

# AGENDA

## CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING



Overview and Scrutiny

Date: Tuesday 3 April 2012  
Time: 6.30 pm  
Venue: Town Hall, High Street,  
Maidstone

Membership:

Councillors: Mrs Wilson, Mrs Gooch (Chairman),  
Yates, English, Mrs Gibson, Hogg,  
Paine (Vice-Chairman), Pickett and  
de Wiggondene

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Page No.

1. **The Committee to consider whether all items on the agenda should be web-cast.**
2. **Apologies.**
3. **Notification of Substitute Members.**
4. **Notification of Visiting Members.**

**Continued Over/:**

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**Issued on 26 March 2012**

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*Alison Broom*

**Alison Broom, Chief Executive, Maidstone Borough Council,  
Maidstone House, King Street, Maidstone Kent ME15 6JQ**

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

- a) Disclosures of interest.
- b) Disclosures of lobbying.
- c) Disclosures of whipping.

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

<b>7. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2012</b>	<b>1 - 8</b>
<b>8. Welfare Reform Update</b>	<b>9 - 13</b>
<b>9. The Council as a Business Review draft report</b>	<b>14 - 71</b>
<b>10. Work Programming 2012-13</b>	<b>72 - 73</b>

## MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 6 MARCH 2012

**PRESENT:** Councillor Mrs Gooch (Chairman)  
Councillors Mrs Wilson, Yates, Mrs Gibson, Hogg,  
Paine, Pickett and de Wiggondene

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

**It was resolved** that all items should be webcast.

**98. Apologies.**

Apologies were received from Councillor English.

**99. Notification of Substitute Members.**

There were no Substitute Members.

**100. Notification of Visiting Members.**

There were no Visiting Members.

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

There were no disclosures.

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

It was agreed that all items be taken in public as proposed.

**103. Minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2012**

**It was resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2011 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting and duly signed.

**104. Quarter 3 Complaints Monitoring**

Catherine Negus, Policy and Research Assistant introduced the Quarter 3 Complaints Monitoring report. She informed the Committee that in Quarter 3, October to December 2011 there had been 102 complaints and 86% of those complaints had been resolved within the agreed timescale. This was down on the previous period.

Housing had the highest number of out of time complaints because of long term sick leave. They were now receiving assistance from Executive Support. Ten stage two complaints had been received, 90% of these had been resolved within the agreed timescale which showed an improvement on the previous quarter. 28 responses had been received to the Complaints Questionnaire, 29% of those contacted were satisfied or very satisfied with the way their complaint had been dealt with.

An issue highlighted to Members was that staff were not always recording the equalities aspect of complaints. Members were informed that the Core Brief (a document that was circulated to all staff at Team Meetings to inform them of important information) would highlight the need for staff to be aware of this when handling complaints. Miss Negus also explained that in some cases only details of the original complaint or our response to it were being logged, the requirement for both would also be highlighted in the Core Brief and reported to CLT (Corporate Leadership Team). The Officer highlighted that within the last quarter two complainants had been registered as vexatious.

The Committee questioned the progress of the new correspondence and complaints system. They were informed that a consultant had come into to look at work carried out by the IT department and some progress had been made. However, a share point system which matched the desired specifications was now available from an external provider. The Council would be able to purchase this and adapt it to Maidstone Borough Council's exact requirements at approximately the same cost as developing a new system. Members voiced their concerns at this as previous updates given in Quarter 1 and 2 had been on the implementation of a new system. They suggested to Officers that the Council's approach to the development of the correspondence system should have been in line with the principles of Prince II project management as widely advocated by the Council and the progress reported to a project board.

Ellie Kershaw, Policy and Performance Manager, explained that there were a number of Officers now trained in Prince II but training had taken place after this project had begun. As a result it was included in the day to day workload of IT who had had staffing problems.

The Officer explained that the system currently being used was corrupt, meaning that notifications were not being sent when complaints were running out of time and Executive Support were having to remind managers. Members felt that this should not be an excuse for poor performance. They felt that complaints should be monitored by the responsible Manager. The Manager should also be responsible for analysing complaints and identifying trends and these issues should be addressed in the forward planning of the service. There were concerns raised as to whether the issue was symptomatic of a bigger problem such as staff resources as the authority had suffered staff losses.

The Committee considered complaints handling critical to the management and effectiveness of the organisation. It was questioned

whether complaints should be further categorised by 'seriousness'. Miss Kershaw explained that if a complaint was important to the customer it should be important to the authority and it was not for Council Officers to make that distinction. She added that determining the seriousness of a complaint would be costly as it would be a manual job. Members were informed that the new correspondence system would allow a general costing to be allocated to complaints.

Miss Kershaw highlighted the issue of content in complaints handling. She explained that work was being done with Housing as some complaints were actually be appeals against the housing points system for housing allocation. The Committee discussed Development Control and the representations made during the planning process. They considered the handling of representations made after a decision had been made and whether these should be considered as complaints. Members felt that all issues should be logged as a complaint initially and then evaluated and categorised as appropriate at a later stage. The Officer agreed that it was beneficial to be cautious and informed Members that the new correspondence system facilitated this approach.

Members considered the way in which complaints reported by Councillors on behalf of residents were dealt with. They were informed that the new system would allow for two names to be allocated per complaint, the Councillors name and the resident's name, making it easier for the complaint to be tracked. The Officer told members that all complaints whether reported by a Councillor or resident should be recorded in the same way.

Members queried whether the Council had many complaints made about the High Street Project. The Officer confirmed that to date there were one recorded but that as it was a project they may have been kept on file separately.

Members were updated on the complaints training. The pilot session, run in conjunction with the Hazlitt Theatre, had been carried out two weeks prior and a focus group had followed. The Officer reported a positive response and explained that the training would be rolled out to front line staff initially and a session could be run for councillors if this was of interest. She explained that a similar session could be developed on customer care.

**It was recommended that:**

- a) The implementation of the complaints/correspondence system should be reviewed and the remainder of the project should be undertaken utilising the project management principles of Prince II as advocated by the Council;
- b) The Committee remains informed on trends and reoccurring issues for the future analysis of complaints that will be available to them via the new complaints/correspondence system. Training needs should be identified by Managers; and

- c) Whilst the complaints system is not sending reminders, Managers should be monitoring complaints to ensure they do not go out of time.

## 105. Equalities Objectives

Catherine Negus, Policy and Research Assistant introduced the Equalities Objectives report to the Committee. She explained that the Council's duty under the new act was to set one or more equalities objectives. Members were informed that the Council would be setting three objectives which as felt to be proportionate to the size of the authority. They were required to be specific, measurable and achievable.

The authority had to consider the data available to them on the 'protected characteristics' which were:

- Disability;
- Gender reassignment;
- Pregnancy;
- Race;
- Religion;
- Sex and Sexual orientation;
- Age; and
- Marriage.

Miss Negus explained that the data that had been available mainly related to age, gender, ethnicity and disabilities. As more data became available more objectives could be set, the Council would not have to wait a further four years to do this. One of the key recommendations of the report was that when the Council ran surveys more of the characteristics would be included in the questions. There was also an intention to talk to stakeholders and improve data collection methods.

Members were concerned that there would be pressure on residents to reveal private information such and religion and sexual orientation. Ellie Kershaw, Policy and Performance Manager, assured Members that all equalities questions were optional.

The Committee were told that the three objectives to be set were:

- **Improve the number of visitors to the museum aged 55+ by 5% over the next year. This target would then be expected to recur but this should be assessed after the first year.**

The Committee were informed that this would fit into the Council's priority of making Maidstone a decent place. The museum was underused by the borough's elderly residents and work would involve a cafe and events for older people.

- **Increase the proportion of men registering for the Healthy Weight from 24% to 28% over the next year. Subject to review, targets would then be set for each of the next three**

**years leading to a probable target of 40% by the end of the fourth year.**

It was highlighted that this was dependent on the programme being granted PCT funding to continue. This target would fit with the Council's priority outcome of ensuring that 'residents are not disadvantaged because of where they live or who they are, vulnerable people are assisted and the level of deprivation is reduced'. Members were informed that it was mainly women who were referred to the programme despite research showing that there were a higher proportion of overweight men in the borough than women. This target could also help to address the issue that men in deprived wards had a life expectancy of up to 5 years less than in other wards.

- **Increase the proportion of people aged 18-24 who feel that the Council keeps people 'well informed' or 'fairly well informed' about services and benefits to 58% over four years.**

Members were told that this objective was based on the results of the recent Resident's Satisfaction Survey and the earlier Place Survey in 2008.

The Committee questioned who would take ownership of the objectives and targets. They were informed that each objective would be assigned to a manager and actions included in service plans. It was explained that there would be a number of different contributors but there would be overall ownership. The objective set around young people would be owned by the Head of Communications but there would be a number of different departments whose leaflets and communication methods would have to be considered in ensuring that this objective was met.

It was established that when the action plans were developed Managers would be questioning the cause of the inequality and why it existed before setting recommendations to achieve the outcome. Members were informed that the objectives would be monitored in the Council's biannual survey.

Concern was raised over the objective set around the museum. It was felt that there would be an impact on visitor numbers when the neighbouring Library relocated, reducing footfall to the area. The Museum had been extended but there had been staff cuts and income generation targets put in place because of a funding shortfall. Members were concerned that the various actions taken with the Museum, along with the equalities objective set, were not being addressed in a joined up manner.

Miss Kershaw explained that surveys would be used to measure the outcome of the objective which would reduce the burden to staff.

Members questioned the way in which people were selected for the Healthy Weight programmes. It was clarified that this was through self referral or by a GP referral and the criteria was a BMI of 28 or over.

A Member referred to 1.3.14 in the report and the comment made regarding the shortage of young people at Maidstone Borough Council. It was felt that this could be seen as a positive outcome as happy staff remained in continuous employment which over time increased the age group.

In relation to staff numbers Members questioned the number of staff leavers since March 2011, when the last staff analysis was undertaken. They were informed there had been 61 leavers.

**It was recommended that:**

- a) The report be noted by the Committee and recommendations set out in the report be taken forward with the Committee's approval; and
- b) The Committee's concerns regarding the capacity of the Museum in achieving the outcome of the equalities objective: 'Improve the number of visitors to the museum aged 55+ by 5% over the next year' be taken into account by the Cabinet Member in his decision making.

**106. Residents Satisfaction Survey**

Roger Adley, Head of Communalisations, introduced the Residents Satisfaction Survey which he explained was an independent postal survey conducted by Lake Market Research from November 2011 to January 2012. Members were informed that this was within the same timescale as the previous 'Place Survey' conducted in 2008. The questions were not like for like but there was a continuation of a number of questions that could be tracked.

It was explained that survey asked a number of questions about the Council's Priorities. He noted that there was a strong correlation between value for money and customer satisfaction. Areas where customer satisfaction was high included communications and a rise in satisfaction was noted with doorstep recycling, local decision making and treating people fairly. Areas where there was a slight fall in satisfaction were with refuse and street collection and different backgrounds getting on well together.

Members were informed that residents had been asked to vote on a list of actions to help deliver the Council's priorities. These included encouraging new business, attracting investment, keeping the elderly and disabled in their own homes for longer, affordable housing, energy efficiency and improving consultation with residents .



The Officer explained that the results of the survey had been analysed on a ward by ward basis so that areas where there were differences in satisfaction levels could be addressed.

Members were pleased to see that satisfaction with the Council was high but there was some disappointment that the ward results did not always echo the same levels of satisfaction and the successes that as ward Members, they were aware of. The Committee questioned what targeted work was going to be done with wards to address the areas highlighted and how the information that underpinned the results would be used. The Officer explained that this would be addressed by each manager in their service planning. He told Members that the results had been very pleasing and the insight into the improvements that needed to be made would be something that Cabinet would be keen to take forward.

Ellie Kershaw, Policy and Performance Manager, informed Members that although exact benchmarking could not be done with the results, she had been in touch with other authorities and those carrying out surveys would share their results to enable some comparison to be made.

The Committee considered the question relating to the satisfaction of the Leisure Centre. It was felt that comparisons between the use of the Leisure Centre and other facilities such as the YMCA and private gyms would be useful in future surveys. Members felt that this was especially important in aiding the fitness of Maidstone residents

A member questioned the way in which the results of Question 3 'Percentage of people agreeing that they can influence decisions affecting their local area' would be addressed as it was noted the satisfaction level was low. Mr Adley informed Members that the Democratic Services Manager was already looking at this issue. The use of Social Networking sites for agendas, decisions and notices was being investigated and other innovative methods. Miss Kershaw advised that the Localism Act would give residents new powers in their local area and in two years time when the next survey was carried out there could be an impact as a result of this.

**It was recommended that:**

- a) The content of the report should be noted by the Committee;
- b) The question 'How satisfied are you with each of the following services... Maidstone Leisure Centre?' in the Residents Satisfaction Survey be expanded to include the usage of other fitness facilities in the borough including the YMCA centres and private gyms so that the fitness of the borough can be evaluated; and
- c) Members of the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee begin a dialogue with Officers about the results of the Residents Survey in relation to their wards. This should be done with a view to further evaluation of the results of the survey returning to the Committee in 3 months time and the evidence being utilised widely by all Members and Officers.

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

The Committee considered its Future Work Programme and the Forward Plan of Key Decisions. It was felt that the Asset Management Plan was an important document to be considered. Members took into consideration their remaining meetings and decided that this document should be circulated to them by email.

Members considered the Leader and Cabinet Member updates scheduled for the April meeting. It was decided that the written updates given at the beginning of the Municipal Year should be revisited by the Committee to determine if there were any areas where an update was required.

### **It was recommended that:**

- a) The draft Council as a Business Review report is circulated to all Members of the committee for their input and amendments in preparation for the final meeting;
- b) The Asset Management Plan 2012-15, as detailed on the forward Plan of Key Decisions, is circulated to the Committee electronically for the its information and individual representations if necessary; and
- c) The Leader and Cabinet Member updates from the start of the Municipal Year are circulated electronically for Members to decide if a final update is necessary.

## **108. Duration of the Meeting.**

6.31 p.m. to 8.10 p.m.

## **Maidstone Borough Council**

### **Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Tuesday 3 April 2012**

#### **Welfare Reform Update**

**Report of:** Overview & Scrutiny Officer

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 At its meeting on 1 November 2011, the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee received an update on issues that had been identified in the Quarter 1 Performance and Complaints reports relating to Revenues and Benefits.
- 1.2 The Committee also received a presentation on Welfare Reform and made a number of recommendations (appendix a).
- 1.3 The Chairman felt it appropriate to receive a verbal update on the recommendations made and the progress made.

