

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Policy and Resources Committee

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 19
SEPTEMBER 2018**

Present: Councillors Mrs Blackmore, Boughton, D Burton, M Burton, Clark, Cox, Field, Mrs Gooch, Harvey, McKay, McLoughlin, D Mortimer, Powell, Purle and Springett

Also Present: Councillor Joy

41. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

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

42. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that the following members were present as substitute members:

- Councillor Purle for Councillor Garland
- Councillor Burton for Councillor Perry
- Councillor McKay for Councillor Harper
- Councillor Powell for Councillor Newton

43. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

44. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor Joy was present as a visiting member, but only to observe.

45. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

46. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

47. 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.

48. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 JULY 2018

In response to a question from a member of the Committee, Mr Sam Bailey, the Democratic Services Manager, confirmed that he would give consideration to the issue of the recording of the movers and seconders of amendments and motions in Committee minutes.

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

49. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS (IF ANY)

There were no petitions.

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

There were no questions from members of the public.

51. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Mr Mark Green, Director of Finance and Business Improvement, updated the Committee on the Committee Work Programme. It was noted that a Special Meeting was no longer required to consider the Kent Medical Campus Innovation Centre and that this item was scheduled to be considered at the Committee's regular October meeting instead.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme is noted.

52. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

RESOLVED: That the reports of Outside Bodies be noted.

53. COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME

Mrs Sheila Coburn, Head of Revenues and Benefits Partnership, gave a presentation to the Committee outlining the recommended approach to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2019/20. Mrs Coburn outlined that:

- Six changes had been made to the scheme in 2017/18, which was a sizeable change to how the scheme had previously operated.
- Due to the scale of changes made in 2017/18, it was not recommended to make any further changes in 2018/19 or 2019/20.
- The amount paid out in benefit had reduced each year since 2016/17, and was projected to carry on reducing until 2019/20 if the scheme was agreed with no changes.

- Universal Credit was due to be introduced in November 2018, which would be a major change to the overall welfare system.
- Changes were required in the Council Tax Reduction scheme in 2020/21 as grant funding from Central Government for the scheme was scheduled to be reduced significantly.

In response to a question from a member of the Committee, Mr Stephen McGinnes, Director of Mid Kent Services, explained that the reason for the small reduction in cost of the scheme between 2016/17 and 2017/18 was that changes made were only applicable to new claimants, with the scheme for new claimants being less generous than that for existing claimants. As the balance of new and existing claimants of Council Tax Support had changed and the proportion of new claimants had increased, the cost of the scheme had decreased.

RESOLVED: That Council is recommended to carry forward the 2018-19 Council Tax Reduction Scheme to 2019-20 with no changes to the scheme.

Voting: For - 12 Against - 0 Abstentions - 2

Note: Councillor Springett arrived during consideration of this item at 6.42 pm.

54. EQUALITIES ANNUAL REPORT

Ms Orla Sweeney, Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer, presented the Equalities Annual Report to the Committee. Ms Sweeney highlighted that this year's report had highlighted two new areas of focus that had been identified as requiring specific actions – the Armed Forces Covenant and Dementia. Alongside the annual update on the Council's progress against its equalities objectives, the report outlined a renewed action plan to achieve the objectives.

RESOLVED:

1. That the progress made on the equalities objectives as set out in paragraph 1.7 of the report is noted.
2. That the new action plan, included in Appendix 1 to the report, is agreed.

Voting: Unanimous

Note: Councillor Boughton left the room during consideration of this item at 6.44 pm.

55. KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR UPDATE QUARTER 1

Ms Anna Collier, Policy and Information Manager, updated the Committee on the Council's progress against its Key Performance Indicators for the first quarter of 2018/19. Ms Collier informed the Committee that:

- Percentage of littering reports attended to should have read 62.89% in Appendix 1, not 100%. This error had occurred due to a problem with the Council's performance management software.
- 10 out of 11 of the indicators presented were exceeding their target.
- The one indicator not achieving its target was the number of homeless preventions. This was due to a change in methodology by central government. The Communities, Housing and Environment Committee had considered this issue in detail at its last meeting.

