

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Policy and Resources Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 29 MARCH 2017

Present: Councillors Barned, Mrs Blackmore, Boughton, Brice, Cox, English, Mrs Gooch, Harper, Harvey, Harwood, McLoughlin, Pickett, Round and Mrs Wilson (Chairman)

195. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies for absence were received from Councillors Garland, Powell and Fermor.

196. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following substitutes were noted:

- Councillor English for Councillor Fermor
- Councillor Barned for Councillor Powell

197. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

198. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no visiting members.

199. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by members of officers.

200. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

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

It was noted that item 13. Report of the Director of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement – Property investment contained exempt information and would be considered in private.

202. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15 FEBRUARY 2017

The committee noted that Councillor Brice had left the room during the consideration of item 16. Report of the Head of Policy and Communications – Resident Survey 2017, and that this was not recorded in the minutes.

RESOLVED:

That, subject to noting that Councillor Brice left the room during the consideration of item 16, the minutes be approved as a correct record and signed.

203. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS (IF ANY)

There were no petitions.

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

There were no questions from the public.

205. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Clerk updated the committee on the Committee Work Programme. It was noted that the Housing and Regeneration Strategy would now come to the June meeting of the committee.

206. REPORT OF THE MID KENT SERVICES DIRECTOR - DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS POLICY

The Business Support Manager introduced her report on Maidstone Borough Council's Discretionary Housing Payments Policy. It was noted that the Council received an annual grant from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to administer Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). The grant was ringfenced and any unspent grant had to be returned to the DWP. DHP were introduced to help benefit claimants who were affected by benefit reforms to move into more financially sustainable accommodation.

In response to a question from a member of the committee, it was noted that the impact of welfare reforms was different for residents who were eligible for disability benefits. For example, the benefit cap did not apply to those who received disability benefits. This was the reason why a low proportion of DHP claimants were disabled.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee approves the Discretionary Housing Payment Policy held as appendix A.

Voting: For - 14 Against - 0 Abstentions - 0

207. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION AND PLACE - PROPERTY ACQUISITIONS

The Director of Regeneration and Place presented his report to the committee. The report referred to the previous decision of the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee on the Temporary Accommodation Strategy, which committed the council to purchasing 13 properties to be used for temporary accommodation for homeless households. However the market conditions meant that decisions on each of these properties had to be reached as quickly as possible. Therefore the report was seeking delegated authority to complete the property acquisitions, with consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the committee.

The committee raised concerns with a previous property that had been proposed for temporary accommodation which was not suitable for the council's needs. The committee therefore suggested that ward councillors should also be consulted with, as they would know their local area the best.

In response to a question from the committee, the Director of Regeneration and Place clarified that consultation would be informal and could take place by email rather than requiring a meeting.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Director of Finance and Business Improvement is granted delegated authority to conclude negotiations with property owners, and approve on a case by case basis (in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee, and the ward Councillors), the purchase of up to 13 properties, for use as temporary accommodation for homeless persons.
- 2) That delegated authority is given to the Head of Mid Kent Legal Services to complete the purchases on the agreed terms.
- 3) That details of any completed purchases are reported back to the next meeting of the Committee following the acquisition(s).

Voting: For - 9 Against - 5 Abstentions - 0

Councillor English requested his dissent be noted on this decision.

208. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT - PROPERTY INVESTMENT

The Property and Procurement Manager presented his report on a property investment. The property investment was of a commercial premises, and would provide a return of 7.14% on the investment. A similar investment in a commercial property that the council had completed two years ago had provided no problems, provided a steady

income with little additional expenditure and had never had any problems with re-letting with new tenants.

In response to a question from a member of the committee, the Property and Procurement Manager explained that there were opportunities to improve sustainability of the Council's managed commercial property and that this would be further explored in the council's developing Property Strategy.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Committee agrees to purchase the leasehold interest in a commercial property.
2. That the Director of Finance & Resources is delegated authority to conclude negotiations with the leaseholder.
3. That the Head of Mid Kent Legal Services is authorised to complete the purchase on the terms as agreed by the Director of Finance & Business Improvement.

Voting: For - 14 Against - 0 Abstentions - 0

209. DURATION OF MEETING

6.31 p.m. to 7.41 p.m.