

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 5
OCTOBER 2010**

PRESENT: Councillor Harwood (Chairman)
Councillors Hinder, Lusty, Ross, Bradshaw, Parr and
Mrs Wilson

51. The Committee to consider whether all items on the agenda should be web-cast.

Resolved: That all items on the agenda be web-cast.

52. Apologies.

There were none.

53. Notification of Substitute Members.

There were no substitute Members.

54. Notification of Visiting Members.

There were no visiting Members.

55. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

There were no disclosures.

56. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.

Resolved: That all items on the agenda be taken in public.

57. Minutes of the Meeting held on 31 August

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 31 August 2010 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman.

58. Gateway Review: Interview with Job Centre Plus:

The Committee noted that Alison Culshaw had sent her apologies. The Committee considered their current work programme and asked if a written statement could be requested asking for Mrs Culshaw's views on the why the Job Centre Plus had not come into the Gateway, if it was something they would consider again and any ideas she may have on improving the Gateway.

Resolved: That the Scrutiny & Performance Officer would write to Mrs Culshaw requesting a statement in response to why the Job Centre Plus did not come into the Gateway, if this was something that they would consider again and any ideas for improving the Gateway.

59. Green ICT Policy Discussion Paper:

The Chairman welcomed Dave Lindsay, ICT Manager and Jennifer Hunt, EMS Manager to the meeting. Mr Lindsay gave a brief overview of the Councils current position (Appendix A) and stated that the approach was currently to embed processes further through existing strategies.

The Committee queried some of the technical detail in the report. Mr Lindsay explained that the thin client technology mentioned in the report reduced the amount of data travelling in-between systems and PCs which should increase effectiveness of computers whilst keeping data secure.

Members asked Mr Lindsay if carbon emissions for the Council had already peaked. Mr Lindsay explained that an extensive upgrade programme switching staff over from desktop PCs to laptops had taken place as part of the office move. In response to further questions on increasing numbers of PCs and Laptops being used by the Council, the Committee was informed that it was unlikely that there would be an increase in the number of units currently used however, new technology was constantly emerging and it was expected that any increases would be offset through other initiatives.

The Committee considered that a corporate steer was required in order to ensure full compliance and asked how this was being addressed. Miss Hunt responded that the Carbon Reduction Board was currently looking in to the cultural issues and was considering a number of initiatives such as Green Champions and a green issues newsletter in order to change the culture. It was also noted that the Cabinet Member for the Environment was on the Carbon Reduction Board. The Committee requested assurance that Manager's and Members would be engaged.

It was noted by the Committee that the current Climate Change Action Plan was due to end in 2010/11 and that work was ongoing to ensure that green issues and climate change were considered in all reports and action plans.

The Committee was keen to know how they could help and was concerned that the technology the Council already owns should be working to increase productivity, they stressed that officers and Members need tools appropriate to their role. Mr Lindsay confirmed that technology and new ways of working were embedded in some areas better than others and although home working was well established and working well that there was scope for improvement for mobile working. The Committee concluded that the emerging Green ICT Strategy should include a consideration of wider working practices with a review of how technological tools are being used including a cost benefit analysis.

The Committee considered funding for Green Technology, it was assessed that there was potential to use invest to save funds. But that there would still need to be capital budgets available to support new technology where invest to save was not appropriate. The Committee felt it was important that this be highlighted to Cabinet.

Mr Lindsay was asked what the timescales for the ICT Green Strategy were; he explained that the ICT Green Strategy was part of the overarching Information Strategy which he was aiming to send to Management Team in January and the Cabinet in April. He assured Members that that there would be extensive consultation to inform the final document.

Resolved: That:

- a) Managers and Members be fully engaged in developing the ICT Strategy to ensure that green initiatives are delivered and embedded at the Council;
- b) Cabinet ensure that funds are available within the capital budget to support and invest in new technologies;
- c) Senior management commit to the ICT Strategy to ensure that the policy is embedded throughout the Council;
- d) the ICT Strategy takes into account and considers wider working practices including a review of existing technology and tools currently used to ensure they are fit for purpose; and
- e) The ICT strategy includes a cost benefit analysis.

60. AMENDED ITEM - Local Enterprise Partnerships:

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Chris Garland, Leader of the Council and Ross Gill, Economic Strategy and Policy Manager at Kent County Council to the meeting.

Mr Gill gave a presentation (attached at appendix A) in which he outlined the need for a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) covering Kent, how the proposals for a Kent and Essex LEP were developed and what the next steps in the process were. It was noted that there was currently no formal guidance outlining what an LEP should comprise of, or appropriate geographical boundaries. However; the Committee noted that it was anticipated that each LEP would contain two upper tier authorities and that LEP Boards should have 50% membership from the business sector. More detail was expected in the Sub-National Economic Growth White Paper which was due out after the Comprehensive Spending Review.

The Committee was made aware that there were currently two proposals for Local Enterprise Partnerships covering Kent, one for a Kent and Essex LEP supported by Paul Carter, Chief Executive Kent County Council and

one to cover Maidstone and Medway which was supported by most Kent MPs and the Leader of the Council.

The Committee queried if Businesses had been consulted in the development of the proposals. Mr Gill confirmed that the Business Advisory Board which includes local businesses was consulted on both proposals and that the initial membership for an LEP Board was likely to be drawn from this group.

A Member asked what businesses wanted to bring to Maidstone. Councillor Garland responded that they required clear planning policies, quality retail and good transport links for both urban and rural economies. The Committee stressed the need for quality investment in infrastructure and that Maidstone's weakness was a lack of higher educational facilities. They noted that Maidstone was well positioned for businesses and had recently been rated in a national survey as one of the top twenty best places for business. Mr Gill commented that through the consultation on the proposals the business community had also expressed the need for the skills and education issue to be addressed.

The Committee heard that Cllr Garland had raised his concerns that a Kent & Essex LEP without Medway would not work, despite shared priorities and infrastructure issues, and that Kent MPs had already written to the Minister in support of a Kent & Medway LEP. The Committee requested that the Leader also write to Eric Pickles to outline his position and arguments for a Kent & Medway LEP. The Committee also asked that Cllr Fran Wilson write to the Business Secretary, Vince Cable outlining the Committee's support for a Kent & Medway LEP.

Members were keen to hear about how the LEP could advance the green agenda but also thought it was important that the landscape surrounding Maidstone be protected. Mr Gill stated that in relation to pursuing the green agenda there would be opportunities in Kent as work had already highlighted the potential need for further manufacturing industry within Shepway and there also appeared to be opportunities around sustainable energy supply such as wind-generated power in North Kent.

A Member reminded the Committee of the gains that Maidstone achieved through the Kent Partnership by having a clear vision of what was required for Maidstone. The Committee concurred that it was important to be proactive in assessing the economic vision for Maidstone and that there was a need for consultation and agreement amongst Members. The Committee suggested that a member workshop be organised with senior council officers to build a picture of economic development for the borough.

The Members queried what would happen if both proposals were rejected; Mr Gill stated that it would still be possible for the counties to work together as they had previously done. Councillor Garland stated that he was confident that at least one of the proposals would be successful. Furthermore he understood that a Kent & Essex LEP had been proposed in order to create a partnership in the South East which would be sufficiently

large enough to compete with the large northern LEPs that were likely to be developed. In answer to further questions on localism, Councillor Garland went on to say that there would be localism as Government would only be assisting with the set up of the LEPs and not directing them.

The Chair thanked Mr Gill and Councillor Garland for attending and requested that the Committee be kept informed of developments in legislation and the progress of the proposals.

Resolved: That:

- a) the Leader, Councillor Garland write to Eric Pickles to state that his preferred proposal was a Kent and Medway Local Enterprise Partnership and circulate the letter that has already been sent by Kent MPs to the Committee;
- b) That the Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Fran Wilson write to the Business Secretary, Vince Cable to express the support for a Kent and Medway Local Enterprise Partnership;
- c) The Leader ensures that Maidstone is well placed by engaging with the LEP for Kent and identifying clearly the plans for economic development in Maidstone assisted by a practical workshop for Members to look at business and economic development in Maidstone;
- d) progress reports be received on the progression of the proposals and LEPs in general and wider local economic development initiatives, especially in relation to the evolution of new green technology businesses as details become available; and
- e) Maidstone Borough Council is pro-active in building partnership to deliver and grow local green businesses and technologies.

61. Future Work Programme and Forward Plan of Key Decisions.

The Scrutiny & Performance Officer reminded the Committee of the informal meeting to interview the Manager of the Citizen Advice Bureau on 19 October.

The Committee considered the work programme for 2010/11 and requested that the interview with the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services be moved to 30 November 2010. They also considered that a written response from Councillor Garland on the mid-year review would be sufficient and agreed to move this item also to the 30 November. The Committee agreed that they would develop questions for these reports at their next meeting.

The Committee agreed that they would like to interview the Chair of the Economic Development, Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) sub-committee about the progress of the LSP and also Neil Harris, Democratic Services Manager on the removal of Council diaries. They requested that both be interviewed on the 2 November.

Resolved:

- a) That the following amendments would be made to the work programme:
- a. That the interview with Councillor Ring, Cabinet Member Corporate Services be moved to the 30 November;
 - b. That Councillor Garland, Leader of the Council be requested to provide a written response on mid-year progress for the meeting on 30 November;
 - c. That the Committee interview the Chair of the Economic Development sub-committee of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for an update on the Economic development work stream in the LSP; and
 - d. That the Committee interview Neil Harris, Democratic Services Manager regarding the removal of the Council diary.

62. Duration of the Meeting

6.30 pm to 9.10 pm.