#### **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 The Committee is recommended to consider the update given by Steve McGinnes, Head of Revenues and Benefits and make recommendations as appropriate.

#### **3. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 3.1 The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee have an overarching role within the scrutiny structure. Their priority area, Corporate and Customer Excellence, encompasses Performance Management and Customer Care and Complaints. These two areas of responsibility have a shared interest in all services delivered within the authority.
- 3.2 As a Committee with an overarching scrutiny outlook Members have the opportunity to voice their current concerns with regard to Revenues and Benefits as part of a bigger picture. The amendments to the Housing Benefit Scheme to be phased in from April 2011-13; the creation of New Universal Credit; and the New Local Scheme for Council Tax are all areas the Committee may wish to gain an informed understanding of to assist them in their ongoing role.

#### **4. Impact on Corporate Objectives**

- 4.1 The Committee will consider reports that deliver against the following Council priorities:
- 'Corporate and Customer Excellence'.
- 4.2 The Strategic Plan sets the Council's key objectives for the medium term and has a range of objectives which support the delivery of the Council's priorities. The Committee's work will contribute to the delivery of these key objectives over the next year.

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN (SCRAIP)**

**Committee: Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Meeting Date: 1 November 2011**

**Minute No: Item 80**

**Topic: Welfare Reform**

<b>Recommendation<sup>i</sup></b>	<b>Cabinet Member<sup>ii</sup></b>	<b>Response<sup>iii</sup></b>	<b>Timetable<sup>iv</sup></b>	<b>Lead Officer<sup>v</sup></b>
The Single Person Discount Form should be reviewed and simplified and the Committee consulted on the changes made;			10 January (next meeting)	Steve McGinnes
The Welfare Reform presentation should be circulated electronically to the Committee by the Scrutiny Officer;			10 January	Steve McGinnes
The DWPs target of dealing with 80% of claimants via on online self service should be investigated by the Head of Revenues and Benefits and his findings on this reported back to the Committee;			10 January	Steve McGinnes
Steve McGinnes should provide 2 to 3 real-case scenarios such as a family a single person and a couple or			10 January	Steve McGinnes

pensioner and prepare a brief presentation to show the real financial calculation and impact of the changes; and				
The Committee should keep a watching brief of Welfare Reform and the timeframes for implementation. The Head of Revenues and Benefits should provide the Scrutiny Officer with important updates in order to keep the Committee up to date.			10 January	Steve McGinnes

### Notes on the completion of SCRAIP

<sup>i</sup> Report recommendations are listed as found in the report.

<sup>ii</sup> Insert in this box the Cabinet Member whose portfolio the recommendation falls within.

<sup>iii</sup> The Officer/Cabinet Member responsible for responding to the recommendation should indicate in this box either the acceptance or rejection of the recommendation.

**If the recommendation is rejected** an explanation for its rejection should be provided. The 'timetable' and 'lead officer' boxes can be left blank

**If the recommendation is accepted** an explanation of the action to be taken to implement the recommendation should be recorded in this box. Please also complete the 'timetable' and 'lead officer' boxes.

<sup>iv</sup> The Officer/Cabinet Member responsible for responding to the recommendation should indicate in this box when the action in indicated in the previous box will be implemented.

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<sup>v</sup> The Officer/Cabinet Member responsible for responding to the recommendation should indicate in this box the Officer responsible for the implementation of the action highlighted in the 'response' box.

# Agenda Item 9

## Maidstone Borough Council

### Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 3 April 2012

#### The Council as a Business? Review

**Report of:** Overview & Scrutiny Officer

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 7 June 2011, Members agreed to carry out a review of the Council as a Business, exploring the financial restraints the Council face and how savings and income generation could be achieved in a more innovative manner.
- 1.2 The Committee agreed to focus its review on the following objectives:
  - What does Maidstone Borough Council want to be and what do our residents want from us including identifying who our customers are and what their requirements are;
  - Establish what the Council perceives its core function to be now and in the future and what statutory services we must provide;
  - Establish the funding opportunities are available to the Council;
  - Identify the factors that are currently considered when savings are made and practical measures and actions for future savings and increasing revenue, income and service improvement;
  - Establish where the Council sees itself in 4 years time; and
  - Identify how the culture of Maidstone Borough council can be more business focussed.

#### **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 Members are recommended to consider the draft report of the Council as a Business Review and make amendments and suggestions as appropriate.
- 2.2 Following any requested amendments to the report, Members are recommended to approve this for submission to the appropriate Cabinet Member and external bodies.

#### **3. Impact on Corporate Objectives**

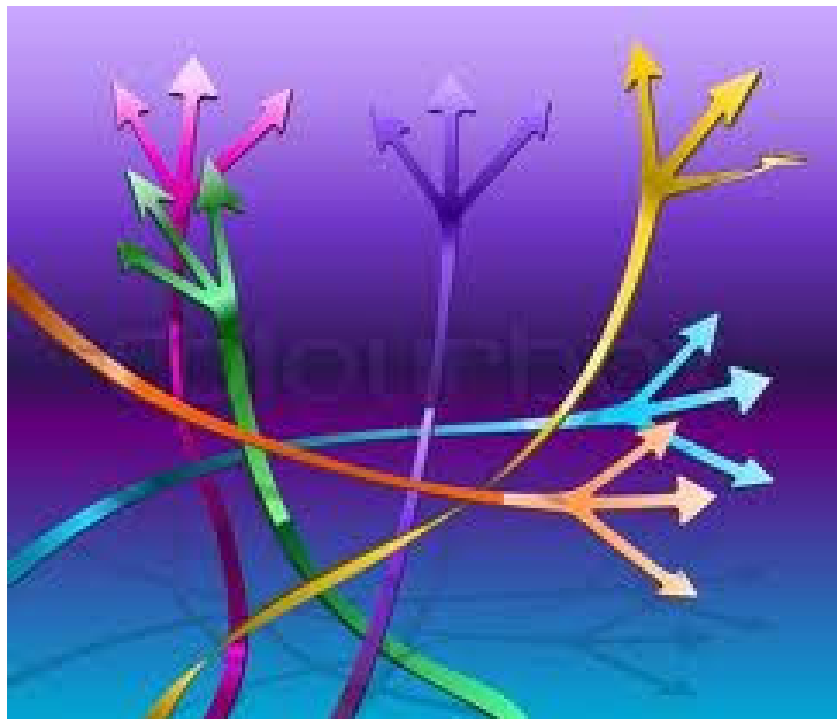
- 3.1 The Committee will consider reports that deliver against the Council's priorities:
  - 'Corporate and Customer Excellence'
  - 'For Maidstone to have a growing economy'; and
  - 'For Maidstone to be a decent place to live';
- 3.2 The Strategic Plan sets the Council's key objectives for the medium term and has a range of objectives which support the delivery of the Council's



priorities. The Committee's work will contribute to the delivery of these key objectives over the next year.

# The Council as a Business?

## Municipal Year 2011/12



### Committee Membership:

Councillor English  
Councillor Mrs Gibson  
Councillor Mrs Gooch (Chairman)  
Councillor Hogg  
Councillor Paine (Vice-Chairman)

Councillor Pickett  
Councillor De Wiggondene  
Councillor Mrs Wilson  
Councillor Yates

## Chairman's Summary

### Councillor Faye Gooch



Central Government has been sending a clear message across the country that the role of local government is changing. The Government's Comprehensive Spending Review 2010<sup>1</sup> set a clear direction for reform. It focused on shifting power away from central government to the local level. This, coupled with the Localism Act 2011, which sets out new defining principles for local authorities and in particular General power of competence which will give local authorities the legal capacity 'to take action and get on with things they think will benefit their local area,'<sup>2</sup> formed the basis of our desire to explore the Council as a business?

It was extremely important from the outset that the true intent of the review was emphasised; the inclusion of a question mark at the end of the review title, The Council as a Business? was used to illustrate that the review was asking a question and considering the nuances of what 'business' is to the council. It was emphasised that the review was about exploring 'blue sky thinking' and innovation when considering ideas for income generation, efficiency savings and the changing role of local government.

We wanted to ensure that there was wide engagement with staff, residents, businesses and other local authorities with the review to fully appreciate the role of the council, the way in which it was perceived and the vision for the future. We were ever mindful of the scrutiny principles as we carried out the review.<sup>3</sup>

We began with a staff and Councillor survey which drew on the entrepreneurial spirit captured by Lord Sugar's television programme 'The Apprentice'. The call for evidence was extended to the public in an article in the Kent Messenger and the Council's Facebook page.

There was further engagement with the public at Maidstone's annual Mela where we had our own stall. A questionnaire was designed which covered 7 of the main 'assets' of the Council and the Borough. We sought to establish residents' perceptions, opinions and suggestions for business opportunities. Areas

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spend\\_sr2010\\_easyread.htm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spend_sr2010_easyread.htm)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localismlainenglishguide>

<sup>3</sup> <http://cfps.org.uk.surface3.vm.bytemark.co.uk/publications>.

discussed were property, parks and open spaced, events, the river, the Council's in-house expertise, waste and recycling and the Council's existing revenue streams.

Early on in our investigations it became clear that in order to explore the idea of the council as a business, it was essential to understand what it was to be 'business-like'. Particularly as local authorities lack the freedoms of private enterprise and operate within statutory constraints.

The Chief Executive, the Director of Change, Planning and the Environment and the Assistant Director Environment and Regulatory Services were the first to be invited to give evidence, on behalf of the Executive. We sought to establish what the Council perceived its core function to be, both now and in the future. The Chief Executive explained the Council's approach to business planning, the medium term financial strategy, the way in which core business costs are applied to each department in what is known as 'recharges' and services which generate or could capture income. She also discussed the development of commercial services and the supporting methodology.

I feel that it is critical at this time for the Council to clarify and understand the 'true cost' of the services it provides by examining the way in which internal recharges add to departments running costs.

The Chief Executive advised that the current methodology for identifying new opportunities began with the categorisation of all Council services to determine whether they can be delivered in-house, shared or delivered through partnership or trade. Part of this process was establishing whether the Council should be abstracting from business that already exists or offering something new.

We questioned the Leader of the Council's outlook for the authority as that of a commissioning body. He informed us that the Council had limitations, with statutory instruments in place and case law used to exemplify all decisions made. With regards to commissioning and commercial activity he explained that these types of activities were very different to the skills usually applied to regulatory services and shift in attitude would be required by the Council, Members and the public.

We raised further questions to understand whether taking a commissioning route would impact on the Council's ability to generate an income. We were informed that the Localism Act and the Public Services White Paper would diversify the way in which services were delivered in the future but one type of activity did not prevent the other. The Council did have to be very clear on what it was doing and there was agreement from Members and Officers that a business-like culture should be fundamental to the Council's approach.

The message from the Executive was that there were opportunities to move forward and provide value for money and resilience within partnership

arrangements. Maidstone Borough Council's first shared service had been borne out of another authorities need for expertise. The resilience of partnership arrangements was said to be the key to service delivery. Current shared services: Legal, HR and Revenues and Benefits were transactional activities, offering economies of scale.

We asked the Executive to identify areas that had potential to develop commercially. Consultancy and advice were suggested as planning pre application advice helped eliminate legal challenges, saving money and time. The Crematorium and Leisure Centre were highlighted as two areas already generating an income and providing a local need.

It was at this stage in the review that we recognised the value of our understanding of the Budget Strategy and the Council's Medium Term Financial planning helped by the additional training we received as a Committee. We felt that our engagement with the Budget Strategy in its most formative stages would be beneficial and this could be facilitated by appointing a cross-party working group.

The business community was the next to be invited to debate the review topic. It was universally felt that the Council should not be in direct competition with local private businesses for fear of ruining the very businesses we seek to encourage. There was a difference between being entrepreneurial and being business-like. The Council's responsibility to the residents of Maidstone (as detailed in its priorities and outcomes) fundamentally prevented it from exploiting areas of businesses that could be profitable such as car parking.

The running of the Leisure Centre and the Hazlitt Theatre and the Radio 1 Big Weekend event demonstrated the Council's entrepreneurial capabilities to businesses. Offering free events like 'Proms in the Park' was seen as competing with the private sector but in a non-business-like manner and it was felt that charging for these events would demonstrate a belief in what was on offer.

Business representatives stressed that the Council needed to be very clear about what it was trying to achieve in each of its services.

Some businesses, when considering the prospect of outsourcing, thought it preferential to keep a service and run it for a profit. They felt that external providers could provide a certainty in income without risk but if the Council was confident it could provide the best service then it should.

The Leader of the Council explained the Council's business-like approach was its sharing of back office functions with other authorities as part of the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership (MKIP). There were aspirations as part of this, to sell services to other authorities but he stressed that encroaching on the private sector would be detrimental to an already struggling economy. The Council

needed to be as efficient as possible going forward and shared services and partnership working demonstrated this going forward.

A visit to Maidstone Prison began to bring together the messages we had received. The Print Unit was an efficiently run function within a Government service. The skills of those employed were utilised to their full potential from graphic design and proof reading to machine maintenance. Its business was mainly an internal printing function but there were a number of private sector clients using their service. The pricing of jobs was carried out by Head Office with a particular regard for the private sector in terms of pricing.

On Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> October 2011 I attended a conference on Public Sector Income Generation at the Barbican. The messages were clear and served to cement those given thus far. Shared services were said to provide the biggest gains. Partnerships were what Councils were good at and they were fundamentally about trust and developing long term relationships. We were told that local authorities should be focusing on their strengths and be clear about what they were trying to achieve. In relation to the private sector speaker Peter Cosmetatos, Director of Policy, British Property Federation said that common ground could be found between the private and public sectors with expertise provided by both sides.

Throughout the course of the year we listened carefully to the messages that were given. One of the messages that resonated most was 'if you try to be everything to everyone you'll be no one'. It was felt a singular outlook either as a commissioning authority or one focused entirely on income generation did not reflect Maidstone Borough Council and its priorities or the wants and needs of residents. As local government moves forward into a time of change we found that there was a need to 'know your business' which could be improved.

Developing shared services and partnership working are areas on which Maidstone Borough Council has strength and expertise. This, combined with a business-like environment, where staff are encouraged to demonstrate an entrepreneurial spirit that can enhance the Council's relationship with the private sector, should provide an efficient and resilient organisation for the future.

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## **Recommendations**

### **Know your Business**

The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee's role in scrutinising the Budget, and for the first time the Fees and Charges report for 2012/13, provided an important insight into the Council's vision for the future and areas where it saw its strengths.

Member's involvement in the development of the Budget Strategy in its most formative stages is considered vital to all the elements of the Council's business, setting direction and determining the way forward.

