

## **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **HOUSING, HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

#### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 11 JULY 2023**

##### **Attendees:**

<b>Committee Members:</b>	<b>Councillor Joy (Vice Chairman in the Chair) and Councillors Conyard, Forecast, Hastie, Jeffery, Joy, Mortimer, Riordan, Webb and J Wilkinson</b>
<b>Cabinet Members:</b>	<b>Councillor Parfitt-Reid, Cabinet Member for Housing and Health and Councillor Garten, Cabinet Member for Environmental Services</b>

##### 19. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Khadka, Knatchbull, Rose and Springett.

##### 20. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following Substitute Members were present:

- Councillor Conyard for Councillor Khadka
- Councillor Forecast for Councillor Knatchbull
- Councillor Webb for Councillor Springett
- Councillor Wilkinson for Councillor Rose

##### 21. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

##### 22. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

Note: Councillor Webb left at 19:30 p.m. and returned at 19:33 p.m.

##### 23. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

##### 24. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

##### 25. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

26. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 JUNE 2023

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed with the following amendment:

Item 17 – Property Acquisition for 1,000 Affordable Homes Programme - the number “48” to be removed from the resolution.

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

The Committee enquired whether the NHS Kent and Medway consultation on integrated care strategy could be on the Forward Plan and the Cabinet Member for Housing and Health stated it would be taken forward.

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

28. REVISIONS TO THE COVERT SURVEILLANCE AND ACCESS TO COMMUNICATIONS DATA POLICY AND GUIDANCE NOTES

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Health introduced the report and stated the Home Office Code of Practice recommends that the policy is reviewed annually and that minor revisions were being sought.

**RESOLVED:** That the Cabinet Member for Housing and Health be recommended to approve the revisions to the Covert Surveillance and Access to Communications Data Policy.

29. BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN UPDATE AND COST FOR ACHIEVING NET ZERO 2030

The Cabinet Member for Environmental Services introduced the report, which provided an update on the progress and implementation of the Council’s Biodiversity and Climate Change Action plan (the plan), and the estimated costs for achieving net zero emissions for the Council’s operations by 2030. The plan’s actions that related to the Committee’s terms of reference were outlined.

During the discussion, concern was expressed on how much progress had been made since the last update on the plan was provided, including to mitigation measures and tree planting. It was requested that indicative statistics on the actions’ progress be included in future updates to demonstrate the progress of each action.

In response, the Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager confirmed that as the Council had allocated funding within its Capital Strategy for the de-carbonisation of its properties, it was eligible for the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, allowing the Council to potentially receive up to two thirds of the cost of decarbonising its properties. The report outlined the mitigating actions being taken, with further information on Housing Energy Performance Certificates and the allocation of funding across the plan to be provided outside of the meeting.

In response to questions, the Cabinet Member for Environmental Services confirmed that there were enough resources available to achieve the outcomes set out in the plan, with a significant amount of time being spent in preparing for and developing the actions prior to implementation; an example of the ongoing work with The Mall's waste contractors to provide recycling facilities was given.

The Committee's comments would be shared with the Cabinet ahead of its consideration of the 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.

30. PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER – TOWN CENTRE RENEWAL

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Health introduced the report and stated that the Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) had to be renewed every three years and was made of two provisions, begging and street drinking. It was emphasised that the council's approach is to support those who were most vulnerable in society that is captured in the Council's Enforcement Policy and other Strategies. Assisting street homeless was part of this policy framework in conjunction with the Homeless Support Service. In the main, the PSPO acted as a deterrent for professional beggars who were not actually homeless. For street drinking the PSPO acted as a collaborative tool between Maidstone Police and Maidstone Ambassadors and was used in a wider policy to reduce anti-social behaviour in the town centre.

The Committee expressed concern that supportive measures for vulnerable residents were not explicit in the PSPO and that the Council had received correspondence from Liberty Human Rights which raised concerns over the potential misuse of PSPOs. The committee considered whether additional legal advice was required before the decision should be taken by the Cabinet Member.

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Health stated that the Homeless Support team at the Council provided support for vulnerable residents and was working as intended. The Head of Housing and Regulatory Services stated the PSPO was a prescribed legal document and that it was part of a wider approach, including engagement and the community safety partnership plan. Help was provided to those in need before any punitive action was considered. It was clarified that legal advice had been obtained from Mid Kent Legal Services in preparation for the renewal of the PSPO, when the PSPO was drafted in 2020 and the Service had reviewed recent case law in regard to PSPOs. The likelihood of a successful legal challenge to the PSPO was considered to be remote.

**RESOLVED:** That the Cabinet Member for Housing and Health be recommended to authorise the Head of Housing and Regulatory Services to renew the existing Town Centre Public Space Protection Order for a further 3 years.

31. HOUSING STRATEGY 2023 - 28 ACTION PLAN

The Cabinet Member for Housing and Health introduced the report highlighting three priorities: the delivery of a range of housing types, ensuring existing homes in the Borough are maintained, and securing the very best support for the most vulnerable residents. The Action Plan set out the framework to achieve the aims of the Housing Strategy and included an increase in temporary accommodation and supported housing options, interventions to prevent homelessness and sustained tenure for vulnerable people. The funding of the Action Plan was outlined including the Council's support to Golding Homes who had applied for the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund, and how we are signposting residents to schemes such as the Home Upgrade grant which retrofitted houses that have no access to gas.

In considering the report, the Committee suggested that the Housing Strategy should connect its actions more coherently with the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan. The Committee also enquired about the progress of Golding Homes' bid for the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and were informed that the Council is working collaboratively with Golding Homes to identify properties most likely to be affected by damp and mould.

The Committee expressed concern that demand for affordable and social housing was increasing nationally and whether a 'Right to Rent' policy could be introduced to mitigate the situation for mortgage payers. They were informed that there was no government scheme to help residents with mortgage payments similar to a 'Right to Rent' policy but this was being raised with the Department for Levelling Up, Homes & Community. It was noted that the Housing Options team understood the pressures of the market in Maidstone and had received the highest number of approaches in Kent for homeless applications, but were dealing with the issue effectively as Maidstone was in the lower quartile in temporary accommodation per thousand population. The 1,000 Affordable Homes project would assist with increasing demand in time, and achieving this target was the priority, but it could be revised in the future.

**RESOLVED:** That the Cabinet Member for Housing and Health be recommended to adopt the Housing Strategy 2022-23 Action Plan.

32. DURATION OF MEETING

6:30 p.m. to 7:37 p.m.