

## MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

### Economic and Commercial Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee

#### MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 22 APRIL 2014

**Present:** Councillor Barned (Chairman), and  
Councillors Ash, Cox, Cuming, Greer, Hogg, Naghi,  
Newton, Paterson and Mrs Stockell

**Also Present:** Councillor Greer

92. THE COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER WHETHER ALL ITEMS ON THE AGENDA SHOULD BE WEBCAST

**RESOLVED:** That all items should be webcast as proposed.

93. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

94. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute members.

95. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS/WITNESSES

Councillor Malcolm Greer, Cabinet Member for Economic and Commercial Development was present to speak on item 8: Cabinet Member for Economic and Commercial Development Review of the Year 2013/2014.

Karen Franek, Principal Economic Development Officer, was present to speak on item 9: Enterprise Hub Update and item 10: Employability and Worklessness Projects Update.

Abi Lewis, Economic Development Officer, was present to speak on item 10: Employability and Worklessness Projects Update.

96. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

97. TO CONSIDER WHETHER ANY ITEMS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

**RESOLVED:** That all items should be taken in public as proposed.

98. URGENT ITEM- AMENDED AGENDA

The chairman explained to the committee that an amended agenda had to be published as the minutes of the previous meeting had not been published with the original agenda.

99. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 MARCH 2014

It was explained to the Committee by the Research and Performance Officer that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2014 would require the following amendments:

- That the following phrase be added at the end of minute 90: Future Work Programme:  
**RESOLVED:** That the committee note the future work programme.'
- That a further minute be added to show the duration of the meeting

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes be signed as an accurate record of the meeting, subject to the changes above.

100. CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2013/2014

Councillor Malcolm Greer, the Cabinet Member for Economic and Commercial Development, was invited to speak on item 8: Cabinet Member for Economic and Commercial Development Review of the Year 2013/2014.

Councillor Greer explained the progress within his portfolio over the previous year, which included:

- High Street Regeneration Phase 2, which was completed on time and on budget.
- High Street Regeneration Phase 1, which had been handed over to Kent County Council to maintain as they were the Highway Authority.
- Cllr Greer was in the process of making arrangements to ensure utility companies repaired the High Street in a timely manner after any necessary works.
- Consultations (with the public and businesses) and feasibility studies were underway for further regeneration work on Gabriels Hill, Earl Street and Week Street.
- The arrangements being made to use a local company for all repairs to the High Street.
- Kent Institute of Medicine and Surgery (KIMS) was opened on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2014 by the Duke of Gloucester. The first operation was scheduled for the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2014. This brought 800 jobs to Maidstone, and 25% of procedures undertaken would be for NHS patients.
- KIMS Phase 2 was underway, called the Maidstone Medical Campus (MMC). Outline planning permission had been agreed and the Section 106 agreement was currently

being negotiated. This was a £230 million development, and would provide 3,000 jobs in Maidstone.

- The deal to regenerate Wrens Cross fell through, as Kent County Council (the site owner) and the developer could not come to an agreement.
- The commercialism agenda. It was explained the main areas under consideration were:
  - How to utilise the assets the council already had;
  - How and when the council could become financially self-sufficient; and
  - What investments could be made to ensure this happened.
- The Committee were informed that the Cabinet Member had been visiting businesses, and the one thing that stood out was the difficulty in these businesses being able to recruit skilled individuals to help them grow.

It was explained that the new Cultural Services Manager was in place at the Museum and in terms of the Visitor Economy the following achievements were highlighted:

- New signage had been installed in the town;
- A coach drop off point near the museum was operational; and
- The Visitor Information Centre won an award.

In terms of charitable work, the following work had been undertaken:

- Vinci helped build a garden at Heather House; and
- Blackthorn Trust have opened a new clinic room for ex service personnel. A £5,000 grant from Maidstone Borough Council helped to contribute towards the funding for this room.

Councillor Greer then took questions from the Committee.

The Committee were surprised that the consultation and feasibility study for the regeneration of Earl Street were only just about to take place, as it had been spoken about for some time.

Councillor Greer responded that as there was not a proposed regeneration scheme in place, the Council had missed out on Section 106 funding from the Next development at Junction 7 of the M20. This had focused everyone's minds in the Economic Development Department to have proposed regeneration schemes ready for implementation. This would be so that when the next major development was proposed the council could secure funding through Section 106 funds.

