

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 8 DECEMBER
2020**

Present: Councillors D Burton (Chairman), Clark, English, Garten, Mrs Grigg, McKay, Munford, Perry and Springett

Also Present: Councillors Kimmance and Round

263. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Parfitt-Reid and Spooner.

264. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Perry was present as Substitute Member for Councillor Parfitt-Reid.

Councillor Springett was present as Substitute Member for Councillor Spooner.

265. URGENT ITEMS

Item 19 – Fees & Charges 2021/22 would be taken as an urgent item and had been published within the Amended Agenda, as the report was not available at the time of publication. An urgent update to this item would be displayed during the officer introduction to improve visibility of the figures presented. There was no new information contained within the update.

266. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

Item 19 – Fees and Charges would be taken before Item 16 – Maidstone Authority Monitoring Report, in order that the finance reports would be discussed together.

267. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillors Kimmance and Round were present for Item 16 – Maidstone Authority Monitoring Report.

268. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

269. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillors D Burton, Clark, English, Garten, Mrs Grigg and Munford had been lobbied on the following items:

Item 16 – Maidstone Authority Monitoring Report

Item 18 – Local Plan Review Update

270. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

271. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 NOVEMBER 2020

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed at a later date.

272. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

273. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

274. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

275. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

276. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

277. 2ND QUARTER FINANCIAL UPDATE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT 2020/21

The Head of Finance introduced the report and explained that the Committee's income shortfall of £1.5 million mainly resulted from the reduced income from planning and parking due to the Covid-19 pandemic. A second application to the Government's Sales, Fees and Charges (SFC) scheme had been submitted, which would be used to offset the losses.

Within the revenue budget, a forecast overspend of around £45,000 against the Local Plan Review had arisen due to climate change assessments, the extension of specialist contracts and the local walking and cycling implementation plan. Capital expenditure had been minimal,

but it was anticipated that the funds would be spent by the end of the financial year.

In response to questions, the Head of Finance confirmed that the funding received from the sales, fees and charges compensation scheme would be re-claimed by central government if the Council was deemed to have overclaimed. The £1 million set aside for the Council's Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan, did not include funding for non-spatial policy formation being undertaken by the Spatial Planning Team. It was requested that further information on the feasibility of accessing the funds be added to the Committee Work Programme.

The Senior Business Analyst gave a performance update, informing the committee that two of the six key performance indicators (KPIs) achieved within 10% of their target. These were the Processing of planning applications: major applications, which saw an increase in applications of over 50% compared to the same period last year, and Processing of planning applications: minor applications.

Good performance was highlighted for Percentage of priority 1 enforcement cases dealt with in time, Percentage of priority 2 enforcement cases dealt with in time, and Number of affordable homes delivered, the latter having recovered from the poorer performance in Q1. The number of open enforcement cases for October 2020 was 313 and for November was 303.

Members requested that additional figures regarding enforcement, including the outcomes of closed cases and the status of open cases, be added to the Committee Work Programme. The Head of Planning and Development advised that providing further qualitative information would reduce the time available for Officers to spend on site. It was hoped that such information would be provided digitally in the future, to be retrieved by Members more readily.

The Director of Regeneration and Place referenced the relatively high staff turnover within the planning enforcement team. A redeployment of resources had been agreed; to fill the vacant team leader position and increase the number of staff site visits.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 2 for 2020/21, 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 2020/21, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified, be noted.

278. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2021/22 - 2025/26

The Head of Finance introduced the report, which had been prepared in the context of the continued impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the proposed re-prioritisation of the Strategic Plan objectives as reported to the Policy and Resources Committee in July 2020.

The Committee were informed that Council Tax charge would likely increase by 2% and that the same level of income would be retained under the business rates retention scheme as in the previous year. The cost of borrowing for the capital programme would be reduced to around 1%, providing that the Council was not investing solely for yield.

The results of the residents' survey were highlighted, with the two most important services identified as waste collection and parks and open spaces. The proportion of residents that believed the Council's services represented value for money remained similar to previous years. Further detailed budget proposals to be brought to each committee in January 2021.

The Committee expressed that further comments would be provided once the details proposed had been received.

RESOLVED: That the Medium-Term Financial Strategy be noted and the Committee's comments be taken into account.

279. FEES & CHARGES 2021-22

The Head of Finance introduced the report on the annual review of fees and charges. It was proposed that the deferred increase in parking charges take effect from 1 April 2021, with inflationary increases to building control services and an increase to planning pre-application advice services following a bench-marking exercise that had been undertaken. It was anticipated that there would be a 13.8% income reduction for the Committee in the next financial year.

Several Members expressed concerns that it was inappropriate to increase parking charges due to the ongoing effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and that this would result in reduced demand for the service. Consideration was given to further publicising the Council's car parks to increase their usage. Particular reference was made to reduction in parking income that resulted from the removal of parking spaces to accommodate the King Street cycle lane and the negative feedback received from the active travel scheme.

However, it was highlighted that if the parking charges were not implemented, further savings would have to be found from other services and that the increase had already been deferred due to the pandemic.

The proposed increases to the pre-application fees were discussed, due to the significant difference between the proposed charges and the Kent average. The Head of Planning and Development advised that the services provided across the Kent Authorities varied, so a direct comparison was not possible. Pre-application advice and Planning Performance Agreements (PPA) were not compulsory and the proposed increase to the former was deemed significant in the current economic climate. The Director of Regeneration and Place highlighted that the fees associated with this service had to be cost recovery only.

A request was made for a report concerning the feasibility of increasing PPA fees to be added to the Committee Work Programme.

RESOLVED: That

1. The proposed discretionary fees and charges, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be agreed; and
2. The expected statutory fees and charges, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.

280. MAIDSTONE AUTHORITY MONITORING REPORT

The Planning Policy Officer introduced the report that outlined the progress made on the local plan's implementation, review and the engagement arising from the duty to cooperate. The period covered was 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020, with the progress made since then to be included in the next authority monitoring report.

As a result of the reduction in retail and employment space, the approach to these would be reviewed within the current local plan review. Two of the key highway schemes would not be delivered in time, with all schemes to be continually monitored.

The Committee were informed that 134 dwellings had been completed within the time period, which led to a shortfall of 206 against the 9-year target of 7947 since the local plan's adoption.

Several Members highlighted the importance of providing different types of housing across the borough.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

281. INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING STATEMENT 2020

The Head of Planning and Development introduced the report and noted that production of an Infrastructure Funding Statement (IFS) was a statutory requirement that would be published on the Council's website by 31 December 2020.

The IFS replaced the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) 1-2-3 list and outlined the financial and non-financial developer contributions that had

been received by the Council over the past year. The document was key to achieving the necessary infrastructure within the Council's adopted local plan. Following a bidding process, the Committee would allocate the CIL funds based on project prioritisation. Section 106 monies would be used on the projects specified. The difference between the CIL and Section 106 was outlined.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

282. LOCAL PLAN REVIEW UPDATE

The Principal Planning Officer introduced the report. The ongoing public consultation on the Regulation 18 preferred approaches document was referenced, alongside the pre-consultation exercises undertaken with key stakeholders.

There had been no Government response or likely timescale released in response to the proposed planning reforms consultation that took place between 6 August 2020 to 1 October 2020.

Reference was made to several incorrections within the Council's public consultation document and its accessibility. In response, the Strategic Planning Manager confirmed that an amendment would be published on the Council's website and that the accessibility issue would be raised with the equalities officer.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

283. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.17 p.m.