunity to provide bungalows through the 1000 affordable homes programme. The Council worked closely with KCC towards securing extra care schemes for our growing older population, as they were very successful.

RESOLVED: That the Executive be recommended to approve the Housing Strategy 2023-2028, attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

137. 1000 HOMES UPDATE

The Lead Member for Housing and Health introduced the report, stating that the Council's housing portfolio had increased to 238 units across the past five years. The next capital programme proposed a further £261.7 million towards achieving the 1000 affordable homes programme, purchasing temporary accommodation units, private rental sector units and the proposed Heathlands Garden Community. The changes to the Council's staffing structure and the three consultants appointed to support the projects' delivery were outlined.

The Lead Member for Housing and Health drew attention to the risks which included increased build costs, inflation, static local housing allowances and rising borrowing costs. It was hoped that there would be opportunities to offset the risks, such as modern construction methods and more realistic land purchase prices.

A grant from Homes England to support affordable housing would be secured, although the Council would still need to provide a subsidy per unit; in January 2022 this was estimated to be £17,600, but this had risen to £50,000 due to increased construction costs. In total £50 million of internal subsidy would need to be provided to deliver the 1000 affordable homes programme, and it was

imperative that the Council set side funding annually for that purpose. The programme's progress was outlined alongside its wide promotion.

In response to the Visiting Member's statement, the Director of Regeneration and Place reiterated the importance of ensuring that the housing provided was of good quality, irrespective of construction method. The employer's agent, Calfordseaden, would be monitoring on-site works to ensure the buildings' high standards, with the building regulations to be signed-off by the Council's Building Control Team where possible.

In response to a question, the Director of Regeneration and Place outlined the parameters of the Council's choice-based letting system alongside the use of Rural Exception Sites to restrict additional housing to local residents.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

138. DURATION OF MEETING

6:30 p.m. until 8:00 p.m.