Councillor Greer suggested that draft sketches of the proposed Earl Street scheme should be circulated to the committee.

In response to a question from the Committee, Councillor Greer assured the Committee that the council had a ready supply of granite blocks for any repairs that were needed for the High Street.

The Committee asked Councillor Greer for information on how the high street fared in terms of foot fall, particularly in comparison to other high streets in Kent and regionally. Councillor Greer informed the Committee that this information could be supplied to the Committee at a later date.

The Committee enquired about whether there was any progress with regeneration work at the Maidstone East train station site. Councillor Greer responded that whilst there were proposals in place for the regeneration of the site, there needed to be an anchor store (such as a large food chain) to commit to make it viable. However, there are questions to be asked by the Council on whether Council funds should be invested to make a regeneration project viable.

The committee asked whether there had been any progress in putting some visitor information back in the town hall. Councillor Greer stated that this was the responsibility of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, so could not speak on his behalf.

The Committee thanked Cllr Greer for his update.

**RESOLVED:** That

- a) Information on footfall on the High Street, as well as comparative figures for Kent and regionally, be circulated to the committee;
- b) Draft sketches of the Earl Street regeneration scheme be circulated to the committee; and
- c) A progress update be requested from Councillor Moss around provision of visitor information at the Town Hall.

Councillor Stockell left the meeting during this item at 19:34.

#### 101. ENTERPRISE HUB UPDATE

Karen Franek, Principal Economic Development Officer, was invited to speak on item 9: Enterprise Hub Update.

Karen Franek conveyed to the Committee that the reason for the delays in the project was that Kent County Council had withdrawn £200,000 of grant funding for the project.

This had resulted in a review of the project to determine whether the project could be delivered on budget and responsibly. As a result of this review, various business plans had been written for the project based on different funding assumptions.

Karen Franek reassured the Committee that the Council remained committed to the project and that there was a need for an Enterprise Hub. However it was important to ensure that the council wasn't exposed to unnecessary risk whilst pursuing the project.

The Committee enquired how the Enterprise Hub would fit in with other providers in the sector. Karen Franek responded that the Enterprise Hub would be one of many providers in the market place that cater for the different needs of different businesses. The Enterprise Hub would be an open plan work space that would provide a collaborative working environment for small businesses, which was different to other providers in the market that provided managed offices. The Enterprise Hub would have an important role in linking up businesses with the appropriate support to enable them to grow.

The Committee asked Karen Franek whether the building proposed- the Crown Post Office on King Street- was suitable for such a business hub. In response, Karen Franek explained that the actual building itself was perfect for the Enterprise Hub. However the building was only being offered leasehold, which gave the Council a reduced level of security.

The Committee was of the opinion that good ideas would inevitably succeed, and questioned whether there was any need for an Enterprise Hub. Karen Franek explained that it was important that those who considered starting their own business were provided with high quality advice, as far too many businesses fail in their first few years of operation. The advice and support provided would help those who were considering this option decide whether starting a business was the right option for them. Those who go ahead with their businesses would also be able to achieve success earlier if they had access to the right advice and support.

In response to a question from the Committee, Karen Franek explained that one of the reasons for locating the Enterprise Hub in the town centre was because the town centre has good public transport links. This was important because one of the Council's objectives was to reduce the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training. One of the ways of achieving this was to encourage young people to start their own business, and good access by public transport to the Enterprise Hub was important to achieve this.

**RESOLVED:** That the final proposal outlining the Enterprise Hub be considered by scrutiny before the Cabinet Member takes a decision.

## 102. EMPLOYABILITY & WORKLESSNESS PROJECTS UPDATE

Abi Lewis, Economic Development Officer, and Karen Franek, Principal Economic Development Officer, were invited to speak on item 10- Employability and Worklessness Projects Update.

Abi Lewis gave a verbal update to the Committee on the progress of the Employability and Worklessness projects, including:

- A jobs fair, with businesses that had live vacancies present at the fair;
- A work experience coffee morning, where young people could come to find out about work experience placements at the Council;
- Developing a training providers database website to help guide young people to the appropriate training opportunities suited to their needs; and
- Cllr Greer and Abi Lewis would continue to visit local businesses to help them understand the benefits of employing young people, either in full employment or as apprentices.

The Committee asked Abi Lewis what provision there was in rural areas around skills and employability. Abi Lewis responded that those living in rural areas often faced barriers around transport in particular. However this was being addressed by travelling to those rural areas to provide support, for example hosting CV clinics in rural areas.

