

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Policy and Resources Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 30 OCTOBER 2017

Present: Councillors Adkinson, Barned, Mrs Blackmore, Boughton, D Burton, Butler, Cox, English, Garten, Mrs Gooch, Harvey, Harwood, Hastie, McLoughlin and Mrs Wilson (Chairman)

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

It was noted that apologies were received by Councillors Brice, Fermor, Garland, Harper and Perry.

2. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

It was noted that the following Members were present as substitutes:-

Councillor Adkinson for Councillor Harper
Councillor D Burton for Councillor Garland
Councillor English for Councillor Fermor
Councillor Garten for Councillor Brice

Councillor Round was substituting for Councillor Mrs Blackmore until she arrived.

3. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items.

4. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

Councillor Round indicated that he was substituting for Councillor Blackmore until she arrived and would then remain as a Visiting Member.

5. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

6. **DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING**

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

7. **EXEMPT ITEMS**

RESOLVED: That Agenda Item 15 which related to a Property Acquisition be taken in private due to the possible disclosure of exempt information.

8. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 SEPTEMBER 2017

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 20 September 2017 be agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and signed.

In response to a question from a Member on the minute which related to the 100% Business Rates Retention Pilot, the Director of Finance and Business Improvement advised that a Business Rates Pilot application had been submitted for all of the Kent Authorities, which included Medway, Sevenoaks and Dover Councils. However, it also stated that if the Pilot were to be unsuccessful then the Councils would revert back to the existing arrangements which would then exclude Sevenoaks and Dover.

9. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

10. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

11. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the Committee Work Programme and were advised of a few updates which were:-

- The Property Strategy report would be presented to the Committee in December 2017
- A report on the Mote Park Lake Dam would be presented to the Committee in January 2018

In response to questions from Members, the Director of Finance and Business Improvement advised that:-

- The Office Accommodation Strategy Working Group was still meeting and the Leader of the Conservative Group had indicated that he would be nominating a representative from his party shortly.
- Work was being progressed on a way forward to capture action points from the minutes that were not picked up in decisions.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

12. CORPORATE RISK UPDATE AND RISK APPETITE STATEMENT

The Deputy Head of Audit Partnership presented a report on the risk management processes and the subsequent outcomes of existing risk work. This included the identification of new risks at a corporate level.

In response to questions from Members, the Deputy Head of Audit Partnership advised that:-

- Those risks in the higher category were monitored more closely by the Corporate Leadership Team. There were two ways in which issues could be accelerated for Members' attention which could be through the Urgency Committee or by way of a briefing to Policy and Resources Committee. An example given was the briefing following the Grenfell Tower Fire incident. Members asked that this procedure be codified in the risk management practices and policies.
- The following wording would be added to the Risk entitled 'Poor Partner Relationships' in Appendix 1 – **Continued horizon scanning in respect of devolution.**
- The risks associated with political change were included as it was recognised that changes to the political environment could have an impact on the way the Council delivered its services. This could slow down processes where there was a requirement to realign spending and other associated issues.
- Those Members who were concerned about the cyber threats to the Council speak to the Head of Mid Kent ICT Services to satisfy themselves that measures were in place to adequately protect the Council and that Officers would provide more information with regards to the ICT risk.

Councillors Boughton and M Burton asked for their dissent to be noted in regard to the cyber threat to the Council and that it should be monitored by the Corporate Leadership Team on a continual basis rather than on a quarterly basis.

RESOLVED:

1. That the risk appetite statement as set out in Appendix 1 be agreed and adopted into the risk management framework.

Voting: Unanimous

2. That the Corporate risks as set out in Appendix 2 be noted with the additional wording added to the risk under Poor Partner Relationships which reads '**Continued horizon scanning in respect of devolution**'.

Voting: For - 13 Against - 0 Abstentions - 2

Note: Councillor Blackmore arrived at 6.50 p.m. during the consideration of this item and did not participate in the voting for Recommendation 1.

13. DEBT RECOVERY SERVICE

The Head of Revenues and Benefits presented a report on the Debt Recovery Service which gave an update on the successful implementation and operation of a shared debt recovery service with Swale and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils.

The Committee noted that there was an opportunity to expand the service to deliver on behalf of other local authorities. Discussions had already been held with Gravesham Borough Council to undertake a 6 month trial of the service for the enforcement of Council Tax, Business Rates and parking debt.

In response to questions from Members, the Head of Revenues and Benefits advised that:-

- The investments, benefits and risks would be shared equally by the Mid Kent Services partners (Maidstone, Swale and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils).
- The objectives quoted in the report were set out in the business case and at present the number of warrants enforced had surpassed the medium term goal.

RESOLVED: That

1. The progress that had been made in the implementation and delivery of the Debt Recovery Service be noted.
2. Delegated authority be given to the Mid Kent Services Director to negotiate and enter into such agreements as are necessary to expand the Debt Recovery Service in order to provide services for other Councils.

Voting: Unanimous

14. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

The Head of Revenues and Benefits presented a report on how the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2018-19 would be taken forward following the gradual roll out of Universal Credit.

At its meeting in July 2017 the Committee agreed that a consultation on the updated Council Tax Reduction Scheme would be undertaken with option 1 being the preferred option.

In response to Members' concerns, the Head of Revenues and Benefits advised:-

- Over 3,200 members of the public who were in receipt of Council Tax reduction were consulted by email.

- There would be an opportunity to review the changes next year.
- If option 1 is agreed then this could be carried out within existing resources.
- If option 2 is agreed then the Council would need more resources.

RESOLVED: That

1. The outcome of the public consultation be noted.
2. The **Committee Recommends to Council** that Option 1 is adopted and the Council Tax Reduction Scheme be amended to incorporate the changes summarised in Section 3 to the report of the Head of Revenues and Benefits.

Voting: For - 14 Against - 0 Abstentions - 1

15. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That the press and public be excluded from the meeting due to the possible disclosure of exempt information.

16. PROPERTY ACQUISITION

The Corporate Property Manager presented a report on a proposed acquisition to acquire the leasehold of commercial/industrial units as detailed in the exempt report.

In response to questions from Members, the Corporate Property Manager advised:-

- That there would be 7.5% return on the investment.
- The buildings were in good condition.
- The leases were currently on short term so the Council would be in a good position to negotiate improved rates.
- The Council was cautious about making investments of this type but it felt that the potential benefits outweighed the risks.

RESOLVED:

1. That the purchase price as detailed in the exempt report be agreed.

2. That the Director of Finance and Business Improvement be given delegated authority to conclude negotiations with the leaseholder.
3. That the Head of Mid Kent Legal Services be authorised to complete the purchase on the terms as agreed by the Director of Finance and Business Improvement.

Voting: For: unanimous

17. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.10 p.m.