

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES, LEISURE AND ARTS POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 6 FEBRUARY 2024

Present:

Committee Members:	Councillor Forecast (Chairman) and Councillors Bryant, Eagle, Fort, Mrs Gooch and Harper
Cabinet Members:	Councillor Russell (Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts)

82. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Hinder and T Wilkinson.

83. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

84. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

85. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

86. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

87. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

88. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

89. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9 JANUARY 2024

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 9 January 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed.

90. FORWARD PLAN RELATING TO THE COMMITTEE'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESOLVED: That the Forward Plan relating to the Committee's terms of reference be noted.

91. BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN UPDATE

The Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts introduced the biannual report on the implementation of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan explaining that:

- Since the last update report was published in July 2023, the Officers had explored options to focus the Council's Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategy in discussion with the Cabinet and having regard to feedback from the Policy Advisory Committees about the achievability and impact of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Action Plan. This had included consideration of ways forward in achieving net zero housing Borough-wide, progressing sustainable integrated transport, solar energy generation investment, local energy action plans and biodiversity enhancements.
- The report provided details of ongoing initiatives, including Maidstone Borough Council property and fleet decarbonisation and monitoring the Council's carbon footprint, and highlighted progress in implementing the Action Plan referencing the success of the Eco Hub, the status of potential solar PV projects on Council buildings and tree planting and rewilding projects. Reference was also made in the report to the award of grants from the Rural England Prosperity Fund to support upgrades and retrofits etc.

Members thanked the Officers for a comprehensive report.

In response to comments and questions by Members, the Cabinet Member/Officers advised the Committee that:

- The original Action Plan included 68 actions which were subsequently reduced to 38 actions separated into those within the Council's direct control and those it could influence. The actions were aligned to the relevant Cabinet Members and presented to the respective Policy Advisory Committees. The actions would be re-merged for consideration holistically by the Cabinet.
- The focus and priorities of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Strategy had changed to five areas where reductions in the largest impacts of the Borough's carbon emissions could be made. The target date for completion of the 38 actions was loosely around 2030. In terms of the new strategic directions, the Government's targets were to achieve net zero transport and net zero domestic housing by 2050. The Council would try to better that.
- The Officers had completed a net zero scenario for existing housing across the Borough using Parity Projects software. The scenario data would be used to develop strategies, identify energy-efficient retrofitting opportunities, and create strategic areas to support net zero domestic housing across the Borough, seek partnerships and open up opportunities for large scale funding to support residents in reducing their utility costs.
- The 6,000 trees referenced in Action point 6.7 were those funded and planted by the Council, not planting schemes undertaken by community groups and schools etc. in association with the Woodland Trust.

- The response to the invitation for applications for the second round of Rural England Prosperity Funding had been good and grants would be awarded soon.

Whilst Members welcomed the five items prioritised in paragraph 2.4 of the report, concern was expressed about their feasibility, affordability, and the timescales for their achievement. It was suggested that an additional recommendation be made to the Cabinet that Action Plans for the five items listed in paragraph 2.4 of the report be submitted to the relevant Committees by September 2024 at the latest.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET:

1. That the strategic considerations for tackling net zero Borough-wide and Action Plan updates shown at Appendix 1 to the report of the Biodiversity and Climate Change Manager be noted.
2. That Action Plans for the five items listed in paragraph 2.4 of the report be submitted to the relevant Committees by September 2024 at the latest.

92. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.15 p.m.