

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Policy and Resources Committee

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 15
FEBRUARY 2017**

Present: Councillors Mrs Blackmore, Brice, Cox, English, Fermor, Garland, Mrs Gooch, Harper, Harvey, Joy, McLoughlin, Powell, Mrs Ring, Round and Wilson (Chairman).

Also Present: Councillors M Burton and Naghi

173. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Pickett, Harwood and Boughton.

174. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following members were present as substitutes:

- Councillor Joy for Councillor Pickett;
- Councillor English for Councillor Harwood; and
- Councillor Ring for Councillor Boughton.

175. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

176. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor Naghi was present as a visiting member for item 12 - Report of the Head of Policy and Communications – Councillor Referral from the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee.

Councillor M Burton was present as a visiting member for item 12 - Report of the Head of Policy and Communications – Councillor Referral from the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee.

177. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

178. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillor Blackmore had been lobbied on item 15 - Report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement – Medium Term Financial Strategy 2017/18 Onwards.

179. TO CONSIDER WHETHER ANY ITEMS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION.

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

180. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 JANUARY 2017

RESOLVED: That the minutes be agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and signed.

181. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS (IF ANY)

There were no petitions.

182. AMENDMENT TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

As the agenda was long, and there were important items on the agenda that needed a decision, the Chairman proposed that the items be taken in the following order to ensure the most urgent items were prioritised:

- Item 11
- Item 10
- Item 12
- Item 13
- Item 15
- Item 19
- Item 14
- Item 16
- Item 17
- Item 18

RESOLVED: That the items be taken in the order proposed by the Chairman.

183. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement updated the Committee on its Committee Work Programme. It was noted that briefings on the Homelessness Reduction Act and the Housing White Paper had been added to the work programme.

184. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (IF ANY)

Mark Smurthwaite, Chairman of the Medway River Users Association, asked the following question of the Chairman of the Committee:

Through over 40 years of supporting the interests of the River for all of its users, we strive to work with all official bodies with an interest in our River.

We have worked with the Borough council in the implementation and actions of your Destination Management Plan (DMP), and are

proud to be associated with this plan and are encouraged by its success so far.

As I am sure you are all aware one of the Key points of focus for the DMP was to use the river to promote Maidstone. To this aim we have called many meetings to further improve and develop the condition and appearance of the River and we have been hugely successful in this aim.

However I am here today to ask for the Support of MBC in the organisation of a River Festival or Regatta for our town.

In its height this event has attracted over 20,000 people to central Maidstone. I concede that the event in its old guise may have had its day despite the enthusiasm of some to bring it back. But Maidstone needs and has the capability to hold a river Based event, if organised and promoted properly.

We ask that you support a committee to form and organize this event. There is no request for funding from MBC as sponsorship and support has been offered from a variety of very prestigious and respected organizations companies and individuals. We just ask for your commitment to fully support such an event.

This will in no way conflict with any existing events planned in fact quite the opposite as it will just reinforce the capability of Maidstone to fully promote its potential.

Anyone who does not see the potential is quite honestly blinkered and oblivious to the potential of our River and our town, as this type of event has been supported by the good will of the boating community in their 100's for over 40 years.

Even when there had been no official Festival there has been a gathering of boats on the river exceeding 100 boats each year. If this alone does not demonstrate the good will and intention of the Boating community then nothing does.

There have been NO issues of any kind from the last 3-4 years of such a gathering. Can I therefore have your backing and support and assistance to form a committee to help promote our Town?

The Chairman suggested that the question Mr Smurthwaite was asking was similar in scope to the next item on the agenda, and with Mr Smurthwaite's agreement, the Chairman moved to the next item.

185. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS - COUNCILLOR REFERRAL FROM HERITAGE, CULTURE AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

Councillor M Burton gave a presentation to the Committee on the reason for the call in. Councillor M Burton explained that the signatories to the call in would welcome a family oriented River Festival returning to Maidstone. But they felt that the wording of the decision at the moment

could leave the council exposed to risks and costs that had not been properly considered.

The Committee considered the call in and referred to the Festival and Events Strategy, which outlined that the council would only financially support two events and these were Proms in the Park and Maidstone Mela.

The Committee expressed their desire for the festival to return to Maidstone, but confirmed that any new festival proposed for Maidstone needed to be properly planned and cost neutral to the council – including in officer time.

RESOLVED: That the Council welcomes boat owners to Maidstone to enjoy the town and all it provides. It will be pleased to consider a proposal for a river festival or regatta when the organisers provide a fully prepared and costed events plan which must be cost neutral to the Council and comply with the Council's Festival and Events Policy. Our policy can be found on the council's website and the Maidstone Culture and Leisure Team will be pleased to answer any questions in relation to it.

186. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF REVENUES AND BENEFITS - COUNCIL TAX - EXCEPTIONAL HARDSHIP SCHEME

The Interim Head of Revenues and Benefits presented the report and outlined the key features of the Council Tax Exception Hardship Policy, which included:

- There would be a sum of £25,000 per year available for Exceptional Hardship payments;
- The policy set the definition of who would be considered as eligible for an Exceptional Hardship payment;
- The administration of the Exceptional Hardship Award was at the total discretion of the council, however there was an appeals process set out in legislation and detailed in the policy.

RESOLVED: That the Committee approves the Council Tax Exceptional Hardship Policy attached at Appendix I.

187. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT - MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2017/18 ONWARDS

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement updated the Committee on the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2017/18 onwards. He made a presentation that covered the following key issues:

- The Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee had been asked to reconsider the £100,000 growth commitment to the Museum, but they had chosen to keep this item in their budget;
- The Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport Committee had requested that the £45,000 saving in their budget for Planning Policy be removed, however it was recommended that this saving remained in the budget;

- The Communities, Housing and Environment Committee had chosen not to remove Voluntary and Community Sector Grants altogether and had instead reduced them to 25% of the previous total;
- The Local Plan Inspector had required the council to conduct a review of the local plan in 2021 so this needed to be budgeted for;
- The Council Tax Collection fund had been adjusted upwards since the previous estimate, and these extra funds had been added to the budget;
- The Mote Park Café had been overspent, therefore required a contingency fund;
- Due to all of this the savings required had increased by £300,000 from £1.5 million to £1.8 million.

The Committee considered the report and discussed the budget consultation that was carried out to inform the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Members of the committee were concerned that the council was allocating money to the museum when it had been relatively low on residents' priorities when they were consulted on the budget.

An amendment was moved to recommendation 3, to add the following wording to the end of the recommendation:

'except deletes the revenue growth item for the museum for 2017/18 and 2018/19. The committee agrees that a planning enforcement fund, of £50,000 for 2017/18 and a further £50,000 2018/19, is established to allow direct action should a case require escalated enforcement.'

However this amendment was lost and the committee instead added the additional resolution number 11.

RESOLVED: That the Committee

1. Notes the outcomes of consideration of budget proposals by the Service
2. Committees;
3. Agrees an updated Strategic Revenue Projection as set out in Appendix A;
4. Agrees updated budget proposals as set out in Appendix B;
5. Agrees the Revised Estimate for 2016/17 as set out in Appendix C for recommendation to Council;
6. Agrees the Budget Estimate for 2017/18 as set out in Appendix C for recommendation to Council;
7. Agrees the Capital Programme set out in Appendix D for recommendation to Council;
8. Agrees a £4.95 increase in Council Tax for 2017/18 for recommendation to Council;
9. Agrees the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy/ Efficiency Plan as set out in Appendix F;
10. Recommends to Council the appropriate matters for decision to set a balanced budget for 2017/18 and the necessary level of Council Tax in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and the Localism Act 2011 including the decisions made above.

11.Requires that the planning service review currently in progress pays particular attention to the volume of planning enforcement activity required, the associated policy, and the consequent resourcing of the planning enforcement service in the round – including staffing, legal support and direct action.

188. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT - MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY - FEES & CHARGES UPDATE (LEGAL SERVICES)

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement explained that the proposals in the fees and charges update contained in the report moved Mid Kent Legal Services to a flat rate fee of £210 per hour, rather than a range of different fees for different types of work. This reflected the market rate, and applied mainly to Section 106 agreements where the Council recovered its costs from developers once the work had been completed.

