

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 29 JUNE 2016

Present: Councillor Mrs Wilson (Chairman), and
Councillors Mrs Blackmore, Boughton, Cox, Fermor,
Garland, Garten (Part), Mrs Gooch, Harper, Harvey,
Harwood, McLoughlin, Pickett, Powell, Mrs Ring and
Round

6. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Brice. Councillor Round had advised that he would be late in arriving to the meeting.

7. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following Substitute Members were noted:

Councillor Ring for Councillor Brice;

Councillor Garten for Councillor Round until his arrival.

8. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items, however the Chairman had agreed to take an urgent update to item 13: Report of the Head of Human Resources Shared Service – Workforce Strategy 2016-2020.

9. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

10. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Councillor Harwood disclosed a conflict of interest with regards to item 21 and notified the Chairman that he would leave the meeting when this agenda item was reached.

Councillor Boughton disclosed that he had been a part of conversations regarding item 21 however he would take part in discussion of the item and vote.

Councillor Gooch advised that item 21 related to her ward however she had not taken part in any conversations regarding this subject and so would take part in the discussion and vote.

11. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

12. TO CONSIDER WHETHER ANY ITEMS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION.

RESOLVED: That the items on part II of the agenda be taken in private as proposed.

13. MINUTES (PART I) OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 APRIL 2016

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 April 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed.

14. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 MAY 2016

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed.

15. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS (IF ANY)

There were no petitions.

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

There were no questions from members of the public.

17. POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2016-17

A Member requested that an item on devolution be added to the work programme.

RESOLVED: That the Committee work programme 2016-17 be noted.

18. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES SHARED SERVICES - WORKFORCE STRATEGY 2016- 2020 (UPDATED)

The Head of Human Resources Shared Service, Dena Smart, introduced the report on the Workforce Strategy 2016-2020 and directed the Committee to the updated version of the strategy contained in the amended agenda.

It was explained that:

- The Workforce Strategy 2016-2020 focused on self-sufficiency, reduction of resources and change.
- Due to changes in the council's ability to recruit and retain employees, the council needed to be more competitive and offer rewards.

During discussion the following points were made:

- The future work skills word cloud summarised the driving forces that would impact on future employees. One of these was channel shift, the process of directing members of the public to online and technological methods of communicating with the council. This both provided a 24 hour service and also reduced costs.
- The potential effect on freedom of movement for European Nationals, following the result of the referendum on membership of the European Union, may impact on the workforce or create difficulties in recruitment.

Members noted the Workforce Strategy 2016-2020 action plan, and it was moved that progress on the action plan be reported to Employment Committee every six months.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the draft Workforce Strategy 2016-2020 be agreed;

For – 14 Against – 1 Abstain - 0

- 2) That an update report on the progress of the Workforce Plan be presented to the Employment Committee every six months.

For – 15 Against – 0 Abstain – 0

19. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF HUMAN RESOURCES SHARED SERVICES - HEALTH AND SAFETY STRATEGY

Dena Smart, Head of Human Resources Shared Service, presented the report on the Health and Safety Strategy and advised that this had been updated to include plain English terminology, the change in workforce and new priorities.

RESOLVED: That the draft Health and Safety Strategy be agreed.

For – 15 Against – 0 Abstain – 0

20. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF FINANCE AND RESOURCES - MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY - REVENUE 2017/2018 ONWARDS

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement, Mark Green, presented the report on the Medium Term Financial Strategy which set out underlying assumptions used, with particular reference to the Efficiency Plan as required of local authorities by central government.

Following the result of the referendum on the United Kingdom's (UK) membership of the European Union (EU), the Director of Finance and Business Improvement advised the following:

- The exit of the UK from the EU could impact on finances in the medium to long term.
- For example, the local government funding regime covering four years from 2016 could be withdrawn in exceptional circumstances, and the UK's exit from the EU could be defined as an exceptional circumstance.
- The effects of the UK's exit from the EU coupled with the Chancellor's devolution agenda may entail a return of services to local authorities.

With regard to the Medium term Financial Strategy it was explained that an Efficiency Plan was required to set out budgetary gaps and to identify opportunities for efficiencies and savings.

During discussion Members noted that:

The Commercialisation Strategy was important to ensure that savings could be found through profit.

The savings required for the current municipal year had been identified, and would be monitored throughout the year to ensure they are delivered.

It was moved that a progress report on the Commercialisation Strategy be presented to the next meeting of the committee.

RESOLVED:

1. That, for planning purposes, a council tax increase of £4.95 be agreed for the development of the Medium Term Financial Strategy;
2. That the strategic revenue projection given at appendix C (ii) be agreed for planning purposes and used to identify growth and savings for efficiency planning;
3. That the approach outlined for the development of the efficiency plan be agreed;

For – 13 Against – 1 Abstain – 0

4. That a progress report on the Commercialisation Strategy be presented to the next meeting of the committee.

For – 15

Against – 0

Abstain – 0

21. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF REVENUES AND BENEFITS SHARED SERVICE - COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2017/2018

The Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service, Stephen McGinnes, presented the report setting out details of, and a public consultation on, the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2017/2018.

