

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 12 NOVEMBER  
2019**

**Present:** Councillors Kimmance, Mortimer (Chairman), Perry, Powell, Purle, Mrs Robertson, D Rose, M Rose and Young

**Also Present:** Councillors B Hinder and McKay

27. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:

- Councillor M Burton
- Councillor Mrs Joy
- Councillor Khadka

28. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that the following Substitute Members were present:

- Councillor Perry for Councillor M Burton
- Councillor Kimmance for Councillor Mrs Joy
- Councillor Mrs Robertson for Councillor Khadka

29. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman informed the Committee that he had agreed to take an urgent update to Item 17 – Draft Bio-diversity Strategy. The reason for urgency was that the document provided an update to the Strategy already on the agenda and it was important that Members had the definitive document when considering that item.

30. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman indicated that he intended to change the order of business to take Agenda Item 18 – Request for Village Green application after Agenda Item 10 - Questions and Answer Session for Members of the Public.

31. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor B Hinder was present as a Visiting Member, and indicated that he would like to speak on Agenda Item 18 – Request for Village Green application.

Councillor McKay indicated that he was present to support the questioner, Ms Bonnet.

32. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

33. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillor M Rose stated that she had been lobbied on Item 12 – Member Agenda Item Request – GP Surgery Provision.

34. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

35. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 OCTOBER 2019

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 15 October 2019 be approved as a correct record and signed.

36. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

37. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Ms Dee Bonett asked the following question of the Chairman:-

"Would the Chairman consider changing the clause in the Pet Policy, as it stands currently, to enable those who are residing in Temporary Accommodation, to continue to do so with their pets, until permanent accommodation can be found with their pets?"

The clause in the Pet Policy currently states:

"..... Whilst under this policy you have been permitted to home your pet(s) with you in your temporary accommodation. You may be offered accommodation to end the Council's housing duty to you where the landlord is a housing association or private landlord. The housing provider is likely to have their own policy as to whether pets are permitted in their accommodation and the Council does not have the authority to overrule their decision. In normal circumstances if you were to be

offered accommodation where pets are not permitted, the offer of accommodation would not be considered as an unsuitable offer on the basis that your pet could not join you... "

The Chairman asked the Head of Housing and Community Services to respond and he commented as follows:-

- That he had reviewed the last six months of lettings and there had been no refusals from applicants leaving temporary accommodation on the basis that they could not take their pets with them.
- Looking at the number of offers made generally through the housing register, in particular to homeless households, Officers had observed that just over 50% of those lettings had restrictions around pets. So to introduce the change being proposed, this may have a significant impact but it was an unknown factor as there had not been any refusals on those grounds. The Head of Housing and Communities suggested that the Council would put their efforts into persuading landlords and housing associations who make those offers to come more in line with the Council's position then hopefully the situation described would not become a problem in the future.

Ms Bonett then asked a supplementary question:-

"As you are aware the pet policy for those in temporary accommodation was connected to the suicide of a very best friend of mine, are you willing to take the risk that this could happen again as my friend was only given one offer of permanent accommodation, he could not take his pets to temporary accommodation before the policy or to permanent after the policy. He killed himself after 10 days. What would happen if someone was offered permanent accommodation and they were only given one offer and they could not take their pets. The clause, I feel, should be changed to prevent this tragic situation happening again, which is why I am continuing to campaign. Thank you for meeting with me tonight.

The Chairman thanked Ms Bonnet and stated that Officers would be in touch to set up a meeting with her.

### 38. REQUEST FOR VILLAGE GREEN APPLICATION

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement, in presenting the report on the Village Green application, apologised for the time taken for this matter to be dealt with.

The Committee noted that under the Council's Constitution, the Policy and Resources Committee was responsible for making decisions regarding land and property and therefore it was recommended that the matter be referred to that Committee.

Councillor B Hinder addressed the Committee and advised that the original petition was the result of the residents' enormous depth of feeling to protect the area known as Weaving Heath and to illustrate the significance of the area of green space, he reiterated a Planning Officer's comment in relation to a recent planning application in the area which stated that it was important to consider the landscaping around Weaving Heath.

