

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 1 DECEMBER
2020**

Present: Councillors M Burton, Joy, Khadka, Mortimer
(Chairman), Powell, Mrs Robertson, D Rose, M Rose
and Young

Also Present: Councillor Springett

87. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies.

88. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

89. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

90. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillor Springett was present as a Visiting Member for Item 14 – RSPCA Campaign Concerning Fireworks.

91. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

92. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

Councillors M Burton, Joy, Mortimer, Powell, Mrs Robertson, D Rose, M Rose, and Young had been lobbied on Item 14 – RSPCA Campaign Concerning Fireworks.

93. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

94. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 3 NOVEMBER 2020

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2020 be approved as a correct record and signed at a later date.

95. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

96. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

97. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

98. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

It was noted that the Local Nature Reserves Report would be presented to the Policy and Resources Committee, before being presented to the Committee, due to the additional funding necessary for the sites.

The GP Provision Briefing Note would be delayed until March 2021, due to the structural and staffing changes and preoccupation with Covid-19 from the Kent and Medway Clinical Commissioning Group.

The report on whether there is a requirement for an additional MBC Provided Gypsy and Traveller Site would be presented once the Local Plan Review evidence collection had completed.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

99. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

100. RSPCA CAMPAIGN CONCERNING FIREWORKS

The Head of Housing and Community Services introduced the report and outlined the current RSPCA campaign, whereby local authorities had been lobbied to support the campaign to reduce the negative impact of the noise generated on pets and vulnerable people. It was noted that Kent County Council's trading standards were responsible for the sale of fireworks.

The Committee expressed support for the campaign and referenced the negative impact of fireworks. The advisory nature of the Safety Advisory Group (SAG) was highlighted but it was confirmed that some insurers and the civil aviation authority, would not provide insurance for an event that disregarded the SAG's advice. Government legislation would be necessary to set a noise level limit on fireworks.

RESOLVED: That

1. Public firework display providers be encouraged, through the Councils' SAG process, to advertise in advance of their events to

allow residents to take precautions for their animals and vulnerable people;

2. A public awareness campaign be promoted at relevant points in the year, about the impact of fireworks on animal welfare and vulnerable people, including the precaution that can be taken to mitigate risks;
3. The Council write to the UK Government urging them to introduce legislation to limit the maximum noise level of fireworks to 90dB for those sold to the public for private displays; and
4. The Council write to KCC urging them to encourage local suppliers of fireworks to stock quieter fireworks for public displays.

101. 2ND QUARTER FINANCIAL UPDATE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT 2020/21

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement introduced the financial update, with reference made to the Council's budget gap of just over £7 million due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Council had received £2.5 million in funding from central government which had helped to mitigate the budget gap.

The Committee's main adverse variances arose from the provision of temporary accommodation for the homeless during the pandemic and from providing the Community Hub. Favourable variances were noted for recycling collections and depot operations for the second quarter period.

In relation to capital expenditure, the Brunswick and Union Street schemes were near completion. There was a reduction in borrowing costs arising from the delay in starting additional capital projects due to the pandemic.

The Senior Business Analyst highlighted a correction to the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and compost from 53.73% to 52.81% and Percentage spend and allocation of Disabled Facilities Grant Budget (YTD) from 67.8% to 58.9%. Both KPIs had still achieved their first quarter targets. Of the 16 targeted indicators, seven had not reached the second quarter target, with the Contamination: Tonnage per month rejected indicator having missed its target by more than 10% due to the implementation of greater contamination checks by Kent County Council. The Waste team had begun a communications campaign, whereby a leaflet that outlined recyclable materials was hung on the bins of half of the borough's residents. If successful, the leaflets would be attached to all resident's bins.

Specific reference was made to the positive performances from the Home choice, Housing Options, Accommodation, Housing and Health, Community Protection and Street Cleansing teams.

The Committee expressed support for the work undertaken, with the request made for a staff member from the Waste Team to attend a future meeting of the Committee. The Senior Business Analyst would provide further information on the communications campaign undertaken by the Waste Team by email.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 2 for 2020/21, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant variances have been identified, be noted;
2. The Capital position at the end of Quarter 2 be noted; and
3. The Performance position as at Quarter 2 for 2020/21, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified, be noted.

102. DRAFT MEDIUM-TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2021/22-2025/26

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement introduced the report, which had been prepared in the context of the continued impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the proposed re-prioritisation of the Strategic Plan objectives as reported to the Policy and Resources Committee. An updated version of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) would be presented to the Policy and Resources Committee in February 2021, prior to the MTFS's presentation to Council later that month.

The Committee were informed that Council Tax would likely increase by 2% with the Council awaiting further information on the level of business rate retention in the Local Government Finance Settlement, for the next financial year. The results of the residents' survey undertaken were noted, with the two most important services identified as waste collection and parks and open spaces. Around one third of respondents agreed that the Council represented value for money for the services provided.

In response to questions on the funding available to the Committee, it was confirmed that the Council's was focusing on improved use of funds, rather than cutting services. The reduction in borrowing costs in providing greater flexibility to the Capital programme was referenced with regard to future projects.

It was requested that neutral, adverse and positive financial scenarios assuming a freeze in Council Tax also be presented to the Policy and Resources Committee, before agreement was sought from Council to an increase in February 2021. The Director of Finance and Business Improvement highlighted that if Council Tax was not increased, £320,000 in revenue would be lost and would have to be found, for example through cuts in services.

RESOLVED: That the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2021/22-2025/26 be noted and the Committee's comments be taken into account.

103. FEES & CHARGES 2021-22

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement introduced the report and noted that the Fees & Charges are reviewed annually, in accordance with the Charging Policy as set out in Appendix 2 to the report. The proposed fees & charges and the rationale were outlined in Appendix 1 to the report, with attention drawn to the proposed increase in garden waste services. This increase was proposed because the Council's charge is lower than the Kent Average.

There were a number of changes in Cemetery and Crematorium fees and charges, based on a careful assessment by the Crematorium Manager of the appropriate level of charge.

The Committee expressed concern over the increases proposed within the Purchase of Exclusive Right of Burial section, notwithstanding that these were proposed because the Council's fees are under-priced compared to the competition. It was felt that it was imprudent to increase these charges, given the current situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

An increase in fines for littering was suggested, with the Director of Finance and Business Improvement having explained that the collection of fines was difficult to enforce and would not deliver significant returns.

It was felt that greater information was required before a decision could be taken about the Cemetery and Crematorium fees and charges.

RESOLVED: That consideration of this item be deferred, to enable the officers to report back to the next meeting of the committee with further information relating to the cemetery and crematorium fees and charges proposed.

104. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.17 p.m.