That a cross party, Member led, budget working group be established and meet at the appropriate critical times in the budget making process

### **A community focused Business Leader**

A survey designed to draw out innovative business opportunities and ways of working that would result in efficiency savings, helped identify the aspirations that staff and Councillors had for the organisation they worked for. Conducted on an anonymous basis to encourage participation, there was an obvious awareness and understating of the direction the Council was heading.

The Executive's outlook provided a vital underpinning for the suggestions that were put forward. The Committee looked primarily to both acknowledge and challenge their viewpoints in order to fully examine its objectives and achieve the outcomes of the review.

The suggestions from staff and Councillors indicated that there was a great deal of in-house expertise that could be developed further and an enthusiasm to do so.

That procurement and legal sections are shared with outside organisations, especially within the public sector as a starting point from which a business section can be developed that can take on other businesses interests.

That the Council set up a 'work hub' facility for small businesses utilising space that is not used in Maidstone House or the Gateway. Printing and other resources including mentoring in areas of in-house expertise could be provided for a fee.

## **Income Generation**

It is clear that there is an entrepreneurial spirit present within the organisation. There is also an understanding that the Council has to carefully consider any type of business activity and its impact on local private sector business. This does not have to be detrimental; competition on a level playing field is business-like. New types of activities could create opportunities for local businesses, bringing economic growth to the borough.

The success of Radio One's Big Weekend in Maidstone in 2008 is still talked about by staff and residents. Maidstone was put on the map with global music icons performing in Mote Park. Residents, young and old, are very much in support of the Council providing future events. 24 of the 34 residents consulted at the Maidstone's Mela were keen to see music festivals on the scale of the Radio 1 Big Weekend return to Maidstone on a regular basis. The Committee sought the opinion of local authorities with a proven track record in large scale events. London Councils, Tower Hamlets and Lambeth, responded to the enquiries made explaining that they had established events teams in place and described themselves as 'facilitators'.

Also popular with residents is an increase in street markets, particularly continental food markets and more being made of the river. Boat hire is a popular choice with 27 of 34 residents in favour of this type of activity being on offer.



That an event organiser is sought and Mote Park is let for big festival events on a similar scale to the Radio 1 Big Weekend. The viability of establishing an events team should be investigated.

That the Council's facilities and assets, including parks and open spaces are evaluated on the basis of being hired out to community groups and businesses

That the empty space in the Gateway escalator area is utilised for events and advertising

That the Willington Street Park and Ride Site, currently closed on Sundays, is rented out to a private organiser for Boot Fairs

That the Council finds a more cost effective way of charging for small fees and fines so that the significant numbers of small amounts that are written off (e.g. stray dog fees) are reduced; and the Council is enabled to charge for all the statutory fees it is entitled to.

That the Council investigate the opportunity presented by the Environment Agency with the introduction of a compulsory 'boat MOT' called the BSS (Boat Safety Scheme). Existing staff could be trained to provide BSS checks, providing a service to boat owners, but also working to improve safety on the river

It is the opinion of this Committee that Maidstone Borough Council is progressing in the right direction but urges that it takes on board and implements the recommendations made in this report.

# Thank you

The Committee considered evidence from a variety of stakeholders and would like to thank the following individuals and organisations who have personally contributed to this review:

Paul Cadman, Manager Print Unit, **HMP Maidstone**

Victoria Wallace, Chief Executive, **Leeds Castle**

Elaine Collins, **Marden Business Forum** and **Network of Rural Business Forums**

John Taylor, **Chairman Economic Development Group of Chamber of Commerce**

## **Maidstone Borough Council:**

Leader of the Council, Councillor Chris Garland

Councillor David Burton

Alison Broom, Chief Executive

Director of Change, Planning and the Environment, David Edwards

Assistant Director of Environment and Regulatory Services, Steve Goulette

## **Public Sector Income Generation, Seizing Opportunities, The Barbican, London**

The Committee would also like to thank the Councillors, Council Officers, and members of the public who took the time to offer their opinions and ideas on the Council as a business? They were invaluable to the review.

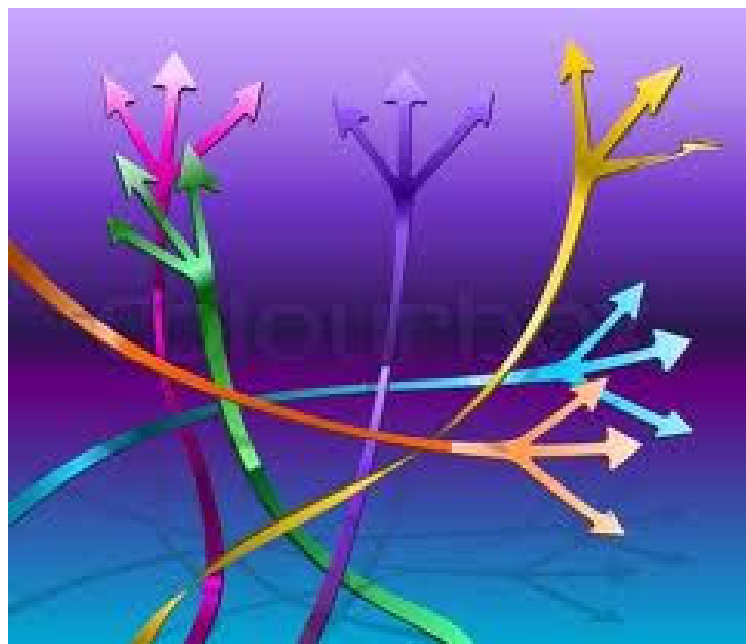
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# **The Council as a Business?**

## **Municipal Year 2011/12**



### **Evidence Pack**

Evidence	Who gave evidence	Page
2/8/11 – Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee	<b>Maidstone Borough Council’s Executive</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alison Broom, Chief Executive</li> <li>• David Edwards, Director of Change, Planning and the Environment</li> <li>• Steve Goulette, Assistant Director, Environment &amp; Regulatory Services</li> </ul>	4-6
11/09/11 – Maidstone Mela, Public Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various Members of the Public</li> </ul>	34-46
4/10/2011 – Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee	<b>Maidstone Business Leaders</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• John Taylor, Chairman of the Economic Development and Regeneration LSP Delivery Group</li> <li>• Victoria Wallace, Chief Executive Leeds Castle</li> <li>• Elaine Collins, Marden Business Forum and the Network of Rural Businesses</li> <li>• Council Chris Garland, Leader of the Council and Managing Director of Atia Financial Book keeping</li> <li>• Councillor David Burton, Managing Director of Burtons Medical Equipment Ltd</li> </ul>	7-10
12/10/2011 – Public Sector Income Generation Conference	<b>The Barbican, London</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Attended by Councillor Fay Gooch, Chairman</li> </ul>	17-18
26/10/2011 – Visit to Maidstone Prison – Print shop	<b>Maidstone Prison</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paul Cadman, Manager G industries</li> </ul>	19-21
1/11/11 – Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee	<b>Maidstone Borough Council</b> <b>The Budget Strategy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paul Riley, Head of Finance and Customer Services</li> <li>• Council Chris Garland, Leader of the Council</li> </ul>	10-12
10/01/12 – Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee	<b>Maidstone Borough Council</b> <b>The Budget Strategy 2012/13 Onwards</b> <b>The Budget Strategy 2012/13 Fees and Charges</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Paul Riley, Head of Finance and Customer Services</li> <li>• Councillor Chris Garland, Lead of the Council</li> <li>• Alison Broom, Chief Executive</li> </ul>	12-16

Evidence	Who gave evidence	Page
Compiled responses to call for evidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maidstone Borough Council Staff and Councillors</li> <li>• Various Members of the Public</li> <li>• Other Local Authorities.</li> </ul>	22-34

# **Minutes of Meetings**

**2 August 2011**

## **The Council as a Business? Review**

The Chairman welcomed Alison Broom, Chief Executive, Steve Goulette, Assistant Director Environment & Regulatory Services and David Edwards, Director of Change, Planning and the Environment.

The Committee was taken through a presentation which focused on the council's business planning, the medium term financial strategy, how cost centres were managed, services which generate or could capture income and commercial services. Mrs Broom advised that when identifying new areas that could trade and demand an income it was essential to prioritise and allow a period of planning and experimentation before planning too ambitiously as this would impact on the council's baseline budget. The Chief Executive identified particular projects in the Council's current business that were being addressed, these included the review of fees and charges, the local setting of planning application fees and the future governance of the Hazlitt Theatre. Human Resources was highlighted to the Committee as an area providing commercial opportunity with their experience and implementation of the Midland system. Mrs Broom explained that the current methodology used for identifying new opportunities began with the categorisation of all Council services as to whether they could be delivered in-house, shared or through partnership and trade. Research to establish experience and good practice would follow this along with consideration being given to the impact of competition with local employers or service providers. The Chief Executive advised that part of this process was establishing whether the Council should be abstracting from business that already exists or offering something new. The final area addressed in the presentation was the Council's finance information project, the aim of which was to deliver 'an enhanced recharge and budget management culture across the council supported by efficient processes.' It was explained that this would result in an improved budget management culture; the three main work streams of the project would be budget monitoring, recharges and the account code structure. A completion date of April 2012 was given.

Members questioned the Chief Executive on the Leader of the Council's outlook for the authority the previous year which was to describe the Council's future as

that of a commissioning body. Mrs Broom explained that the Council had limitations, there were statutory instruments in place and case law was used to help exemplify all decisions made. This put the authority in a position where, for example, the cost of market pitches could only be enough to cover costs. With regards to commissioning and commercial activity, Mrs Broom explained that both types of activity required different skills to those usually applied to regulatory services; a shift in attitude and approach would be required by the Council, Members and the public. Members questioned whether a commissioning route would impact on the Council's ability to generate an income. Mrs Broom explained that with the advent of Localism and the government's White Paper on Public Services there would be diversity in the way in which services were delivered. The Chief Executive told Members that one activity did not prevent the other but the Council did have to be very clear on what it was doing.

Members raised questions on the general power of competency in relation to the Public Services White Paper and the action the Council was taking in relation to this. Mrs Broom explained that the Local Government Act 2000 had introduced wellbeing powers but the legal environment had remained unchanged. In order to exploit these powers and to give them foundation the Council had used the Sustainable Community Strategy. The Chief Executive informed Members that the Council did not need the general power of competency to be responsive to the needs of the community and once the vision and ambition of the organisation was set, a way would be found to achieve this.

The Committee's questioning moved on to the Council's assets and areas that could provide an income. Members were interested in determining the executive's outlook on hiring out parks such as Mote Park for events and charging for venues such as the newly vacant Town Hall. Mrs Broom told Members that event management was something the Council had limited experience of other than Shakespeare and Proms in the Park. The Committee was told that this would be an area that their research could add value.

Some Members of the Committee raised questions surrounding parking and enforcement activity. Members were assured that parking enforcement was to ensure compliance and not to raise an income. Mr Goulette informed Members that the annual review into parking charges was taking place. It was agreed that Councillor Barned would undertake research in this area and report back to the Committee.

Members raised concerns regarding the public's perception of the council operating as a business and felt that there was a difference between being a



business and being businesslike; with the latter being where emphasis should be placed. Members and Officers were in agreement that a businesslike culture should be fundamental to the council's approach.

Mr Edwards, Director of Change Planning and the Environment told the Committee that resources were required to adapt and change to provide services that residents want. The Director felt that there were opportunities to move forward and provide good value for money and the resilience could be found within partnership arrangements. The Committee was informed that the first shared service had been borne out of another authority's need for expertise. The resilience of partnership arrangements was said to be the key to service delivery. Members questioned the issue of ownership when entering into partnership arrangements and the importance of this in order to maintain excellence. Officers informed Members that this was addressed at the formative stages of any partnership arrangement. Mrs Broom told Members that there was often a contrast in the cultures of authorities coming together to form partnership arrangements, she informed the Committee that cultural interfacing was important. Members questioned the partnership model suggesting that the arrangement was structured to reduce cost to each of the partners and would therefore reduce the scope for income generation. Mrs Broom explained that the current shared services; Legal, HR and Revenues and Benefits were 'transactional activities' and the economies of scale were there.

Members asked the Officers to identify areas that had potential to develop commercially, the waste strategy was said to be an area that offered opportunities as well as planning fees, HR and Revenues and Benefits. Mr Goulette identified the Crematorium and the Leisure Centre as two areas already generating an income and providing a local need. Mrs Broom highlighted consultancy and advice as areas to address, planning pre application advice helped eliminate legal challenges, saving money and time.

The Committee queried the way in which the organisation evaluated and sought to improve itself with 'value for money' no longer in existence. The Chief Executive informed Members that the authority was keen to be put forward for peer reviews and was open minded in this area.

Members praised the recent budget strategy training that has been arranged with Paul Riley and noted its value to the Committee as part of its ongoing responsibilities as the overarching Overview and Scrutiny Committee as well as its relevance to the review topic and the benefit of an increased understanding of this. The Committee felt that their engagement with the budget strategy at its most formative level would be of most benefit to them. Members felt that this could be achieved by appointing a smaller working group who would take on additional involvement and report back to the Committee as a whole.

**4 October 2011**

### **The Council as a Business? Review**

The Chairman welcomed John Taylor, Chair of the Economic Development and Regeneration Local Strategic Partnership Sub Group, Victoria Wallace, Chief Executive at Leeds Castle, Elaine Collins from the Marden Business Forum and the Network of Rural Business Forums, Councillor Chris Garland, Leader of the Council and Managing Director of Atia Financial Bookkeeping and Councillor David Burton, Managing Director of Burtons Medical Equipment Ltd.

The debate began with by questioning how the Council was regarded as a Business and the consideration that there was a difference between entrepreneurial spirit and a business like approach. Members agreeing with the panel of witnesses that they were two very different concepts and that how you run a business was 'business-like'. The Committee felt that Councils were being actively encouraged to run their organisations like businesses but felt they should not be in direct competition with local private businesses.

Councillor Burton spoke of the difference between business like and entrepreneurial. He referenced a Machiavellian definition used by the Leader of the Council which defined an entrepreneur as someone who knew the difference between opportunity and profit and charged for it.

He felt Car Parking was an area that as an entrepreneur it would be easy to make a profit from but for the council it would be at odds with its role which was more about social engineering than exploiting its assets for profit. Councillor Burton described his own experiences from a business perspective where he had experienced the public sector competing with the private sector. He spoke of the manner in which the public sector had undercut the private sector by offering a premium service that was not costed to include the overheads such as in house finance departments and rental costs. This led to the misconception that they were making a profit, when in fact they were operating at a loss.

