

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 31 AUGUST 2021

Present: Councillors Cox, McKenna, Newton, Perry, Purle (Chairman), Mrs Robertson, M Rose, S Webb and Young

Also Present: Councillors English, Hinder and Naghi

45. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bartlett, Joy and Mortimer.

46. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

The following Substitute Members were present:

Councillor Perry for Councillor Bartlett;
Councillor Robertson for Councillor Joy; and
Councillor Cox for Councillor Mortimer.

47. **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

RESOLVED: that Councillor Purle be elected as Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2021/22.

48. **URGENT ITEMS**

The Chairman informed the Committee that he would take the Election of the Vice Chairman as an urgent item.

RESOLVED: that Councillor S Webb be elected as Vice Chairman for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2021/22.

49. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

Councillor Hinder was present as a Visiting Member for Item 12 - Questions from Members to the Chairman.

Councillors English and Naghi were present as Visiting Members for Item 20 - Brenchley Gardens.

50. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

51. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

52. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

53. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 29 JUNE 2021

RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2021 be approved as a correct record and signed.

54. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

55. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There was one question from a member of the public.

Question from Sue Gullett, on behalf of Maidstone Climate Emergency Network, to the Chairman of the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee:

'We would like to thank MBC for participating in the No Mow May scheme. I personally have particularly appreciated Church Green in Staplehurst, an area of which has been left uncut this year, and I've heard some positive comments about it from other residents.

We have also been heartened to see that this year many verges have been left largely uncut, with a resulting increase in wildflowers & insects. I gather that there have been some negative responses to No Mow May, and no doubt to the uncut verges, and that your committee will be asked to review lessons learnt.

In line with your Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan section 8.4 do you agree that, in order to engage and inspire the wider public, information about schemes such as No Mow May needs to be eye catching & ideally on site? This would mean that anyone who, on first glance, sees untidiness and neglect is immediately made aware of the reasons and the wider benefits, thus helping to build stronger support for sustainable practices.'

The Chairman responded to the question.

Sue Gullett asked the following supplementary question:

'Is the Committee aware of the Road Verges campaign organised by the charity Plantlife? Plantlife provides information and resources for Councillors, including a PDF for producing posters.'

The Chairman responded to the supplementary question.

The full response was recorded on the webcast and made available to view on the Maidstone Borough Council website.

To access the webcast, please use the link below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dh0LLFFI9M&t=4679s>

56. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There was one question from a Member to the Chairman.

Councillor Hinder asked the following question:

'I have received lobbying from a number of my ward residents regarding the "perceived outdated practice" of giving away live pets-namely Goldfish - as prizes.

Has this Council considered the effect of giving away animals as prizes and would it support a move to ban the giving of live animals as prizes in any form?

This outdated practice occurs on land owned by the Council and also on private land. Does this not therefore give clear indication that this Council condones this outdated practice?

Would this Council support National moves for an outright ban on the giving of live animals as prizes?'

The Chairman responded to the question.

The full response was 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=Dh0LLFFI9M&t=4679s>

57. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED: that the Committee Work Programme be noted.

58. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

59. SOCIAL HOUSING PROVIDER PRESENTATION - GOLDING HOMES

Sue Chalkley, Interim Chief Executive, and Annmarie Roberts, Director of Operations, from Golding Homes presented their report to the Committee.

An overview was given of the changes to the service throughout the last 18 months, which included the launch of a new campaign whereby all employees of Golding Homes went through customer service training. Repairs and maintenance had been carried out inhouse since February 2021 rather than by contractors, and complaints had since reduced by 50%. An increase in customer satisfaction had also occurred. The current business plan included an investment of £5.1 million in building and fire safety, and asset data was being collected as a step towards becoming net carbon zero by 2050.

In response to questions, it was explained that the majority of complaints related to repairs and maintenance. The impact of the pandemic on tenants in relation to the ongoing suitability of their allocated accommodation could be incorporated in the review of provision for older and vulnerable people.

The Head of Housing and Community Services commented that applications to transfer accommodation are administered by the Council through the Housing Register and data could be extracted as to the number of transfer requests received.

In response to further questions, it was explained that external consultants would be brought in to assist with preparation for the in-depth assessment relating to regulatory measures, which would take place in quarter four. The drop in customer satisfaction could be a result of the new system which better enabled residents to make complaints, and the key drivers for lower satisfaction were within estates and cleaning and caretaking services. An update to the Committee was requested to take place before the regulatory measures assessment.

Golding Homes had seven buildings within the Borough which would be applicable to the EWS1 process, and it was confirmed that works needed to be completed on all buildings in order for them to gain the EWS1 fire safety certificate.

