

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 2  
NOVEMBER 2010**

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

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

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

**64. Apologies.**

There were none.

**65. Notification of Substitute Members.**

There were no substitute Members.

**66. Notification of Visiting Members.**

There were no visiting Members.

**67. Disclosures by Members and Officers:**

Councillor Lusty declared that he had been lobbied by Councillors on Agenda Item 9, Feedback on decision to remove Council Diaries.

**68. 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.

**69. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 5 October 2010**

**Resolved:** That subject to the amendment of the recommendations for minute number 60:

to re-word recommendation d) as follows:

“ 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 a further recommendation be added to include:

“e) Maidstone Borough Council is pro-active in building partnership to deliver and grow local green businesses and technologies.”

the minutes of the meeting held on 5 October 210 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman.

## **70. Update on the LSP Economic Development & Regeneration Delivery Group**

The Chairman welcomed Keith Grimley, Economic Development Officer, and John Foster, Economic Development Manager to the meeting. Keith Grimley stated he had been the officer lead for the Economic Development and Regeneration Delivery Group since March 2010; John Taylor from Page & Wells was the Chairman. He informed the Members that this group comprised of twelve members, from various organisations including businesses as well as internal Council staff and the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Councillor Malcolm Greer. Quarterly meetings were held for the group to consider a range of matters including economic development, housing, transport regeneration and neighbourhood planning. The next meeting of the group was due to take place in mid December 2010 to update and agree targets and priorities for the group. It had however been established by the group that the LDF would be their main focus at this time.

The Committee stated that they were concerned that these issues and in particular the LDF were being considered in private meetings without sufficient Member involvement and means to ensure that interests and lobbying were recorded, and indicated that Scrutiny could play an important role in such a group. Members expressed concern that they had not been aware the group had considered the LDF. Keith Grimley informed the Committee that a Chairman s written report to the Board expressly stated the groups’ temporary focus on the LDF. Members suggested that the group did not have enough business representation in its membership.

Keith Grimley informed the Committee that there had been four meetings held this year, for which the minutes and agendas were publicly available on the internet. The tangible outcomes from these meetings had been limited as the group had been focussed on topics such as skills and also external members of the group getting to grips with how the Council operates. He also highlighted that Councillor Greer was a Member of the group, and that the suggestion for other Members to join was welcomed. The Members were informed that Paul Andrews, Managing Director for Jobs In Kent who had extensive knowledge and

experience, was also part of the group and that it was difficult to get other businesses to give their time freely to contribute. It was acknowledged that Kent County Council had declined to participate in the group.

It was explained to the Committee that Officers identified that there were overlapping issues that cut across the LSP delivery groups and addressed them. E.g. sustainability.

In answer to questions, John Foster informed Members that Economic Development contributes towards the running of the Leader programme, and large parts of rural South Maidstone benefit from it. Projects are funded to support rural comments.

The Committee expressed concern that housing was being focussed on at the expense of economic development and was concerned that the group was not focussed on regeneration. John Foster and Keith Grimley commented that making the group more focussed would be advantageous, as the agenda is very broad. With this in mind the Committee suggested that the objectives and terms of reference be re-drafted to reflect this. The Committee also discussed the need to involve Higher Education institutions outside of the borough boundaries in partnership projects.

The Committee also expressed concern that planning permission for numerous offices had been granted but planning permissions had not been implemented. They requested an update from officers on why this was the case. Keith Grimley informed the Committee that Economic Development services have an on-going dialog with businesses and work together to promote the area. It was highlighted that the recent Locate In Kent Study states that Maidstone was the preferred business location in Kent.

The Committee enquired as to the amount of officer and business partners time accrued so far, at who's cost and whether the officers present felt that it was a good use of resources. John Foster informed the Members that so far he was only able to account for Keith Grimley's time as the Executive Officer, totalling ten-twelve hours so far including monthly and quarterly meetings.

**Resolved:** That the Economic Development team and partners be thanked for their work and time committed to date and it be recommended that:

- a) the LSP Board should consider inviting a member from each of the relevant Scrutiny Committees to join each of the LSP delivery groups;
- b) the LSP Board be informed of the Committee's concern at a potential conflict of commercial interests arising from the focus of the Economic & Regeneration Delivery Group upon the evolving MBC Local Development Framework and its membership and that administration of the LSP is formalised to ensure that interests and lobbying are recorded;
- c) the LSP board should consider opening up membership of the Economic & Regeneration Delivery Group to higher and further

education facilitators outside of the borough boundaries, including Universities of Kent and Greenwich;

- d) the Committee receive feedback on why there has been no take-up for the significant business development locations in the borough that already have planning permission in place;
- e) the Committee will use their influence to encourage Kent County Council economic development team to participate in the work of the County Town's LSP Economic & Regeneration Delivery Group;
- f) the minutes, agenda and terms of reference of the Economic Development & Regeneration Committee are circulated to the Committee and include a breakdown of the number of officer hours spent on LSP work and the cost of this time;
- g) the objectives and Terms of Reference of the Economic and Regeneration Delivery group are re-drafted to make them outcome orientated with a strong focus on business, economic development and urban regeneration; and
- h) the Delivery Group is proactive in creating opportunities for broad-based business partnerships to engage pro-actively with new Government initiatives, including green technologies, both inside and outside the borough so as to create a vibrant and sustainable economy for Maidstone.

#### **71. Amendment to Order of Business**

**Resolved:** That Agenda Item 9, Feedback on decision to remove Council Diaries be deferred for another meeting.

#### **72. Feedback on decision to remove Council Diaries**

**Resolved:** That Agenda Item 9, Feedback on decision to remove Council Diaries be deferred for another meeting.

#### **73. Formulate questions for mid-year updates**

The Committee considered the Leader and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services priorities to ascertain appropriate questions for the mid-year update. The Committee agreed that both the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and the Leader give information on how the Council has responded to the new government's agenda and priorities. The Leader provides information on the budget, budget monitoring and the subsequent communication of savings with staff. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services provide information on the five top risks the Council faces in light of the national changes, an update on staff morale and detail on how the national changes proposed for housing benefits will impact residents. The Committee also requested an update on asset management.

**Resolved:** That

a) the Leader provide information on the following issues as part of the mid-year update:

- i. How the Council has responded to the changes from national government; and
- ii. The present budget situation, budget monitoring and how the savings required were being communicated with staff.

b) the Cabinet member for Corporate Services provide information on the following issues as part of the mid-year update:

- i. Risk management and the top five risks that currently face the Council;
- ii. Staff morale and leadership including whether this has affected productivity;
- iii. Whether the national changes proposed to Housing Benefit changes will impact upon residents; and
- iv. An update on asset management, including recent sales and the current land portfolio.

#### **74. Future Work Programme and Forward Plan of Key Decisions**

The Committee considered the future work programme, it was noted that the second quarter monitoring report will be considered at the next meeting. It was agreed that the decision on the removal of dairies be deferred to a future meeting.

**Resolved:** That the work programme be noted.

#### **75. Duration of Meeting**

6.30pm to 8.32pm.