

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES, LEISURE AND ARTS POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 5 SEPTEMBER 2023

Attendees:

Committee Members:	Councillors Forecast (Chairman), Bryant, Eagle, Fort, Mrs Gooch, Harper, Hinder, Naghi, and T Wilkinson
Cabinet Members:	Councillor Russell, Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts.
Visiting Members:	Councillor Cleator.

30. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

31. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

32. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

33. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor Cleator was present as a Visiting Member for Item 10 – Response to Kent County Council’s ‘Kent Family Hub Services’ Consultation.

34. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

35. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

36. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

37. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 JULY 2023

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 July 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed.

38. 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.

39. RESPONSE TO KENT COUNTY COUNCIL'S 'KENT FAMILY HUB SERVICES' CONSULTATION

The Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts introduced the report, and stated that Kent County Council (KCC) were consulting on various delivery models for Family Hub Services and a reduction in youth services across Kent. The responses would be used to inform KCC's decision making on which buildings would be used to provide children's, young people's and family services, which was the subject of the 'Community Services Consultation' which took place earlier in 2023.

The Cabinet Member stated that following a detailed assessment of the proposals, the impact to Maidstone's residents had not been properly evaluated, with the Council's concerns having been substantiated by the 2021 Census and health inequalities data that had not been provided with the proposals originally.

The main areas highlighted within the draft response at appendix A to the report were outlined, including the closure of youth support services, particularly in Shepway and Parkwood which were areas of high need, the wider impact to the public, community and voluntary sectors, digital exclusion and the high level of support needed in high need areas to support the delivery of online services as part of the Family Hub model. It was stated that insufficient detail on the Family Hub model, including the services possible locations alongside insufficient district level data, had hindered the ability to submit a meaningful response and inform a robust Equality Impact Assessment.

The Committee expressed support for the draft response attached at Appendix A to the report, and emphasised the points made by the Visiting Member, including: the detrimental impact of digital exclusion and the importance of in-person youth services in building social and educational skills, particularly within deprived areas such as Shepway and Parkwood that had a high number of children under 15 years of age; removing youth services could increase the pressure faced by other organisations, such as the Council, Kent Police and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services; the existing impact of Covid-19 on young individuals social skills and likelihood of increased anti-social behaviour from the proposal, and that the it had only been put forward due to KCCs ongoing financial difficulties.

The Cabinet Member stated that the draft response at appendix 1 to the report would be amended to include the sentiments expressed by the Local Ward Member on residents' behalf.

The Officers were thanked for the work undertaken.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET MEMBER: That the draft response to Kent County Council's Kent Family Hub Services Consultation at Appendix A to the report, be submitted by the deadline of 13 September 2023.

Note: Councillor Fort arrived at 6.48 p.m. during the item's consideration and had no interests or lobbying to declare.

40. 1ST QUARTER FINANCE UPDATE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT 2023/24

The Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts introduced the report and stated that:

- There was a £46,000 revenue overspend for quarter one, which was expected to reach £60,000 by the end of the financial year. The overspend had arisen mainly from the Council absorbing the increased services charges to the tenants at Love Food Lockmeadow, which had been higher than expected;
- The Council had a net overspend of just over £300,000 for the financial year, and that an overspend of £800,000 was being offset by underspends elsewhere in the budget. Any underspends would be monitored to identify possible further savings;
- Capital expenditure had been minimal, with the improvement works at Mote Park Leisure Centre likely to take place mainly in the next financial year;
- The only key performance indicator that had not achieved its target was 'Footfall at the Museum', with it hoped that greater performance would be achieved across quarter two, as this included the holiday period. The Museum was developing a proactive marketing strategy to increase visitor numbers.

In response to questions, the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement stated that the £60,000 overspend at Love Food Lockmeadow was small in comparison to the £1.5 million in income generated by Lockmeadow. The £23,000 overspend at Mote Park Leisure Centre was mostly due to utilities, with the Council contractually obliged to absorb any increase in utilities above the retail price index (RPI); a further overspend was a risk, but this had not been projected into the budget as additional utility cost increases could be less than the RPI. It was stated that the River Walk project was shown for the end of the financial year, as feasibility works had been conducted but external funding would be required to support its delivery. The project would be linked to the Town Centre Strategy.

In response to concerns on the provision of lighting, the Cabinet Member stated that there was a specific lighting project that had been developed by external consultants as part of the Town Centre Strategy. The Insight, Communities and Governance Manager confirmed that the project would need to be delivered by March 2025, following the receipt of the third and last year of UK Shared Prosperity Fund money in April 2024. The project team had been formed and was due to have its first meeting later in the week, to support the quick progression of the design and commissioning works.

The Committee noted the quarter one update provided.

RESOLVED: That the following be noted

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 1 for 2023/24, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances had been identified;

2. The Capital position at the end of Quarter 1 for 2023/24;
3. The Performance position as at the end of Quarter 1 for 2023/24, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified;
4. The Recovery and Renewal Update, attached at Appendix 3 to the report; and
5. The UK Shared Prosperity Fund update, attached at Appendix 3 to the report.

41. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY AND BUDGET PROPOSALS

The Cabinet Member for Communities, Leisure and Arts introduced the report, and referenced the all-Member briefing held in August 2023 on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and Budget Proposals for 2024/25 to 2028/29. The budget gap for 2024/25 was around £900,000, with savings identified to reach a balanced budget, which included £40,000 in savings relating to the Committee's remit. The budget gap would increase substantially in future years, with more challenging work to be completed to identify savings at that point.

The Cabinet Member stated that the two assumptions in drafting the MTFS and budget proposals were that Council Tax would increase by the referendum limit of 3%, and that fees and charges would increase by 5% overall, in line with the increased cost of services, rather than individually. The recommended fees and charges would be presented to all Policy Advisory Committees in Autumn 2023.

In response to a question, the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement stated that the Council would seek to charge for its printing services in accordance with the market rate and recover any direct costs and overheads. The Council already provided printing services for other authorities, and there was scope for increasing external custom.

The Committee expressed support for the proposed MTFS and budget proposals, and thanked the Cabinet Member and Finance officers for the work undertaken, including the all-Member briefing provided.

RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to the CABINET: That

1. The Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2024/25 to 2028/29, as set out in Appendix A to the report, be approved; and
2. The budget proposals, as set out in Appendix B to the report, be approved.

42. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.23 p.m.