Mr Taylor provided a similar example to the Committee where the public sector had taken over the running of patient transport only to find out six months later that it was no longer financial viable. The original provider refused to come back as their trust had been broken. Mr Taylor emphasised that trust was paramount in business. Mrs Collins suggested good practices in this area such as the approach taken by the private sector with IT providers. She told the Committee that this was a service that was market tested annually and could be taken back fairly through a tendering process at any stage.

It was felt that Maidstone Borough Council had been entrepreneurial in the past with the development of Fremlin's Walk in the Town Centre and in hosting the Radio 1 Big Weekend which were two large projects brought to fruition by the authority. Ms Wallace stated that the Council were already acting in an

7

entrepreneurial manner in running the Leisure Centre, the Hazlitt Theatre and various events. She made particular reference to Proms in the Park which was a free event. It was felt that by not charging for events the Council could be seen to be putting itself in competition with the private sector and behaving in a non business like manner, charging would demonstrate a belief in what was on offer.

Members discussed the possibilities of local authorities generating an income with advantages for both sectors referring to power stations and telephone boxes that were once areas developed by the public sector and provided a benefit to the private sector. With reference to this they highlighted the future infrastructure of rail and road as areas that could be developed by the public sector to aid the private sector. It was felt that there were services provided by the Council that would not be of interest to the Private Sector. The Leader responded by explaining that he was not critical of this outlook referencing the High Street Regeneration as a capital project that would create a better environment for Maidstone. He felt that when there were capital funds available to invest in projects then this was an important area for the Council but it was not something that should be looked to on an annual basis. Members discussed niche services that the Council already offered such as street naming.

Ms Wallace explained that her business was essentially a charity with a trading arm and clearly defining each area of the business was vital. She explained that every part of the business at Leeds castle generated a small surplus income but if an area was not and it was something that they wanted to provide then it would be cross subsidised. This was done in order to achieve the outcomes of the business. She told Members that there were 'grey areas' but the council needed to be very clear about who it was in each of its services. She stressed the importance of this way of thinking. Mrs Collins agreed with this and suggested that the Council would benefit from an outside influence who could evaluate what the council could offer from a business perspective.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Chris Garland, explained the current position of the Council, informing the Committee and the panel of witnesses on the way in which the Council had taken a business like approach by sharing back office functions such as Revenues and Benefits, with Swale and Tunbridge Wells as part of the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership (MKIP) which had achieved the desired economies of scale. He spoke of the partnership's aspirations to sell their services to other authorities. Councillor Garland told Members he was concerned about taking money out of an already struggling economy if the council were to seek to generate an income. He felt that encroaching on the private sector would be detrimental to a stagnant economy. Councillor Garland advised that a business like approach through shared services had already provided half a million pounds of savings and the business improvement unit at the council would work to continue to reduce processes and create efficiencies. The council were focused on this and there was more to do.

Members felt that the council needed to be the most efficient body possible and discussed the way in which the law was changing which would enable the Council to choose to be a business as well as the argument for outsourcing its services. They highlighted the Localism bill and the power of general competence which could change the way of the council provided some services. They felt that there were important lessons to be learnt citing examples given by the panel of their negative experiences with other public sector organisations. The Committee agreed with regards to Capital Projects like the High Street Regeneration you had to spend money to attract businesses. They also highlighted the use of Environmental Enforcement Officers who issued Penalty Charge Notices for litter dropping as an efficient service that was now paying for itself.

Councillor Burton informed the Committee he would not consider the prospect of outsourcing within his own business and would prefer to keep a service and run it himself for a profit. He advised trying harder and being more frugal. He said he considered outsourcing to be the soft option that could possibly cost more. He said this was an area where he would like to see entrepreneurial spirit. Ms Wallace explained that the catering at Leeds Castle generated £2 million but they were only recouping £30,000 profit annually. This was managed by an external provider and Leeds Castle received £600,000 of the profit providing a certainty in income without the risk. She told Members if they were confident that they could provide the best service than they should.

The panel highlighted the Town Hall, now empty and needing a use, something the Committee were exploring as part of the 'Council as a Business?' Review. The Leader informed the panel that this was being explored and possibilities could include the Private Sector being brought in to provide a service, with possibilities including a Coffee Shop.

The Panel were asked if they could each give one example of what Maidstone Borough Council could do to help businesses to flourish and suggested: as little as possible, only what is statutory, mandatory and necessary; to work with Kent County Council to provide Broadband in rural areas; to stick to planning deadlines; to provide broadband in other areas too; and to be simpler to deal with, processes can be obstructive. The panel were in agreement with each other on the suggestions they made. Councillor Dennis Collins told the Committee that the three most important elements of business were value for money, reliability and trust.

The Chairman invited John Foster, Economic Development manager at the Council to give his thoughts in summary of the debate. He told the Committee that it had been an interesting debate to listen to. He spoke of the way in which his team communicated with the business world through the Chamber of Commerce. Mr Foster informed the Members that policies and strategies put in place by the Council did not impact negatively on the business community

because rural economies forums were used as sounding board. Mr Taylor expressed the opinion of the business community in relation to the current economic climate, informing the Committee that there was an appreciation that times were hard but that the best services provided by the council in the most efficient manner would help businesses move forward.

The Chairman thanked the panel of witnesses for an enthralling debate which had generated the desired internal philosophical discussion.

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## **1 November 2011**

### **The Budget Strategy**

The Chairman introduced Paul Riley, Head of Finance and Customer Service.

Mr Riley took the Committee through the most likely forecast for the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (appendix B). The Cabinet had made their decision on the Budget Strategy on 14 September 2011. The forecast showed the Committee the Council's current position and the next 5 years.

The first calculation 'Available Finance' showed the revenue support grant received from government, the loss incurred and the collection fund adjustment for Council Tax. Members were informed that the revenue support grant would be confirmed in January 2012 and that a 2.5% rise in council tax was included in the projection each year. The Officer explained that a correlation was made with the Consumer Price Index (CPI), and reflected rises in fuel and other utilities with the cost totalling £410,000 for 2012/13. Under the various headings, Inflation Increase, Contractual Commitments, National Initiatives, Local Priorities and Minor Initiatives, Various Priorities and Council Assets, incomes and losses were accounted for. Single Voter Registration scheduled for 2014 /15 was incorporated into the outgoing costs for 2014/15.

Mr Riley made reference to the £1.1 million deficit forecast as a result of the changes to Council Tax Benefit and collections. He explained that from a financial perspective this shortfall would be shared with the other precepts for whom Maidstone collected on behalf of including the Police, Fire and Parishes. The government suggestion for 12 monthly payments for Council Tax rather than 10 was highlighted to the Committee as this would prevent reinvestment, although it was explained that payments could be changed to the 1<sup>st</sup> of the month.

Another Financial consideration highlighted was in relation to Welfare Reform, discussed under the previous item on the agenda, and the 'transitional costs' faced as Universal Credit was introduced. The loss of grant combined with the retention of staff as the scheme was phased in until 2017 would have a negative impact on the council's financial affairs.

The Officer informed Members that there was £700,000 to £800,000 of savings still to find for 2012/13. He explained that Senior Officers would be aligning their decision making process with the council's priorities and the strategic plan rather than taking a 'salami slice' approach. Mr Riley highlighted areas where future changes to Council Tax and Benefits could affect services currently provided such as the Gateway and the Contact Centre.

The retention of Business Rates was explained to the Committee. It was explained that there would be a focus on incentivised business growth but that disproportionate success in this area would be levied which could impact negatively on Maidstone with only 10% being retained by MBC and the rest to go to Kent County Council (KCC). Concern was raised that Kent as a two tier authority had not been taken into account, and Maidstone's structure had not been considered. The effect of this would mean that more money would leave Maidstone for other areas in Kent. Mr Riley informed Members that he hoped the consultation process taking place would reveal that there were still two tier authorities in place like Maidstone and not just unitary authorities to consider.

The Capital Programme was discussed. Members were informed that the Hazlitt Theatre's heating had been replaced and there was funding set aside to assist the Museum.

Mr Riley moved affairs on to the future including the council's Core Strategy and the Infrastructure Delivery plan that would follow. He explained that a great deal of funding was needed to deliver the core strategy and he informed the Committee that changes to capital funding would include section 106 agreements and the introduction of a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). This was something that MBC would not have to give to KCC until they reached an agreement with KCC on changes they required to their infrastructure. It was discussed that the Leader of the Council, Councillor Garland, had confirmed that the general principle would be to work with KCC on infrastructure and agreement would most likely take place once the Infrastructure Delivery Plan was in place from the Core Strategy which would demonstrate where needs were to be met.

Members were informed that a project was underway to address fees and charges. This would look across the whole council and provide comprehensive analysis of where there would be an ability to make an income.

Finally, Leader of the Council, Councillor Garland, updated the Committee on three main areas that he felt required further consideration. Members were informed that Cabinet would have to reconsider a saving that had been identified. The proposal would be not to reduce the funding for Concurrent Functions for 2012/13 (the grant scheme for Parishes in the borough) which would result in a need to find an additional £100,000 in savings. Councillor Garland informed the Committee that Parishes Members had been informed that

in principle an agreement had been reached by the Cabinet Member for an interim period of 12 months which would result in the grant being maintained at its current level. He told Members that he was in support of this.

The last area discussed was the Council Tax Grant and the government proposal to keep council tax at 0% and replace it with a grant of 2.5%. Councillor Garland told the Committee that this would result in a loss of £375,000 year on year for the Council with a continued loss of £7m in total due to the accumulative loss of interest. Members considered whether Council tax should be frozen following the governments lead of a 0% rise against a 2.5% year on year increase which would result in a approximately £5 a year for a band D Council Tax payer. The Committee felt that it would be beneficially to investigate the opinions of other local authorities on the matter.

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## **10 January 2012**

### **The Budget Strategy**

The Chairman introduced Paul Riley, Head of Finance and Customer Services, Councillor Chris Garland, Leader of the Council, Alison Broom, Chief Executive, Ellie Kershaw, Policy and Performance Manager and Georgia Hawkes, Head of Business Improvement.

Mr Riley introduced the Budget Strategy. He informed Members that the two reports had been taken to Cabinet since he last attended Scrutiny; The Budget Strategy 2012/13 onwards and the Budget Strategy 2012/13 Fees and Charges which covered the changes to the budget to date. On 8 November 2011 the Council informed of the Revenue Support Grant they would be receiving in 2012/12. The details confirmed the assumed figure of £5.7 million detailed in the Budget Strategy.

It was explained that the report included updates on the changes to date to the strategic revenue projections and savings proposals to achieve a balanced budget. In relation to strategic revenue projections changes included the proposal that the three temporary posts in Economic Development should be made permanent in order to achieve growth in tourism, a priority for Maidstone. Changes to savings proposals included bringing forward savings that had been identified for 2013/14 in Democratic Services and Overview and Scrutiny as they had been achieved early.

Members were informed that the Budget Strategy for the medium term included an assumed 2.5% Council Tax increase in its projections. In 2011/12 the Council had taken a four year grant in place of a rise in Council Tax. It was explained that the grant on offer from Government for 2012/13 was a one year, one off grant of £339,000 and there was no ongoing financial recompense being offered

by Government after that year. In accepting the grant the Council would be accepting a freeze on Council Tax for 10 years. In 2013/14 and thereafter the Council would have to find additional savings of £339,000. Mr Riley highlighted that the Budget Strategy Savings Proposals forecast in the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2013/14 was calculated without taking into account the impact of the grant freeze and were in excess of £600,000 of savings to find. In 2013/14 without a Council Tax rise and without the grant the Council would have to find over £1million in savings with only £305,830 identified so far.

Members were informed that if the Council were to refuse the grant from Government and opt to raise Council Tax by 2.5% this would equate to a 0.38% rise to a band D Council Tax bill of £5.56 for the year.

The Committee questioned Maidstone's Band D average Council Tax bill in comparison to other authorities in Kent. They were informed that it was the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest in Kent. It was clarified by Officers that Maidstone received more in Council Tax than Government Grant. Members considered the position of other Kent Authorities and were informed that Gravesham Borough Council would not be accepting the Council Tax freeze grant.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Garland, told the Committee that in 2012/13 he expected the Council to benefit financially from proposed changes to Business Rates and that Cabinet would be recommending that Maidstone Borough Council accept the Council Tax freeze grant. He estimated that residents would save approximately £70 on their Council Tax over the next ten years as a result of Cabinet's decision.

The Committee considered the options and felt it was difficult to make a calculation in terms of savings to the resident or the deficit faced by the Council. A Member was concerned that the authority could find itself in position that would be difficult to recover from as a result of accepting the freeze grant. The Committee were sympathetic to the 2.5% rise but felt that the debate should go on to full Council.

The Committee considered ways in which further savings could be found or income generated. Suggestions included:

- Abolishing the Park and Ride service in Maidstone;
- A reduction in elected Members;
- Income generated by departments such as Building Control and Development Control from fees and charges; and
- The commercial viability of the crematorium.



The Chief Executive informed Members that work had begun on looking at the size and shape of the organisation. With regards to the Park and Ride she identified that the structure of car parking charges in Maidstone as the issue, confirming that the current charging structure did not enhance the Park and Ride service. In response to the suggestion that the number of elected Members could be reduced, it was clarified that recent consideration had been given to this option when the Council had the opportunity to take part in the Boundary review but this had not been pursued.

It was explained that Building Control could not make a profit and had to break even over a three year period. With regards to Development Control it was explained that Government Legislation which would decentralise responsibility for setting planning application fees to the local planning authority had not yet come into effect. The Council had done a great deal of work on benchmarking in this area in preparation for this change.

Finally, with regards to the Crematorium, the Chief Executive explained that on the basis of its performance this year the Crematorium had exceeded its targets and there was a recent agreement to change the Crematorium's commercial viability in auxiliary areas such as with memorials. She explained that the surplus profit made benefitted other council services and it would continue to do this. Some Members raised questions about the state of repair of buildings on the Crematorium site. They were informed that the buildings on the road frontage had been disposed of and the chapel had been closed due to its current state. The Committee were advised that they were at liberty to recommend an alternative course of action such as including the repair of the chapel in the Capital Programme. It was confirmed that in relation to commercial activity the Crematorium and Bereavement Services was an area that had already been identified by the Council. Housing was also being looked at in depth with a visit to Wokingham Borough Council planned.

The Leader of the Council felt that the savings and income generation would be achieved by a combination of measures with the Council ceasing to provide certain services and moving into partnerships with other authorities via the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership in order to generate an income.

Some Members felt that there was an opportunity to build on the successes of the environmental enforcement team's litter enforcement expanding a self funding service to other areas of the borough. The Leader of the Council informed members that the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Mrs Ring, was investigating this at present. It was agreed that this was an area that should be explored more fully.

