

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL
POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON
WEDNESDAY 23 NOVEMBER 2016

Present: Councillor Mrs Wilson (Chairman), and
Councillors Mrs Blackmore, Boughton, D Burton,
English, Fermor, Garland, Mrs Gooch, Harper, Harvey,
Harwood, McLoughlin, Pickett, Mrs Ring

111. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Brice, Cox, Powell and Round.

112. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following Substitute Members were noted:-

Councillor Mrs Ring for Councillor Brice
Councillor English for Councillor Cox
Councillor D Burton for Councillor Round

113. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

114. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

115. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members and Officers.

116. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

117. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

118. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 26 OCTOBER 2016

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed subject to the following amendments:-

Under Minute 101 – Councillor Boughton be added to the list of Councillors recording dissent on page 7:-

Under Minute 107 – the following bullet point be added:

‘That the lease would provide for termination in the event that the Fant Wildlife Group failed to undertake their commitments and responsibilities’.

119. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS (IF ANY)

There were no petitions.

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

There were no questions from members of the public.

121. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman stated that the two letters circulated to members of the Committee were related to the confirmation of the multi-year settlement offer and the other was a copy of a letter sent to the Environment Agency.

In response to a Members’ question the Director of Finance and Business Improvement indicated that although the flooding report was scheduled for January, should there be anything significant to report, he would bring an urgent item to the December meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

122. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT - SECOND QUARTER BUDGET MONITORING 2016/17

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement which provided an overview of the capital and revenue budget and outturn for the second quarter of 2016/17. It also highlighted variances within cost centres that exceeded or were expected to exceed £30,000.

It was noted that the main contributors to the overspend were temporary accommodation and development management. Members were advised that measures to address the situation would be reported to the respective Service Committees.

In addition, increased controls have been put in place in the following areas of spending which would be closely monitored by Corporate Leadership Team:-

1. Recruitment
2. Temporary Staff
3. Discretionary spending; and

4. Contractual commitments

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

- The surplus from car parking income was ring fenced but could be used for improvements to the street scene.
- The Council's cash reserves were held in short term investments for ease of access.
- The Council is not faced with the situation it had had in previous years where it would be waiting on a letter from Central Government on a financial settlement. The current position gives a greater amount of certainty.
- The Council would not want to take monies from its reserves as this would create a shortfall that may not be able to be replaced.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The revenue position at the end of the second quarter be noted and the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position where significant variances have been identified, as set out in table 1, paragraph 2.8 of the report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement;
- 2) The proposed slippage in the capital programme of £1,417,894 into 2017/18 as detailed in paragraph 2.13 of the report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement be agreed;

Voting: For: 13 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

- 3) The performance of the collection fund and the estimated level of balances at the year end be noted; and
- 4) The performance in relation to the treasury management strategy for the second quarter of 2016/17 be noted.

123. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS - STRATEGIC PLAN PERFORMANCE UPDATE QUARTER 2 2016/17

The Head of Policy and Communications presented a report on the Strategic Plan Performance Update Quarter 2 2016/17.

It was noted that 70% (12) of the Key performance indicators (KPIs) reported for quarter 2 achieved their target.

In response to queries raised by Members, the Head of Policy and Communications advised that:-

- The Head of Environment and Public Realm would be requested to circulate a briefing note to the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee which provided a cost analysis of the Saturday freighter service against the general pick up of flytipping.
- The annual survey of Parish Councils would in future include the Parish Meeting Chairmen.

During the discussion, Councillor D Burton proposed and Councillor English seconded that Recommendation 5 be deleted.

Voting: For: 13 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

Councillor Mrs Blackmore arrived at 7.30 p.m. during the discussion but declined to vote as she had not been party to all the discussions.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The summary of performance for Quarter 2 of 2016/17 for Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and corporate strategies and plans be noted;
- 2) The progress of the strategic plan action plan at Appendix II be noted;
- 3) It be noted where complete data is not currently available; and
- 4) The performance of Key Performance Indicators from Quarter 1 of 2016/17 for which data was not available at Policy and Resources committee on 26 July 2016 be noted.

124. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT - COUNCIL TAX AND BUSINESS RATES - PROJECTED COLLECTION FUND SURPLUS/DEFICIT FOR 2016/17

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement on Council Tax and Business Rates – Projected Collection Fund Surplus/Deficit for 2016/17.

Members were reminded that the Council was required to maintain a collection fund which accounted for all local tax payments for council tax and business rates. The income was used to pay precepts to KCC, Kent Fire Authority, Kent Police (Council Tax only), Central Government (Business rates only) and the equivalent requirement of this Council which included the local Parish Precepts.