In response to questions from Members, the Chairman advised that:-

- Councillor B Hinder had been kept informed of developments since the initial petition had come to Committee in June.
- He would find out about whether any progress had been made in regard to other potential green spaces that could be given the protection of village green status.

**RESOLVED:** That Members refer the petitioners' request to Policy and Resources Committee.

#### 39. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the work programme and noted that the agenda for December was very busy and if any items could be deferred to another meeting then they would.

Councillor M Rose requested that an item be brought to a future meeting on the RSPCA's fireworks safety code on the use of fireworks and their detrimental effect on animals.

In response to a request from a Member, the Chairman stated that he would try to move the meeting in December from Tuesday, 10<sup>th</sup> December to Monday, 16<sup>th</sup> December to avoid the week of the General Election.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the Committee Work Programme be noted.
2. That the Committee meeting scheduled for 10<sup>th</sup> December be moved to 16<sup>th</sup> December subject to the agreement of the Proper Officer.

#### 40. MEMBER AGENDA ITEM REQUEST - GP SURGERY PROVISION

The Chairman referred to the agenda item request from Councillors Purle and D Rose for an item to come before the Committee on GP surgery provision.

The Committee were advised that the Chief Executive would be pleased to provide a report to the January 2020 meeting on this issue.

**RESOLVED**: That a report on GP provision would be produced for the January Committee meeting.

41. 2ND QUARTER PERFORMANCE AND BUDGET MONITORING

The Interim Head of Finance presented the highlights of the Second Quarter Budget Monitoring for 2019/20 as follows:-

- The Revenue Budget indicated an under spend of £605,000 and was forecast to have a small under spend of £126,000 at year end.
- Parks and Open Spaces and the Crematorium both had adverse variances.
- Recycling Collection, Community Environmental Engagement, Homeless Temporary Accommodation, Homelessness Prevention, Housing First Project, Depot Services. Fleet Workshop and Management and Grounds Maintenance Commercial all showed a positive variance.
- There was a salary slippage of £40,000 which was expected to be offset by service underspends by year end.

The Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer presented the highlights for the second quarter performance monitoring 2019/20 as follows:-

- 9 out of 15 targetable quarterly Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) reportable to the Committee had achieved their Quarter 2 target.
- 4 of the targets were for information only.
- The Clean Street consultation concluded with a total of 1,785 responses which showed that 44% of respondents thought that their local area was fairly clean or very clean.
- Three of the Five targeted KPIs that related to the priority 'Homes and Communities' had been rated green as they had achieved their quarterly targets, 2 had been rated amber and had missed their target by less than 10%.

**RESOLVED**: That

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 2 for 2019/20, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted.
2. The Capital position at the end of Quarter 2 be noted; and
3. The Performance position as at Quarter 2 for 2019/20, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues had been identified, be noted.

42. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2020/21-2024/25

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement, in presenting his report on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2020/21 – 2024/25, explained that the report set out how the Council would deliver the Strategic Plan in financial terms.

The Committee noted that:-

- A budget for action on climate change would need to be built into next year's budget.
- Central government planned to roll forward the existing funding settlement to 2020/21 which would provide some stability next year. However, after 2021 there remains considerable uncertainty.
- The government planned to set a limit of 2% to increases of Council tax, above which a referendum would be required.

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

- In the event that self funding capital bids could not be found, the Council would be looking for new proposals to meet the strategy and would welcome suggestions from Members.
- Assuming that Council tax goes up by 2% then further savings for 2020/21 would not be required and the existing services that the Council provided would not be affected if all other variables remained constant.
- If there was a deficit in subsequent years post 2020/21 then further savings would need to be made.
- Given the fact that growth of 2% per annum in the Council Tax base had not been achieved in previous years, it was prudent to assume that the Council Tax base increase for 2020/21 would be 1.5%.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee considered the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 – 2024/25 and provided comments to be taken to the Policy and Resources Committee.

43. HOUSING ALLOCATION SCHEME REVIEW

The Committee considered the report of the Homechoice and Strategy Team Leader which detailed proposed changes to the Council's Housing Allocation Scheme.

