

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND THE ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY **17 JANUARY 2017**

Present: Councillor Mrs Ring (Chairman), and
Councillors Barned, M Burton, Cox, D Mortimer, Perry,
Webb and Webster

Also Present: Councillor Mrs Gooch

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Mrs Robertson.

2. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

Councillor Cox was substituting for Councillor Mrs Robertson.

3. **URGENT ITEMS**

The Chairman advised that there was an urgent update to Agenda Item 12 - Report of the Head of Policy and Communications – Strategic Plan 2015-20, 2017-18 Update (Appendix B).

4. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

Councillor Mrs Gooch indicated that she wished to speak on Agenda Item 13 – Report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement – Medium Term Financial Strategy and Budget Proposals 2017/18 and Agenda Item 16 – Report of the Head of Housing and Community Services – Service Level Agreements Review and Grant Budgets.

5. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

The Chairman disclosed an interest in Agenda Item 16 as she was a Trustee of Citizens Advice Bureau. She indicated that she would leave the meeting during consideration of this item and Councillor D Mortimer, the Vice-Chairman, would take the chair.

6. **DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING**

The following Members were lobbied on Agenda Item 16 – Report of the Head of Housing and Community Service – Service Level Agreement Review and Grant Budgets:-

Councillors Barned, Cox, Joy, D Mortimer, Mrs Ring, and Webb.

7. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

8. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 DECEMBER 2016

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2016 be approved as a correct record and signed.

9. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS (IF ANY)

There were no petitions.

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

Miss A. Hogg addressed the meeting to ask a question as follows:-

Council support is vital for charities within Maidstone, to provide the help that meets the needs of local people, such as: Citizens Advice Bureau, Age UK, Homeless Centres to name a few of many.

Without Council support, these Charities, which many have volunteers to provide much needed services for the public, would indeed struggle to carry on, which would inevitably fall to the Council to then provide help to people. In the long term, this would cost the Council more money, to pay staff to provide these services that will not have the expertise of the Charities that provide them at present.

Is it true that the Council still plans in cutting down the money given to these Charities, including the ones mentioned, that have been supported by Maidstone Borough Council for up to 15 years, which have in the past, and continue to provide exceptional service to all residents of the Borough, that rely on the Council's support in order to survive?

In response the Director of Regeneration and Place stated that the Council acknowledged the important role that the third sector delivered, providing a range of services that were not necessarily within the remit of the Council to supply but supported the wider needs of residents within our community.

Mr. Malhotra from the Citizens Advice Bureau delivered a statement which covered the following points:-

- That there would be a diminished service if funding was cut to the Citizens Advice Bureau
- That residents referred to the charity's advice as priceless, invaluable and life changing.

- The service saved money for the Council and helped to prevent homelessness.
- Providing money advice helped residents avoid using credit.
- The volunteers who provide the service got invaluable experience and gained confidence which assisted them in finding paid employment.

Mrs Salisbury of Maidstone Mediation delivered a speech to the committee which made reference to the following:-

- That Maidstone Mediation was unique in its position that it worked with the Safer Maidstone Partnership.
- That who would carry out this vital work in the community if Maidstone Mediation did not.
- That the charity gave advice on anger management and helped with family mediation.

Mrs Bobb from Involve addressed the committee and made the following points:-

- Involve provided essential networking opportunities for various bodies, such as the disabled or older people.
- The Organisation had other smaller community groups with funding.
- They also helped smaller charities to survive.

The Chairman thanked all the visitors for their contribution to the meeting.

11. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Members noted that the February and April meetings would include a Crime and Disorder Committee meeting.

Members requested that an item come forward in regard to litter enforcement once the changes to legislation are known.

12. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS - STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-20, 2017-18 UPDATE

Members considered the report of the Head of Policy and Communications relating to the Strategic Plan 2016-20, 2017-18 Refresh.

Members made suggested changes to the Strategic Plan within the areas of their specific responsibilities.

