

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 6 APRIL 2021

Present: Councillors Joy, Khadka, Kimmance, Mortimer (Chair), Powell, D Rose, M Rose, Springett and Young

Also Present: Councillors Adkinson and Harper

161. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors M Burton and Mrs Robertson.

162. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Springett was present as a Substitute Member for Councillor M Burton, and Councillor Kimmance was present as a Substitute Member for Councillor Mrs Robertson.

163. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

164. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillors Harper and Adkinson were present as Visiting Members for Item 12 – Committee Work Programme and Item 17 – Declaration of Local Nature Reserves.

165. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Councillor Mortimer stated his position as a Trustee of Hayle Park Nature Reserve, as appointed by the Council, in relation to Item 17 – Declaration of Local Nature Reserves. As the report was for noting with no financial considerations, Councillor Mortimer stated his intention to partake in the discussion for this Item.

Councillor M Rose stated her position on the Committee of Fant Wildlife Park, also in relation to Item 17 – Declaration of Local Nature Reserves.

166. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillor M Rose had been lobbied on Item 10 – Question and answer session for members of the public.

167. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That Item 18 – Granada House be taken in private due to the possible disclosure of exempt information.

168. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 2 MARCH 2021

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed at a later date.

169. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

170. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Ms Dee Bonett asked the following question of the Chairman:

"Since the Pilot Scheme was implemented in August 2020, the recognition of John Chadwick's Memory, continues to gather momentum to a much wider audience.

Therefore I have vowed, to continue moving Maidstone Borough Council and the CHE Panel forward positively, I will no longer agree to any interviews that do not include The Pet Policy for Emergency Accommodation and The Pilot Scheme, inspired by his tragic death.

John Chadwicks Memory no longer needs to stop at his Suicide. The changes made here in Maidstone for Pets in Accommodation, is firmly seen to have set the Benchmark for Local Authorities to follow suit.

Would Maidstone Borough Council and the CHE Panel consider naming the changes made, in Memory of John Chadwick? I would like to see this as being "Chadwicks Rule" or "John Chadwicks Rule", or any such tributes fitting in his name.

I feel this would further set a precedence for Local Authorities to follow, both here in the UK and also abroad."

The Chairman responded to the question.

Ms Bonett asked the following supplementary question:

"Are Maidstone Borough Council informing those who are residing in emergency accommodation with their pets of their rights to be able to refuse the first offer of accommodation which may have a no pet policy or which may not be suitable for the pets?"

The Chairman responded to the question.

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

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

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRAYzILaH94>

171. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

172. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

In response to questions, the Head of Housing and Community Services explained that the Anti-Idling Policy had been postponed due to limited officer capacity, as priority had been given to workstreams enabling Covid-19 recovery. However enforcement officers were exercising available powers to encourage drivers to turn off their engines when static.

The next meeting of the Committee acting as the Crime and Disorder Committee would occur on 1 June 2021, prior to the ordinary meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

173. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no Reports of Outside Bodies.

174. SAFEGUARDING POLICY REFRESH

The Housing and Inclusion Manager introduced the report and explained that the feedback received from Members and Officers had indicated that the Safeguarding Policy needed to be streamlined. The proposed document would be easier to navigate whilst still providing an overview of the Council's safeguarding responsibilities. New Safeguarding Champions had been recruited with training provided, and the Sharepoint site underwent a refresh in October 2020. Since this date, 30 safeguarding alerts had been received, the majority of which related to domestic abuse and mental health concerns.

In response to questions, the Housing and Inclusion Manager explained that the updated policy did not contain changes to the safeguarding process but removed information that was not necessary. Kent County Council were responsible for safeguarding across the county. The policy's success would be measured by the continuance of safeguarding alerts being raised by staff.

RESOLVED: That

1. The refreshed safeguarding policy be adopted; and
2. The safeguarding data collected across the organisation be reviewed in twelve months.

175. PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING ENFORCEMENT POLICY 2021

The Housing and Health Manager introduced the report, explaining that the policy had been updated to reflect numerous changes in the relevant legislation and regulations. This included the Tenant Fees Act 2019, the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards Regulations 2015, the Electrical Safety Standards in the private Rented Sector Regulations 2020 and the Housing and Planning Act 2016. A suggestion was made to rename the policy to the Housing Standards Policy.

In response to questions, it was clarified that the policy would apply to social housing landlords and private landlords, and that property inspections could be implemented both reactively and proactively.

RESOLVED: That the Housing Standards Enforcement Policy 2021-2025 attached at Appendix A to the report, including the table of financial penalties to be applied under sections 23, 126 and Schedule 9 of the Housing and Planning Act 2016, be approved.

176. ACCESS TO SERVICE REVIEW UPDATE

The Senior Policy and Engagement Officer introduced the report confirming that the panel was comprised of Councillors Burton, Joy, Mortimer, Powell and M Rose. The review had begun with digital accessibility, considering the accessibility of the Council's website, the services offered digitally, and the impact of digital exclusion, comparing Maidstone to the national picture. The second phase of the review was communication, considering community engagement and developing the community repository. Further meetings of the panel had been scheduled to continue the review and a report would be presented to the Committee once it was complete.

Members of the panel felt positive about the review which had led to increased knowledge in the areas considered and expressed their thanks to the Officers involved.

RESOLVED: That the progress on the Access to Services Review and the emerging recommendations in Appendix 2 to the report be noted.

177. DECLARATION OF LOCAL NATURE RESERVES

The Parks and Open Spaces Manager introduced the report which proposed the first sites to be declared Local Nature Reserves, selected to make the best use of the resources available. The report followed the Committee's decision of 16 December 2019 to create new and extend existing local nature reserves within the Borough. The sites proposed were outlined and it was noted that it would take up to a year to bring the sites forward.

The Committee expressed support for the proposals.

RESOLVED: That the planned work and sites to be progressed be noted.

178. EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC FROM THE MEETING

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item 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**

Item 19 – Granada House

3 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

179. GRANADA HOUSE

The Housing Delivery Manager introduced the report and explained that full surveys had been completed in respect to the proposed works to Granada House, with the findings set out in the report. An update was provided on the options available, with the recommended option highlighted.

The financial aspects of the proposed works were outlined, and the works deemed necessary to improve the standard of the accommodation. The Housing Deliver Manager and Head of Housing and Community Services responded to questions by Members.

It was suggested that a green roof be considered as the area had high levels of pollution.

RESOLVED: That

1. The proposed programme of works to Granada House be approved;
2. A new tender procurement process be undertaken to choose a suitable Contractor and Employers Agent to undertake and oversee the necessary works required; and
3. A follow up report be presented to Policy and Resources Committee outlining the results from the tender procurement process and to approve the financial commitments required to complete the works.

180. DURATION OF MEETING

6.34 p.m. to 8.44 p.m.

The Committee adjourned between 7.55 p.m. and 8.13 p.m. due to technical difficulties.