It was noted that there would be a projected surplus of £341,122 for the end of the financial year on the collection fund. In addition a deficit on the collection fund for business rates would be £5,716,816 which had been due to a significant number of appeals having been received.

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

- The deficit would not affect the Council's reserves and would be accounted for in the closing of accounts.
- The new rating list for businesses would come into effect from 1st April 2017 and this may see more appeals being generated.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The 2016/17 Council Tax projection detailed in Appendix I of this report be agreed and as a result the distribution of the surplus set out in paragraph 4.7 of the report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement be agreed; and
- 2) The 2016/17 Business Rates projection detailed in Appendix II of the report be agreed and as a result the distribution of the deficit set out in paragraph 4.11 of the report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement be noted.

125. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF MID KENT SERVICES - COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2017/2018

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Mid Kent Services on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2017/18.

Members were reminded that the decision on the Council Tax Reduction Scheme had been deferred from the meeting held in October to enable more detailed information to be provided in order that Members could consider the financial impact of the different options, the cumulative impact of changes, possible changes to the recommendations following further analysis of the impact and any unintended impact in relation to homelessness. Finally the report provided a comparison with other boroughs in Kent.

Councillor McLoughlin proposed and Councillor Harvey seconded that Option 12 – Limiting the number of dependent children within the calculation for Council Tax Reduction to a maximum of two be deferred for ten months. This would allow time for parents to be made aware of this change as it could have a significant impact if it was brought in with effect from 1st April 2017.

Voting: For: 6 Against: 7 Abstentions: 0

Motion Lost.

RESOLVED: That having noted the outcome of the public consultation and considered the potential impact of the proposed changes on working age claimants with the protected characteristics of disability, age and sex, under the Equalities Act (2010), the Council be recommended to approve the council tax reduction scheme as amended by the Policy and Resources

Committee at its meeting on 23 November 2016 as detailed below:-

Option 1 – Reducing the maximum level of support for working age applicants from 87% to 80% - Recommendation to Implement

Option 2 – Removing the Family Premium for all new working age applicants – Recommendation to Implement

Option 3 – Reducing backdating to one month – Recommendation to Reject

Option 4 – Using a minimum income (notional income) for self-employed earners after one year’s self-employment – Recommendation to Reject

Option 5 – Reducing the period for which a person can be absent from Great Britain and still receive Council Tax Reduction to four weeks – Recommendation to Implement

Option 6 – Reducing the capital limit from the existing £16,000 to £6,000 – Recommendation to Reject

Option 7 – Introducing a standard level of non-dependant deduction of £10 for all claimants who have non-dependants resident with them – Recommendation to Reject

Option 8 – Taking any Child Maintenance paid to a claimant or partner into account in full in the calculation of Council Tax Reduction – Recommendation to Reject

Option 9 – Restricting the maximum level of Council Tax Reduction payable to the equivalent of a Band D charge – Recommendation to Reject

Option 10 – Removing Second Adult Reduction from the Scheme – Recommendation to Reject

Option 11 – Removing the work related activity component in the calculation of Council Tax Reduction – Recommendation to Implement

Option 12 – Limiting the number of dependent children within the calculation for Council Tax Reduction to a maximum of two – Recommendation to Implement

Option 13 – Introducing a scheme, in addition to Council Tax Reduction, to help applicants suffering exceptional hardship – Recommendation to Implement

Voting: For: 13 Against: 0 Abstentions: 1

126. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLACE - REVIEW OF THE MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL COMMERCIALISATION STRATEGY 2014/15 - 2018/19

Members considered the report of the Director of Regeneration and Place on the review of the Council's Commercialisation Strategy 2014/15 – 2018/19. The commercialisation strategy was half way through its five years and the report gave an update on the success of the strategy to date and how it could be refined and improved for the future.

The Director of Regeneration and Place advised that some of the smaller projects had been slow on delivery but they still had the potential to grow. However, it was evident that the Council should pursue housing development and regeneration as these would produce the biggest return on investment.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The progress made since Maidstone Borough Council's first commercialisation initiatives were commenced in 2014, and the renaming of Commercial and Economic Development service area to Regeneration and Economic Development be noted; and
- 2) The strategy be refocussed on the following areas:-
 - * Pursue a housing and regeneration agenda and receive a detailed strategy for this within 3 months
 - * Continue business improvement reviews for existing services
 - * Develop the shared services with partner local authorities
 - * Expand the grounds maintenance and commercial and garden waste services
 - * Utilise IT innovations to boost the cost effectiveness and user experience of the parking service

Voting: For: 14 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

127. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 9.10 p.m.