

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**PLANNING, INFRASTRUCTURE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 29 JANUARY 2024**

**Attendees:**

<b>Committee Members:</b>	<b>Councillors Blackmore (Chairman), Cleator, Conyard, Mrs Grigg, Jones, Kimmance, McKenna, Spooner and Trzebinski</b>
<b>Cabinet Members:</b>	<b>Councillor Cooper (Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development)</b>

112. APOLOGIES OF ABSENCE

There were no apologies.

113. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

114. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

115. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

116. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

117. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

118. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

119. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 JANUARY 2024

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed.

120. 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.

## 121. BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development introduced the report and stated that the Council was joint 35<sup>th</sup> of 186 Councils in implementing its plan. Successes included a significant reduction in carbon emissions, providing carbon literacy training, the Eco-Hub, and upgrading 17% of the Council's fleet to electric vehicles. The ambition to continue making improvements within the available budget was highlighted.

In response to comments made by the Committee:

- The Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager advised that visitors to the Eco Hub had more than doubled this year, with events delivered in partnership with 18 businesses with sustainable credentials. The team looked to target re-opening the hub in the Winter and half term periods to encourage greater attendance and would focus on raising awareness to lower utility bills.

The Council had software that modelled a net zero scenario for all properties in the borough, allowing for further retrofitting, solar PV and funding opportunities to be looked into.

- The Head of Insight, Communities and Governance stated that staff travel to work was collected through a survey, to shape options to reduce emissions, such as car sharing being offered; the data could be provided with future updates once the data had been finalised.
- The Cabinet Member stated, where possible and practical, the Council would use the latest technology to support net zero housing. Retrofitting existing properties would rely on national policies and funding.

Members were supportive of the aims of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan but recognised that there was more work to be done. Suggestions made during the discussion included providing cycle to work initiatives and sharing information relating to the re-wilding, planting and hedging possibilities with local environmental groups.

The Cabinet Member agreed to pass on any queries outside the Committee remit to the relevant portfolio holder.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET:** That the strategic considerations for tackling net zero borough wide and action plan updates shown at Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.

## 122. MAIDSTONE LOCAL BUS FOCUS GROUP

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development introduced the report and stated that the proposed Local Bus Focus Group (LBFG) would replace the previous Quality Bus Partnership which had ended in 2021. Kent County Council (KCC) had proposed the LBFG's creation as part of a countywide strategic network. It was hoped that the LBFG would provide a mechanism for the Council to input into issues affecting the borough, with a

regular update report to be presented to the Maidstone Joint Transport Board for accountability purposes.

Option 1 of the report was the preferred option, which contained two recommendations.

The Committee supported the creation of an LBFG, but expressed concerns that the group may not be effective, could lack accountability and become a forum to discuss existing issues as opposed to pursuing improvements. Specific references were made to the following: that the rural areas needed to be represented, as there had been a reduction in the bus services available making the services more difficult to use and that alternative options should be considered; bus services were not reliable and there was a lack of accountability from service providers and; that a variety of external agencies should be involved in the LBFG to ensure its success, as well as KCC and the LBFG.

In response to the comments made the Cabinet Member stated that:

- KCC's initial proposal did not include Member engagement, but this had been put forward by the Council;
- Creating a LBFG would be an improvement on the current situation, with it hoped that the Council could secure improvements through the group. A significant amount of work had gone into the proposal;
- As the Council would be administering the LBFG, it would be appropriate to invite additional external partners where required, but KCC attendance had to be secured.
- If the Committee wished to be updated on the LBFG's creation and meetings, this should be after at least two meetings.

The Principal Planning Officer confirmed that KCC had been allocated £35.9 million in funding to support the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership network, with this to be allocated through the proposed structure. Creating a LBFG would allow the Council to put a case forward to access the funding.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET MEMBER:** That

1. A local bus focus group be created to allow for interaction and work on strategic issues with bus operators;
2. Delegated authority be given to the Head of Spatial Planning and Economic Development, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development, to commit the monies received from the Local Authority Bus Subsidy (Revenue) Grant, totalling £39,766, in accordance with the grant funding agreement as outlined in point 2.4 of the report; and
3. An update be provided to the Committee after at least two meetings of the local bus focus group have taken place.

123. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.20 p.m.