

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

**MINUTES (PART I) OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 14
NOVEMBER 2017**

Present: Councillors Barned (Chairman), M Burton, Garten, Joy, D Mortimer, Perry, Mrs Ring, Mrs Robertson and Webb

Also Present: Councillor English

54. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies had been received from Councillor Webster.

55. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor Perry was substituting for Councillor Webster.

56. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

57. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor English indicated his wish to speak on Agenda Items 12 – Heather House Community Centre and 16 – Decommissioning Part of the Public Realm CCTV Service.

58. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Councillor M Burton indicated that as the instigator and presenter of the Petition against the closure of Heather House he had pre-determined and would therefore sit in the public gallery and not participate in the debate but would leave the Chamber when it came to the vote.

Councillors Garten, Perry and Mrs Ring advised that although they were signatories to the Petition which related to the proposed closure of Heather House they came with an open mind and would listen to both sides of the debate before coming to a decision.

59. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

All Members stated that they had been lobbied on Agenda Item 12 – Heather House Community Centre and Councillor Mortimer stated that he

had also been lobbied on Agenda Item 16 – Decommissioning Part of the Public Realm CCTV Service.

60. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That the items on Part II of the agenda should be taken in private, as proposed, due to the likely disclosure of exempt information.

61. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 17 OCTOBER 2017

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed.

By way of an update, the Chairman advised that a letter had not yet been drafted to send to the West Kent Health and Wellbeing Board but he confirmed that it would be sent shortly.

62. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

Councillor M Burton presented a Petition to the Committee with the following wording:-

"We the undersigned ask that Maidstone Borough Council commit to maintaining Heather House Community Centre, Park Wood as a useable community facility until such time as concrete plans are confirmed for a replacement facility to be built. Further to this, we the undersigned ask that Heather House remains open to the public for as long as possible during this replacement development period".

The Committee noted:-

- The value that the Community Centre brought to Park Wood.
- The public perception was that the facility had been allowed to deteriorate and the true value has been ignored.
- That there is no concrete evidence that a new facility would be built if the existing building was to be demolished.

63. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Mrs Harris addressed the Committee to make a Statement with regard to Heather House.

The Committee noted the following points:-

- That she was a member of the Heather House Short Mat Bowls Club who had been using the facility for 20 years.
- The facility had been much appreciated over the years by local residents who came along not only for the activities but also for

companionship.

- Many residents would not be able to travel to other venues as they did not have transport.
- Lack of storage facilities at other venues was a problem. Heather House had storage facilities which was a huge benefit.
- Lack of heating and kitchen facilities had meant that there had been a reduction in bookings.

Mr Long also addressed the Committee to make a Statement with regard to Heather House.

The Committee noted the following points:-

- That he was a member of Semara Bowls Club for the last 10 years.
- That storage facilities at other venues were non-existent so finding an alternative venue had been difficult.
- Lack of heating had been a problem.
- That he felt Golding Homes could have assisted with some funding to keep the facility open in the short term.
- That should a new facility be built, it should have sufficient storage areas.

The Chairman read out a Statement from Councillor Pickett which stated that:-

- He was against the proposed plan to close Heather House as he felt it was a very popular and well used facility.
- The Council had a duty of care to the residents and users of Heather House to provide an amenity that helped social cohesion and health and well-being.
- Lack of maintenance over the years had been a problem.
- The local community could not wait a minimum of two years before a new facility was built.
- The Council should adopt a sticking plaster scheme where a minimum amount of money was spent to retain the present building and mount essential repairs and remedial work.
- That the new boilers installed are transferred to the new facility when it was built.

64. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Committee Work Programme.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

65. HEATHER HOUSE COMMUNITY CENTRE

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing and Communities relating to Heather House Community Centre.

The Committee raised the following points:-

- That Section 106 contributions could have been directed towards the facility which would have secured its future.
- That there should be a 'sticking plaster' plan put in place until firmer plans had been made for the facility to be rebuilt.
- The Centre had been run down over a number of years with no investment being put into it.
- There should be plans in place for the long term future, looking 20-25 years ahead.
- The Committee should see the audited accounts for Heather House.
- There was a need for a facility of this kind in the area and if it was closed down then it would be many years before a new community centre could be built.
- The item should be deferred until the Committee have had an opportunity to visit the facility and further information on costings had been provided.
- That several years ago there was a vision for a new hall which would have included a doctor's surgery, pre-natal facilities and a café.
- That the Council should carry out a consultation with the local residents to see what they wanted from the facility for the future.
- That the redevelopment of this facility should not be kicked into the long grass.
- That there was not sufficient information contained in the report to enable a decision to be made on the long term future of the facility.
- If the decision was to go for a deferral, then that would seal its fate for closure.

RESOLVED: That Option 3 as detailed in the report be agreed and that the Committee receive a costed business plan for the redevelopment of the facility within 3 months.

Voting: For: 8 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

Councillor Mrs Joy asked for her dissent to be noted that the report did not have all the necessary information in order to make an informed decision.

66. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR UPDATE QUARTER 2, 17/18

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Policy, Communications and Governance which related to Key Performance Indicators Update Quarter 2 2017/18.

It was noted that 7 out of the 11 Key Performance Indicators had achieved their target for Quarter 2.

