

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CLIMATE TRANSITION, CORPORATE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 3 SEPTEMBER 2024

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillor Joe Higson (Chairman) and Councillors Cannon, Conyard, Couch, Forecast, Mrs Gooch, Jenkins-Baldock, Jones and Sweetman
Cabinet Members:	Councillors Cox, Cabinet Member for Corporate Resources and Jeffery, Leader of the Council

24. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies.

25. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

26. URGENT ITEMS

The Chairman stated that he intended to take the following documents:

- Item 13 – Property Acquisition and the Exempt Appendices to the item, as urgent items, and;
- Appendix 2 to Item 10 – 1st Quarter Finance and Risk Monitoring Report, as an urgent update.

The Committee adjourned between 6.34 p.m. and 6.43 p.m. to allow members to read Item 13 – Property Acquisition.

27. CHANGE TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Chairman intended to take Item 12 – Reference from Council – Nature Recovery Declaration, prior to Item 10 – 1st Quarter Finance and Risk Monitoring Report, to allow the Director of Strategy, Insight and Governance to attend for that item.

28. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

29. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

30. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

31. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That all items be taken in public, unless any Member of the Committee wished to discuss the Exempt Appendices to Item 13 – Property Acquisition, in which case the Committee would enter into closed session due to the possible disclosure of exempt information, for the reason specified having applied the public interest test.

32. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 JULY 2024

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to changing the title of Councillor Cox in the attendees from 'Cabinet Member for Housing and Homelessness' to 'Cabinet Member for Corporate Resources'.

33. 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.

34. REFERENCE FROM COUNCIL - NATURE RECOVERY DECLARATION

The Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Management introduced the motion and stated the nature recovery declaration was intended to update the Council's climate emergency declaration in 2019. It was stated that Nature recovery strategies were required by upper tier local authorities, and that Kent County Council (KCC) was currently consulting on its own strategy. The decline of nature was highlighted due to over-development and an increasing population, and that the nature recovery declaration would act as a different mindset for officers.

The committee expressed support for the motion but raised concerns of Point 9 in the declaration related to farming and the negative impacts it could potentially have on the economics of farmers.

In response to concerns, the Cabinet Member for Planning Policy and Management stated that Point 9 in the declaration relating to farming was designed to engage collaboration with the farming community, but that the declaration would prioritise sustainable farming over profit margins. It was further clarified that there would be costs associated with policies related to the nature recovery declaration, but that these would be associated with specific projects that were enacted after the declaration.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to CABINET: That the Nature Recovery Declaration be considered.

Note: Councillor Couch arrived during the discussion of the item at 7.03 p.m.

35. 1ST QUARTER FINANCE AND RISK MONITORING REPORT

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Resources introduced the report setting out the financial positions for the Council at Quarter 1 and stated that:

- The Council had projected an overspend by the end of the financial year of £354,000. The main sources of the predicted overspend were outlined as MPH residential properties, Lockmeadow complex and development management, but that mitigation measures would be implemented over the course of the municipal year.
- There was a projected underspend to the services within the Committee's remit of £792,000;
- The delay in completing the development at Maidstone East had delivered unplanned income to the Council through additional interest;
- At the start of the financial year there was scope to reducing and eliminating overspend in the Council's services;
- The Corporate Risk Register had been updated to include Kent County Council's financial challenges and downgrade the risk of election failure due to the successful delivery of the 2024 Borough and General elections

The main sources of variances were outlined as:

- Maidstone Property Holdings (MPH) with a shortfall of £437,000, primarily due to rental income from Granada House being attributed to MPH, and that an acquisition is yet to be completed and will likely be accounted for in the next financial year.
- Lockmeadow complex, with a shortfall of £400,000, primarily due to vacant retail units, but it was expected that these would be filled by the end of Quarter 3.
- Development management, with a shortfall of £546,000, primarily due to a fall in the number of planning applications submitted.
- Temporary accommodation, with a shortfall of £200,000. It was explained the Council was acquiring on average two or three properties a month which would mitigate these costs.

The Committee thanked the officers for their work on the Council's finances and in compiling the report.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 1 for 2024/25, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted;
2. The Capital position at the end of Quarter 1 for 2024/25 be noted.
3. The Risk update, attached at Appendix 2 be noted.

36. UPDATED ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH, WASTE CRIME & COMMUNITY PROTECTION ENFORCEMENT POLICY

The Leader of the Council introduced the report and stated that the two most significant updates to the Environmental Health, Waste Crime and Community Protection Enforcement policy were additional partners to the policy and animal welfare, including animal penalty notices.

In response to questions, the Public Realm Operations Manager stated that bonfires were covered by the policy, that Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) were issued in a measured manner to change behaviour and not issued for profit, and that typographical changes would be made before implementation of the policy.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to CABINET: That

1. The adoption of the Environmental Health, Waste Crime and Community Protection Enforcement Policy 2024, to replace the 2019 policy, be approved.

37. PROPERTY ACQUISITION

The Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement introduced the report and stated that the Council was constantly exploring opportunities for financial gains to support its strategic priorities, and that a property acquisition opportunity had been raised recently.

The Committee entered into closed session at 7.33 p.m. to discuss the information contained within the exempt appendices to the report.

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business due to the likely disclosure of exempt information for the reasons specified having applied the public interest test.

	Head of Schedule 12A and Brief Description
Item 14 – Exempt Appendices to Item 13 – Property Acquisition	3 – Financial/Business Affairs

The area of the property was outlined and it was stated that there was a strong case for acquisition.

The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services further stated that from a financial perspective the acquisition was a good opportunity for the Council and there was a low risk of poor execution.

In response to questions, the Interim Estates Manager explained the history, ownership and previous finances of the property.

The Committee returned to open session at 7.45 p.m. and were satisfied that the acquisition represented a good opportunity to the Council.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to CABINET: That

1. The amount specified in Exempt Appendix 1, and the site shown outlined in red on the attached plan, Exempt Appendix 2, be agreed;
2. The Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement is delegated authority to conclude negotiations with the leaseholder;
3. The Director of Finance & Business Improvement is delegated authority to instruct solicitors to negotiate and complete all necessary agreements and deeds arising from or ancillary to the purchase.

38. DURATION OF MEETING

6.31 p.m. to 7.46 p.m.