A Member felt there would be benefit in looking at parking enforcement and in particular non-compliance with residents parking across the borough to ensure that there was a fair and consistent approach taken. Officers agreed that this

was something that could be investigated and adjustments could be made to service delivery but in terms of the budget for parking enforcement this could not be increased.

Officers informed Members of the Council's policy on setting fees and charges detailed in the budget strategy report on fees and charges. This informed the range of issues considered by Officers in considering fees and charges and areas of income generation of which £140,000 had been identified. Members observed that proposed increases were in areas where they could be sustained.

A Member of the Committee highlighted that Maidstone Borough Council was not enforcing mooring charges along the river and were informed that these were enforced at certain times of the year when it was considered financially viable to do so. Members felt that this was an area that could be explored further and an opportunity could be being missed in promoting Maidstone via boating and tourism organisations as a place to come and moor boats free of charge.

Mr Riley moved on to the Council's Capital Programme and other areas of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. He explained that the New homes Bonus would be used in lieu of assets for the Council's Capital Programme. This was due to one property remaining unsold and a key proposal within the budget strategy was to delay the sale of this asset in order to get the best price.

The Infrastructure Delivery Plan was discussed and the Community Infrastructure Levy which would replace Section 106 agreements.

The Capital Programme for 2015/16 remained blank and would be informed with the information from the Infrastructure Delivery Plan which would provide the details of the infrastructure required to deliver the Core Strategy.

Finally Mr Riley explained the recent consultation with residents to establish which statutory services were important. Residents had been asked to consider levels of customer services provided in areas such as the Gateway and in relation to Officer response times by email and letter. It was explained that the information gathered would be used to inform work being undertaken on a customer programme and was not being used to make immediate savings. Members were informed that if changes were to be made to achieve savings to customer service the intention would be to direct the saving to another 'channel' and increase its resources. Mr Riley gave the example of the website and work being carried out to utilise it as a customer services tool.

With reference to the consultation some Members sought clarification on the way in which responses was gathered from residents and were informed that a day had been spent at the Gateway and a further two days in the Mall. There were concerns that the results were overly simplistic and not fully representative of the residents of Maidstone. They were told that the responses had been kept

separate. The Committee were informed that the respondents would be mapped by postcode to help evaluate the responses.

Ms Kershaw, Policy and Performance Manager, explained that a recent Overview and Scrutiny review had also helped identify that the Gateway was poorly used during its extended opening hours on a Thursday evening and a Saturday morning.

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# Public Sector Income Generation Conference – Seizing Opportunities

Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> October 2011 at The Barbican, London

Attendees: Cllr Fay Gooch, Orla Sweeney and Ellie Kershaw

Highlights of interest to MBC

## Speakers

### Chair opening address:

- Efficiency & Reform is at the top of the Government's agenda  
What will Councils look like in 20 years time?

**Colin Cram**, Former Chief Executive, North West Centre of Excellence, and Director, Marc 1 Ltd

- Extreme: councils becoming businesses  
Virtual Councils: just letting contracts; just commissioning services.
- Councils in competition with each other: higher risks come with that. No Audit Commission to raise the red flag; no safeguards.
- Greater Manchester is a unit of councils joining together to take the opportunity and to provide an economic unit

### Keynote Address:

**Alison Scott**, Assistant Director, Local Government Finance & Policy, CIPFA

- Local Government will survive
  - Depressing: effects of cuts; impact on services  
Yet Social Care and care for the most vulnerable is increasing.
- Optimistic: The reaction is resource reduction: Councils are adapting

- Balance risks and reward
- New opportunities: shared services; biggest gains by working on commonalities and building on experience.
- Building on small gains is better, more appropriate. Mutually work with the 3<sup>rd</sup> sector. We can be commercial yet still manage non-commercial services – it's our strength!
- Focus on gradual gain: messy if done too quickly or too radically

### Guest Speakers:

**Paula Lucci**, Head of Research, New Local Government Network

- Value for money: smarter use of assets
- Can't be all things to all men: focus on strengths with a 'we can do it' attitude.
- Share assets rather than relying on Council tax.
- We're good at partnerships: partnership is about trust, wanting to be there, built up over a long time.

**Cllr Peter Fleming** – Leader, Sevenoaks District council, Chairman of the Local Government Group Improvement Programme Board

- We're good at listening, at finding ways round things
- Companies like Serco etc are driven by cost, not by value. Residents want value for money, not lowest cost. Don't sell what the public really values (eg forests!)
- Possible tension between what businesses want and what councils need to do, but we're not always in competition e.g. Community Wardens are sponsored by business.

## Case Studies

### Strategic Estates Partnerships – how they could benefit local authorities:

- First joint venture of its kind in the NHS: 'Red Rose Corporate Services' with 'Lancashire Care'
- Must invest time and energy getting into bed with the right people.
- Good Asset management encourages re-investment.
- You don't need to own assets to deliver the services
- Selling = short term gain
- Rationalisation = medium term gain
- Joint venture = longer term
- It's not PFI – PFI aren't always aligned with their parties  
*Note MBC decided against going down this route some while ago as our asset base not sufficiently large / suitable)*

- Be clear what you are trying to achieve

### Increasing Revenues, Saving Money: Improving Debt Collection

- The public and private sector are actually one economy – we share customers. The key difference is that the public sector can't choose who it lends to. Key similarities are how to collect more money more cheaply.
- Important to differentiate between the can't pay (extreme financial hardship) and won't pay (extreme lack of intent to pay)
- Need clean and correct details. The more information you have, the easier to trace.
- 32% pay Council Tax late. 19% forget to pay: Send texts!
- Technology is working faster than the law. Our kids are the customers of tomorrow therefore we must use IT

**David Lee**, Council Leader,  
Wokingham Borough Council

Wokingham was the worse funded authority in the country.

- They wanted /needed to be self financing, so set up subsidised companies.
- Objective was to do things more effectively, not to make savings or cut services, and to commission services. The delivery model was the one that was most efficient, whether commissioning services in house or externally
- They set up a trading company to enable people to buy the services. It's outside Local Authority legislation therefore they were able to make a profit.
- They are Teckal exempt (public procurement legislation)
- Wokingham Housing Ltd  
Wokingham Enterprises Ltd etc

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**Peter Cosmetatos**, Director  
of Policy (Finance), British  
Property Federation

- Leads policy on Finance and EU legislation
  - The Private Sector: look at their expertise and our expertise. They are not the enemy.
  - Look at common ground to promote agendas.
  - Be clear what you want to achieve
  - Think carefully to get the most attractive bids and outcomes
-

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**Paul Obrien**, Chief  
Executive, Association for  
Public Service Excellence

- There are practical things a local authority can do e.g. opportunities for renewable energy. Start with solar PV. Economic advantages not just environmental
- Examples of municipal entrepreneurs:
  - Vehicle maintenance, MOTs
  - Tree inspections
  - Asset management
- The Localism Bill – what's it all about? **Crack on with what you think is right.**

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## **Visit to Maidstone Prison Print Shop**

**26 October 2011**

**Attended by:**

Councillor Fay Gooch

Councillor David Pickett

Councillor Stephen Paine

Councillor Michael Yates

Councillor Mike Hogg

Orla Sweeney (Overview and Scrutiny Officer)

- Print Shop – Made up of a number of workshops
- Employs 105 inmates
- Established in 1909
- Manager Paul Cadman is required to give an annual capacity forecast which has now risen to in excess of £1 Million.
- Process begins with the job sheet being received from head office.
- Paul Cadman as manager orders the supplies for next day delivery (no stock kept)
- Graphic design is the next stage – undertaken by the in house graphic design team – once agreed by the customer
- A job sheet acts as a tracking system
- At time of visit there were 38 printing jobs in progress
- Every stage of the process is part of the training programme.

- An aluminium plate is created for the art work, the design etched into the sheet with lasers. 4 are needed for each (to make up the colour)
- Printers for the Print Shop are centrally funded
- Savings are achieved by the Prison Services because printing work was previously contracted out. This is now produced in-house and the process facilitates training for the inmates. 60% reduction in cost.
- The majority of the work undertaken is for the Prison and Magistrates Courts
- Kenneth Clark MP, Secretary of State for Justice– working Prison Model was referenced
- Job Tracking/Performance/Monitoring form was designed in house
- The type of paper used is dependant on the customer’s specifications.
- Various contacts are in place for supplies (varying specifications).
- Print facility needs to run continuously so lunch is brought into the facility
- The Print Rooms waste is tracked and there is a culture of reuse.
- In relation to the staff – all instructors are former Print background and inmates skills are utilised from proof reading skills to engineers and repairs
- Qualifications are offered – NOCN (national Open College Network) Graphic Design Level 3, equivalent to A-Level. In some areas there was progression on to Level 4.
- The Prison Service has Print Units all over the country
- Maidstone can complete large jobs (5,000) using printers capable of producing 10-11,000 copies per hour (up to 16,000)
- It was highlighted that the Print Unit could operate continuously and there would be no shortage of volunteers but a balance was needed with the finishing process - unlimited printing could cause a bottle neck at the finishing stages.
- Mr Cadman explained that there was a monitoring process as part of each job sheet which included quality control and accountability.
- It was highlighted to Members that the Unit were conscious of the private sector and did not want to impact on private businesses

- It was explained that jobs were priced by head office who priced jobs, careful not to undercut the private sector. Due to labour costs the unit had the ability to undercut every other organisation. Savings were achieved through paper costs (holding no stock and using a variety of suppliers).
  - Big Clients included: Banner, Rank Zerox and Timpsons, HMSC, Insight Magazine for the Ministry of Justice and NHS.
  - The unit was kept clean by a permanent cleaner
  - Inmates were paid £8.10 weekly wage
  - The Unit operates in line with the prisons Decency Strategy – ‘ more respect, better environment.’
  - A simple recycling set up was noted. It reflected the ingrained ethos of reuse and recycling across the prison (in house recycling facility also). Black bins were used for litter, Green for clean waste paper and Red for Chemical waste.
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## **Compiled Calls for Evidence**

The following survey was designed by the Committee using software package Survey Monkey and circulated to Staff and Councillors as an anonymous questionnaire. It was later used as part of a press release in the Kent Messenger and on the Council's Facebook page.

Many of you will have seen Alan Sugar's 'The Apprentice' and understand we are again in an age when we must embrace our entrepreneurial spirit! We all sit there watching and come up with far better money making ideas, why not share them with us!

The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee have begun their major review of the year 'The Council as a Business?'

The Committee would like to explore the possibility of generating an income for the Council which might substantially reduce the need for service cuts and savings in the current economic climate.

Your idea could relate to your skills and ambitions not currently being utilised, your current role, any role or department in the Council or any of the Council's resources...

- 1. What can you offer the residents of Maidstone? Can you think of a 'paid for' service that yours or another department could offer?**
- 2. What niche service could you offer the public and/or private sector?**
- 3. How could Maidstone Borough Council manage their land and/or resources in a manner that could generate an income? (or in a manner that is more efficient?)**

## **Responses from Staff, Councillors and the public**

### **Responses to Survey**

**. What can you offer the residents of Maidstone? Can you think of a 'paid for' service that yours or another department could offer?**

Providing a scribe service that would enhance ideas that a resident wanted to put down, i.e. when he/she wanted to air a grievance with either a paper or with a outside body (excluding legal matters).

**2. What niche service could you offer the public and/or private sector?**

Us IT to help people starting up computer access.

**3. How could Maidstone Borough Council manage their land and/or resources in a manner that could generate an income? (or in a manner that is more efficient?)**

Consider using MBS vehicles to help movement of awkward items

**1. What can you offer the residents of Maidstone? Can you think of a 'paid for' service that yours or another department could offer?**

we are developing the potential for providing personal travel planning advice.

**2. What niche service could you offer the public and/or private sector?**

we are developing the potential for providing travel planning advice for small businesses.

**3. How could Maidstone Borough Council manage their land and/or resources in a manner that could generate an income? (or in a manner that is more efficient?)**

The Council could set up a work hub facility for small businesses either on the first floor gateway area or in the 6th floor which I understand is being looked at being got rid of. Instead of getting rid of it, it could be made available to small businesses to use as a work hub and printing facilities retained for their use (at a fee of course). This would benefit local small business the council.

**1. What can you offer the residents of Maidstone? Can you think of a 'paid for' service that yours or another department could offer?**

How about getting our IT department to develop a free smartphone application, working with the Visit Maidstone team, to say 'What's on in Maidstone'. This could be done in conjunction with the KM's 'What's On' as well as Downs Mail's 'What's On' service which is currently printed in their newspapers. They could pay a small fee to get their services online, and we could fund the service (and make a small margin) from selling adverts to pubs, hotels etc. People can add their own events to allow pubs to advertise band nights, for example, but anyone wanting to advertise an event could pay a small fee, e.g. £2, to stop abuse of the service (e.g. people advertising house parties etc!). Hopefully this means the app looks after itself, rather than needing a member of staff to run it. Apps are supposed to be very easy to make in this day and age, so there is probably someone on the IT team who can do it - or who knows someone who can do it. This ties up with the Communication and Leisure and Culture strategies. It could be modelled on the 'Time out' website for London. If nothing else, it'll get some good press for the council - especially if it is done with the papers as partners. Can be used to highlight events at the Theatre and Leisure centre, to help drive up revenue there.

**2. What niche service could you offer the public and/or private sector?**

As above

**3. How could Maidstone Borough Council manage their land and/or resources in a manner that could generate an income? (or in a manner that is more efficient?)**

Make it clearer how community groups can hire out facilities, e.g. parks, for events. Could the council loan out equipment to manage grounds to RSLs and even private households and businesses?

**1. What can you offer the residents of Maidstone? Can you think of a 'paid for' service that yours or another department could offer?**

I'm required to fill in this box to proceed. My suggestion relates to box two. But, while I'm here how about premium number residential telephone IT Helpdesk service

**2. What niche service could you offer the public and/or private sector?**

Hosted email, file and possibly web services.

**3. How could Maidstone Borough Council manage their land and/or resources in a manner that could generate an income? (or in a manner that is more efficient?)**

Not my area. Sorry

**1. What can you offer the residents of Maidstone? Can you think of a 'paid for' service that yours or another department could offer?**

The Council's Property Section used to offer a design and construction service to other public bodies and built several village halls in the surrounding villages. We stopped making a profit when the service broken up and the council housing went.

**2. What niche service could you offer the public and/or private sector?**

I am the Council's Conservation Architect, working on listed buildings and Scheduled Ancient monuments. Not a common skill set.

**3. How could Maidstone Borough Council manage their land and/or resources in a manner that could generate an income? (or in a manner that is more efficient?)**

Easy - listen to the legal and property professional's advice and stop interfering.