The Officer advised that the following targets had been significantly exceeded:-

1. The number of affordable homes delivered (gross) – 74 against 50 target
2. Number of household prevented from becoming homeless through the intervention of housing advice – 137 against 75 target
3. Percentage of fly-tips with evidential value resulting in enforcement action – 60% against 20% target
4. Percentage spend and allocation of Disabled Facilities Grant Budget (YTD) – 48.4% against 20% target

RESOLVED: That the summary of performance for Quarter 2 of 2017/18 for Key Performance Indicators (KPIS) be noted.

67. 2ND QUARTER BUDGET MONITORING 2017/18

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement which provided an overview of the revenue budgets and outturn for the second quarter of 2017/18, and highlighted financial matters which may have a material impact on the Medium Term Financial Strategy or the Balance Sheet.

It was noted that there was an overall positive variance of £177,547. However, the current forecast indicated that the outturn position would change to an overspend of £140,960.

The Head of Finance highlighted that the capital programme included the recent purchase of Lenworth House and other housing investments.

RESOLVED:

1. That the revenue position at the end of the second quarter and the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position where significant variances had been identified be noted.
2. That the position with the capital programme be noted.

68. REVIEW OF PARISH SERVICES SCHEME

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement which related to the Parish Services Scheme.

It was noted that a review of the Parish Services Scheme had taken place this year and a consultation had been undertaken with the parishes during July, August and September. The survey form had been sent to the Clerks and Chairs of each Parish Council.

The Committee was informed that the only change proposed by the Council to the Scheme was an additional aim, namely to recognise the financial constraints faced by the Borough Council. In view of this the Director of Finance and Business Improvement felt it was appropriate to explore ways in which expenditure on the Parish Services Scheme could be reduced whilst continuing to serve its overall objectives.

The changes proposed were as follows:-

- Grounds maintenance would be recalculated based on a current standard amount per hectare of open space and would be reviewed annually in line with the Council's overall grounds maintenance budget.
- The analysis of survey returns did not show that small parishes incurred significantly higher costs per unit of population on the services covered by the PSS. It was therefore considered that the Small Size Allowance be removed for future years.
- The War Memorials grant would be retained at the same fixed amount as in 2017/18.
- There was some disparity around the number of notice boards in each parish. Therefore it was considered that there was no merit in paying a regular annual amount for notice boards if they are only renewed after a number of years. Hence it was proposed that the grant for notice boards be withdrawn and that a central fund of a fixed amount from which parishes could apply for a grant as and when notice boards needed replacement be established.
- The Play Areas grant would in future be a fixed amount to cover basis compliance costs (e.g. quarterly inspection) for strategic play areas. The cost of replacement equipment would be covered by a

one-off grant for strategic play areas across the borough.

- The Churchyards grant would be retained at the same fixed amount as in 2017/18.

In response to questions raised by Members, the Director of Finance and Business Improvement advised:-

- That the survey was sent to Parish Clerks and Chairmen.
- That the notes of the last Parish Liaison Meeting would be available shortly.

RESOLVED:

1. That the outcomes of the review of the Parish Services Scheme be noted.
2. That consideration of Recommendations 2 and 3 of the report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement be deferred until after the Parish Liaison Meeting in January when the representatives would have had an opportunity to be properly consulted.

Voting: For: 2 Against: 1 Abstentions: 5

69. DECOMMISSIONING PART OF THE PUBLIC REALM CCTV SERVICE

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing and Communities which provided Members with an update on reducing the hours of monitoring of CCTV cameras to 84 hours per week and the consultation undertaken with MaidSafe and Kent Police on the impact of reducing the hours of monitoring.

It was noted that the number of cameras that remained in operation and are being monitored by Medway Control Group (MCG) had been reduced to 33. This comprised of 28 static cameras and 4 mobile cameras and a single camera that utilised a wireless link.

Councillor English addressed the Committee as a representative of One Maidstone. He emphasised that One Maidstone considered that the reduction in hours of monitoring was not ideal but agreed that this would be an acceptable level of service.

Members raised the following points:-

- That CCTV cameras make people feel safe, particularly the elderly. However, the Police should be paying for this service.
- That the CCTV cameras used by Shop Retailers could be linked up.

- That partnership working and a review of the technology should be looked as part of the tendering process.

RESOLVED: That Option 3 as outlined in paragraph 5.3 to the report be implemented by the Head of Housing and Community Services.

Voting: For: 7 Against: 1 Abstentions: 0

70. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

RESOLVED: That the press and the public be excluded from the meeting due to the possible disclosure of exempt information.

71. SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS - REVIEW OF FUTURE FUNDING

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Housing and Communities which provided a progress update on how the future funding to external organisations would be distributed.

It was noted that following the decision made by the Committee in January 2017 to reduce the Service Level Agreement budget, this report sought approval on how the remaining budget, which would reduce by a further 5%, would be distributed for the financial year 2018/19.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Communities, Housing and Environment Committee adopt Option B as set out in paragraphs 3.3 and 3.5 – 3.7 for funding grants post April 2018 to external organisations through Service Level Agreements held with the Housing and Communities Service.
2. The Communities, Housing and Environment Committee gives delegated authority to the Head of Housing and Community Services to enter into Service Level Agreements to provide projects from 2018/19 to be agreed with the relevant providers.

Voting: For: unanimous

72. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 9.10 p.m.