RESOLVED: that the presentation be noted.

60. REFERENCE FROM THE POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - LESSONS LEARNED FROM 'NO MOW MAY'

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the reference, which recommended that the Committee review the lessons learned from the 'No Mow May' Campaign.

RESOLVED: that lessons learned from the 'No Mow May' Campaign be reviewed within the Parks Delivery Plan for Biodiversity.

61. APPOINTMENT TO THE HOWARD DE WALDEN CENTRE

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the report, which outlined the steps taken to fill the Trustee vacancies to the Howard de Walden Centre.

A nomination form had been received from Councillor Cox and was appended to the report. Councillor English requested to be appointed to the outside body and outlined previous experience relevant to the role.

RESOLVED: that Councillors Cox and English be appointed as Trustees to the Howard de Walden Centre for a term of four years.

62. RECOVERY AND RENEWAL ACTIONS

The Head of Policy, Communications and Governance introduced the report which outlined the Council's action plan for recovery and renewal from the Covid-19 Pandemic following the allocation of £860,000 in unringfenced grants to the Council. The Committee was asked to consider the actions proposed and raise any new actions for consideration by the Policy and Resources Committee. A community resilience fund had been proposed whereby one-off payments could be accessed by voluntary and community sector organisations via the drafted application form, to fund projects that would benefit Maidstone residents.

In response to questions, the Head of Policy, Communications and Governance confirmed that more detail could be sought regarding the suggested resources assigned to each proposed action, and explained that there would be regular progress and spending reports brought to the Committee. If a change was recommended to the allocated resource for any of the actions, this would need to be taken to the Policy and Resources Committee.

Concern was raised that smaller organisations may not meet the eligibility criteria set out in order to apply for funding through the Community Resilience fund, and more flexibility in paying successful bids was suggested. It was also raised that bids should be considered by way of a self-selected panel taken from the Committee Members.

RESOLVED: that feedback on the action plan be reported back to the Policy and Resources Committee for consideration at their meeting on 20 October 2021.

63. ENGLAND TREES ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Biodiversity and Climate Change Officer introduced the report which was requested by the Committee at its meeting on 1 June 2021 and provided an update on initiatives including the action plan for tree planting activities across the Borough. The Woodland Trust would be working in Partnership with the Council to sustainably increase tree cover, and discussions would be initiated with local large landowners due to the limited areas for wide scale tree planting on the Council's estate. The Forestry Commission would also be creating a 127-hectare woodland within the Borough.

In response to questions, the Biodiversity and Climate Change Officer explained that planting would begin in the new year which would coincide with the planting season and welcomed suggestions for new planting

initiatives. There would be close collaboration with the Planning Teams to avoid disruption to infrastructure and properties, and with strategic planning to ensure tree planting was included in new developments. A maintenance plan would mitigate the risks around trees being vandalised, with more developed trees being planted in public parks.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

64. BRENCHLEY GARDENS

The Community Protection Manager introduced the report which outlined steps taken to reduce the negative activity within the park.

In response to questions, the Head of Housing and Community Services explained that bringing a report to the Committee in November would allow time for discussion with park users. Brenchley Gardens was a standing item on the agenda at the relevant ward cluster meetings, which enabled a discussion with the relevant ward Members.

The Community Protection Manager commented that closing the park at night would not improve antisocial behaviour that mainly happened in the daytime. Consideration should be given to where displaced groups would go if the park was not accessible and how that would affect the ability to safeguard the young people involved.

RESOLVED: that

1. The approach set out in the report to address community safety concerns and create a more positive environment at Brenchley Gardens be endorsed;
2. An update report be provided by the Head of Housing and Community Services to the Committee at their meeting on 30 November 2021;
3. Officers be asked to pursue further and bring forward firm proposals and costings in the next Committee report as to:
 - a. Securing and locking the grounds at night;
 - b. Additional CCTV coverage;
 - c. Additional lighting at night; and
 - d. Securing the bandstand; and
4. Officers be asked to meet with interested Members to discuss landscaping and biodiversity matters and to include any resulting actions and proposals when reporting to the Committee on the Parks Delivery Plan for Biodiversity.

65. COMMUNITY SAFETY PLAN TIMETABLE

The Head of Housing and Community Services introduced the report, which proposed the timetable for the new three-year plan to go to Council

for adoption. A public consultation was proposed and the importance of Member engagement was highlighted.

RESOLVED: that the timetable at 2.4 of the report and process to enable to the Council to adopt a new Community Safety Plan 2022-25 be approved, subject to the rescheduling of the Member engagement event on 9 September 2021, and that direction on Member engagement be provided.

66. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30pm to 8.43pm.