

## **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

#### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 6 JANUARY 2015**

**Present:** Councillor Mrs Gooch (Chairman), and  
Councillors Black, Butler, English, Mrs Grigg,  
Mrs Stockell and Mrs Wilson

**Also Present:** Councillors Mrs Blackmore and  
McLoughlin

89. THE COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER WHETHER ALL ITEMS ON THE AGENDA  
SHOULD BE WEBCAST

**RESOLVED:** That all items on the agenda be webcast.

90. APOLOGIES

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from  
Councillors Ash, Edwards-Daem, Long and Pickett.

91. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following substitute members were noted:

Councillor English for Councillor Pickett

Councillor Mrs Wilson for Councillor Long

92. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor Mrs Blackmore was in attendance and indicated a wish to speak  
on item 8 – Strategic Plan 2015/2020.

Councillor McLoughlin was also in attendance.

93. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

94. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

95. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 2 DECEMBER 2014

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 2 December 2014 be agreed as a correct record and signed.

96. STRATEGIC PLAN 2015/2020

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Mrs Blackmore, introduced the draft Strategic Plan 2015/2020 and explained that the two priorities and seven specific issues had been agreed following consultation with residents through road-shows and online correspondence. As a result of the consultation a clean and safe environment and transport improvements have been identified as the top two priorities for the council. Efforts had been made to ensure that the document was streamlined, easier to read and user friendly.

It was noted that:

- Where respondents had asked a question face to face, or through correspondence and provided contact details, a reply had been provided.
- Members expressed appreciation of the mission statement 'Putting People First'.
- There had been a large response in favour of the clean and safe environment priority from Headcorn respondents. The Leader of the Council explained that this may be due in part to the community having experienced an incident not long in advance of the consultation which had created a focus on community safety.

A number of suggestions were made for inclusion within the Strategic Plan which aimed to show the link between the leisure and retail offer and the town centre, give emphasis to the heritage of the Borough, highlight the variety of markets and festivals offered across the Borough, and make reference to the river.

Cllr Mrs Blackmore left the meeting at 7.20 p.m. following the approval of the recommendations.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Draft Strategic Plan be noted, and the following amendments referenced in discussion between Members, the Leader of the Council and Head of Policy and Communications be requested:

1. A reference to be made to the river within the 'Ensuring there are good leisure and cultural attractions' priority.
2. Under the heading Respecting the Character of our Borough, delete 'which aside from Tovil are rural' at the end of the second sentence, and for the third point under 'We Mean' be amended to read 'Respecting our Heritage and Natural Environment'

3. Under 'Ensuring there are good Leisure and Cultural Attractions', to include reference to the river and for the sentence to read '...a well-used leisure centre, a castle, various markets and a variety of festivals and events held throughout the year and across the Borough'.
4. Under 'Enhancing the Appeal of the Town Centre for Everyone' to include the phrase 'for leisure' after 'popular place' and before 'to live' in the last sentence.
5. In the background data provided, the results of academic year 2011/2012 to be replaced and updated with the most recently available data, and for the graphs to be made larger with the colour labelling made clearer.
6. For Maidstone's rating within the 'Halifax Best Places to Live' survey to be referenced in the introduction to the Strategic Plan 2015/2020.

97. BUDGET STRATEGY 2015/16 ONWARDS - CAPITAL

The Head of Finance and Resources, Paul Riley, presented the future Capital Programme report, produced as part of the consideration of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Mr Riley highlighted the Capital Funding 2014/15 onwards and Capital Programming 2015/16 onwards figures, which summarised the current position.

The Committee was advised that the provisional calculation of New Homes Bonus receipts for 2015/16 was based upon an additional 431 dwellings the figure in the programme represented 65% of the £4.2m settlement that had now been given by government. Since the report was written the Government had confirmed the New Homes Bonus figure at £4.3 million. This figure would be amended for the report to Cabinet in February. Within Planning, Transport and Development, it was explained that the figures estimated for the Bridges Gyratory and Sustainable Transport Scheme represented the maximum value of possible funding.

In response to questions the Committee heard that:

- The Improvements to Play Areas scheme was likely to be progressed in stages, and included improvements throughout urban and rural areas.
- The matter of prudential borrowing would be accounted for within the business plan of each project when presented for decision to Cabinet.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

98. BUDGET STRATEGY 2015/16 ONWARDS - REVENUE

The Head of Finance and Resources presented the Revenue report as part of the Budget Strategy 2015/16 onwards. The report was produced annually following the publication of the provisional finance settlement figures, however, on this occasion the provisional settlement had not been received at the time the report was written. The finance settlement details had been released at the time of the Committee, and included the following:

- The referendum limit for council tax increases was confirmed at 2%.
- Comparing the settlement values to the 2015/16 estimate used in the Cabinet report on 17th December 2014 there was a reduction of £8,000. This would require funding on top of the savings already proposed.
- The value of New Homes Bonus for 2015/16 would be £4,306,285 which was £68,811 greater than the Council's current estimate.

Members were advised that the Budget Working Group had completed an in-depth review of the provisional business plans and proposals that would be brought forward to achieve the objectives of the Commercialisation Strategy. This was completed in order that the Group could be confident that the assumptions built into the Medium Term Financial Strategy were achievable. The Group had also considered a number of other aspects of the Medium Term Financial Strategy including the savings and efficiencies included with the report. The Chairman of the Budget Working Group explained that the Group had been generally positive with regard to the commercial projects presented, and noted the importance of speedy implementation.

In response to questions the following was noted:

- An exercise had been conducted by departments to identify underused budgets and hold them aside. A large amount of underspend had been identified as slippage occurring due to staff employment. As the number of staff were reduced this reduced the expectation of slippage.
- The Commercialisation Strategy aimed to attain an income of £1m over 5 years. Five business cases had been developed, and all would need to be agreed and implemented in order for the £1m income to be accrued. Where income could not be generated savings would be required instead. When the programme was established £500,000 was set aside to ameliorate risk.
- The Council had purchased Aylesbury House Bed and Breakfast to be utilised as temporary accommodation for some of those to whom the Council had a housing duty. Members expressed that they would actively support officers to explore options that mitigate the financial risk to the Council while achieving strategic objectives when acquiring properties for residential purpose. The Cabinet

Member for Corporate Services stated that when the Council managed its own housing stock maintenance of properties could be costly, and that this would need to be given due consideration when looking at the matter of acquisitions.

The Chief Executive, Alison Broom, informed the Committee that professional development on strategic risk would be provided for all Members, as an emphasis on commercial projects signalled the need for a collectively agreed approach to risk.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the report be noted.
2. That it be noted that Members were in active support of Officers in finding options that mitigate the financial risk to the Council while achieving strategic objectives, and request an update from the Head of Housing and Community Services on this issue.
3. That Officers be requested to produce Member Development sessions on strategic risk with a view to these being incorporated into new Member inductions commencing from elections in May 2015, and rolled out to all members.

99. **BUDGET STRATEGY 2015/16 - FEES & CHARGES**

The Head of Finance and Resources, Paul Riley, introduced the report which discussed the setting of the level of fees and charges for 2015/16, and the impact of the proposed fees and charges on the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. It was explained that the Council adopted a Corporate Fees and Charges Policy in May 2009 covering charges for services where the Council raised income by charging the user of the service and where the setting of the fee or charge was discretionary. The Policy did not apply to services where the Council was prohibited from charging, such as collection of household waste, or services where the charge is currently determined by Central Government such as planning application fees. The Cabinet had agreed the fees and charges for 2015/16 totalling an additional £76,300.

A Member asked whether there was income generated from taking photographs of artefacts in the Museum, and was advised by the Head of Finance and Resources that this would be looked into and an answer provided outside of the Committee.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Head of Finance and Resources be requested to ascertain whether income was generated through photography of artefacts in

the Museum and for this information to be circulated to the Committee.

100. USE OF REVENUE UNDER SPEND - UPDATE

The Committee was provided with an update on the progress of schemes that received funding from the revenue under spend in 2011/12 and 2012/13 by the Head of Finance and Resources, Paul Riley. This had been requested by the Committee in July 2014. The report detailed that Cabinet had proposed a bidding process in order to bring forward schemes that delivered on the Council's objectives.

With regard to Planning & Development schemes, a member asked for clarification as to why there had been a delay in employing Planning Conservation Officers. The Chief Executive advised that specific projects had been identified which required a structured and paced implementation, but that now the project had commenced it was expected that the work would be completed reasonably quickly.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

101. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee was invited to consider the future work programme, the List of Forthcoming Decisions, and the SCRAIP report. It was noted that there were no SCRAIP updates to be provided at the current time.

The Chairman highlighted the upcoming co-located simultaneous meeting to be held at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council on 12 January 2015, and clarified that this meeting would hear the findings of the Joint MKIP Task and Finish Group on communication and governance.

A Member expressed concern that the term 'training' was used in some circumstances to describe learning opportunities for Members, and explained that a preferred term for adult learning would be 'professional development'. The Committee expressed an interest in participating in any future professional development regarding strategic risk activities.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That the future work programme be noted.
2. That the List of Forthcoming Decisions be noted.
3. That it be noted that there are no SCRAIP updates to be provided at this time.
4. That the Committees approval of, and interest in undertaking, the proposed professional development session on strategic risk be noted.

102. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.42 p.m.