It was proposed to rename the Housing Register bands to greater reflect the qualifying criteria as the current banding criteria had been wrongly

interpreted as denoting priority. Therefore the new banding would be as follows:-

Band C – Community Contribution and Homeless Prevention  
Band H - Homeless  
Band M – Medical and Health Assistance  
Band R – Reasonable Preference

It was noted that the amendments to the proposed scheme were being proposed to support homelessness prevention by encouraging applicants to remain in their current accommodation and avoid the use of temporary accommodation. By applying a new band criteria households there would be less 'Direct Lettings' and those put into the Band C – Community Contribution and Homeless Prevention would have opportunity to secure affordable housing.

In response to questions from Members, Officers advised that:-

- The amendments to the scheme were seen as the fairest and simplest way of allocation.
- Officers tried to match the applicant's requirements with the type of properties available. However if the applicant did not want to progress with the property after viewing it, Officers would email the applicant to find out the reasons why they refused it and reset the priority date if the motive specified was assessed as unreasonable. This process could take up to 56 days but was normally dealt with in a short period of time.
- There are very few refusals and Officers would not amend the priority date if a valid reason for refusal was given. However, there was an appeal process.
- Mutual exchanges operate outside of the Council's allocation scheme are dependent on the type of tenancy held. In the main, local housing associations do permit their tenants to explore mutual exchanges as a means of enabling transfers between consenting parties.
- On certain schemes priority was given to those with a local connection to a parish area for new builds in rural areas.
- That if a homeless person has a pet, that would be taken into consideration when trying to match them up.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee agrees the proposed changes to the Council's Allocations Scheme.

#### 44. MAIDSTONE APPROACH IMPROVEMENTS PROJECT

The Head of Environment and Public Realm introduced the report which provided an update on the Maidstone Approach Improvement Project

which sought approval for the final designs to the street scene and landscaping improvements on a key arterial route.

The Committee commented as follows:-

- That the Maidstone Sign be accepted although it was felt that the coat of arms could be a little larger.
- Ensure that the memorial by the bus stop opposite Weaving Street was not touched or removed.
- That the silhouettes for the railings should be smoothed down so that there were no sharp edges
- That the design for the dinosaur should be changed to better reflect the Iguanodon.

The Head of Environment and Public Realm advised that KCC would have the final approval on the designs for the railings as they need to ensure that they would not compromise the safety of the railings.

It was noted that the dinosaur would be put on a plinth on the area by where the bus lane starts at New Cut Road.

In response to a question from a Member, the Head of Environment and Public Realm stated that the stone wall would continue to be maintained out of existing budgets and was subject to an annual inspection programme.

**RESOLVED:** That

1. The installation of a new heritage-style 'Welcome to Maidstone' sign on the A20 with the words "The County Town of Kent" be approved.
2. The four installations to celebrate the heritage and history of Maidstone, specifically an Iguanodon silhouette, bicycle silhouettes, hop frame and planting as well as Go Green Go Wild inspired tree carving be approved; and
3. The concept of a townscape silhouette attached to safety railings be approved, pending further operational exploration.

#### 45. DRAFT BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY

The Parks and Open Spaces Manager gave an introduction to the Committee on the Draft Bio-diversity Strategy.

The Committee noted that previously the Council had adopted its Local Biodiversity Action Plan in 2011 which covered the period 2009-2014. This was jointly produced by the Council's Parks and Leisure Team and Medway Valley Countryside Partnership.



Due to a number of significant changes to the approach to conservation management and the political environment the Committee in 2018 agreed to fund a refresh of the Biodiversity Action Plan. Medway Valley Countryside Partnership was tasked with preparing this as a new Biodiversity Strategy which has now been completed.

The Committee felt that the document was considerably long and there was a depth of detail within the Strategy and to enable it to be given their full attention, a Workshop should be held in the new year where all Members of the Council could attend to enable that understanding to be had. Then the Committee could receive a report after that time for consideration.

**RESOLVED**: That the report related to the draft Biodiversity Strategy be deferred to enable a Workshop to take place in January 2020 where all Members would be invited.

46. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.30 p.m.