**1. What can you offer the residents of Maidstone? Can you think of a 'paid for' service that yours or another department could offer?**

After school clubs (Assumes spare capacity, which is unlikely)

**2. What niche service could you offer the public and/or private sector?**

Event/conference organisation (Again, assumes spare capacity, which is unlikely)

**3. How could Maidstone Borough Council manage their land and/or resources in a manner that could generate an income? (or in a manner that is more efficient?)**

Increase planning and building control fees to fully recover the cost of providing the service +10% (assuming we have the powers). Introduce road pricing/tolls/single user car pricing

**1. What can you offer the residents of Maidstone? Can you think of a 'paid for' service that yours or another department could offer?**

See Q3 below

**2. What niche service could you offer the public and/or private sector?**

See Q3 below

**3. How could Maidstone Borough Council manage their land and/or resources in a manner that could generate an income? (or in a manner that is more efficient?)**

<http://sd.defra.gov.uk/2011/01/sustainable-business-model-a-seven-point-plan/>  
<http://sd.defra.gov.uk/2011/03/six-steps-to-significant-change/>

**1. What can you offer the residents of Maidstone? Can you think of a 'paid for' service that yours or another department could offer?**

COPYING AND SCANNING SERVICES

**2. What niche service could you offer the public and/or private sector?**

I AM A GRADUATE IN COMMUNICATION STUDIES AND HAVE EXPERIENCE IN MARKETING ETC I HAVE SUBMITTED IDEAS FOR THE BRIGHT SPARKS AND RECEIVED AN AWARD FOR MY IDEA.

**3. How could Maidstone Borough Council manage their land and/or resources in a manner that could generate an income? (or in a manner that is more efficient?)**

UTILISE ALL THE EMPTY SPACE IN THE GATEWAY ESCALATOR AREA FOR EVENTS ETC ADVERTISING.

**1. What can you offer the residents of Maidstone? Can you think of a 'paid for' service that yours or another department could offer?**

1. On site (at Maidstone House) childminding service for Council staff and any 'left over' spaces could be offered to the public maybe in conjunction with the Department for Works and Pensions helping long term unemployed with childcare when they go back into work. 2. MBC to offer a floristry service to the public esp to cater for Births, Deaths and Marriages. As an example, Glasgow City Council have run this service very successfully for numerous years now. 3. Start a running group(s) for Council staff and the Public. Different groups available to cater for all fitness levels. The memberships could be set up through Mote Park Leisure Centre and paid for on a quarterly basis. 4. Car parking - have a scheme where residents/businesses can purchase permits for Council owned car parks on a monthly, quarterly or annual basis.

**2. What niche service could you offer the public and/or private sector?**

1. Offer printing services to local companies. 2. Offer the 'Weight for It' scheme, currently available to MBC staff only, to members of the public and carry out the sessions in the evening and charge for this 10 week 'course'.

**3. How could Maidstone Borough Council manage their land and/or resources in a manner that could generate an income? (or in a manner that is more efficient?)**

1. Utilise the space at the ground floor of the gateway building (under the stairs and escalators) by offering pitches to local small businesses

**1. What can you offer the residents of Maidstone? Can you think of a 'paid for' service that yours or another department could offer?**

Parks

**2. What niche service could you offer the public and/or private sector?**

Events

**3. How could Maidstone Borough Council manage their land and/or resources in a manner that could generate an income? (or in a manner that is more efficient?)**

Search for a large event organiser and let Mote Park for big festival event such as the Radio 1 big weekend

**1. What can you offer the residents of Maidstone? Can you think of a 'paid for' service that yours or another department could offer?**

-

**2. What niche service could you offer the public and/or private sector?**

Fire risk assessments - all commercial premises by law need to have a fire risk assessment.  
Project Management - we could sell this as a service to KCC, local housing associations.  
Building surveying - we have the expertise to undertake condition surveys. Clerk of works - we could undertake this for local developers or housing associations.

**3. How could Maidstone Borough Council manage their land and/or resources in a manner that could generate an income? (or in a manner that is more efficient?)**

I noticed that the park and ride at willington street was closed on a sunday. Why not have a bootfair there? There is a boot fair at sutton road, where they charged £10 per pitch and there must have been circa 100 pitches. Entry was £3 and there must have been at least 200 people there across the day. The boot fair could be advertised on the councils website and via posters at the carpark and also in mote park which is very popular. If the event is held once a month, you may make £15K per year? Another site could be mote park? If the high speed train is permanant at maidstone west and is a success, couldnt 13 tonbridge road be turned in a car park?

**1. What can you offer the residents of Maidstone? Can you think of a 'paid for' service that yours or another department could offer?**

?

**2. What niche service could you offer the public and/or private sector?**

?

**3. How could Maidstone Borough Council manage their land and/or resources in a manner that could generate an income? (or in a manner that is more efficient?)**

Charge 20p to use MBC public toilets

**1. What can you offer the residents of Maidstone? Can you think of a 'paid for' service that yours or another department could offer?**

unknown

**2. What niche service could you offer the public and/or private sector?**

unknown

**3. How could Maidstone Borough Council manage their land and/or resources in a manner that could generate an income? (or in a manner that is more efficient?)**

utilise buildings like the town hall as a farmers market on a sunday or to show artwork of local up and coming artists, wedding receptions, proms etc

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## **Emailed responses to calls for evidence received**

The ground floor underneath the Gateway that is currently unoccupied could be used as a baby crèche/ nursery, primarily for staff to use, and then depending on numbers could be opened up to KCC staff potentially.

Reasons for keeping it for staff:

Should there be any problems, the parent is close by to pick the baby up.

It would save on traffic congestion as they'd be travelling to work anyway.

It would help with flexi time, as it would coincide with time for travelling to work regardless.

Should the parent wish, they can spend lunch with their child.

It would be comparably cheaper than private nurseries.

It would be run by qualified child minders, so the council would be offering employment.

KCC could use it due to location.

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How about joining up the Maidstone borough council electronic news letter with the Maidstone town mail this will then have more news.

Joint cooperation with the town centre initiative and the council seems to be the right way forward.

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- Getting rid of the parking tickets and having it done electronic. So you just pay your money, plug your reg number into the machine and then the warden can just plug the reg number into a machine to determine whether you've paid or not. Would save money on paper and constantly having to restock the machines in all the car parks
  - Or can the above be a text service, similar to those in London?
  - Getting the waste collection people to help deliver things that have to go to all households – as the visit every home throughout the week anyway. for example teaming up with elections etc.
  - If the depot has refuse lorry facilities can it be opened up as a car wash?
  - Turning the town hall into an exhibition space
- 

How about getting our IT department to develop a free smartphone application, working with the Visit Maidstone team, to say 'What's on in Maidstone'. This could be done in conjunction with the KM's 'What's On' as well as Downs Mail's 'What's On' service which is currently printed in their newspapers. They could pay a small fee to get their services online, and we could fund the service (and make a small margin) from selling adverts to pubs, hotels etc. People can add their own events to allow pubs to advertise band nights, for example, but anyone wanting to advertise an event could pay a small fee, e.g. £2, to stop abuse of the service (e.g. people advertising house parties etc!). Hopefully this means the app looks after itself, rather than needing a member of staff to run it. Apps are supposed to be very easy to make in this day and age, so there is probably someone on the IT team who can do it - or who knows someone who can do it. This ties up with the Communication and Leisure and Culture strategies. It could be modelled on the 'Time out' website for London. If nothing else, it'll get some good press for the council - especially if it is done with the papers as partners. Can be used to highlight events at the Theatre and Leisure centre, to help drive up revenue there.

---

We should look first at the cost effectiveness of the income we currently collect. Stray dog fees is one that comes to mind where we write off significant numbers of small amounts that incur the full cost of administration. Also, though it is sensitive, litter fines that are progressed to legal action are expensive too.

If we can find a cost effective way of charging for small fees and fines we should elect to charge all statutory fees that we can.

---

Share our procurement or legal sections with outside organisations and develop a business section that can take on other businesses interests, prove that we are looking forward in our objectives. and strive to ensure excellence and a business to be proud of .

---

Take on training and develop a training facility section that can train sections and personnel for anyone in local government or outside organisations.

---

Develop the reach the summit to outside businesses and monitor their performance to ensure value for money.

Find a way to merge our priorities with the private sector and give advice and experience.

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Just had another thought for revenue raising.... Next year the Environment Agency are introducing a compulsory 'boat MOT' called the BSS (Boat Safety Scheme). I believe there are only 5 people on the River Medway who are qualified to carry out these BSS certificates. What about the council sending someone off to a training course and then providing BSS checks too? There might be some capacity in the depot staff perhaps (or maybe not, I don't know). That way the council provides a service to boat owners, but we also work to improve safety on the river (there have been a couple of boat deaths within Maidstone this year due to non-compliance with boat safety standards).

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I hope that you don't mind me emailing you with my idea.

I noticed in last week's Kent Messenger that people are annoyed that KCC have been cutting down trees and not replacing them all, and now say that it's up to individual councils to replace them. I've also seen in this week's KM that you are collecting ideas for money-generating schemes for the Council.

This idea wouldn't make money - unless the Council would like to collect trees etc and then sell them, which I'm sure would also be workable - but it would save the Council having to spend money on new plants.

For some time now I've been thinking that maybe Maidstone Borough Council might like to ask people whether they have any trees or shrubs that they might like to donate?



For example, the previous owners of the house where we now live (40 Bell Meadow, Maidstone) planted a spreading juniper tree right next to the neighbour's boundary. It is about 10 feet high and 6 feet across, and the neighbours have had to cut it back on their side to stop it interfering with their fence and their tree, and every year I have to cut it back too. It's totally the wrong type of plant for this type of garden, and absolutely in the wrong place! What it really needs is to be in a wide open space, such as part of the landscaping for the new Library, or maybe in Mote Park as part of its regeneration scheme, or other parks or alongside roads. Then it could grow to its heart's content and become a magnificent specimen - there's one at Maidstone Hospital that is really impressive.

All it would need is a couple of men with a digger and a lorry to take it from here and transport it to its new site with a big enough rootball so that (with a bit of attention such as watering for the first week or so) it would continue to grow happily in the space which nature meant it to have. We also have a laurel tree, two decorative conifers and a couple of other things that they could have as well, all for free. The times I've looked at them and thought - if only they could be in the right space, they'd look wonderful! But they are just not in the right place here.

I'm sure that there will be lots of people in the same position as us, living with things that they or others before them have planted in ignorance of the size to which these trees and shrubs will grow, and that will never reach their full potential unless they have the proper space in which to flourish. If you were to advertise for them you will probably receive lots of offers!

This would save the Council having to spend any money at all in purchasing new trees/shrubs for their own planting schemes, at whatever cost they would normally be, and if they can sell them to other places (such as businesses who are landscaping their surrounding land), so much the better.

It would also be a good way of recycling plants which would leave small, overcrowded front gardens and instead enhance Council and public areas, provide a haven for wildlife and also make sites instantly look more 'established' because the trees and shrubs would already be mature.

I hope that you think that this idea would be a workable one; please feel free to contact me if you would like further details or if the Council would like to have our juniper and any other shrubs to start with, to see whether or not the scheme would work.

Thank you for considering it.

My apologies - in my previous email I rather overestimated the height of our juniper, it's more like 6 or 7 feet high, not ten! (But it would be much higher if we didn't have to keep pruning it.)

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## Facebook responses



**Maidstone Borough Council**

**We need your ideas.**

Many of you will have seen Alan Sugar's 'The Apprentice' and understand we are again in an age when we must embrace our entrepreneurial spirit! We all sit there watching and come up with far better money making ideas, why not share them with us...

535 Impressions · 0.37% Feedback

July 22 at 4:26pm · Like · Comment · Share

Julia Batt likes this.

**Julia Batt** Both fantastic ideas - and good luck to getting plenty more. :D

July 30 at 5:36pm · Like

Write a comment...

Hi Maidstone,

\*\*\*\* also commented on Maidstone Borough Council's status.

\*\*\*\* wrote "I'm not keen on this idea. Who would want to get married or have a reception here? No parking close by and the residents of Maidstone at the bus stops having a good old beak. The town hall is nice inside if you don't mind the boards with the councillors listed in your photos. There's no opportunity for photos outside. In comparison the Archbishops palace has nice grounds, the palace itself is lovely, close convenient parking and is away from the hustle and bustle in the town, plus it sounds a bit more salubrious on the invitations. I really don't think many brides would want to be outside the town hall for any length of time with all the Maidstone chavs watching. Having said that I did see a stretch hummer outside the Archbishops palace for a wedding the other week, classy!"

## Responses from Local authorities

### Tower Hamlets

**Tower Hamlets Council host music events on annual basis, attracting festival goers from across the country. These include: Lovebox, the Apple Cart Festival and Underage Festival aimed at under 19s.**

**In their email response Tower Hamlets Events team explained:**

Tower Hamlets Arts and Events does have a lot of experience and expertise in this area including major music festivals and smaller corporate events. We note with interest that more local authorities are looking at more effective ways of exploiting their assets. I have been charged, as part of our own income generation plans, to look at how we might effectively sell our services to other boroughs, either through consultancy input or indeed actually managing their events programme for them. It is a complex business and I think there's limited benefit in a one off briefing but happy to consider this. I suggest it would require a day of visiting your parks if we are to make any sensible observations about their potential. Ideally it would be myself and a member of my events team doing the assessment and attending the meeting in the evening. For this we would charge a fee of £1,500 all expenses included.

What you would get from this would be:

- Quick assessment of your parks, suggestions for making them more event friendly, what potential markets they would suit.
- Brief history of event development in Tower Hamlets and key issues such as managing resident relations, licencing, environmental impact
- suggested ways forward depending on scale of your ambitions
- opportunity to pick our brains. What we offer over private sector event companies is an intimate knowledge of the issues for local authorities and how to navigate through the barriers and potential pitfalls.

### Lambeth

**Lambeth Council's events team supplied the following responses to questions:**

- How did your team come together?  
**There was an Entertainments Team, however the council decided to bring in an events consultant to write an events strategy and as a result of this the events team was born in 2006/2007**
- Did someone with in-house expertise take the initiative?  
**Yes (as above)**
- Is your team made up of various areas of expertise i.e. licensing, project management, health and safety, environmental enforcement, waste and

recycling etc or do you have a procedure or process in place within the organisation that brings together the various departments? Is this all provided in-house or do you outsource areas?

