

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 6 OCTOBER 2020

Present: Councillors M Burton, Joy, Khadka, Mortimer (Chairman), Powell, Mrs Robertson, D Rose, M Rose and Young

56. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

57. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

58. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

59. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

60. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

61. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillors M Burton, Joy, Mortimer, Powell, Mrs Robertson and D Rose stated that they had been lobbied in relation to Item 15 – Heather House and Pavilion Building.

62. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public as proposed unless any member of the Committee indicated a wish to refer to Item 16 – Exempt Appendix – Heather House and Pavilion Building – Financial Summaries.

63. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 25 AUGUST 2020

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 25 August 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed at a later date.

64. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

65. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

66. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

Question from Councillor M Rose to the Chairman of the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee

The Chairman read out the question on behalf of Councillor M Rose.

'Can Maidstone Borough Council tell this Committee their plans for affordable housing in Maidstone and further to what they consider to be affordable as far as buying and renting?'

The Chairman responded to the question.

The full response was recorded on the webcast and were made available to view on the Maidstone Borough Council Website.

To access the webcast recording, please use the below link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Of-tQIT6vU>

67. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Several Members felt that the Work Programme contained too few items and it was highlighted that any Member could submit an agenda item request.

In response to questions, the Director of Regeneration and Place noted that the transition to homeworking had been excellent with multiple staff surveys conducted with a generally positive response. Meetings now occurred digitally, with monthly staff webinars and the Communications team ensuring newsletters were regularly provided to the Council's Staff.

The Access to Services Review Task and Finish Group would meet at the end of October 2020.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

68. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

69. FIRST QUARTER FINANCIAL UPDATE AND PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT 2020/21

The Head of Finance introduced the report and highlighted that the current forecast overspend of £136k, which was higher than experienced in previous years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This could be partly mitigated through additional government funding and the Council had now

made its first claim under the Sales, Fees and Charges scheme. The variances were attributed in the main to the Depot, Licensing, Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation.

The capital net expenditure of £540k related mainly to the Brunswick and Union Street Housing Developments which were to be completed by the end of the year. Upon completion, the market rented properties would be under the control of Maidstone Property Holdings Ltd (MPH). The sale of properties from both developments were moving forward.

The Policy and Information Manager noted a correction to the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of percentage of gas safety certificates in place on all residential properties from 97.94% to 97.33% and percentage of all electrical safety certificates on all residential properties from 98.02% to 100%. Two properties had denied the Council access to renew the gas safety certificates, due to the pandemic lockdown period. This had since been rectified.

The Policy and Information Manager informed the Committee that five of the fifteen targetable KPIS for did not reach the quarter one target, but that two of these achieved within 10% of the target. The number of households housed through the housing register missed its target by more than 10%.

The Head of Finance confirmed that £2million in government funding had been provided to the Council, with further opportunities to claim in the coming months.

The level of temporary accommodation available was discussed at length, in reference to the protections provided to tenants as part of the Coronavirus Act 2020. The Director of Regeneration and Place confirmed that the Council now possessed between 60-70 accommodation units, with capital programme funding to purchase a further 10 units. The Council had good relationships with several private sector providers that had been contacted in the past to provide temporary accommodation at short notice. There was confidence in the relevant teams to manage the situation should it arise.

The Committee were informed that the Council had not experienced a high-level of approaches regarding evictions and that this would be monitored with a predictive analytics tool that had been installed. A Member request was made to add this topic as an item to the work programme for further consideration if necessary.

The Director of Regeneration and Place would provide responses via email to queries that concerned the licensing variance within the revenue budget and social housing refusals from residents that arose from the property's unsuitability.

RESOLVED: That

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

70. **HEATHER HOUSE AND PAVILION BUILDING**

The Housing Delivery Manager introduced the report that included an improved scheme design for the Heather House and Pavilion building sites. A new community centre on the Heather House site and 12 new build, 3-bedroom properties on the Pavilion building site were proposed. The existing play areas were due to be upgraded in the future. A new community centre on the Pavilion building site was considered, but this would delay the housing construction and increase costs.

The Housing Delivery Manager commented that there had been positive initial planning feedback and that the shortfall envisaged was £234k, rather than the £600k estimate for the previously presented scheme. Heather House was the sole community facility owned and directly managed by the Council, with the submission of tender for management providers and works contract to be triple tracked. The local community and stakeholders would be involved in further consultation, with those organisations that had expressed interest in the centre's management to be contacted. As part of the procurement and appointment exercise, there was to be no further requests for financial support from the Council.

The Committee expressed general support for the proposal and acknowledged the reduced shortfall envisaged. The importance of the Community Centre and the positive works of with group operating from within the venue were highlighted.

A work programme request was made for an update report to be provided to the Committee in January 2021 on the progress of Heather House.

RESOLVED: That

1. The change to the original brief for the redevelopment of both the Heather House and Pavilion Building sites and the new scheme design options being recommended to pursue, along with the indicative financial returns shown at Exempt Appendix B, be noted; and
2. The a follow up report be presented to the Policy and Resources Committee to approve the submission of detailed planning applications for both sites, going out to tender for the works

contract and procurement of the management provided; subject to the inclusion of a timetable of resident and stakeholder engagement and communications to be appended, be endorsed.

71. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. – 7.58 p.m.