

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

PLANNING, INFRASTRUCTURE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 7 JUNE 2023

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors Councillor Mrs Annabelle Blackmore (Chairman), Mrs Blackmore, Cleator, Conyard, Jones, Kimmance, McKenna, Munford, Springett and Trzebinski
Lead Members:	Councillor Paul Cooper, Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development
Visiting Members:	Councillors Cannon, Forecast and Jeffery

6. APOLOGIES OF ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Grigg.

7. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Munford was present as Substitute Member for Councillor Grigg.

8. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items but the Chairman stated an amended agenda had been provided to include Item 6a - Disclosures of Lobbying.

9. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillors Cannon, Forecast and Jeffery were in attendance for Item 11 - Strategic CIL Assessments and Spends.

Councillor Jeffery was also in attendance for Item 10 - Reference from Council – Town Centre Strategy.

10. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Councillor Cooper stated that he used to worship at St Faith's Church.

11. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillors Blackmore, McKenna, Spooners and Trzebinski disclosed they had been lobbied on Item 11 – Strategic CIL Assessments & Spend.

Councillor Blackmore had also been lobbied on Item 10 – Reference from Council – Town Centre Strategy.

12. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

13. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 MAY 2023

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed.

14. FORWARD PLAN RELATING TO THE COMMITTEE'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan relating to the Committee's Terms of Reference be noted.

15. STRATEGIC CIL ASSESSMENTS & SPEND

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development introduced the report and outlined the requirement for the Council to allocate strategic CIL monies to the infrastructure needed to support the development of the areas as set out in the adopted Local Plan.

Infrastructure providers were invited to submit bids during a consultation process between 3 May 2022 to 15 July 2022. A total of 22 bids were received, which had then been appraised by the relevant Officers and moderated by an external consultancy. The four schemes put forward were outlined.

Several Committee Members expressed that bids for other highway improvement schemes should have been submitted, such as for the Fountain Lane/A26 junction, Baker Street and Hart Street improvement schemes. In response, the Head of Development Management confirmed that the Council had engaged with infrastructure providers, including Kent County Council, in advance of the bids' opening. There were no detailed plans for the Fountain Lane/A26 junction improvement scheme, and the Council could only consider the bids received. The Head of Development Management reiterated the bids suitability with reference made to the Council's adopted Local Plan monitoring indicators. The Chief Executive further advised on the bids' alignment with the Council's strategic objectives.

In response to further questions, the Head of Development Management confirmed that the bid consultation had run for 10-weeks as it was the first consultation run. The standard approach for planning related consultations was a 6-week consultation. The CIL monies provision could be prefaced with a time period by which the funds had to be spent, to prevent unnecessary delay to the schemes' progression. The Head of Finance confirmed that the bids' received had to include information on the project's deliverability, to mitigate the risk of increasing costs.

The Committee expressed support in particular for the Heather House and St.Faiths Community Centre projects as these would benefit the local communities. To ensure the schemes deliverability, a time-restriction on the funds' usage within the agreement between the Council and relevant bodies was supported. It was recommended that a second consultation process take place to encourage further bids, to focus on areas such as highway improvement, social infrastructure and biodiversity and climate change.

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development stated that the discussion had been helpful and reiterated the requirement for infrastructure providers to submit bids.

RESOLVED: That the Cabinet be recommended to:

1. Agree the Community Infrastructure Levy funding that has been collected be allocated (as minima) to the following strategic projects for the period to 31 March 2025 (figures are approximate and based on early February 2023 data):
 - a) M20 Junction 7 Upgrade - £1,900,000 in Strategic CIL monies subject to appropriate due diligence by the Director of Finance & Business Improvement in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance & Corporate Services; and
 - b) A229 Linton Crossroads Junction Improvement - £1,232,000; and
 - c) Heather House Community Centre Redevelopment - £956,420; and
 - d) St Faith's Community Centre Redevelopment - £200,000; and
2. Agree that Maidstone Borough Council and the Infrastructure Provider for the A229 Linton Crossroads Junction Improvement includes a time limited delivery date; and
3. Agree to reopen the Community Infrastructure Levy funding process with effect from 1 October 2023 to 15 December 2023 (10 week period) for a further round of bids to be received according to the terms and conditions of the process.

16. REFERENCE FROM COUNCIL - NOTICE OF MOTION - TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development introduced the reference, outlining the previously agreed governance arrangements for the Town Centre Strategy which included the formation of a Town Centre User Group (the Group). The Group would include Elected Members from Wards in the local vicinity of the Town Centre and was expected to meet for the first time in June 2023. An additional stakeholder group was not required, given the engagement that would take place with the Group alongside the previous input with Members through Town Centre Walk-about, and the ongoing engagement with Political Group Leaders.

The Chief Executive emphasised that Members would have many opportunities to be involved in the Town Centre Strategy and associated delivery plan's development; there would be an extensive period of engagement before the Strategy was formally adopted; this was currently planned to occur by the end of the calendar year. Reassurance was given that the Group had been created in recognition of the role of the Town Centre for people who live there or in the surrounding areas to the Town Centre, as well as those that visited the area.

The seconder of the original motion at Council supported the engagement being undertaken through the Group and with political group leaders.

The Committee felt that no further recommendations on the reference were required, as since the motion was originally considered by Full Council the Group had been formed and was meeting in the near future.

RESOLVED: That

1. It be noted that the seconder of the motion supports the Town Centre User Group and welcomes that it has been convened; and
2. The Committee does not have any further recommendations to the Cabinet.

17. 4TH QUARTER FINANCIAL UPDATE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development introduced the report setting out the financial and performance position for the services reporting into the Committee as of Quarter 4.

It was noted that there was a revenue variance in the Innovation Centre which represented £110,000 but rental income had increased and was in line with budget. The Business Terrace had recorded a variance of £72,000 because of lower business rate income as the pandemic negatively impacted tenants. This had led to a peak of eight vacant units but this had since reduced to two vacant units.

The Key Performance Indicator (KPI) for 'Priority 1 enforcement cases being dealt with in time' had achieved 50% of the 95% target. A meeting would be held with the Director of Regeneration and Place to discuss the matter. The KPI regarding 'processing of planning applications: Minor applications' was not on target. Parking income was ahead of budget and had recovered since the pandemic.

In response to questions the Chief Executive confirmed that the Innovation Centre's tenants were complimentary of the site's standard and management; further consideration could be given to extending the site's opening hours provided it was financially viable. The Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development stated that both he and the Leader of the Council planned to visit the site and would consider the suggestion made.

In response to comments the Insight, Communities and Governance Manager stated that all KPI's had been agreed by the relevant Heads of Service and a KPI related to *percentage of 'planning applications meeting biodiversity net gain 20% adopted standard'* would not be implemented until November 2023, provided no further changes were required. The Cabinet Member for Planning, Infrastructure and Economic Development explained that the newly proposed indicators concerning biodiversity net gain and renewable energy generation would likely be reviewed, subject to relevant policies being adopted through the Local Plan.

RESOLVED:

That the following be noted:

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 4 for 2022/23, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified;
2. The Capital position at the end of Quarter 4;
3. That the Performance position as at Quarter 4 for 2022/23, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified, be noted.

That the Cabinet be recommended to:

4. Agree the proposed new KPIs for 2023/24.

Note: Councillor Conyard arrived at 6.40 p.m. and stated that he had no disclosures of lobbying or interest to declare.

18. DURATION OF THE MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.17 p.m.