

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES, LEISURE AND ARTS POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 JULY 2023

Present:

Committee Members:	Councillor Mrs Gooch (in the Chair) and Councillors Bryant, Eagle, Fort, Harper, Hinder and Naghi
Cabinet Members:	Councillor Russell (Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts)

18. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from the Chairman (Councillor Forecast). In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman (Councillor Mrs Gooch) took the Chair.

19. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

20. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

21. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members, although Councillor Russell, the Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts, was in attendance.

22. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

23. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

24. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That the items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

25. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 JUNE 2023

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed.

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

The Committee considered the Forward Plan for the period 31 May 2023 to 30 September 2023 in so far as it related to its terms of reference.

In response to questions, Councillor Russell, the Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts, advised the Committee that the Policy Advisory Committees (PACs) were advisory committees and could only advise the Cabinet on matters within their remit. They did not have any power to make decisions on those matters. Proposed decisions were reported to the PACs for consideration and comment. Requests for updates should be directed to the appropriate Cabinet Member(s).

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan relating to the Committee's terms of reference be noted.

27. BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN UPDATE AND ESTIMATED COSTS FOR ACHIEVING NET ZERO 2030

Councillor Russell, the Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts, introduced the biannual report on the implementation of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan following the annual review of the Action Plan agreed by the Executive in April 2023.

The Cabinet Member explained that one action relating to the terms of reference of the Committee - 6.6 (Work with local farms and landowners to deliver landscape scale biodiversity initiatives Nature Recovery Strategy, including reconnection of habitats, flood plain restoration, reduced chemical inputs and reintroduction of lost native species) had yet to commence as delivery relied very heavily on partnership working with farmers and landowners.

In response to questions, the Cabinet Member/Officers explained that:

- In terms of the actions aimed at encouraging a move to electric taxis, the location of additional rapid charge points had not yet been determined. The terms of reference of this Policy Advisory Committee covered the communications element of working with the taxi trade to facilitate the move to electric vehicles.
- With regard to the action aimed at increasing the Borough canopy, the terms of reference of this Policy Advisory Committee covered communications and partnership working to deliver tree planting and rewilding projects. The Officers had been in discussion with the Woodland Trust regarding the cost effectiveness of tree planting schemes and the carbon sequestration and would promote the Woodland Trust tree planting scheme as much as possible.
- The majority of the funding for decarbonising the Council's buildings would come from applications to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme. Priority would be given to buildings where the biggest cuts in emissions could be achieved, or which had the oldest heating systems, and this would inform decisions going forward. Maidstone House was a priority because its heating system was coming to the end of its life. There was an opportunity to apply for Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme funding this Autumn. In terms of the Leisure Centre, consideration would be given to the reduction in carbon

emissions achieved as a result of the improvement works already planned and funded when prioritising projects.

- The current Green Fleet Strategy which was to gradually transition vehicles to EV based on the market and operational need was considered to be a better approach than converting the entire fleet to electric in the medium-term. Waiting for other emerging technologies for the fleet transition such as hydrogen and other fuel types particularly for heavier vehicles was likely to save costs in the medium term.
- Investment in maximising the solar energy generation on Council property was considered to be good medium-term investment in terms of both savings to the Council and carbon reductions.
- The Council would seek to maximise external funding, but it also had money in the Capital Programme that could be used to match that external funding, prioritising schemes that would meet its investment criteria; for example, the installation of new equipment which is energy saving.
- The estimated costs of decarbonising key Maidstone Borough Council assets and the annual savings were based on site surveys and energy audits on each building by APSE Energy and were considered to be a good ballpark in terms of how much the Council would be saving.
- In-person training would be provided for Councillors on carbon, climate change and biodiversity.

During the discussion reference was made to:

- Planting projects undertaken by Parish Councils and community groups, and it was suggested that they be encouraged as partners.
- The importance of maintaining existing woodland as well as encouraging people to plant more trees. The Cabinet Member undertook to follow up concerns raised about the condition and maintenance of the Borough Council-owned Dove Hill Wood and to provide a briefing note for Members.

Members thanked the Officers for a very thorough report.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET: That the Action Plan implementation updates and indicative costs of achieving net zero by 2030 for the Council's operations be noted.

28. COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY REFRESH AND ACTION PLAN 2023/24

Councillor Russell, the Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts, introduced the report setting out an updated Communications and Engagement Strategy 2023/26 and Action Plan for 2023/24 explaining that:

- The Communications and Engagement Strategy was driven by the Strategic Plan which sets out the Council's long-term aspirations for the Borough and how they would be achieved. The aims and objectives of the Strategy were to support the delivery of the Strategic Plan by ensuring that all campaigns and

projects were aligned to and supported the narrative of the four priorities: Thriving Place; Homes and Communities; Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure; and Safe, Clean and Green.

- The aim of the Communications Team was to promote, protect and uphold the reputation of the Council. It supported the delivery of the Strategic Plan through working with Members, services, residents and other key stakeholders to deliver timely and effective campaigns, messages and events which promote and deliver the Council's priorities. The key campaigns and actions the Communications Team would be undertaking were set out in the Action Plan for 2023/24 together with details of the communication channels and tools that would be used.

During the discussion:

- The Cabinet Member undertook to provide clarification regarding the figure of 644 million referenced in the report.
- The Communications and Engagement Manager provided more detail on events delivered/supported over the past year and associated press and publicity.
- It was noted that Boxley Ward Members would be willing to assist with delivery of the Insight magazine in some of the outlying areas in the north of the Borough.
- Members thanked the Officers for a very thorough report and comprehensive Strategy.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET: That the refreshed Communications and Engagement Strategy 2023/26 and Action Plan for 2023/24, attached at Appendices 1 and 2 to the report of the Communications and Engagement Manager, be approved.

29. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.20 p.m.