

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITIES AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CABINET ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES of the meeting held at the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1RS, at 6.30 pm on Wednesday, 15 November 2023

Present:

Councillors Rutland (Vice-Chair), Fairweather, Hill, Lewis, March, Morton, Munday, Ms Palmer, Webster and Wilkinson

Officers in Attendance: David Candlin (Head of Economic Development and Property), Stuart Clifton (Housing Services Manager), James Read (Senior Economic Development Officer), Hilary Smith (Economic Development Manager) and Emer Moran (Democratic Services Officer)

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Pound

CHAIR'S INTRODUCTION

COM95/23 The Chair opened the meeting and outlined procedural matters of the meeting.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

COM96/23 There were no apologies received.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

COM97/23 There were no declarations of interest made.

NOTIFICATION OF PERSONS WISHING TO SPEAK

COM98/23 There were no members of the public, or visiting Members of the Council registered to speak.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED THURSDAY 12 OCTOBER 2023

COM99/23 **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting dated Thursday 12 October was a true record of the proceeding.

FORWARD PLAN AS AT 1 NOVEMBER 2023

COM100/2 **RESOLVED:** That the Forward Plan as at 1 November 2023, be noted.
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CONTRACTING OUT OF THE HOMELESSNESS REVIEWS FUNCTION

COM101/2 Stuart Clifton, Housing Services Manager introduced the report as per the agenda.
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Questions from Members and Officer clarification included:

- It was advised that the original decision was made by a Housing Options Advisor. Should an applicant request a review of that decision it was carried out by Housing Options Manager. A number of contracts were currently reviewed out, however they

had not gone through the formal contracting process as required by legislation which needed Cabinet approval and specified within delegation.

- The contracted review was a fresh assessment of the decision made by the review Officer who had no previous knowledge of the case. To complete the review, Officers obtained their own information and carried out their own enquiries. A broad width of knowledge around various pieces of legislation related directly to that case was needed.
- Officers considered the cost of contracting out the review as stated in the report quite good value for money when the number of hours involved in carrying out that review were significant at times.
- It was confirmed that it was a desktop review of the application however, there was the opportunity for the applicant to meet with the Review Officer if needed and it was for the Officer to go to the applicant.
- Page 93 of the report outlined the number of reviews received per year.
- It was advised that there was no specific list of preferred Review Officers used by the Housing Team however, Officers agreed to obtain details of review officers from other local authorities had contracted out the reviews and update Members.
- Officers provided an explanation as to whether the current Housing Team had the capacity to complete independent reviews as they came forward.

RESOLVED:

- A. That the recommendations in the report, be supported.

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS TOGETHER BID RENEWAL BALLOT

COM102/2 Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager introduced the report as per
3 the agenda.

Questions from Members and Officer clarification included:

- It was confirmed that as the BID started, whoever either owned or leased that property was responsible for the payment.
- The BID set a budget over 5 years, and once in place it was mandatory to pay the levy. It was acknowledged that there could be changes to the income over the 5 year term due to circumstances such as businesses going under or refusing to pay.
- It was confirmed that if a new tenant came in and took over the BID, they took over the payment to the BID as well.
- Thanks were given to Hillary for her report and her tireless work in launching and supporting the BID, and to directors and board members past and present for their contributions over the past five years.
- It was acknowledged that the BID played a crucial role in the economic vitality of the town centre and hence the borough as a whole.

RESOLVED:

- A. That the recommendations in the report, be supported.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2023-2026

COM103/2 Hilary Smith, Economic Development Manager introduced the report as per
3 the agenda.

Questions from Members and Officer clarification included:

- It was highlighted that as two thirds of the Borough were High Weald AONB and mentioned in the report, the third that remained was not acknowledged and it was proposed that wording be added to address that. This was addressed and Officers suggested wording along the lines of *rural areas including high weald AONB*.
- It was noted that a sustainability manager was due to join the council in the near future.
- The Economic Development (ED) team communicated with many other organisations that produced resources, advice and guidance and grants (when available) to businesses and promoted those via various communication channels.
- There was currently a small micro grants for small businesses which was due to be allocated next year to rural businesses who made applications. It was thought this could be for schemes that included work towards Net Zero.
- It was important to note that there were delivery partners involved in the aim for net zero and it was felt that there was a responsibility on all of us including Town and Parish Councils in there as well as the communities and the Council.
- The provision of tourist information at the Amelia was an ongoing project. The ED team were working hard on improving and refreshing the visit Tunbridge Wells website and social media. Talks with Royal Victoria Place were underway about the information centre already in place and the potential to amplify that for tourism.
- Flexible ticketing and transport was discussed and the ED team advised that they regularly liaised with Southern Eastern Railway responding to their consultations which provided feedback from residents on issues such as flexible ticketing.
- Officers and Members gave clarification on a face to face meeting they had with a local resident who raised concerns about the strategy and the possibility of inward investment and large sites for development, for example that might house large businesses. It was hoped that the gentleman's concerns were addressed and it was deemed to be a very useful conversation.
- The mention of the increased use of the Southborough Civic Centre was mentioned and Applause Rural Touring were welcomed. It was hoped that there would be a fruitful partnership with Applause and Southborough Town Council going forward.
- With regard to concerns raised about traffic congestion and lack of public transport, Officers advised that the ED team was actively involved in a number of projects that were hoped to improve and support the vitality of the town centre. This was supported through their partnership with Kent County Council (KCC) and other transport operators as well as working closely with the Council's Planning department. Examples of projects highlighted included; Car Club, cycle route from Langton Green to Rusthall and the shuttle service between the Knightswood development and

Tunbridge Wells Station. The projects were dependent on funding through KCC, Government and Section 106 agreements.

- It was confirmed that the mention of the Decimus Burton Museum was in the report as a comment from a respondent to the consultation. It was not suggested in the document that it was a project that ED supported.

RESOLVED:

- A. That the recommendations in the report, be supported.

URGENT BUSINESS

COM104/2 There was no urgent business for consideration.
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DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

COM105/2 The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 24 January 2024.
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NOTES:

The meeting concluded at 7.40 pm.