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## Regeneration and Property Committee

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**MINUTES** of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 13 September 2023 from 7.03 pm - 7.47 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Monique Bonney (Chair), Hayden Brawn, Ann Cavanagh, Shelley Cheesman, Roger Clark, Simon Clark, James Hall, Mark Last, Peter Marchington, Sarah Stephen (Vice-Chair), Mark Tucker, Mike Whiting, Chris Williams and Ashley Wise.

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Eva Harris, David Johnson, Joanne Johnson and Kellie MacKenzie.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (VIRTUALLY):** Councillor Elliott Jayes.

281 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

282 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 July 2023 (Minute Nos. 183 – 193) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

283 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

**Part B Minutes for Information**

284 **Disposal of Minster Community Centre, New Road, Minster**

The Chair drew attention to exempt Appendix III which was tabled for Members. As Members did not discuss the paper it was not necessary to go into private session.

The Interim Property Services Manager introduced the report and read out the recommendations as set-out in the agenda papers.

The Chair invited Members to ask questions.

A visiting Ward member asked members to consider proposing the following to the Policy and Resources Committee: That all money from the sale of the New Road Community Centre plot be ring-fenced to repair or replace the roof at Thistle Hill Community Centre to enable Minster to continue to have an operational community centre.

The Head of Regeneration, Economic Development and Property and Interim Head of Planning noted that it was correct that the Regeneration and Property Committee could only recommend use of the funds to the Policy and Resources Committee, and it was not within the Committee's gift to allocate funding itself. She said the cost of the repairs to Thistle Hill Community Centre was not known and therefore ringfencing all the costs from the disposal of Minster Community Centre might not be appropriate.

Further points raised included:

- Considered it “strange” that the portacabin was deemed fit in 2020 but unfit now following the condition survey;
- thought the costs to repair the portacabin as outlined in the report were high and the Council should consider whether a company wanted to take it over completely as a going concern first;
- aware of other assets the Council had which had been transferred over with similar repair issues leaving the leaseholder and the Council in a difficult position;
- did not consider it was right for the Committee to propose ring-fencing receipt and it was a Policy and Resources Committee decision not for this Committee; and
- rather than ring-fencing the money could the Council, once the portacabin had been sold, look at whether some of the money could be used for the Thistle Hill repairs before reallocating the money?

In response the Interim Property Services Manager confirmed that the portacabin was erected in 1997 making it approximately 30 years old. The valuations for the repairs were carried out externally and he had no reason to contradict their valuation. He said that a qualified Building Control surveyors assessment said the property was life-expired. The Interim Property Services Manager said that with regard to the Council letting it out as a going concern there would be a risk to the Council’s reputation renting out a property that could not be guaranteed for the period of the lease.

The Interim Property Services Manager explained that the Council were the freeholders of Thistle Hill Community Centre, which was leased to the community group, on a long fully insuring repairing lease so it was not in Council ownership.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That the land between 53-59 New Road, Minster be declared surplus and placed on the open market to effect a freehold disposal.**
- (2) That delegated authority be given to the Head of Regeneration, Economic Development and Property and Interim Head of Planning in consultation with the Head of Mid-Kent Legal Services to negotiate a freehold sale of the property and to complete the necessary legal formalities.**

## 285 Procurement of energy supplies

The Head of Regeneration, Economic Development and Property and Interim Head of Planning introduced the report and recommendations as set-out in the agenda papers.

The Chair invited questions from Members, and points raised included:

- Supported delegation to officers but not in consultation with the Chair of the Regeneration and Property Committee;
- thought that when the renovations commenced there had been some discussion about installing solar panels on Swale House?;
- could the £30,000 be put towards the installation of solar panels?; and
- considered that short-term agreements were the best option for the Council.

In response the Chair clarified that capital would be required for solar panels which had not been within the budget for the Swale House improvement works, however officers could explore whether they could be installed in the future and whether any grant

funding was available. The Estates Officer explained that there was flexibility with Laser Buying Group for installing solar panels. The Head of Regeneration, Economic Development and Property and Interim Head of Planning advised that officers were currently working on a baseline report looking at the viability of solar panels for several Council owned properties and what offsets there were in terms of the Council's carbon emissions. This would be progressed in line with the priorities of the new Corporate Plan.

Councillor Mike Whiting moved the following amendment to recommendation (3) in the report: That reference to "in consultation with the Chair of Regeneration and Property Committee" be removed. This was seconded by Councillor Mark Tucker. On being put to the vote the amendment was lost.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That the Council continues to purchase energy supplies via Laser Buying Group for the period 1 October 2024 to 30 September 2028 on a two year renewing basis for both electricity and gas. This would provide flexibility and leaves open the opportunity to apply a full assessment of other frameworks should the information required by made available by them.**
- (2) That to support Swale Borough Council's ambition to achieve net zero within its operations by 2025 the Council continued to purchase renewable energy via Laser Buying Group, paying the additional surcharge for renewable electricity and gas at an estimated additional total cost of £30,000 per annum.**
- (3) That delegated authority be given to the Head of Regeneration, Economic Development and Property and Interim Head of Planning, in consultation with the Head of Finance & Procurement and the Chair of the Regeneration and Property Committee to vary the contract during this term, subject to consideration of the financial and environmental benefits of any such change.**

286 **Forward Decisions Plan**

Members considered the Forward Decisions Plan and raised points including:

- When would the Central Stadium, Sittingbourne item be considered and why had it been delayed: and
- concerned that the Central Stadium item had been delayed and considered it should be reported to the November 2023 Committee meeting. Aware that there was third party interest so the Council needed to act quickly.

In response the Head of Regeneration, Economic Development and Property explained that the Central Stadium item had been delayed because the Playing Pitch Strategy needed to be approved first and further information on the covenant was required to enable Members to make an informed decision. She said officers would bring the item to Committee as soon as possible. The Chair explained it was one of the Council's most complex assets and due diligence was needed to ensure it was considered properly.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That the Forward Decisions Plan be noted.**

Chair

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All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel