

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COBTREE MANOR ESTATE CHARITY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 20 JULY 2017

Present: Councillor McLoughlin (Chairman), and
Councillors Cox, Mrs Gooch, Perry and Mrs Wilson

6. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

7. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

8. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There no Visiting Members.

9. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

10. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

11. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That the item contained in Part II of the agenda be taken in private as proposed.

12. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 APRIL 2017

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 April 2017 be approved as a correct record and signed.

13. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 23 MAY 2017

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 May 2017 be approved a correct record and signed.

14. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

15. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

16. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT - CONTINGENCIES & RESERVES REPORT

The Senior Finance Manager (Client) presented a report on Contingencies and Reserves of the Trust.

The Committee noted that this was a follow up report from March 2017 which outlined the background to the current financial position and set out a future projection of resources that were likely to be available.

It was noted that the projection set aside £421,000 in the first five years to meet the costs of the proposed capital programme for the Café.

The Senior Finance Manager advised that in his opinion the current reserves of £150,000 were sufficient but the level would continue to be monitored.

The Committee were mindful that costs were continuing to rise and felt that they would prefer to see the contingency for unexpected events topped up to ensure that sufficient funds were maintained.

RESOLVED: That the allocation of future surpluses as outlined in Section 4 of the report of the Director of Finance and Business Improvement be approved.

Voting: For: unanimous

17. REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT - STAFF RECHARGES REPORT

The Senior Finance Manager presented a report on Staff Recharges.

The Committee noted that the report set out details of the current recharges from the Council to the Trust for 2017/18 and the methodology used to calculate them.

The Senior Finance Manager advised that:-

- The figures set out in Appendix A to the report represented staff salaries along with an allocation of associated overheads such as office accommodation, telephones and computer charges.
- The charges would be reviewed in the Autumn as part of the Council's budget setting process and would be adjusted at the end of the year to reflect outturn figures.
- A separate financial management system was proposed for the accounts of the Trust. This would impact on the recharges as they would need to be taken out of the Council system and dealt with

separately.

- A further report would be brought forward once agreement had been reached on how the finances of the Trust would be dealt with.
- It was proposed that some form of Service Level Agreement should be set up to ensure any recharges to the Trust were accurate and reflected the level of service provided by the Council.

RESOLVED: That

1. The current recharges be noted and that the Committee requests that a further report be brought detailing how the increases have occurred.
2. That Officers be requested to work on a service level agreement to be progressed and completed by March 2018.

Voting: For: unanimous

18. **REPORT OF THE HEAD OF REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - COBTREE MANOR ESTATE FINANCIAL POSITION**

The Senior Finance Manager presented a report which summarised the 2016/17 year end outturn and the current financial position of the Estate as at 31st May 2017 which covered the activities at the golf course, Kent Life, the Manor Park and the Café/Visitor Centre.

It was noted that:-

- The accounts for 2016/17 stated that there was a net operating deficit of £77k which was mainly attributed to difficulties around the golf course contract.
- The accounts for 2017/18 forecasted a small surplus.
- Officers had looked at a standalone financial system for the Trust but it was not felt to be viable. However, it was felt that to set up a separate company on the Council's existing financial system would be the way forward.

RESOLVED: That the current financial position be noted.

19. **REPORT OF THE HEAD OF REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - COBTREE MANOR ESTATE UPDATE JULY 2017**

The Cobtree Manager presented the report updating the Committee on the operation of the estate.

The Committee noted that:-

- The Estate had been awarded the Green Flag.

- New security measures had been put in place following the break-in of the Visitor Centre/Café during the May bank holiday weekend.
- Two students from Hadlow College studying horticulture and conservation had been working with the Cobtree Ranger over May/June.
- Events in the park had been fully booked.
- The EPOS system in the Café was now working properly and an additional point of sale has been introduced.
- The Men in Sheds project continued to thrive with more Members joining. The problems with condensation in the Elephant House had led to them seeking funding for works to the roof from the Trust.
- The Communications Team were working on a redesign of the visitors survey for the café in readiness for the summer holidays.
- Car parking income continued to flourish.
- The new design for the car park was presented.
- The new management agreement and lease for the operation of the golf course had still not been completed. Officers were hopeful that the remaining issues would be resolved in the near future.
- The members of CMET were very keen to see a train on the estate and initial enquiries had been made with Kent Highways to look at the feasibility of going under the highway. Planning permission would also need to be sought.

RESOLVED:

1. That the contents of the Estate Update be noted.
2. That the plans for the car park resurfacing be progressed.

Voting: For: unanimous

20. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF REGENERATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - COBTREE MANOR PARKS VISITOR CENTRE/CAFE UPDATE- JULY 2017

The Leisure Manager presented a report on the Cobtree Manor Park Visitor Centre/Café Update.

The Committee noted that:-

- There had been an increase in prices of 15% from 1st April 2017

- The staff rotas had been streamlined and agency staff were only used to cover emergencies such as staff sickness
- Staff had negotiated more competitive prices for goods
- The opening of a second point of sale at peak times had increased sales and reduced customer waiting times
- The menu had been refined
- The introduction of disposable plates, cups and cutlery at peak times had been successful

The Committee asked for their thanks to be conveyed to the staff at the Cafe for all their hard work.

RESOLVED: That the contents of the Visitor Centre/Café Update be noted.

21. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: That the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business because of the likely disclosure of exempt information for the reason specified, having applied the Public Interest Test:-

**Head of Schedule 12A
& Brief Description**

Exempt Report of the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development – External Café Tender Result – Cobtree Manor Country Park

Para 3 - Information re financial or business affairs

22. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT - EXTERNAL CAFÉ TENDER RESULT

The Committee considered the exempt report of the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development which provided a summary of the tender process undertaken in consideration of the appointment of an external catering operator at Cobtree Manor Country Park.

RESOLVED:

1. That a five year contract be awarded to the contractor as detailed in the exempt report of the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development for the operation of the Cobtree Manor Country Park Café.
2. That delegated authority be given to the Director of Finance and Business Improvement to negotiate the terms of the contract with the contractor as detailed in the exempt report.
3. That delegated authority be given to the Head of Mid Kent Legal Services to enter into the necessary contracts with the contractor as

detailed in the exempt report.

Voting: For: unanimous

23. DURATION OF MEETING

2.30 p.m. to 4.30 p.m.