

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY COHESION POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 10 DECEMBER 2024

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors Cleator (Chairman), Conyard, Dawes, Forecast, Fort, Milham, Oliver and Rodwell
Cabinet Members:	Councillors D Naghi (Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion and Safety) and Wales (Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness)
Visiting Members:	Councillors Couch, Kehily, Sweetman, S Thompson and D Wilkinson

48. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman advised the Committee that they intended to take Item 16: Comprehensive Strategy for Reducing Violence Against Women and Girls: Progress, Proposals, and Pathways Forward ahead of Item 10: Future Sustainability of Community Larders.

49. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Khadka and Parfitt.

50. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following Substitute Members were noted:

- Councillor Conyard for Councillor Khadka
- Councillor Forecast for Councillor Parfitt

51. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman stated that Item 16 – Comprehensive Strategy for Reducing Violence Against Women and Girls: Progress, Proposals and Pathways Forward would be taken as an urgent item to allow it to be considered by the Committee before presentation at Cabinet.

52. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

The following Visiting Members were present for Item 16 – Comprehensive Strategy for Reducing Violence Against Women and Girls: Progress, Proposals and Pathways Forward:

- Councillor Couch
- Councillor Kehily

- Councillor Sweetman
- Councillor S Thompson
- Councillor D Wilkinson

Note: Councillor Dawes arrived at 6.34 p.m.

53. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

54. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

55. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public, unless any Member of the Committee wishes to discuss Item 15 – Exempt Appendices to Item 10: Future Sustainability of Community Larders, in which case the Committee would enter into closed session due to the possible disclosure of exempt information, for the reason/s specified having applied the public interest test.

56. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 NOVEMBER 2024

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 12 November 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed.

57. 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.

58. COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY FOR REDUCING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS: PROGRESS, PROPOSALS, AND PATHWAYS FORWARD

The Community & Strategic Partnerships Manager introduced the report and thanked Councillor Jenkins-Baldock for bringing forth the motion. It was stated that this was an important and topical issue which had already driven significant changes in the Safer Maidstone Partnership's approach to tackling violence against women and girls relying heavily on collaboration. It was acknowledged that there was still work to be done with the hope that the recommendations would lead to sustainable, well planned, and supported improvements.

Following statements from the Visiting Members, the Committee were enthusiastically supportive of the recommendations and concerns were raised that this had not been debated further when the motion was introduced at Full Council. Several Members stated that lived experiences were an important part of the discussion. It was also widely agreed that education on these issues should be introduced earlier.

In response to queries, the Community & Strategic Partnerships Manager and Director of Strategy, Insight & Governance agreed that the discussion had shown that lived experiences were important to inform the issue going forward.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET: That

1. The work undertaken to date in relation to reducing violence against women and girls through the Safer Maidstone Partnership be noted;
2. The actions as set out in section 4 of the report be progressed, ensuring the appropriate stakeholders can be engaged and the actions implemented appropriately; and
3. A further report be provided to Crime and Disorder OSC in April 2025 to provide an update on the progress made for each action, alongside the new Community Safety Partnership Plan, which will outline how violence against women and girls has been incorporated into the 2025-2028 Partnership Plan.

59. **FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY OF COMMUNITY LARDERS**

The Cabinet Member for Community Cohesion and Safety introduced the report and stated that the community larders at Shepway, Park Wood and Trinity had been opened to address health inequalities and food insecurity. The wider benefits had been reduction of food waste and providing opportunities for volunteering. The grant funding utilised to open and establish the larders has since ended, but a one-off sum was allocated in the 2024/25 budget, which will allow them to operate until the end of the financial year. There was no budget currently allocated beyond this. Interest was sought from charities and community-interested companies to continue the community larders but had unfortunately fallen through.

The report proposed to invest a one-off payment to The Bread and Butter Thing to continue with the larders, with the details outlined in the exempt appendices.

The committee entered into closed session at 7.17 p.m. to discuss the report appendices in further detail.

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business due to the likely disclosure of exempt information for the reasons specified having applied the public interest test.

Head of Schedule 12 A and Brief Description

15. Exempt Appendices to Item 10: Future Sustainability of Community Larders	3 – Financial/Business Affairs
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The Committee returned to open session at 7.45 p.m. and agreed the recommendation asking that officers relay any relevant information relating to The Bread and Butter Thing and consider the closed session comments in any future discussions.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET: That a one-off investment in The Bread and Butter Thing, to ensure a sustainable larder provision, as outlined in Exempt Appendix 3 to the report, be agreed.

60. HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING ACTION PLAN 2024-2029

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness introduced the report and stated the four priorities of the strategy: homelessness prevention; to provide accommodation; to work alongside vulnerable people; and to support rough sleepers. The Cabinet Member also outlined some of the proposed interventions including: expansion of the one view system and predictive analytics models; good partnerships working with other agencies; trying to reduce the number of households in temporary accommodation (TA) and working with stakeholders, including the voluntary and third sector. The rough sleeper count was mentioned, which had found an increase from 6 to 12 on the wettest day of the year. The Cabinet Member welcomed any suggestions for metrics, which might help with data gathering.

The Committee were supportive of the strategy. Several Members raised concerns around support for available for vulnerable people, particularly those with mental health issues. It was also suggested that the rough sleeper count may not be a true reflection of the numbers, as some people would sofa surf during bad weather.

In response to queries, the Head of Housing & Regulatory Services acknowledged the difficulty in attaining accurate figures and advised that a dashboard was being produced around homelessness, which all Members would have access to. He also advised that the staff at Trinity were fully trained to assist and support people with mental health needs.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET MEMBER: That the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan 2024-2029 be adopted.

61. 2ND QUARTER FINANCE UPDATE REPORT 2024/25

The Head of Finance introduced the report setting out the financial position for the services reporting into the Housing and Community Cohesion Policy Advisory Committee as at 30 September 2024 (Quarter 2). It was stated that:

- There was an overall overspend of around £449,000. Measures had already been introduced to produce downward trend including review of recruitment to current vacant posts by the Corporate Leadership Team and focus on critical spend areas only, by Heads of Service;
- This Committee had an overspend of £450,000, mainly due to dog control and temporary accommodation. There was an increased volume of dangerous dogs and longer waiting times for owners to collect, where medical or vet bills were concerned, and more people utilising temporary accommodation for longer periods due to lack of private accommodation and other routes to move onto; and
- There was quite a large Capital Expenditure slippage. The capital programme was approval to business case, not approval to spend, therefore the delivery of housing schemes took longer than original planned. These were taking longer than expected through the planning permission process. This was being reassessed for the next capital programme being developed for 2025/26.

In response to queries, the Head of Finance advised that demand for temporary accommodation was increasing and that more had been budgeted in 2025/26 to allow for this.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 2 for 2024/25, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted; and
2. The Capital position at the end of Quarter 2 for 2024/25 be noted.

62. HALF-YEARLY PERFORMANCE (KPI) UPDATE 2024/25

The Head of Insight, Communities and Governance introduced the report and stated that it set out the performance position against the 2024/25 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for the first half of the year covering April to September. The Committee were also reminded that KPI dashboard was available online and refreshed monthly.

It was outline that, of the 22 KPIs, 9 had a half yearly target and 7 had met their target, just under 78%. Both remaining KPIs missed target by more than 10% margin. This was for delivery of new affordable homes, which was down due to a downturn in development activity and for percentage of repairs completed within 21 days on residential properties by the Maidstone accommodation team. It was advised that a new housing asset manager had been appointed and performance has started to improve on this issue.

In response to queries, the Head of Housing & Regulatory Services advised that, due to communication issues, some of the repairs had not been recorded upon completion, but that this was now monitored more closely.

RESOLVED: That the performance position as at the end of the first half of 2024/25, including any actions being taken or proposed to improve the positions be noted.

63. FEES AND CHARGES 2025/26

The Head of Finance introduced the report and noted that the setting of Fees and Charges was part of the Council's budget setting process and intended to reflect current market rates. It was outlined that the rates were either statutory or discretionary and, where they were discretionary, it had been balanced to be competitive with the private sector. The report also highlighted opinion on the budget from the resident survey.

In response to queries, the Head of Housing & Regulatory Services confirmed that the Council were responsible for collection of stray dogs.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET: That the Fees and Charges as detailed in Appendix A to the report be approved.

64. EXEMPT APPENDICES TO ITEM 10: FUTURE SUSTAINABILITY OF COMMUNITY LARDERS

The Head of Insight, Communities & Governance and Policy, Partnerships & Inclusion Manager answered queries from the Committee on the costings, areas covered and methods used by The Bread and Butter Thing and also on previous interested parties during the procurement process.

65. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.34 p.m.