RESOLVED:

1. That the following amendments to the draft Strategic Plan 2015-20, 2017-18 Update be recommended to Policy and Resources Committee:

<u>Page</u>	<u>As presented</u>	<u>Committee's amendments</u> (additions in bold)
Vision, Mission and Values Section		
3	Our Vision section followed by Our Mission section.	Reformat so that Our Mission is first section, followed by Our Vision.
Action Section		
3	Under Action – A home for everyone	'Planning and delivery for sufficient homes to meet our Borough's needs' be re-inserted and 'A home for everyone' be taken out.
Our Values Section		
3	STRIVE Section placed on page 3.	Section to be relocated to last page of document.
Providing a Clean and Safe Environment		
4	First paragraph	Maidstone Borough Council has demonstrated its commitment to deliver cost effective and sustainable waste and recycling services. as a result our recycling rate has improved significantly. Maidstone does not experience high levels of crime. We have with our Community Safety Partnership agreed that reducing anti-social behaviour, domestic abuse, reoffending and improving road safety are out priorities up until 2018 During the first year of the Strategic Plan The Council has introduced street cleansing and we will ensure we meet that objective.
4	We mean	People feel safe in the Borough and they live in a clean environment of high quality an attractive a safe and clean environment.
4	We will	Working with partners to deliver the Community Safety Plan Strategy 2017-18.
4	We will	Amend: Deliver the Air Quality

		Strategy working with partnerships.
Respecting the Character and Heritage of our Borough		
5	We mean	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not to include - Deliver the blue and green infrastructure strategy • Include - Deliver the biodiversity action plan
Ensuring there are good Leisure and Cultural Attractions		
5	Amend first paragraph	There is always something to see or do in Maidstone borough with the river, two museums and a theatre in the town centre, quality parks and open spaces and a well used leisure centre, a castle, various markets and a variety of festivals and events held across the Borough and throughout the year.
5	We will	<p>Keep the bullet point: Maximise the benefits of our leisure and cultural assets through our commercialisation approach to maintain key services</p> <p>Delete: Deliver the programme of projects a sustainable future for Mote Park</p> <p>Add: Ten year Parks and Open Spaces Strategy</p>
A Home for Everyone		
7	Change title – A home for everyone	Planning and delivery for sufficient homes to meet our Borough’s needs
7	We mean	<p>Amend sentence to read: Having enough homes to meet our residents’ long term needs, to include homes for affordable rent and affordable home ownership. These must be economically sustainable for all our residents.</p> <p>Delete: deliver the affordable housing programme.</p> <p>Not to include: develop and</p>

		implement a housing standards strategy
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2. That it be recommended to Policy and Resources Committee that Key Performance Indicators for the action areas be considered by each Service Committee following the finalisation and adoption of the Strategic Plan 2015-20, 2017-18 update.

13. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT - MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY & BUDGET PROPOSALS 2017/18

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement presented a report on the Medium Term Financial Strategy and Budget Proposals 2017/18. The report set out details of the revenue budget proposals for the Committee for the year 2017/18 and the remainder of the five year medium term strategy planning period.

It also provided details of the Chancellor's Autumn Statement and the Local Government Finance Settlement 2017/18.

Members were advised that New Homes Bonus would be reduced from 2017/18 it would only be paid for five years after a new home is built and from 2018/19 for four years. However, the committee noted that this change would not affect the Council's revenue position as New Homes Bonus had always been used to fund revenue projects.

Members' attention was drawn to Appendix 'B' which detailed the Budget Proposals. It was noted that when changes to voluntary sector grants were originally proposed, the voluntary sector grants were first drawn up, the recommendation was to phase out the grants altogether. However, Members had decided against that particular course of action. Therefore the proposal that was considered by the committee in the Director of Finance and Business Improvement's report was to reduce grants by 25% each year.

Members were asked to take into account that Sports & Recreation and Culture & Tourism had been ranked low in terms of importance by members of the public when considering the budget proposals.

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

- The Parish Services Scheme did not form part of the budget proposals under the voluntary sector grants. The scheme would be dealt with in a separate report when it was reviewed next year.
- Although no decision had been made yet on CCTV options, Officers were confident that savings would be made.

- The figure quoted for Disabled Facilities Grants was related to the staff time associated with processing of the applications.
- Savings identified for the Recycling Collection were as a result of taking out a vacant post and using the Kent Resources Partnership for marketing purposes.

RESOLVED That:

1. The budget proposals for services within the remit of the Committee, as set out in Appendix B to the report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement, be agreed for submission to Policy and Resources Committee.
2. The extension of the existing Parish Services Scheme for one further year to 31 March 2018 be agreed.

