

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Policy and Resources Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 25 JULY 2017

Present: Councillors Mrs Wilson (Chairman), Barned, Mrs Blackmore, Boughton, Brice, Cox, Fermor, Garland, Mrs Gooch, Harper, Harvey, Harwood, Hastie, McLoughlin and Perry.

Also Present: Councillor English

30. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies.

31. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

It was noted that Councillor English was present as a substitute for Councillor Harwood.

32. **URGENT ITEMS**

There were no urgent items.

33. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS**

There were no visiting members.

34. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

Sam Bailey, Democratic Services Manager, informed the Committee that he was acting as Company Secretary for Maidstone Property Holdings Limited. However this was not an interest and he would not need to leave the room during the consideration of item 17. Report of the Director of Regeneration & Place – Housing Development & Regeneration Investment Plan.

William Cornall, Director of Regeneration & Place, informed the Committee that he was a Director of Maidstone Property Holdings Limited. However this was not an interest and he would not need to leave the room during the consideration of item 17. Report of the Director of Regeneration & Place – Housing Development & Regeneration Investment Plan.

Councillor Wilson informed the Committee that she was a member of the Kent Medical Campus Local Delivery Board, but that this was not an interest as it was not a decision making body.

Councillors Blackmore and Garland arrived at the meeting during the consideration of this item.

35. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

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

RESOLVED: That the following items be taken in private due to the possible disclosure of exempt information:

- Item 18 – Minutes (Part II) of the Meeting Held on 28 June 2017
- Item 19 – Exempt Appendices to the Report of Director of Regeneration & Place – Housing Development & Regeneration Investment Plan
- Item 20 – Exempt Report of the Head of Revenues and Benefits
- Item 21 – Exempt Report of the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development – Kent Medical Campus Investment Strategy
- Item 22 – Exempt Report of the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development – Property Acquisition

37. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 JUNE 2017

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

38. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

39. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

40. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement updated the Committee on the Committee Work Programme. It was noted that there was another Property Acquisition on the Work Programme for September, and that this was a separate Property Acquisition to the one on the agenda for this meeting.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme is noted.

41. REPORT OF THE INTERIM HEAD OF THE LEGAL PARTNERSHIP - POLICY ON DISPOSAL OF PROPERTY

The Interim Head of the Legal Partnership introduced her item regarding a proposed Policy on the Disposal of Property. The Committee noted that

this policy had been written and brought to the Committee as a result of several land transfers that had required a two stage process to designate the land surplus and then to authorise the sale. The proposed process simplified this by suggesting that the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee could deal with the full process. The Policy had been drafted to ensure that the Policy reflected the Parks and Open Spaces 10 Year Plan.

The Committee discussed the Officer delegation to deal with disposals worth under £100,000, and whether it was appropriate to delegate this function if a disposal was particularly contentious. The Interim Head of the Legal Partnership confirmed that she could amend the Terms of Reference regarding the delegation to add 'except in circumstances where there has been an objection received to the advertisement'.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the following sentence, under the heading of 'Open Space' be removed from the Policy on Disposal of Property:

'The Council will not usually dispose of areas of parks or other areas which are classed as public open space.'

Voting: For - 14 Against - 1 Abstentions - 0

- 2) That the Maidstone Borough Council Policy on Disposal of Property is adopted.

Voting: For - 12 Against - 1 Abstentions - 2

- 3) That the following addition to the terms of reference to the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee is agreed and recommended to Council:

"To declare Open Space surplus to requirements for the purposes of advertising and disposing of open space under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 or any other similar enactment and to take the final decision on disposal." (With delegation to the Director of Finance and Business Improvement to deal with all disposals up to the value of £100,000)

Voting: For - 12 Against - 3 Abstentions - 0

- 4) That the following amendment to the terms of reference of the Policy and Resources Committee is agreed and recommended to Council:

"To make decisions regarding land and property including acquisition (by agreement or compulsorily), disposal, appropriation and development, with the exception of the declaration of Open Space surplus to requirements for the purposes of advertising and disposing of open space under section 123 of the Local Government

Act 1972 or any other similar enactment and the final decision on the disposal of Open Space.”

Voting: For - 12 Against - 2 Abstentions - 1

Councillor Harwood arrived during consideration of this item, but did not replace Councillor English as a member of the Committee until the next item.

42. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY, COMMUNICATIONS AND GOVERNANCE - COMMUNICATIONS ACTION PLAN 2017-18

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement presented the Communications Action Plan 2017-18 to the Committee. It was noted that the Communications Action Plan set out how the Communications Team planned to achieve the Communications Strategy that had been agreed by the Committee last year.

Members requested the following additions to the Action Plan:

- Communications and Media Engagement at times of emergency, when the emergency plan had been activated;
- Communication with Maidstone’s business community; and
- Some further clarity around the resources required for the team to carry out the Action Plan.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Director of Finance and Business Improvement confirmed that annual cost of the Borough Insight magazine would be no more than the equivalent publication that was previously sent out with the Downs Mail.

The Committee suggested that the Leader of the Council should write the Foreword for the next Borough Insight Magazine.

RESOLVED:

That the Communications Action Plan 2017-18 be approved.

Voting: For - 12 Against - 3 Abstentions - 0

43. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY, COMMUNICATIONS AND GOVERNANCE - CORPORATE PLANNING TIMETABLE

The Committee considered the Corporate Planning Timetable that the Head of Policy, Communications and Governance had drafted. The Committee requested that a workshop be held on refreshing the Strategic Plan.

RESOLVED:

That the timetable for refreshing the Strategic Plan and Service Planning is agreed.

Voting: Unanimous

44. REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT - MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement presented his report on the Medium Term Financial Strategy. It was noted that the report presented three scenarios – favourable, neutral and adverse – for the purpose of financial planning. The scenarios guided the Council’s financial planning and would help ensure the Council could set a balanced budget in each of the scenarios, through a mix of efficiency savings, increased income, transformation and business improvement, and service reductions.

The Committee debated whether, due to the current uncertainty and interest rates being at a historic low, it was appropriate to bring forward prudential borrowing to fund investments that would contribute to the Council’s revenue budget. The Director of Finance and Business Improvement explained that he would request advice on this measure from the Council’s external financial advisors and circulate a briefing note to the Committee once the advice had been received.

RESOLVED:

1. That the assumptions described in the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy set out at Appendix I for planning purposes are noted.
2. That the financial projections contained within the Medium Term Financial Strategy are noted.
3. That the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy set out at Appendix I is agreed for submission to Council.

Voting: Unanimous

45. REPORT OF THE HEAD OF REVENUES AND BENEFITS - COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME 2018/2019

The Interim Head of Revenues and Benefits gave a presentation to the Committee on the options for consultation for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2018/19.

In response to a question from a member of the Committee, the Interim Head of Revenues and Benefits confirmed that many other councils had introduced a six monthly review mechanism for Universal Credit claimants who were also claiming Council Tax Support.

RESOLVED:

1. That the options in section 4 of this report are agreed as the basis for public consultation concerning the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, with the preferred option identified as Option 1.
2. That the potential impact of the changes on working age claimants with the protected characteristics of disability, age and sex, under the Equalities Act (2010) are noted.
3. That the fact that the proposed changes will have no material impact on Council Tax Reduction Scheme customers not in receipt of Universal Credit is noted.
4. That delegated authority is given to the Head of Revenues and Benefits to finalise and commence consultation on the updated Council Tax Reduction Scheme, incorporating the changes, to be implemented for 2018/19.

Voting: For - 14 Against - 1 Abstentions - 0

46. **REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION & PLACE - HOUSING DEVELOPMENT & REGENERATION INVESTMENT PLAN**

The Director of Regeneration & Place introduced his report outlining the Council's Housing Development & Regeneration Investment Plan. It was noted that the Housing Development & Regeneration Investment Plan replaced the council's previous Commercialisation Strategy and refocused capital investment into housing and regeneration projects in order to provide a commercial return to the Council.

The Committee questioned whether the Regeneration and Economic Development Team had the appropriate range of skills to ensure the delivery of the plan. The Director of Regeneration & Place assured the Committee that the team was supported by external expertise when required, for example architects and cost control consultants. The Director of Regeneration & Place agreed to hold a workshop for members to explain the skills required to implement the plan, and what measures had been put into place to ensure the skills requirements were being fulfilled.

The Committee requested further consideration be given to potential market volatility and the impact on construction costs as a result of the UK leaving the European Union; and making the most of development opportunities in Rural Service Centres, not just the Town Centre.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Housing Development and Regeneration Investment Plan is adopted.

2. That Officers arrange a Members workshop in the new-year to explore the potential for the long term expansion of the Plan.
3. That the Housing Development element of the Housing Development and Regeneration Investment Plan is adopted as the renewed Business Plan for Maidstone Property Holdings Limited.

Voting: Unanimous

47. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

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

48. Minutes (Part II) of the Meeting Held on 28 June 2017

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

49. Exempt Report of the Head of Revenues and Benefits

The Interim Head of Revenues and Benefits presented her item to the Committee. All of the recommendations were agreed by the Committee.

50. Exempt Report of the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development - Kent Medical Campus Investment Strategy

The Economic Development Officer presented her report to the Committee on the Investment Strategy for the Kent Medical Campus. The report outlined that to enable a maximum return on Business Rates for the Council from the Enterprise Zone it would be beneficial for the Council to make investments to increase the likely success of the Zone. The priority area for investment had been identified as an Innovation Centre for small businesses, with the objective of the small businesses moving on to their own premises within the zone once they had become established.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Economic Development Officer confirmed that a detailed business case would be brought back to the Committee which would outline the risks involved in setting up an Innovation Centre.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Investment Strategy, as set out in Appendix I, is adopted.
2. That, subject to a detailed business case, the first investment of business rates retained from the Enterprise Zone is into the development of an Innovation Centre.
3. That delegated authority is given to the Head of Regeneration & Economic Development to appoint a consultant to undertake a

feasibility study including initial designs for an Innovation Centre.

4. That delegated authority is given to the Director of Regeneration and Place to enter into negotiations with the landowner of Kent Medical Campus on an appropriate joint venture or acquisition for the land to enable the innovation centre.

Voting: Unanimous

51. Exempt Report of the Head of Regeneration and Economic Development - Property Acquisition

The Housing Development Officer gave a presentation to the Committee recommending the purchase of a residential property, once the developer had completed works on the property.

The Committee raised concerns about issues of water ingress at the property that had been highlighted to members during the planning process. The Housing Development Officer thanked the Committee for the information and confirmed that she would ensure a specialist surveyor was employed to thoroughly assess the situation before completion. The Regeneration and Economic Development Manager assured the Committee that as the deal being considered was that the property would only be handed over at completion, the Council would ensure any water ingress issues were resolved before the property was purchased.

RESOLVED:

1. That the purchase price set out in paragraph 1.1 is agreed.
2. That the Director of Finance and Business Improvement is granted delegated authority to conclude negotiations with the owner.
3. That the Head of Mid Kent Legal Services is authorised to complete the purchase on the terms as agreed by the Director of Finance & Business Improvement.
4. That the Head of Mid Kent Legal Services is authorised to complete the contract documentation required for the appointments of Clerk of Works on the terms as agreed by the Director of Finance and Business Improvement.

Voting: Unanimous

52. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 9.36 p.m.