**We all have different event organisational skills, I organise cultural events within the borough, I have colleagues who have production knowledge, concessions knowledge, commercial experience etc. We all have different experience and expertise in event organisation. This enables use to offer a full service to people wishing to hold an event in a Lambeth park or Open Space. If an event organiser is planning a large event, there will need to present at the Safety Advisory Group which is made up of the relevant stakeholders, such as the police, fire service, ambulance service, licensing, food safety, emergency planning, community safety, parks etc.**

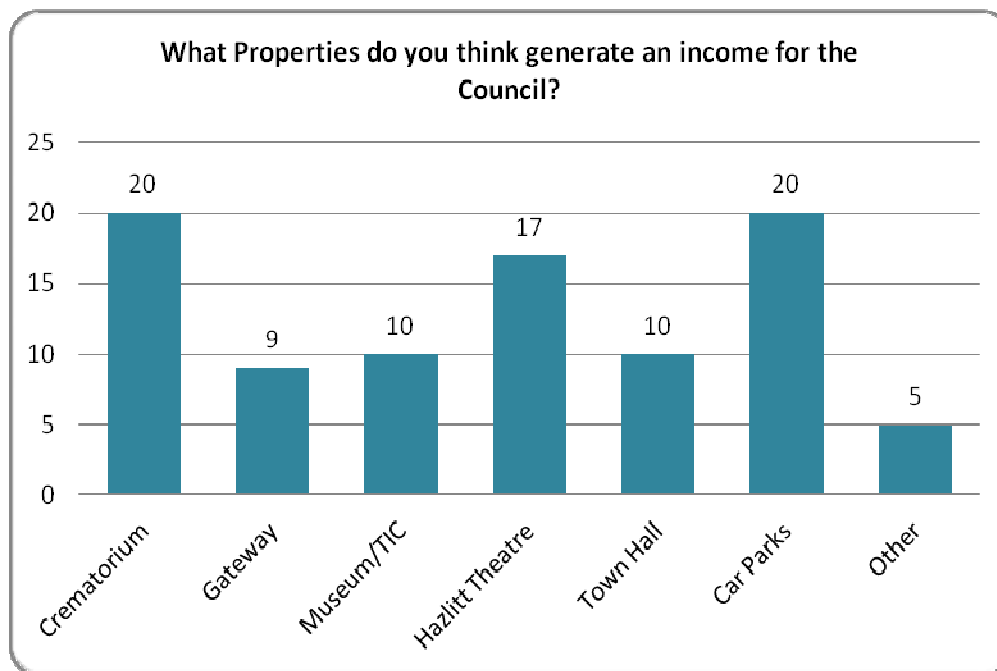
- What sort of events do you organise?  
**In house, we organise between 6 and 10 events per year, these include Lambeth Country Show, Fireworks, sustainable events, transport events etc. We facilitate around 300 external events per annum.**
- Do you advertise and if so where?  
**Yes, local media, the Council's website and social network sites. Also on JCDecaux etc.**
- Who do you target? (corporate organisations or community groups)  
All in house events are targeted at the Lambeth community.
- Brockwell Park and Clapham Common have hosted all manner of events over the years from political rallies (The anti nazi league march and music event), music festivals, country shows – events that attract people from all around the Country to firework displays and events in the community calendar – Are these wide ranging events managed by the same team/resources? Are these events sought by your team or are you approached? **Lambeth Events Team manage and facilitate all events that take place in the borough. If an external organisation plan an event they will manage it but the events team will facilitate it.**
- The Committee are very much looking at events management as a way of providing an income for the authority and utilising the borough's assets. Are events an area that has generated significant income for Lambeth? If so, do your team operate as a commercial arm of the Council? Does your team compete with the private sector and if so how have you become business like in your approach? **By hiring out our parks and open spaces we do bring in revenue for the council. We have a rate card which we use to advise event organisers of the fees that are relevant to their type of event. For an example, a small community group will pay less for site hire than a large commercial company. We do not really compete with the private sector as we offer a different service.**

# Maidstone Mela

11 September 2011

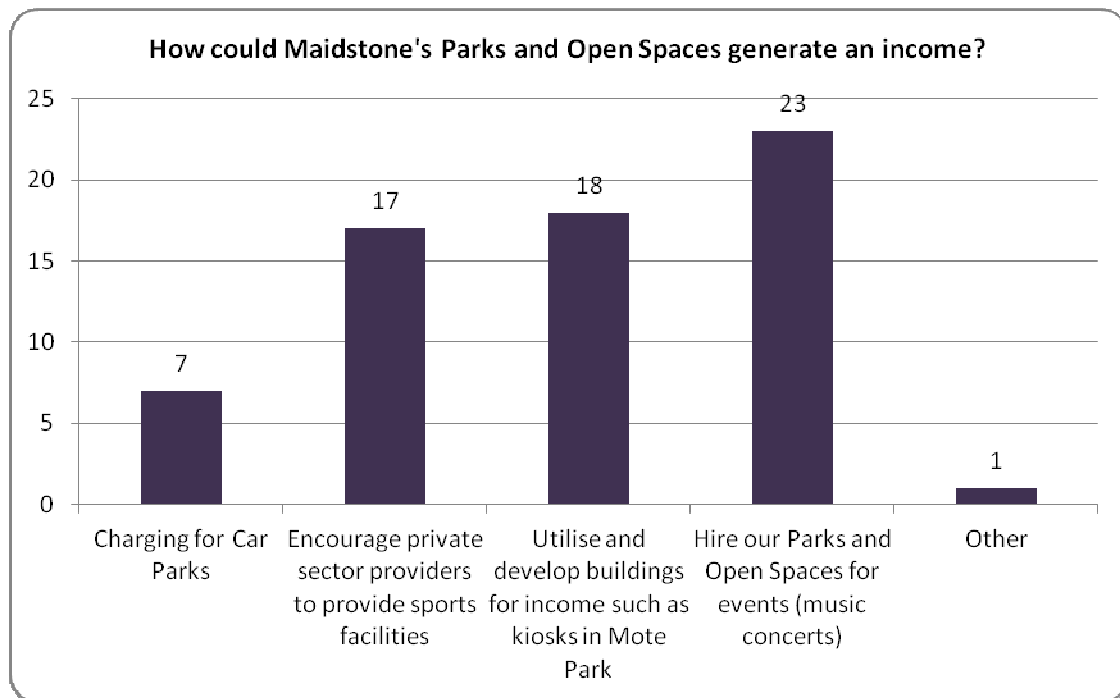
The Committee engaged with residents at Maidstone Mela. The questionnaire conducted provided the following results. In addition to this the public made a number of additional comments and suggestions.

## Property



- Adverts on bins
- Electricity generation
- Golding Homes let empty shops to organisations – virtually for free, for a nominal fee. If a charity and useful they shouldn't be charged. It helps maintain the building, stopping it from going to rack and ruin.
- Hazlitt – events needed
- Crematorium – needs refurbishment
- Carriage Museum could generate an income
- Reopen Toilets and pay
- Hire Out Town Hall
- Open Historic Buildings as a tourist attraction

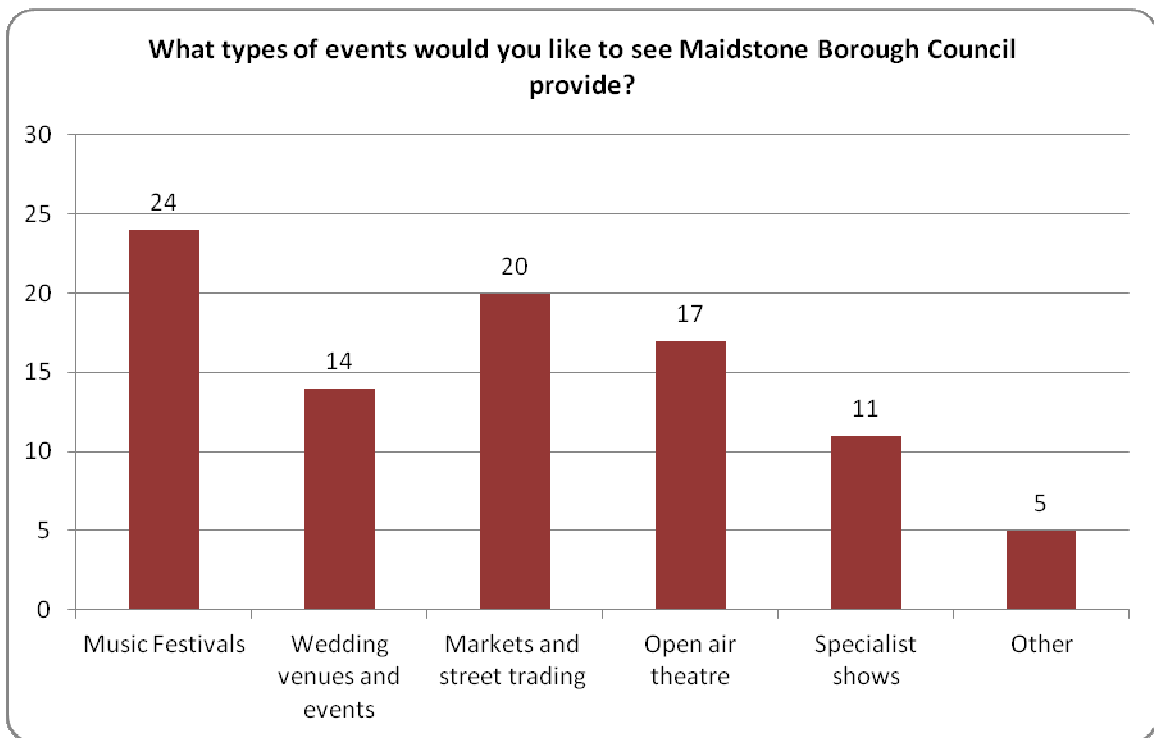
## Parks and Open Spaces



- In relation to charging for car parking 'keep it free'
- Kiosks utilised for 'fast food'
- Kiosks liked the way they are
- Youth Clubs – advertise to Youth clubs
- Only charge for parking if accessible transport and disabled parking is provided free of charge
- Invite organisations to sponsor children's playgrounds, like roundabouts are.
- Kiosks (if empty) grants are available to help utilisation?
- Kiosks – should be sophisticated food outlets
- Kiosks – bars
- Pop concerts
- Car parking charges – not on a regular basis (only for events)
- Regards kiosks as a public service – private companies could push the price up

- Against event in Park – for walking dogs and picnics
  - KCC charges
  - Parks – adventure playground, children’s birthday parties at the cafe
  - Markets – better in Parks?
  - Kiosks selling souvenirs
  - Kiosks are a bit run down
  - Kiosks – seasonal – taken into consideration in contracts
  - Kiosks – franchised to Costa etc. staff are unhelpful
- 

## Events

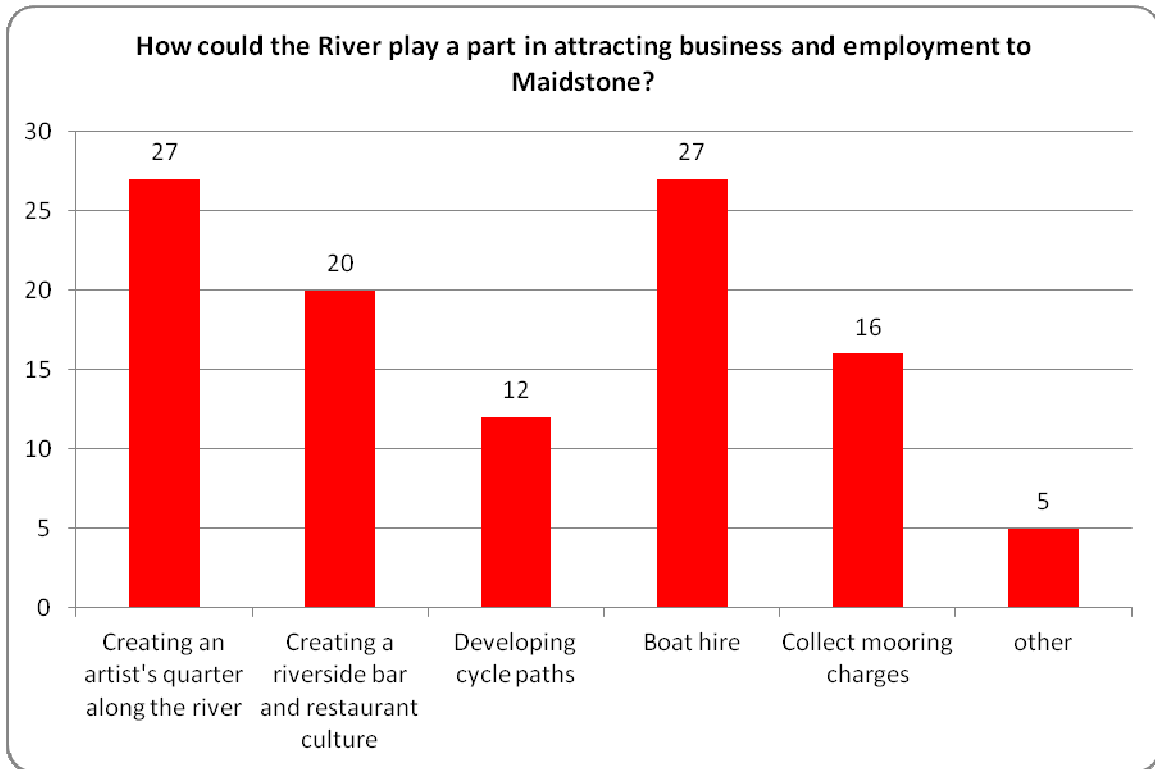


- Music festivals – not too regular

- Wedding venue – not parks
- Markets – too regimented – 2<sup>nd</sup> hand stalls required to display price (Lockmeadow)
- Parishes – work with look at what they do (re wedding venues) – Barming for example (use of village halls etc)
- High Street – consider disabled access
- Lots more we could do – more joined up thinking – Lockmeadow – has only one road in...
- The Town Hall suitable as a wedding venue
- Music events wanted
- Drive in movies
- Open Air Theatre at Archbishops Palace
- Seasonal wedding venues (Parks etc)
- County Hall area needs improvement
- Not nearly enough use of sports pitches
- People will pay for parking but have to be careful – 50p?
- Specialist shows on agricultural land
- No one uses the Open Air Theatre
- Events – as long as don't affect neighbouring residents
- Carnival
- Car Parking charges – if not too much
- People like to have their wedding and reception in the same place, at the Town hall parking would be a problem
- Love markets!
- Markets tried at Margate
- Too much completion for specialist shows



