

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Communities, Housing and Environment Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 2015

Present: Councillor Mrs Ring (Chairman), and
Councillors English, D Mortimer, Newton, Mrs Parvin,
Perry, Sargeant, Webb, Webster and J.A. Wilson

Also Present: Councillor Sargeant

20. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

It was noted that apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs Robertson.

21. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Councillor English substituted for Councillor Mrs Robertson.

22. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

Councillor Sargeant was in attendance as an observer.

23. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

There were no disclosures by members or officers.

It was noted, in relation to item 16, Maidstone Parish Charter, that Councillor English was the Secretary to the Kent Association of Parish Councils (KALC).

24. **DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING**

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

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

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

26. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16 JUNE 2015**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 June 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed.

27. **PETITIONS**

There were no petitions.

28. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Joan Langrick asked the following question of the Chairman:

Would the Committee be prepared to consider the following proposal?

The day we start seeing the homeless as valuable human resources is the day we start saving money. Those on housing lists or saving for a home of their own were previously working in their various capacities including ex-service personnel with strong leadership skills all looking for a hand up rather than a hand out. However, being homeless also engenders feelings of humiliation and degradation which can swiftly deteriorate into debilitating lifestyles and, saddest of all, mental health problems. These, not only cause distress to the sufferer, but treating them also costs the council a great deal of money. Add to these the massive housing cuts which will shortly apply to the eighteen to twenty one year's old, and we have a nightmare scenario which should make us provide temporary homes as speedily as they did after the last war. The question is "How can this be achieved in a cash strapped economy?"

The answer lies in recycling instead of wasting thousands of pounds chasing fly tippers and paying for vast amounts of domestic and commercial goods to be buried in precious land fill sites. The TV programmes "Amazing Spaces shed of the year" demonstrated how ordinary men and women created imaginative and weather-proof homes out of materials such as these. I suggest teams of the more motivated homeless be allocated several suitable sites, with access to all utilities, where they whilst building their own homes, out of recycled material, will quickly realise they are also rebuilding their confidence, self-esteem and so, ultimately their lives. The project would be structured, safe, renewable and appropriate to the area. Also, as these are temporary buildings the council will have no difficulty restoring these sites when their occupants move to their permanent homes. Surely helping the homeless to help themselves is a far better way of easing the vulnerable back into society rather than spending thousands of pounds on treating the addictions and mental health problems which have been created while sleeping on our pavements? I am hoping the council will look favourably on my project as it will not only be saving money but also, saving lives.

The Chairman replied that:

She had consulted Council officers on the matter and asked the Head of Housing and Community Services to make the response. It was explained that:

- Officers had visited Brighton to evaluate similar projects;
- The issue in bringing such a project forward was finding land suitable;

- A range of short-term accommodation options had been looked at but it was felt that there was no substitute for long-term accommodation;
- The Council's goal was to deliver as much long-term housing as possible;
- There would be a review of the Housing Strategy and the Committee would also be asked to consider themes for inclusion in the Strategy; and
- Promoted in the review would be the Government's self-build initiatives.

The next meeting of the Committee on 13 October would focus on the Council's Housing Strategy

29. REFERENCE FROM POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT 2014/15

The Committee considered the reference from Policy and Resources Committee in relation to the Annual Performance report 2014/15.

It had been noted by the Policy and Resources Committee when it received the report that there were no Key Performance Indicators for the Council's Commercial Waste Service.

The Head of Finance and Resources explained that the Quarterly Budget Performance Monitoring report would always pick up on adverse issues. The officer advised against putting a disproportionate emphasis on a single service area.

The Committee was satisfied that the Quarterly Budget Performance Monitoring report was fit for purpose and no further action was required.

RESOLVED: That the reference be noted.

30. BUDGET MONITORING 2015-16 AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2016-17 ONWARDS

The Head of Finance and Resources introduced the Budget Monitoring 2015-16 and Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016-17 report. It provided a financial analysis of the recent out-turn for 2014/15, the current performance in the first quarter of 2015/16 and the recently agreed draft medium term financial strategy for 2016/17 onwards.

It was explained that the main purpose was to consider the decision of the Policy and Resources Committee on the Medium Term Financial Strategy

and the impact this had on the Committee. The major budgetary pressure for the Committee to consider, as set out in the report, was temporary accommodation.

The Committee considered the report and resolutions and debated the impact of a non-decision making Budget Working Group, as referred to in the report's recommendations. The Committee was advised that this was intended to facilitate blue sky thinking when looking at its budgetary pressures and to enable free discussion on possible solutions. This in turn would support a more focused debate at the Committee meeting.

Members felt that the involvement of the entire Committee was needed and that a Discussion Group would be a more appropriate term. The recommendations were amended accordingly.

RESOLVED:

1. The out-turn for 2014/15 and the position for 2015/16 as at the end of June 2015 be noted;
2. That a reference be made to Policy & Resources Committee confirming agreement with the decision of the Policy and Resources Committee on the strategic revenue projection and the capital programme, in so far as it affects the Committee's budget;
3. The Committee agreed to consider budget pressures and opportunities to provide savings to support the medium term financial strategy be considered through a discussion group of the whole Committee and the results of the consideration be reported to a later meeting of the Committee for consideration; and
4. That potential capital projects be informally discussed by the discussion group and the results be reported to a later meeting of the Committee for consideration.