The Committee enquired whether the service being delivered could be turned into a revenue stream, as the Committee was aware that schools were already paying for a similar service. Abi Lewis informed the Committee that she was already working with Kent County Council, which would help her to engage with schools and businesses. Abi Lewis stated that developing the service along commercial lines was certainly something to consider.

Abi Lewis conveyed to the Committee that there was a real need for better careers advice in schools.

**RESOLVED:** That

- a) The Council be recommended to look at commercialising the skills and employability service it offers, particularly targeting local schools who may pay for the service offered by Maidstone Borough Council; and
- b) The Committee receive an update on the skills and employability work programme in 6 months time.

103. ECONOMIC AND COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE REVIEW OF THE YEAR 2013/2014

The committee considered the Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee Review of the Year 2013/2014.

**RESOLVED:** That the Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee Review of the Year 2013/2014 be presented to the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee, subject to the following changes:

- Councillor Stockell's name added to the committee membership; and
- The date for the Cabinet Member Decision on the Museums Collections Policy be amended to reflect the new date given in the list of forthcoming decisions.

104. DRAFT EVENTS REVIEW

The Committee considered the draft Events Review.

The Committee discussed whether the order of the recommendations should be changed so they were in order of importance. The Committee decided that the recommendations should be listed in order of importance for the purpose of the report to Cabinet, but should be left in the current order for the draft Events Review report.

The Committee discussed adding extra recommendations around an early warning system to notify residents before events were to take place and a single point of contact at the Council for events organisers.

**RESOLVED:** That:

- a) The recommendations be placed in the following order in the report to cabinet, to reflect their importance:
  - Recommendation 7 should be recommendation 1
  - Recommendation 6 should be recommendation 2
- b) A recommendation be added to the report about an early warning system for residents to let them know when events would be occurring nearby;
- c) A recommendation be added to the report about a single point of contact at the council for events organisers; and
- d) Councillors Cox and Newton should present the draft Events Review to cabinet.

And that the following recommendations should be included in the final review report:

- e) That the Committee supports the compiling of an Events Calendar by the Cabinet Member for Economic and Commercial Development.
- f) That once in place, the Economic Impact Assessment online tool should be used for all regular events that happen in the borough that receive funding or support from the Council.
- g) That once in place, the Economic Impact Assessment tool should be publicised to event promoters and those who have held events in the borough over the past three years.
- h) That a debriefing should happen with the relevant Head of Service following each Council funded or supported event to capture feedback and understand what lessons can be learnt.
- i) That the Council works with Maidstone Area Arts Partnership, and other partners, to create an Economic Impact Assessment tool for smaller events; including a matrix to determine which tool should be used for each event.
- j) That the event documents should be reviewed with the aim of creating an Events Pack for anyone wishing to hold an event which includes a checklist.
- k) That where MBC provide funding for an event, it should take on the role of Event Organiser (and the legalities set out above involved in

this) and delegates the event management to a responsible person/s.

- l) That there should be a single point of contact at the Council for Event Organisers.
- m) That an Event forum is set up to facilitate better sharing on information between the relevant event organisations/partners.
- n) That consideration is given to resurrecting the database of leisure and cultural based organisations, including the possibility of sharing the maintenance and administration of this database with another agency.
- o) That the possibility of sending out an Events Pamphlet with the Annual Council Tax bill be investigated for 2015 and beyond.
- p) That the feasibility of extending sharing arrangements with items from Maidstone attractions and events used at different locations/events to promote and signpost to the attraction is investigated, for example having a piece from Kent Life displayed at the Hazlitt.
- q) That consideration is given to introducing an early warning system to inform residents about events taking place in their area.
- r) That a mechanism for signposting people in the Town Centre to events happening elsewhere in the borough be introduced, as well as exploring opportunities for cross marketing of events.
- s) That the council should compile a list of all the event equipment it holds and publish this list accordingly, and encourage other event organisers/providers to do the same.
- t) That arrangements for hiring event equipment, when it is not in use, to partners and other event providers in the borough be investigated.
- u)

105. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee suggested that fees for using the river should be considered by the Committee as part of its work programming meeting in July 2014.

**RESOLVED:** That the Future Work Programme be noted and that fees for using the river be considered by the Committee as part of its work programming meeting in July 2014.

106. DURATION OF MEETING

18:30 to 21:23