Voting: For: 9 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

14. **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT - FEES AND CHARGES**

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement presented a report on the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2017/18 – Fees and Charges.

The committee was informed that the fees and charges for 2017/18, as set out in Appendix A to the report, were for services which fall under the responsibility of the Committee and generate income through a charge to the service user. The Director of Finance and Business Improvement advised that some of these charges were at the Council's discretion and others were in accordance with statutory requirements.

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

- That some services do not increase the charges as it was either counterproductive to do so; or the charge related to a statutory charge that cannot be changed.
- As the contract for the Pest Control Service had only recently been renewed, Officers intended to retain the current charges.
- That the information, when presented next year, would be separated out to indicate what are discretionary and what are statutory charges.
- That Officers would circulate a copy of the comparisons with other Local Authorities in terms of their fees and charges.

RESOLVED That:

1. The proposed fees and charges for 2017/18 as set out in detail in Appendix A to the report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement be approved.
2. The fees and charges set by the government for 2017/18, as detailed in Appendix A to the report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement, be noted.

Voting: For: 9 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

15. **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
Brief Description**

Report of the Head of Commercial and Economic Development - Property Acquisitions – Brunswick Street Redevelopment

Paragraph 3 – Information re business/financial affairs

Report of the Head of Housing and Community Services – Service Level Agreements Review and Grant Budgets

Paragraph 3 – Information re business/financial affairs

16. **REPORT OF THE HEAD OF COMMERCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - PROPERTY ACQUISITIONS - BRUNSWICK STREET REDEVELOPMENT**

Members considered the exempt report of the Head of Commercial and Economic Development on the Property Acquisition for Brunswick Street redevelopment.

It was noted that following the report to the Committee in June 2016 Officers had now completed negotiations with the owners of the sites and the offers had been accepted.

The committee was informed that further negotiation would be required with the current tenant of one of the sites to agree to an early surrender of the lease if possible.

RESOLVED That:

1. The draft Heads of Terms, as set out in Appendix 2 to the exempt report of the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development, for

the freehold acquisition of the premises detailed be agreed.

2. The Director of Finance and Business Improvement be granted delegated authority to conclude negotiations with the owners regarding the acquisition of both sites.
3. The Director of Finance and Business Improvement be granted delegated authority to commence and conclude negotiations with the tenants regarding the early surrender of the lease.
4. The Head of Mid Kent Legal Services be authorised to complete the documentation required for the purchases and early surrender of the lease as agreed by the Director of Finance and Business Improvement.
5. The acquisition costs related to the development of the Brunswick Street car park site be funded from approved resources within the Housing Investments Capital Programme.

Voting: For: 9 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

17. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES -
SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS REVIEW AND GRANT BUDGETS

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Housing and Community Services on Service Level Agreements – Review and Grant Budgets.

The Chairman, Councillor Mrs Ring, having declared an interest in this item left the room and Councillor D Mortimer took the chair.

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement informed the committee that the Council had provided financial support for external organisations in order to deliver services on the Council's behalf or to supplement those provided directly by the Council. The total budget for that support amounted to £300,000.

The Council was undertaking a review of all expenditure as part of its Efficiency Plan as it needed to find £4m savings over the next five years.

Members were advised that there were 11 Service Level Agreements (SLA) which all expire in March 2017. The proposal was to reduce the budget used to fund the Service Level Agreements and Grants to Outside Bodies over the next 5 years.

During the discussion Members raised the following points:-

- If the funding was cut to some of the smaller charities, it could be the difference that prevents them from carrying on.
- That robust SLAs should be put in place with particular emphasis on performance, value for money and a definition of what the residents

of Maidstone should be getting from that particular organisation. This would help inform the decision on how the organisations' grants should be cut year on year.

- That an analysis should be carried out which looked at what the organisation did for the Council and what impact it would have if they did not continue to carry out the service.
- In response to a question from the committee, the Director of Regeneration and Place explained that the proposed Maidstone Borough Council lottery was not material to this decision. This was because this idea was at an early stage, and no decision had yet been made to go ahead with this proposal.

RESOLVED: That Option B as set out in paragraphs 3.3 to 3.8 (with the exclusion of paragraph 3.6) in the exempt report of the Head of Housing and Community Services, for funding post April 2017 grants to external organisations under Service Level Agreements with the Council be adopted.

Voting: For: 8 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

18. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 9.30 p.m.