Voting: 9 – For 0 – Against 0 – Abstentions

31. **DOES THE COUNCIL SUPPORT THE PRODUCTION OF AN AFFORDABLE ENERGY STRATEGY?**

Helen Miller, Expenditure Project Officer, introduced the Affordable Energy Strategy report and Action Plan. It was explained that approximately 5000 households in the borough were affected by fuel poverty. These households were likely to either under heat their home or fall into debt due to high bills. The negative impact on health and the long term impact on children's educational attainment was explained. Reducing fuel poverty was a key object for reducing health inequalities.

In response to member's questions the Committee was informed that levels of fuel poverty varied across the borough from 2.2% to 15.2%. It

was explained that in urban areas there was a correlation between fuel poverty and high levels of poverty. In rural areas fuel poverty was linked to older, less energy efficient homes with no access to mains gas which was the cheapest fuel. Fuel Poverty was less likely in Social Housing and more commonly found in the Private Rented sector.

The Committee endorsed action 1.22 and 2.28 from the Affordable Energy Action Plan, put forward as preferred options by the officer. It requested that, should further funding be identified, a report be brought back to Committee for its consideration.

RESOLVED:

1. That the support of the Committee be given to the production of an Affordable Energy Strategy;

Voting: 9 – For 0 – Against 0 – Abstentions

2. That actions 1.22 and 2.28 as detailed in the Affordable Energy Action Plan be undertaken and resourced alongside the non-financial based actions. Should further funding be identified, a report should be brought back to the Committee for its consideration; and

Voting: 7 – For 0 – Against 2 – Abstentions

3. That delegated authority be given to the Head of Housing and Community Services to allocate the £50,000 in the existing capital home improvement budget to relevant funding opportunities that are aligned with this strategy as they arise.

Voting: 9 – For 0 – Against 0 – Abstentions

32. **ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH ENFORCEMENT POLICY**

Tracey Beattie, Mid Kent Environmental Health Manager introduced the Environmental Health Enforcement Policy. As a regulatory service, Environmental Health needed to ensure that the steps that lead to formal enforcement action were in line with national guidance. It was explained that part of the policy was to adopt the Enforcement Concordat, the Regulators Code issued in 2014.

In response to Member's questions, the Committee was informed that the Policy was used to support business, enabling help and advice to be given. Where enforcement action was required, officers would follow a stepped approach. Where there were serious breaches of legislation or there was imminent risk to the health or welfare of people, immediate enforcement action may be considered.

RESOLVED:

That the adoption of the draft revised Environmental Health Enforcement Policy in respect of Maidstone Borough Council be approved.

Voting: 9 – For 0 – Against 0 – Abstentions

33. GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS REPORTS

Dr Stuart Maxwell, Senior Scientific Officer, Environmental Protection introduced the Greenhouse Gas Emissions report. It was explained that it was a Central Government requirement that all Local Authorities published details of the greenhouse emissions from their estate and operations. Reports detailing the Council's greenhouse emissions had been produced for the 2013/14 and 2014/15.

RESOLVED:

That the Greenhouse Gas Emissions reports be published on the Maidstone Borough Council website and a hyperlink to the report be sent to the Department for Energy and Climate Change.

Voting: 9 – For 0 – Against 0 – Abstentions

34. CARBON MANAGEMENT PLAN OUTCOMES

Dr Stuart Maxwell, Senior Scientific Officer, Environmental Protection introduced the Carbon Management Plan Outcomes report. He explained that the Council had introduced a Carbon Management Plan in 2009 covering the period from 2009 to 2015.

The Committee was informed that:

- The plan had committed the Council to a target of reducing its CO₂ emissions by 20% from the 2008/2009 level by the end of the 2014/15 financial year;
- In 2013/14 the Council's CO₂ emissions were reduced by 18.4%; and
- In 2014/15 there was an increase of 4.3%. The primary cause of this increase was the breakdown of the Combined Heat and Power (CHP) plant at Mote Park Leisure Centre which resulted in a large increase in energy consumption. This in turn affected the cumulative target reached at the end of the 6 year period.

In response to member's questions it was explained that the CHP plant at the Leisure Centre was quite old. The Committee felt that the Leisure Centre target should be looked at in more detail, resolving that a recommendation be made to the appropriate Committee.

RESOLVED:

1. That the outcomes of the Carbon Management Plan be noted; and

2. That the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee be recommended to consider the targets in relation to the Leisure Centre as set out in the Carbon Management Plan.

Voting: 9 – For 0 – Against 0 – Abstentions

35. MAIDSTONE PARISH CHARTER

Sarah Robson, Housing and Inclusion Manager and Councillor John Perry, the Parish Charter champion introduced the Refresh of the Maidstone Parish Charter report. The Parish Charter described the terms of an effective and productive relationship between Maidstone Borough Council and all Parish Councils in Maidstone Borough, recognising the role of the Maidstone Committee of the Kent Association of Local Councils on behalf of Parishes within Maidstone.

Its purpose was:

- To provide a sound basis for close co-operation in the development and provision of excellent services for local people, both in Parishes and non-Parished areas within the Borough; and
- To support the evolution of the local Parish as an environment within which Parishioners wished to live, being compatible with the Localism Act 2011, which provide a new impetus for all tiers of local government.

RESOLVED:

That the Maidstone Parish Charter – a framework to support effective relationships and partnership working between Maidstone Borough Council and Maidstone’s Parishes and Parish Councils within its administrative area - be approved.

Voting: 9 – For 0 – Against 0 – Abstentions

36. DURATION OF MEETING.

6.30pm to 8.40pm