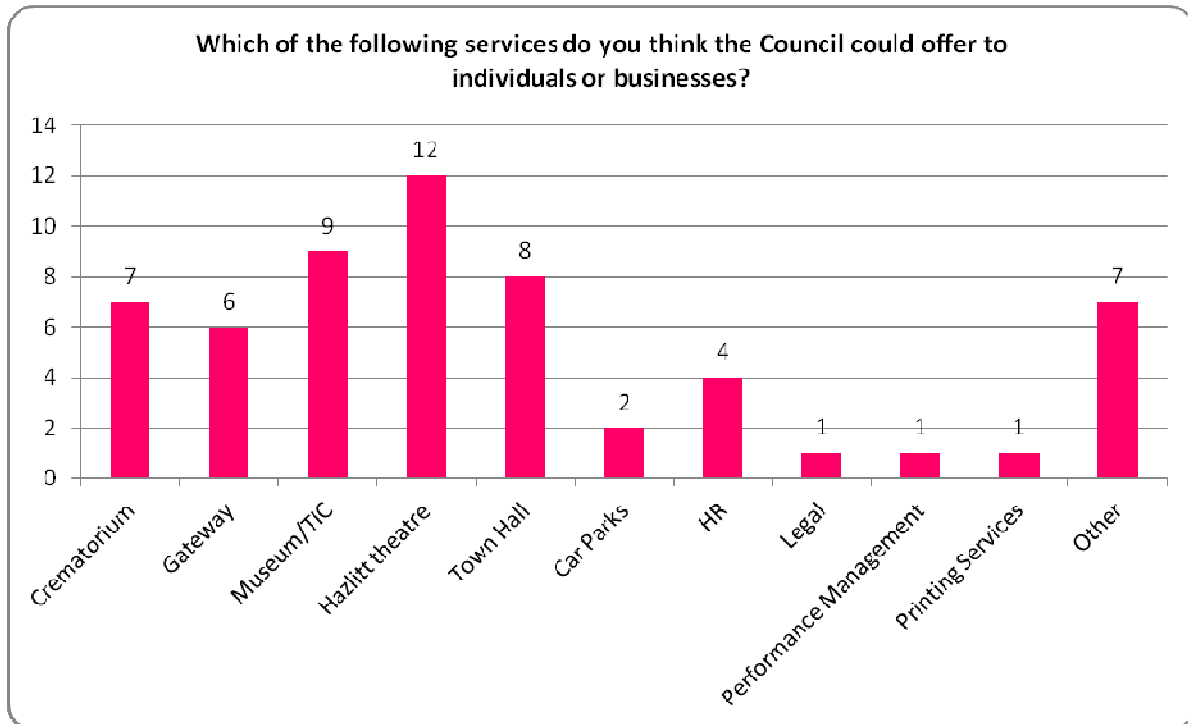
## River



- Hoardings to be decorated
- Riverside bar and restaurant – at Malta Inn
- Cycle Path – ruined – needed away from the river
- Boat hire – already available at Allington
- Publicise the artist quarter – consider local artists/craftsperson – such as Charmain Beaton on Pudding Lane
- River bar closed – encourage something like Mu Mu – an all night cafe/bar.
- Under River Arches – could develop and rent.
- Mooring chagrined should be collected – long term pros and cons?
- Start up units for borough – so far only one let at equilibrium – not offering sufficient encouragement.
- Artist's quarter – a good idea
- Should defiantly collect mooring charges
- Should have built theatre and restaurants along river

- Developing cycle path along river – bad idea
  - Hotel/conference centre
  - Cycle path – safety issues
  - River area – highest priority
  - More needed for locals
  - Get rid of retail warehouses along river
  - Knock down travel Lodge
  - Speed boat hire
  - Mooring charges –demonstrates prestige
  - Missed opportunity at River – Bristol has low rise housing and a night time culture
  - Tonbridge and Malling licence boats, worth considering artist quarter and riverside culture is a good concept
  - Artist’s quarter needs publicising
  - If River Bar closed, it was not making money?
  - Boat Hire was done in 1970s
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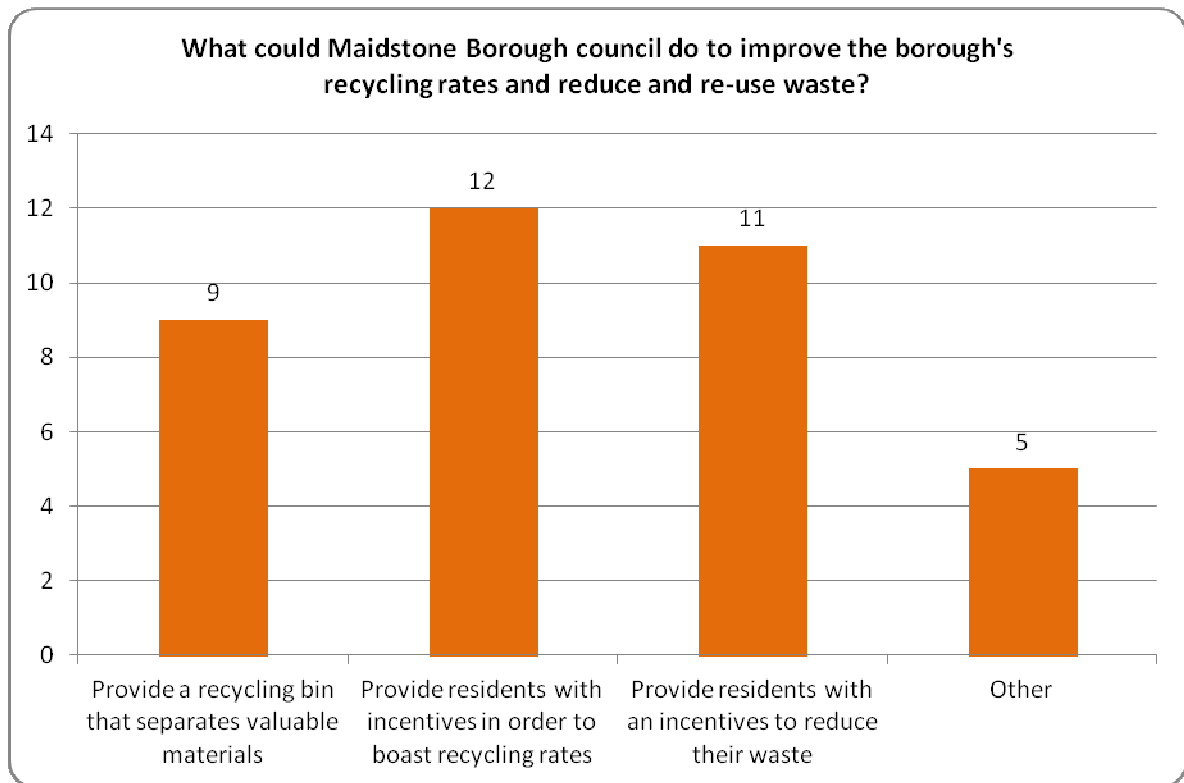
## In-house expertise



- If good enough – could be offered to start up companies
- HR and Legal services were suggested, 'but could end up costing'
- Help start up business up at equilibrium, could encourage – not publicised.]
- HR for new businesses
- Waste –heat energy recycling – helping others improve energy efficiency
- Performance Management and HR for strat up business and Project Management training
- A Touring Hazlitt theatre
- Market Advertising
- Hire out more (staff/property)

- Could result in more staff being taken on (positive) but could take business away from other. In favour of mixed sector, mixed income but as with NHS there is an effect on wait times and the public
- Printing, HR and Performance Management

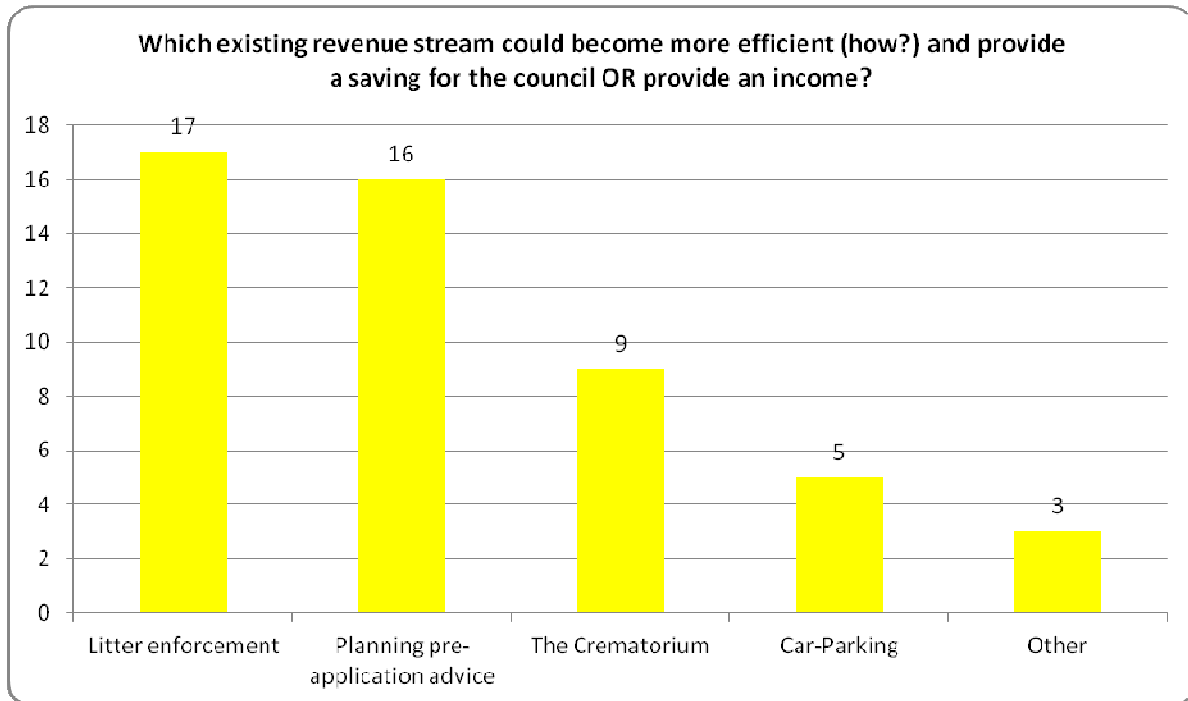
## Waste and recycling



- Don't understand how food bins helps when compared to volume of black bin
- Need to change culture
- Prefer bins than bags
- More or less bins dependent on site
- Enable charities to provider the Freighter service
- ALL valuable materials – the waste we don't use, electricity produced by the incinerator
- Freighter/Social Enterprise should have some input from staff – there was a church project that failed

- Wouldn't back separating out valuable materials for recycling
  - Too much already
  - Glass Collection – suggested
  - Green sacks too expensive
  - Happy with current service
  - Where does heat from swimming pool go?
  - Charitable Freighter collection
  - Would separate more valuable materials if not too complex
  - Make it easier to recycle, cut costs
  - Plastic Tetra Packs need recycling
  - Too much packaging!
  - In favour of enabling charities to collect waste
  - New Waste and Recycling in Medway paper and card is separated. The value has gone down. Don't make more complicated
  - Legalities involved in offering incentives...
  - In Medway and Sittingbourne the Freighter is provided by a Social Enterprise.
  - In Medway kitchen and garden waste are not separated – more efficient approach
  - Offset with Council Tax
-

## Existing revenue streams



- Litter enforcement and 'people being sick'
- At an Essex Council – Bin men don't ever collect on Mondays because of bank holidays – On Mondays bin men do maintenance works – this approach aids efficiencies.
- Litter enforcement for dog mess
- More discretion with litter enforcement – 3 strikes
- Planning advice charged at £10 per sq metre
- Crematorium – pond needs fish and benches and also a younger caretaker
- Litter Enforcement – good job
- More Drug and Alcohol support needed.
- Expand Litter Enforcement to fly tipping
- Market Crematorium elsewhere and offer services for obese
- Don't reduce car parking!
- Car Parks – make more of them
- Litter enforcement is a good deterrent

- Season Tickets for car Parks
- 

## Other

### **What other ideas can you think of that would generate an income or create efficiency savings?**

- Would rather pay the council for local student bus passes
- We waste a lot – high street money spent on meetings etc before ‘will we, won’t we’. Not enough joined up thinking
- Are parking attendants on a ‘quota’ – scrutinising this – the common belief that they do detracts from Maidstone
- Stop Benefits – intense questionnaires
- A Pub
- The carriage Museum
- Keep as much as we can in-house and keep empty properties occupied
- Improve public area with cafes/landscaping/art
- Interim semi-bulky collection at mid price range?
- Pay Toilets
- More advertising
- More Direct Sales
- Cemetery Memorials
- Electricity
- Internal Expertise – Hire Out
- Advertising
- Hire Out Town Hall
- Printing/Publishing
- Sale and redevelopment of Car Parks
- Energy efficiencies
- Accessibility – tackling inequalities.

- Empty buildings should be let on short term leases and taken back when needed by the public
  - Public consultations are too complicated – intrusive questions – should be idiot proof.
  - Art galleries for teenagers, creative stimulus.
  - Music and Arts events
  - Art Gallery for young people to display
  - Switch cafe not open when out of school
  - Hot air balloon rides in parks
  - More events – make the most of space
  - Better Enforcement.
-



**This report is available in alternative formats.  
For further information about this service please  
contact the Scrutiny Section on 01622 602524.**

**The report is also available on the Council's  
website:**

**[www.maidstone.gov.uk/osc](http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/osc)**

# Agenda Item 10

## **Maidstone Borough Council**

### **Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

**Tuesday 3 April 2012**

#### **Work Programming 2012-13**

**Report of:** Overview & Scrutiny Officer

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Committee are invited to consider items for the Overview and Scrutiny work programme 2012-2013.

#### **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 That the Committee suggests items for next year's Overview and Scrutiny work programme.
- 2.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committees will be meeting in June 2012 to agree their work programmes for the next municipal year. At each Committee meeting Members will consider the work programme suggestions from officers, members of the public, Councillors and the 2011/12 Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

#### **3. Future Work Programme**

- 3.1 Topics for the work programme must not include individual complaints or have been reviewed in the two years previously. Reviews carried out by Overview and Scrutiny in the last two municipal years have included:

- Customer Service Gateway;
- Rural Economy;
- Securing Water Supplies;
- Obesity;
- Domestic Violence;
- Neighborhood Action Planning;
- Mental Health Services (joint with Tunbridge Wells);
- Traffic Congestion; and
- Waste and Recycling and the New Waste contract.

- 3.2 The Committee could choose not to consider items for 2012-13 however this would mean that a valuable opportunity to suggest items from experienced scrutiny members would be lost.

#### **4. Impact on Corporate Objectives**

- 4.1 The Committee will consider, as part of the formal work programme planning process, whether potential items meet the council's corporate objectives.

- 4.2 The Strategic Plan sets the council's key objectives for the medium term and has a range of objectives which support the delivery of the council's priorities. Actions to deliver these key objectives may therefore include work that the Committee will consider over the next year.