In response to a question from the Committee, Mr William Cornall, the Director of Regeneration and Place, confirmed that the Council was in the process of recruiting an Interim Conservation Officer as well as a permanent replacement. However as the role was specialist it was difficult to attract the right candidate.

RESOLVED:

That the summary of performance for Quarter 1 of 2018/19 for Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) be noted.

Note: Councillor Boughton returned to the room at 6.49 pm, and Councillor Blackmore arrived at the meeting at 6.52 pm, during consideration of this item.

56. UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENT OF THE NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

Mrs Angela Woodhouse, the Head of Policy, Communications and Governance, provided an update to the Committee on the progress of the New Strategic Plan. The Committee noted that:

- Development of the Strategic Plan had been brought forward a year so that the Council's Strategic Objectives could inform the Local Plan Review.
- During August, workshops had been held with members to consult with them on the content of the plan.
- Following these workshops, the visions and priorities had been drafted and were presented to the Committee as Appendix B to the report.
- Once the draft vision, objectives and outcomes for the new strategic plan had been agreed, public and stakeholder consultation would be undertaken on the plan.

- Consultation with Service Committees was also scheduled to take place at the same time as the public and stakeholder consultation.

The Committee stated its thanks for the hard work of Officers in preparing the plan, and the way in which they had given all members an early opportunity to shape the plan.

RESOLVED:

That the draft vision, objectives and outcomes are agreed for further consideration by Councillors, Committees and consultation with the public and stakeholders.

Voting: For - 12 Against - 3 Abstentions - 0

57. FIRST QUARTER BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

Mr Green presented the First Quarter Budget Monitoring report to the Committee. The Committee noted that there was an overall revenue underspend, but this was expected to decrease by the end of the year and the Council was expected to remain within its overall agreed budget for the year. There had been slippage in the spending of capital budgets due to delays in work on the Council's Housing Developments at Union Street and Brunswick Street as well as the works on the Mote Park Lake Dam. The Committee were recommended to note the report and to approve the Business Rates write offs outlined in the report.

Mr Green explained to the Committee that improvements to the bus station at the Mall had been submitted as Maidstone Borough Council's project to the 100% Business Rates Retention Pilot Housing & Commercial Growth Fund.

In response to a question from the Committee, Mr McGinnes explained that the business rates department were proactive in seeking to recover unpaid business rates. However, often when a business folds their premises remain empty and debt accrues while the company is in the process of being wound up. This was why some of the debts recommended for write off could span several years.

RESOLVED:

1. That the revenue position at the end of the first quarter and the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted.
2. That the capital position at the end of the first quarter is noted.
3. That the performance of the collection fund and the estimated level of balances at the year-end is noted.

4. That the write-off unpaid business rates as set out in Appendix 1 is approved.
5. That the performance in relation to the treasury management strategy for the first quarter of 2018/19 is noted.

Voting: Unanimous

58. 100% BUSINESS RATES RETENTION PILOT

Mr Green updated the Committee on the progress with the enhanced Business Rates Retention Pilot for 2019/20. Mr Green explained that the Government was offering a Business Rates retention pilot for 2019/20, but the terms would be 75% retention of growth in Business Rates and not 100% as was the case with the 2018/19 pilot. The reason given by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government for this was that a 100% retention scheme would require primary legislation and there was not enough time in the parliamentary calendar to legislate for this change. However it was possible to move forward with 75% retention without requiring a change in the law.

In order to maximise the chance of success for the bid, some adjustments of the bid for 2019/20 were required. One of the key adjustments required was to ensure that top tier authorities received a greater proportion of funding to recognise the pressure their Child and Adult Social Care budgets were under.

Delegated authority to the Director of Finance and Business Improvement was required for the decision as the bid was a joint bid and would only be finalised at a meeting of Kent Council Leaders immediately prior to submission of the bid.

RESOLVED:

That delegated authority is granted to the Director of Finance and Business Improvement, in consultation with the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee, to sign off a joint Kent proposal for a 75% Business Rates Pilot, together with the associated governance arrangements, on behalf of Maidstone Borough Council.

Voting: Unanimous

59. DURATION OF MEETING

6.32 pm to 8.32 pm