RESOLVED: That the Committee approves the proposed revisions to fees and charges for legal services for 2017/18 as set out in detail in Appendix A.

189. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS - STRATEGIC PLAN 2015-20, 2017-18 REFRESH

The Chief Executive introduced the Strategic Plan refresh for 2017-18, and explained that the changes in the document reflected the changes suggested by each Service Committee. The Council's Communications and Policy teams had worked on bringing this information together, ensuring the information was kept at a strategic level and that the language used was accessible to the public, members and staff.

The Committee thanked officers for their work on the plan.

RESOLVED: That subject to the following changes:

Removing reference to the following from the 'We will commit to' from the 'A home for everyone' section of the draft strategic plan:

- Implementing the Housing Assistance Strategy
- Delivering the Homelessness Action Plan
- Delivering the Affordable Housing Programme

this committee recommends the refreshed Strategic Plan (Appendix B) for approval to full council.

190. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS - RESIDENT SURVEY 2017

The Policy and Information Manager gave a presentation on this item which covered the following:

- The residents survey was an important way to consider the views of our residents, and to compare how the views of our residents had changed since the last survey was undertaken;
- Conducting a residents survey was no longer mandatory, although most other councils still conduct one;
- However carrying out a consultation on the councils budget was still mandatory;
- Therefore the preferred option within the report was that a residents survey was carried out at the same time as the budget consultation in order to reduce costs.

In response to a question from the Committee, The Policy and Information Manager explained that since July the council had run 6 large consultations, the response rate to these surveys had been an average of 983 per survey and the response rate had not declined.

RESOLVED: That

1. A Resident Survey be undertaken in 2017.
2. Note the timetable for consultation set out at section 3.
3. The committee agrees the consultation methodology.

Note: Councillor Brice left the room during the consideration of this item as she disclosed that she knew one of the previous providers who had been engaged to carry out survey work for the council's Resident Survey. She stated that she did not believe this was a disclosable interest and that she had not been lobbied on this item.

191. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS - STRATEGIC PLAN PERFORMANCE UPDATE Q3

The Policy and Information Manager presented the report to the Committee and explained that the Council's KPIs had shown an overall increase in performance, with all but one of the strategies on target.

The Committee raised a concern that footfall at the museum had decreased compared to the same period in the previous year. The Policy and Information Manager explained the reason for the decrease in performance was partly as this quarter was a quiet time of the year. But it was also because during the previous year the museum had held some very popular exhibitions, for example the Lego exhibition. It had proved difficult to maintain this level of performance with similarly popular exhibitions.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. Notes the summary of performance for Quarter 3 of 2016/17 for Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and corporate strategies and plans.
2. Notes where complete data is not currently available.

3. Notes the performance of Key Performance Indicators from Quarter 2 of 2016/17 for which data was not available at Policy & Resources Committee on 23 November 2016.
4. Makes a reference to the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee to review the long term visitor numbers at the Museum due to the decline in visitor numbers.

192. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT - THIRD QUARTER BUDGET MONITORING

Duration of MEetingThe Director of Finance and Business Improvement addressed the Committee on this item, and outlined the key areas in the report which included:

- A drop in the projected overspend in Temporary Accommodation for the Housing Service.
- An increase in the projected overspend for Mote Park Café.
- Treasury management had performed poorly due to low interest rates.
- Street Naming and numbering income had increased due to an increase in development in the borough.
- Members allowances had decreased as many members are past the statutory retirement age and therefore the council is not liable to pay National Insurance Contributions.

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

1. Notes the revenue position at the end of the third quarter and the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position where significant variances have been identified, as set out in table 1, paragraph 2.8;
2. Approves the proposed slippage in the capital programme of £1,802,449 into 2017/18 as detailed in paragraph 2.13;
3. Notes the performance of the collection fund and the estimated level of balances at the year-end; and
4. Notes the performance in relation to the treasury management strategy for the third quarter of 2016/17.

193. LONG MEETING

During consideration of the Report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement – Third Quarter Budget Monitoring, the committee

RESOLVED: That the meeting should continue until 11.00 p.m. if necessary.

194. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 pm to 10.27pm