

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY COHESION POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 14 JANUARY 2025

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors Cleator (Chairman), Dawes, Milham, Oliver, Parfitt, Rodwell and Wilby
Cabinet Members:	Councillors English (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Enforcement), Jeffery (Leader of the Council) and Wales (Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness)

66. CHANGE OF ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman advised the Committee that they intended to take Item 13: Corporate Strategy ahead of Item 12: Medium Term Financial Strategy and Budget Proposals.

67. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Fort and Khadka.

68. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

69. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

70. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

71. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

72. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

73. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public, unless any Member of the Committee wished to discuss Item 15: Exempt Appendix to Item 8: Part II Minutes of the Meeting Held on 10 December 2024 or Item 16: Exempt

Appendices to Item 14: Maidstone East, Sandling Road Project Delivery and Investment Plan (formerly Demolition & Contamination Update).

74. PART I AND II MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 DECEMBER 2024

RESOLVED: That the Part I and II Minutes of the Meeting Held on 10 December 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed.

75. 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.

76. PUBLIC SECTOR-LED GARDEN COMMUNITY

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness introduced the report and outlined the joint venture with the council, acting as land promoter and developer, and Homes England. As the largest allocation on the Local Plan Review, it was considered sensible to adopt a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), with a comprehensive evidence base, prior to the Outline Planning Application (OPA), with the aim of adoption of the SPD by late 2025, submission of the OPA in 2026 and the first houses to be built by 2030. The business case for the Heathlands railway station was also being advanced.

The Cabinet Member stated that, assuming the project reached delivery stage, any monies invested would be recovered as a top slice of any receipts generated through onward sales of development land parcels and that the council would have first refusal to require 40% affordable housing. In response to queries from the Committee, it was advised that the monies would come from, and be returned to, the same funds.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET: That the additional spend of £2.5m associated with providing Supplementary Planning Document support to the Local Planning Authority and submission of Outline Planning Application be agreed.

77. RESIDENTIAL RENT SETTING POLICIES

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness introduced the report and outlined the three policies for each tenure group: social and affordable, Maidstone Property Holdings (MPH) and Temporary Accommodation (TA), which would be made available online for tenants and external stakeholders. The increase was influenced by the central government published rent standard document and would put rent rates in line with housing benefit guidance. The additional £600,000 income from the increase would be used to continue to provide temporary accommodation at a higher standard.

Concerns were raised by the Committee that the rent increase should have been staggered rather than increased in one hit and around how this would affect tenants. The Housing Portfolio Manager advised that the increase would be in line with 2024 levels and, in many cases, would be covered by housing benefits. It was also clarified that the rent setting would only apply to private landlords where the property was rented through the Council.

The Head of Housing & Regulatory Services added that there were exception circumstances and established case law that provided alternatives and that they would be in close contact with tenants. The Committee were reassured by the officer information.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET: That

1. The attached appendices to the report be approved;
2. The revised charge calculation be applied to all Maidstone Borough Council owned and short-term leased Temporary Accommodation; and
3. The Head of Housing and Regulatory Services, in agreement with the Head of Finance, be given delegated authority to amend temporary accommodation rental charges in exceptional cases, as set out in Section 5 to the report.

78. CORPORATE STRATEGY

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and advised that the Corporate Strategy, formerly the Strategic Plan, had been worked up through a series of workshops, including with Members, and through public consultation. There were four main priorities, including:

1. A High Quality Place, Adapted for a Changing Climate;
2. Resilient Communities;
3. Quality Homes; and
4. Fairer Economy for People and Planet.

The Leader advised they had started building a set of Key Performance Indicators and that the report included a year one plan. It was acknowledged that, given the government white paper on devolution, there may be a requirement to prioritise the plan.

The Committee raised several queries, the Leader of the Council advised that:

- As part of resilient communities, they intended to work with farming communities to see how they could be supported and to connect them to local people;
- In response to queries around Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMO), it was stated that there were a few possible routes including Article 4 or a Supplementary Planning Document. Both of these options would be actionable before devolution and were intended to make sure HMOs were dealt with fairly;
- In response to comments that the monies allocated to the Nature Recovery Fund would not be enough to effect real change it was advised that the fund would be prioritised to produce the best results in a short amount of time and that the Cabinet Member for Climate Transition and Nature Recovery had been reviewing sites;

- The monies for property decarbonisation would be used to hire an additional person to help people access funding; and
- Research would be done to set stronger targets for Air Quality Management.