Mr McGinnes explained that:

- The review of Maidstone’s Council Tax Benefit Scheme had been undertaken jointly with other Kent districts, with a focus on reducing costs and protecting the most vulnerable residents.
- The level of alignment required between Council Tax and Housing Benefit schemes made some changes difficult without passing additional costs onto residents. This situation was expected to change once Universal Credit had phased out Housing Benefit.

In response to questions the committee was advised that:

- Additional income would be sought from low income households under the revised scheme. This was because there was no longer any funding available from central government towards council tax support schemes, and this was impacting on the council’s budget.
- The consultation would be issued by email to 2000 people who were in receipt of Council Tax Support, which comprised approximately half of all claimants. Papers copies would also be made available, and agencies such as housing associations would be contacted for advice on further engagement.
- The number of claimants of Council Tax Support had reduced, and the collection rate for council tax among those in receipt of Council Tax Support had risen to 75-80%.
- Kent County Council (KCC) funding had been rolled over but negotiations were ongoing. KCC would contribute towards the cost of administration of the scheme. The scheme would be cost neutral if the proposed changes were implemented.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the findings of the review of the current council tax reduction scheme that was jointly undertaken with other Kent authorities be noted;
- 2) That the potential impact of the proposed changes to the scheme on working age claimants with the protected characteristics of disability, age and sex, under the Equalities Act (2010) be noted;

- 3) That authority be delegated to the Head of Revenues and Benefits to finalise and commence consultation on the council tax reduction scheme to be implemented for 2017/18.

For – 11 Against – 4 Abstain – 0

22. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - THE BUSINESS TERRACE

Karen Franek, Principal Economic Development Officer, introduced the report updating the committee on the Business Terrace and advised that following revaluation it had been confirmed that the Terrace would contribute £10,000 per annum to the council. It would now be eligible for small business rates.

Alison Broom, the Chief Executive, drew attention to the report that had been received in February 2016 which covered the lease arrangements for Maidstone House, including relinquishing the lease for one part, and potential investment in the retained part to extend the Business Terrace offer.

A Member moved to record a vote of thanks for the officers involved in the Business Terrace.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the report be noted;
2. That a 12 month progress and trading report be presented to the Committee no sooner than October 2016 and no later than December 2016, and that this report also explore in greater detail the merits of and potential for the expansion of the Business Terrace offer.

23. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC FROM THE MEETING

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business because of the likely disclosure of exempt information for the reason specified having applied the Public Interest Test.

Head of Schedule 12A and Briefing Description

Minutes (Part II) of the meeting held on 27 April 2016

Para 3 – Information re business/financial affairs

Report of the Head of Commercial And Economic Development – The Acquisition of Land and Property

Para 3 – Information re business/financial affairs

Report of the Head of Finance and Resources – Rivers Medway, Teise and Beult Flood Alleviation – Project Funding

Para 3 – Information re business/financial affairs

24. MINUTES (PART II) OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 APRIL 2016

RESOLVED: That the minutes (part II) of the meeting held on 27 April 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed.

25. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - THE ACQUISITION OF LAND AND PROPERTY

John Foster, Regeneration and Economic Development Manager, introduced the report on the acquisition of land and property.

Members discussed the item and:

RESOLVED:

1. That the partnership between Maidstone Borough Council and Kent County Council be continued to achieve the purchase of the land and property at a ceiling price split 50:50 between the two authorities;
2. That alternatives be investigated should negotiations with the land owner fail.

For – 13 Against – 2 Abstain – 0

Councillor Harwood wished his dissent to be noted.

26. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF FINANCE AND RESOURCES - RIVERS MEDWAY, TEISE & BEULT FLOOD ALLEVIATION - PROJECT FUNDING

Councillor Harwood left the meeting at 21:25 p.m.

Paul Riley, Head of Finance and Resources, presented the report on the Rivers Medway, Teise and Beult Flood Alleviation project funding.

The committee considered the item and:

RESOLVED:

- 1) That work with the Environment Agency through the Executive Board be continued;

For – 14 Against – 0 Abstain - 0

- 2) That the Environment Agency be approached in relation to possible local arrangements for areas of flooding;

For – 14 Against – 0 Abstain - 0

- 3) That discussions with all of the affected Parish Councils be commenced;

For – 13 Against – 0 Abstain - 1

- 4) That the council writes directly to Ministers at DEFRA with the aim of securing additional funding for flood defences in the borough of Maidstone and to advise our partners of this action.

For – 14 Against – 0 Abstain – 0

27. DURATION OF MEETING

6.48 p.m. to 10.14 p.m.