

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 1 MARCH 2022

Present: Councillors Bartlett, Joy, Mortimer, Perry, Purle (Chairman), M Rose, S Webb and Young

149. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor McKenna.

150. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Perry was present as a Substitute Member for Councillor McKenna.

151. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

152. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

153. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

154. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

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

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

156. MOMENT OF SILENCE

The Committee held a moment's silence to reflect on the ongoing situation in Ukraine.

157. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1 FEBRUARY 2022

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed.

158. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

There were no petitions.

159. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from members of the public.

160. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS TO THE CHAIRMAN

There were no questions from Members to the Chairman.

161. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The meeting of the Committee acting as the Crime and Disorder Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been postponed until 30 March 2022 and the Work Programme would be amended to reflect this.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

162. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports of Outside Bodies.

163. REFERENCE FROM POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - MANAGEMENT OF TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION PORTFOLIO

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the item which had been referred from the Policy and Resources Committee concerning the management of temporary accommodation and issues that had arisen in specific properties.

It was felt that the existing process whereby Councillors were informed of new temporary accommodation in their area was effective, and further development of the process was not currently required.

RESOLVED: That the management of problems within the temporary accommodation portfolio continue to be managed as per the current process.

164. 3RD QUARTER FINANCIAL UPDATE & PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Director of Finance and Business Improvement introduced the revenue and capital budgets, and progress on the recovery and renewal projects. The revenue budget for the first three quarters showed an underspend, with a predicted year-end underspend of £299,000. The budget would be carried forward in some areas, including Public Health. Variances in capital expenditure were highlighted in Temporary Accommodation, where a significant underspend was presented. This was due to the lack of availability of appropriate properties for sale at a reasonable price, and this budget would be carried forward to the

following year. Various initiatives launched as part of the Recovery and Renewal Programme were making progress, and would be reported as they develop.

The Head of Housing and Community Services introduced the performance review and explained why some key performance indicators (KPIs) were monitored but not targeted. The KPIs around prevention of homelessness had met their targets and were performing in the top quarter nationally. The percentage of successful relief duty outcomes was improving despite having missed its target by less than 5%, and had outperformed the Kent and national average for this indicator. The update on percentage of noise complaints followed up with diary sheets by a customer was highlighted as a calculation error from the previous report had been noted and rectified.

In response to questions, the Head of Housing and Community Services explained that the use of the homelessness prevention budget underspend to alleviate pressure from the withdrawal of KCC's Homeless Connect service would depend on the grant conditions. Within the medium term financial strategy, £150,000 of grant monies had been channelled towards other areas. However the Rough Sleeper Initiative funding bid for the following three years had been submitted and included an element to help mitigate the impact of KCC's decision to decommission the Homeless Connect service.

There was a national issue, that was also affecting Maidstone, related to those persons who have 'no recourse to public funds' and were street homeless. Statute prevented accommodation being provided in these circumstances. Other assistance had been offered but declined by individuals, and the immigration service had been engaged but no resolution had been offered. However, those who did not accept assistance would continue to be approached by the outreach team.

The Head of Environment and Public Realm explained that the positive variance within the capital budget for parks and open spaces was in part due to budgets having been carried forward during the Covid-19 pandemic, and part due to COMF funding being utilised ahead of the internal budget.

RESOLVED: That

1. The Revenue position as at the end of Quarter 3 for 2021/22, 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 3 be noted;
3. The Performance position as at Quarter 3 for 2021/22, including the actions being taken or proposed to improve the position, where significant issues have been identified, be noted; and
4. The Recovery & Renewal Update be noted.

165. REVIEW OF THE HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY ACTION PLAN

The Head of Housing and Community Services introduced the report and explained that although the strategy was still valid for the following two years, there had been significant changes since it was written in 2018-19. There had been a rapid change in the rough sleeper population in the town centre, and a range of services were provided to prevent homelessness. The Predictive Analysis programme had been nationally recognised for its innovative approach to preventing homelessness, and the development of the project at Trinity featured heavily in the action plan for 2022-24.

In response to questions, the Head of Housing and Community Services agreed that a tour could be arranged for Councillors once Trinity was operational. The Covid-19 pandemic had prevented many soup kitchens from operating, although when they were operational the outreach team would work with people who attended them.

RESOLVED: That

1. The 2019-24 Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy Action Plan attached as Appendix 1 to the report be noted; and.
2. The proposed additional action plan for 2022-24, attached as Appendix 2 to this report, be endorsed and ratified.

166. HOUSING STRATEGY 2022-2027

The Head of Housing and Community Services introduced the report and explained the results of the residents' and stakeholder survey and how that would influence the priorities within the draft Housing Strategy. Due to the low response rate from housing providers, separate discussions would be held so that their delivery and future plans could be considered when agreeing the strategy.

In response to questions, the Head of Housing and Community Services explained that the survey results were anonymous so it would not be possible to ascertain which housing providers had responded.

RESOLVED: That the outcome of the consultation and next steps towards adopting a new Housing Strategy be noted.

167. RIVER LEN LOCAL NATURE RESERVE

The Head of Environment and Public Realm introduced the report and explained that although the River Len Nature Reserve was on borough-owned land, the site was managed by a management committee comprised of volunteers. The management plan was due for renewal, and the Parks Team would work alongside the management committee to draft this. During the pandemic, there had been incidences of antisocial behaviour which involved groups of people consuming alcohol and drugs

on the site and had resulted in increased littering. The Community Protection Team and the Police had been involved, and reports of sewage leaks had been reported to the Environment Agency who had asked Southern Water Services Ltd to take action in response.

In response to questions, the Head of Environment and Public Realm confirmed that the current management plan could be circulated to the Committee. The Parks Team hold the budget for maintenance and repairs of the Nature Reserve, and the management committee can escalate issues for the Park Team to assess whether work is needed. The new management plan would be a collaborative document which would involve officers, the Environment Agency and Southern Water Services Ltd as well as the management committee. The Parks Team could be asked to work with Downswood Parish Council to extend the scope of the plan outside of the borough-owned land.

RESOLVED: That the work being undertaken in the River Len Local Nature Reserve be noted.

168. BRENCHLEY GARDENS FENCING PROPOSAL

The Head of Environment and Public Realm introduced the report and explained the recommended option to enable night-time closure of Brenchley Gardens. As well as the installation of gates into existing entrance ways, fencing would be installed between Maidstone Museum and St Faith's Church which would enable the full closure of the park at night. The proposed design would be funded from the Parks capital budget and was anticipated to cost £30,000, which included a reasonable contingency for archaeological consultants. A security contractor would be employed to close the park at night at a cost of £11,000 per annum, which would be funded from existing revenue budgets. A consultation with residents would run alongside the planning application.

In response to questions, the Head of Environment and Public Realm confirmed that the bandstand frill would be reinstated however structural work was needed to the bandstand itself prior to this.

Although there was some concern that the night-time closure would cause the antisocial behaviour to be relocated rather than resolved, the Committee agreed that the proposed fencing was the best option for closing the park at night.

Thanks was given to the Town Centre Parks Ranger after they assisted at a recent incident, and for their ongoing work to maintain the park for the public.

RESOLVED: That

1. Planning consent be sought to install fencing and gates between Maidstone Museum and St Faith's Church, as set out at 2.4 of the report;

2. Funding be taken from existing capital and revenue budgets for the installation of the fencing and security contractor, as outlined in 2.5 and 2.6 of the report; and
3. A full consultation be undertaken with the residents of McKenzie Court whilst planning consent is acquired.

169. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30pm to 8.06pm.