The Leader of the Council stated that spending related to these areas would come back to the relevant Policy Advisory Committees for review.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET: That the Corporate Strategy and Year 1 Action Plan be approved.

79. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND BUDGET PROPOSALS

The Director of Finance, Resources & Business Improvement introduced the report and outlined the three elements: the Medium Term Financial Strategy, revenue budget proposals and capital budget proposals. The Committee were asked to bear in mind that most of the work was completed before announcement of the devolution white paper. The Committee were advised that the revenue budget proposals aimed to deliver a balanced budget and included a year one action plan with proposals for growth, citizen engagement, supporting the community and voluntary sector, an annual Parish conference in line with the Corporate Strategy. The biggest element in the Capital Programme was the Quality Homes for Life Programme to provide affordable and social housing, which was supported by putting monies in a housing investment fund.

During the discussion, the Committee covered several areas:

- Whether there was need for a Parish conference and how unparished areas would be engaged. Some Members stated that engaging with their Parishes was part of their job, whereas the Leader of the Council said the Parishes they have visited felt they did not have enough engagement. The Leader of the Council advised that there had been a recommendation in the white paper that all areas be fully Parished, which would be looked at in the future;
- Whether there was need for a Citizen's Assembly. In response to queries, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness stated that this would lead to more worthwhile engagement. The Head of Insight, Communities & Governance advised that the Citizens Assembly would give good representation from the community with experts attending to speak on certain topics; and
- Concerns were raised around the cost of dog control. The Head of Housing & Regulatory Services confirmed that this was a statutory service and, although this was more cost-effective to have in house, the cost came from housing the dogs, which was preferred to having them destroyed.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET: That

1. The draft Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2025/26 to 2029/30 set out in Appendix A to the report be approved;

2. The revenue budget proposals set out in Appendix B to the report be approved;
3. The capital strategy principles set out in paragraph 4.6 of the report be approved; and
4. The capital programme proposals set out in Appendix C to the report be approved.

80. MAIDSTONE EAST, SANDLING ROAD PROJECT DELIVERY AND INVESTMENT PLAN (FORMERLY DEMOLITION & CONTAMINATION UPDATE)

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness introduced the report and outlined the two stage procurement process and investment plan for delivery of 180 socially rented homes, commercial space, landscaping and a public park as part of the redevelopment of the former Royal Mail sorting office. It was highlighted that the funding sources and level of funding required had been identified in the exempt appendices.

In response to queries, the Head of New Business & Development clarified that the proposed consultants had been appointed previously under a tender process. It was also stated that there had been interest in the medical provision.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET: That

1. The proposed tenure mix, noting scheme performance as per Exempt Appendix 2 to the report, be agreed;
2. Subject to any necessary further Cabinet decision making, the use of the Council's Section 106, Community Infrastructure Levy and Business Rate Growth Fund monies to support the project, be endorsed;
3. The Director of Finance and Business Improvement be given delegated authority, to:
 - a. Appoint the preferred design contractor to conduct the necessary works as per the tenders;
 - b. Appoint preferred firm to conduct design works under a Pre-Construction Services Agreement (PCSA) with a target price of up to the sum shown in line A of Exempt Appendix 3 to the report; and
 - c. In the event the second stage tender price for the works is returned for less than the sum shown in line B of Exempt Appendix 3 to the report, to let contract.
4. If in the event tenders for the design and works cost are more than the agreed sums, officers return to the Cabinet to seek further approval prior to the development itself commencing; and
5. Mid Kent Legal Services, in consultation with the Director of Finance, Resources & Business Improvement, be authorised to negotiate and complete all necessary contracts, deeds and agreements arising from or ancillary to the tender process.

81. EXEMPT APPENDIX TO ITEM 8: PART II MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 10 DECEMBER 2024

RESOLVED: That the item be considered alongside Item 8: Part I Minutes of the Meeting Held on 10 December 2024.

82. EXEMPT APPENDICES TO ITEM 14: MAIDSTONE EAST, SANDLING ROAD PROJECT DELIVERY AND INVESTMENT PLAN (FORMERLY DEMOLITION & CONTAMINATION UPDATE)

RESOLVED: That the item be considered alongside Item 14: Maidstone East, Sandling Road Project Delivery and Investment Plan (formerly Demolition & Contamination Update).

83. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.53 p.m.