

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

DEMOCRACY AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 27 MARCH 2024

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors Cooper (Chairman), Cox, English, Hastie, Jeffery, Perry, Rose, M Thompson and Webb
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76. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bartlett.

77. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Hastie was present as Substitute Member for Councillor Bartlett.

78. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

79. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

80. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

81. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

82. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

83. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 31 JANUARY 2024

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed.

84. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS (IF ANY)

There were no petitions.

85. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from Members of the Public.

86. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN (IF ANY)

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

87. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

88. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of outside bodies.

89. MEMBER TRAINING 2024/25 - DISCUSSION PAPER

The Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance introduced the report and thanked Members for their feedback for supporting new Councillors, which resulted in the following actions:

- The induction would be split over two sessions rather than one as feedback indicated this was too much information for one session. These would be hosted in the evening to allow Councillors with daytime commitments to attend;
- Councillors would have access to an 'officer buddy' from the Wider Leadership Team to assist and direct their concerns and queries;
- Various training sessions would be held throughout the year and repeated to allow flexibility featuring successful courses from last year including Chairman's training, Carbon Literacy and Nolan Principles, which were well received, and the regular courses such as Overview and Scrutiny skills, how to use the Constitution appropriately, Planning and Licensing;
- There were plans for the Communications team to make a video identifying Council officers and various sites in the Borough;
- There would be appropriate support for Cabinet Members relating to their portfolios; and
- Introducing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion training for Members, which is already in place for officers and should be easy to adapt.

Councillors were pleased with the content of the report and made the following suggestions:

- It was raised that there is a budget available for Councillors that could make use of outside organisations to pursue training of their choosing. It was requested that new Councillors were made aware of this fact;
- Concerns were raised that the Chairing training sessions were scheduled for later than the first meetings of the municipal year. It was clarified that the first meetings would only involve electing Chairmen, and that the second part of the induction training would include basic instruction and could be amended to include points on Chairing; and

- That training sessions on the content of the constitution would be useful, both for new and existing Councillors.

RESOLVED: That the approach to Member training for 2024/25 be noted and any additional training requested be agreed.

90. MEMBERS' ACCESS TO INFORMATION PROCEDURE RULES - ANNUAL REVIEW

The Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance introduced the report and stated that the Constitution required an annual review on the application of the access to information procedure rules, the number of access to information requests from Members, whether these were declined and the reasoning for such decisions.

There had been 66 Cabinet decisions so far this year: out of which 6 had a Part II appendix and 1 where the whole report had been taken in Part II – which the Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance had reviewed and determined was appropriate to be taken in Part II. Officers and the Cabinet endeavoured to ensure as many decision making reports could be considered in open session as possible, the matters categorised as Part II related to property and, in particular, commercial or financial business affairs.

Members commented that they were satisfied with the way information had been dealt with and that reports and appendices dealt with clearly fell within Part II.

RESOLVED: That the annual review of Members' Access to Information be noted.

91. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 6.57 p.m.