

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Policy and Resources Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 24 JULY 2018

Present: Councillors Mrs Blackmore, Boughton, M Burton, Clark, Cox, Mrs Gooch, Harvey, McKay, McLoughlin, D Mortimer, Newton, Perry, Mrs Ring, Springett and Mrs Wilson

26. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies were received by Councillors Field, Garland and Harper.

27. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that the following members were present as substitute members:

- Councillor McKay for Councillor Harper;
- Councillor Ring for Councillor Garland; and
- Councillor Mrs Wilson for Councillor Field.

28. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman informed the Committee that he had decided to accept two urgent updates to item 14. Revenue Outturn 2017/18 – Allocation of Underspend. The Chairman explained that the reason for urgency was that they related to proposals submitted by the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee which had met since the agenda had been published for Policy and Resources Committee.

29. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no visiting members.

30. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

31. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillors Newton, Gooch, Springett and Perry had been lobbied on item 14. Revenue Outturn 2017/18 – Allocation of Underspend.

32. 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.

33. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 JUNE 2018

The Chairman explained that following the meeting, it had been confirmed that the field to the South West of the Enterprise Zone (Pope's Field) was not included in the Enterprise Zone. Therefore a note had been added to the minutes stating this, and an updated map had been published on the Council's website showing the correct boundaries of the Enterprise Zone.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be agreed as an accurate record of the meeting held on 27 June 2018 and signed.

34. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS (IF ANY)

There were no petitions.

35. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (IF ANY)

There were no questions from members of the public.

36. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme is noted.

37. COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT ACTION PLAN 2018-19

Mrs Angela Woodhouse, the Head of Policy, Communications and Governance, introduced the Communications and Engagement Action plan for 2018-19. It was noted that the action plan followed the themes agreed in the Council's Communication and Engagement Strategy and detailed the communications support planned for services across the Council. The previous time the Action Plan had been considered by the Committee, further detail had been requested and this had been provided.

In response to questions from the Committee, it was confirmed that:

- 16-24 year olds were a hard group to engage with, so the Communications Team was trying different channels to engage with this group including exploring the use of Snapchat, Instagram and LinkedIn.
- The Communications Team were working with One Maidstone in any areas of common interest.
- The Council's Returning Officer had an obligation to encourage participation in elections, particularly for those groups that had potential barriers to participation that the Council could address.

The Committee made the following suggestions for the Communications Team to include in their engagement work:

- Ensuring the name of the ward in which the household was located in was included on the Council Tax bill at annual billing time.
- Improvements were required to the form that allowed residents to report fly tipping.
- Information on numbers of prosecutions for fly tipping, dog fouling and littering should be continue to be published in Borough Insight.
- Exploring the possibility of using Kent County Council’s Highway Information Boards to display messages from Maidstone Borough Council as well.

RESOLVED:

That the Communication and Engagement Action Plan for 2018-19, as set out in Appendix A, is approved.

Voting: For - 14 Against - 0 Abstentions - 1

38. 100% BUSINESS RATES RETENTION PILOT - UPDATE

Mr Mark Green, the Director of Finance and Business Improvement, updated the Committee on the 100% Business Rates Retention Pilot and the associated projects that had been agreed as a result of the additional funding.

The Committee noted the following:

- Spending had been lower than expected on the Members Community Grant Scheme. Mr Green encouraged members to discuss any ideas they had with officers even if it seemed initially that they would be outside of the grant’s original remit.
- If there was additional funding available as Business Rates income was higher than the forecast or projects were underspent then a decision was required by Policy and Resources on what to use this funding for.
- The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government had announced that Kent and Medway authorities would need to apply again to be part of the 2019/2020 pilots. If successful then the pilot was anticipated to be 75% retention of Business Rate growth rather than 100%.
- Maidstone had put forward feasibility studies for improvements to the Bus Station as the Council’s application to the North Kent Cluster Housing and Commercial Growth Fund.

RESOLVED:

That the progress with the Business Rates Retention pilot projects be noted.

39. REVENUE OUTTURN 2017/18 – ALLOCATION OF UNDERSPEND

Mr Green presented his report on the Allocation of the 2018/19 underspend to the Committee, including two urgent updates which outlined a proposal submitted from the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee regarding a feasibility for a Low Emission Zone.

Mr Green explained that the Service Committees had been asked for suggestions for one off projects relevant to the Council's strategic objectives that could be funded from the underspend. As a result, Heritage Culture and Leisure Committee had asked for funding for a Heritage and Culture Officer and funding to support expansion of local Nature Reserves and securing Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty status for the Greensand Ridge. Communities Housing and Environment Committee had requested funding for a feasibility study to introduce a Low Emission Zone in the Town Centre to address poor air quality in the borough.

Following a debate where it was suggested that the most prudent approach to the underspend was to allocate it to reserves, it was moved by Councillor Boughton and seconded by Councillor M Burton that:

The 2017/18 underspend of £185,000 is allocated to reserves.

Voting: For - 7 Against - 8 Abstentions - 0

The motion therefore fell.

The Committee supported the proposals made by the Service Committees and welcomed that the majority of the £185,000 would still be allocated to reserves even after allocating to the identified projects.

The Committee was asked to consider creating a contingency fund to ensure the Economic Development team had certainty over its funding after 2020/2021 when the Business Rates baseline was likely to be reset. This was important as the Economic Development team was funded through the income from Business Rates retention growth.

RESOLVED:

1. That the 2017/18 revenue underspend of £185,000 is allocated as set out in in the urgent update.

Voting: For - 8 Against - 7 Abstentions - 0

Councillors Blackmore and Boughton requested that their dissent be noted on this vote.

2. That the proposal to use the surplus of on the Kent Business Rates Pool, as set out in paragraph 1.13, is approved.

Voting: Unanimous

40. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.44 p.m.