

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**COMMUNITIES, LEISURE AND ARTS POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 DECEMBER 2023**

**Present:**

<b>Committee Members:</b>	<b>Councillor Forecast (Chairman) and Councillors Fort, Mrs Gooch, Hinder, Webb and T Wilkinson</b>
<b>Cabinet Members:</b>	<b>Councillor Russell, Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts</b>

54. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman advised the Committee that there had been a change to the order in which the reports would be taken as follows:

Item 12 – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Update

Item 10 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Financial Update and Performance Monitoring Report 2023/24

Item 11 – Fees and Charges 2024/25

55. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bryant, Eagle and Harper.

56. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Webb was present as Substitute Member for Councillor Bryant.

57. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

58. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

59. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

60. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

61. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

62. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 3 OCTOBER 2023

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed.

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

The Chairman stated that, in addition to the items shown, a report on the Financial Inclusion and Social Well-Being Strategy would be presented to the Committee in February 2024.

The Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts added that the report relating to Maidstone Leisure Centre – Leisure Services Contract would be brought to the Committee in January 2024 and the motion relating to Maidstone Leisure Centre referred to the Committee at the extraordinary meeting of the Council would be included on the agenda for the January meeting as well.

**RESOLVED:** That the Forward Plan relating to the Committee's terms of reference, as amended, be noted.

Note: Councillor Mrs Gooch joined the meeting at 6.32 p.m. during consideration of the Forward Plan. She stated that she had no disclosures of interest or of lobbying.

64. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION - ANNUAL UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts introduced the report providing an overview of progress made on the current Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan, which was agreed by the Executive in January 2023, and setting out proposed new actions developed in consultation with Officers and Cabinet Members and informed by the results of the staff EDI Survey.

It was noted that as part of its legislative duties under the Equality Act 2010, the Council was required to have an EDI policy, refreshed every three years, and a robust Action Plan, updated annually. The Council's three overarching objectives as a Community Leader, an Employer, and a Service Provider were set out in the EDI Policy and the Action Plan was in place to deliver these objectives.

Members thanked the Officers for a comprehensive and succinct report and supported the recommendations. It was suggested that a timeline for delivery of the actions would be helpful, and the Cabinet Member indicated that this would be added to Appendix 2 prior to consideration by the Cabinet.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET:**

1. That the progress on the current EDI Objectives and Action Plan at Appendix 1 to the report and highlighted at paras 2.4 to 2.5 be noted.
2. That the recommended actions for the Equalities Action Plan at Appendix 2 to the report and highlighted at paras 2.6 to 2.13 be agreed with the addition of a timeline.

65. 2ND QUARTER FINANCIAL UPDATE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts introduced the report setting out the 2023/24 financial and performance position for the services reporting into the Communities, Leisure and Arts Policy Advisory Committee as at 30 September 2023 (Quarter 2). The Cabinet Member drew the Committee's attention to (a) the improvements in the percentage of tickets sold at the Hazlitt and footfall at the Museum and Visitor Information Centre and (b) the update on progress made against schemes using UK Shared Prosperity Fund monies.

In response to questions:

The Cabinet Member advised the Committee that:

- The ongoing improvement in footfall at the Museum reflected the work put in by the staff and the Trusts to make sure that the facility continued to be worth a visit and to attract visitor numbers. The opening of the Carriage Museum during the summer had contributed to the improvement.
- It was disappointing that a number of units at Lockmeadow had fallen vacant during the period leading to a shortfall against budget. However, progress had been made in identifying new tenants and the business case for the acquisition of the Complex anticipated that there would be a period during which some units would be non-income producing.
- Under the terms of the current contract with the operator of the Leisure Centre, the Council was responsible for excess utility costs. The overspend in relation to the Leisure Centre reflected utility prices continuing to be at a high level. This would be taken into consideration when the new contract was negotiated. Overall, she was pleased that a lot of people were still visiting the Leisure Centre and that they considered it to be value for money.
- It was encouraging that there had been a reduction in the number of households at risk of (or in) financial crisis.
- The Key Performance Indicator measuring the 'Market Hall Occupancy Percentage' achieved 56.04% against its target of 75%. The situation was being monitored and the Council as operator of the facility was doing all it could to attract stall holders such as repainting the undercroft. No increases were proposed to the charges for market pitches.

The Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement advised the Committee that:

- In terms of the shortfall against budget in respect of the Lockmeadow Complex, it was anticipated when the Council acquired the Complex in 2019 that it would be challenging to replace tenants whose leases were due to end in 2023/24 if they did not continue. That had been the case, but Heads of Terms had been agreed with a prospective tenant for the former Frankie & Benny's unit and Serco, the contractor at Maidstone Leisure Centre, had taken on the David Lloyd unit and rebranded it as the Lockmeadow Health Club. Discussions were taking place with letting agents to identify suitable tenants for the other vacant units.

- The business case for the Lockmeadow acquisition assumed a twelve-month timeframe at the end of the existing leases when the units would either be vacant or, if let, subject to an offer of a rent-free period.
- When budgeting for next year the assumption would be made that new tenants are found for the vacant units, but it was also worth considering Lockmeadow in the context of the overall commercial property portfolio. The Council was generating around £4m in total from the commercial property portfolio and he was hopeful that a shortfall in one area would be offset in others.
- For the period up to the end of the current contract for the operation of the Leisure Centre, there was a separate agreement with Serco for the operation of the Lockmeadow Health Club and as part of that agreement income from the Health Club was shared between the Council and Serco. It was proposed to combine the Leisure Centre, Mote Park Outdoor Adventure and Lockmeadow Health Club into one leisure services contract subject to Cabinet approval in January 2024.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 2 for 2023/24, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted.
2. That the Capital position at the end of Quarter 2 for 2023/24 be noted.
3. That the Performance position as at Quarter 2 for 2023/24, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified, be noted.
4. That the Recovery and Renewal Update, attached at Appendix 3 to the report, be noted.
5. That the UK Shared Prosperity Fund update, attached at Appendix 4 to the report, be noted.

66. FEES AND CHARGES 2024/25

The Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts introduced the report setting out the proposed fees and charges for 2024/25 for the services within the remit of the Committee and explained that:

- Fees and charges were reviewed annually as part of the budget setting process. It was not proposed to increase any of the fees relating to educational activities for schools at the Museum. However, it was proposed to increase other fees and charges in line with the Council's Charging Policy.
- The findings of the 2024/25 Budget Survey showed that the Leisure Centre and the Museum featured highly in the list of discretionary services considered most important by respondents.

In response to questions, the Cabinet Member undertook to circulate to all Members of the Committee details of how many schools within the Borough visit the Museum and the action taken to promote school visits.

During the discussion, concern was expressed that one of the findings of the Budget Survey was that the proportion of people who said that they were proud of the Borough had declined from 50.7% in 2022 to 43.8%. In response, the Cabinet Member emphasised the responsibility of all Councillors to promote pride in the Borough and the potential through the discretionary spend items within the portfolio to raise its profile as a destination that people want to visit.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the contents of the report be noted.
2. That the Fees and Charges Policy, as detailed in Appendix B to the report, be noted.
3. **To RECOMMEND to the CABINET:** That the Fees and Charges, as detailed in Appendix A to the report, be approved.

67. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.08 p.m.