

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 14 JUNE 2011**

PRESENT: Councillors Butler, Field, FitzGerald (Vice-Chairman),
Mrs Joy, Nelson-Gracie and Mrs Wilson

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

Resolved: That all items be web-cast.

13. Apologies.

Councillors Paterson, Mortimer, Blackmore, Stockell, Ash, Yates and Parvin sent their apologies.

14. Notification of Substitute Members.

It was noted that Councillor Fran Wilson was substituting for Councillor Paterson, Councillor Joy was substituting for Councillor Mortimer, Councillor Nelson-Gracie was substituting for Councillor Ash and Councillor Butler was substituting for Councillor Stockell.

15. Notification of Visiting Members.

There were no Visiting Members.

16. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

There were no disclosures.

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

Resolved: that all items be taken in public as proposed.

18. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 May 2011

Resolved: That the minutes of the meetings held on 25 May 2011 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting and duly signed by the Chairman.

19. Housing Strategy 2011/12 -2014/15

The Chairman introduced Ellie Kershaw, Policy and Performance Officer and John Littlemore Head of Housing and Community Services. Ms Kershaw introduced the Draft Housing Strategy. She explained that

Maidstone had taken the opportunity to refresh its Housing Strategy at a time when the coalition Government was introducing new legislation affecting housing and the financial climate was making it harder for people to obtain mortgages. The key aim of the document was to develop Maidstone borough's urban and rural communities as models for 21st century quality and sustainable living. The Officer described it as an overarching plan that would guide the Council and its partners in tackling the major housing challenges facing the borough. The Strategy was looking ahead, covering 2011-2015, and aligning itself with the Homes and Community Agency's four year development framework. Members were informed that the Strategy covered two of Maidstone Borough Council's three priorities; For Maidstone to be a decent place to live and Corporate and customer excellence. The strategy also reflected the vision and long term objectives of the Sustainable Communities Strategy 2009-2020.

Members questioned the gaps in the document. It was explained that the document was a draft and the gaps would be completed as part of the ongoing consultation process and the targets would be informed by those meetings. With regards to targets Members agreed that the document would make more sense if these were referred to as target dates. The Committee felt that the way in which the document demonstrated that its four priorities were actioned could be made clearer by simply changing the order of the four elements used to explain this. Members made a number of suggestions regarding the wording of the document. They were assured that the examples given had been altered at an earlier stage in the consultation process (after the report had been submitted to this Committee). Officers were able to additionally take on board Members advice on referencing within the document as it was felt that background documents had been used to inform the document in areas such as Risk Targets and other statements. It was agreed a brief footnote highlighting the document or website used would be sufficient. The Committee questioned some of the wording in the document that made reference to legislation that had yet to become law. This led Members to question the timing of the document. Mr Littlemore explained that the Housing Strategy had expired and they had been faced with the choice of waiting or moving forward with the legislation pending. He told the Committee they had chosen the latter option, making informed assumptions where necessary. Members felt that the wording could be changed to reflect this. The Committee additionally asked that the outcomes for the priorities were altered to read as a statement rather than an explanation for greater impact.

Members specifically queried Priority 3 in the document in relation to Actions. It was highlighted that only small landlords were mentioned. It was felt that there should be an additional paragraph to ensure that it was clear that action would be taken against any landlord providing poor living conditions.

The Committee raised questions about Homelessness in the borough and were informed that this had risen for the first time in four years reflected by an increase in those in Bed and Breakfast accommodation. Mr

Littlemore explained that the footfall at the Gateway had increased from 2,100 in 2009 (January-March period) to 3,100 in 2011 for the same period. The Committee was informed that a different approach had been taken for 2011 in counting the number of people sleeping rough in the borough. In the past a physical count had been attempted, the current year's approach was an estimated figure given by Porchlight, the Police and the Day Centre. The estimated figure for Maidstone was 26.

The Officer explained that the Government Rough Sleeper Advisors had helped Maidstone to identify gaps in their procedure that would be taken forward following on from their diagnostic visit. He told that Committee that Maidstone needed to understand and adopt current ways of working and understand what was happening now. Members questioned rough sleepers in rural areas. Mr Littlemore explained that this was difficult to identify and they were reliant on PCSO's and Parish Council's in these areas. If rural hotspots were found he assured Members, services would be directed to them.

The Committee was also interested in the impact that the Prison had on Housing in Maidstone. Mr Littlemore told Members that there was an issue for Maidstone with people returning to Maidstone after release because they had built up a network on day release. The Officer also highlighted the female prison and the probation hostel as areas that contributed to housing needs in this area. It was decided that the issue should be saved for a later discussion

Members raised questions on a number of Housing issues that were not covered in detail by the Housing Strategy. With regards to Older Persons and Young Persons Housing they were told that supplementary documents were being brought forward. Rural Housing and Rural Exception Sites was a particular area of interest. Mr Littlemore informed the Committee that they were committed to providing rural housing but that the biggest challenge was finding sites. The Officer explained that they had two surveys to complete. Members offered their support in this task and were instructed to contact Andrew Connors in the Housing Team for advice.

Members asked the Officer for updates on relevant Housing plans to enable them to remain informed in all areas.

With regards to the Housing Strategy Members felt unable to endorse the document in its current state but advised they would be prepared to review the document electronically once the suggested amendments had been made.

It was recommended that:

- a) The Draft Housing Strategy with the revisions recommended by the Committee be circulated to Committee Members and appropriate Substitute Members electronically for approval;
- b) Where a 'Target' is present in the document, this should be changed to read 'Target Date';

- c) The early creation of the document ahead of the Localism Bill becoming Law created a hiatus in the Committee's understanding of some of strategy's intentions. It is recommended that where the wording in the document can appear vague; the sentence should begin 'it is anticipated that'.
- d) The order in which information is presented to demonstrate how priorities will be actioned should be revised to the following for ease of read:
 - o Priority
 - o Why it is important to Maidstone
 - o Outcomes (labelled a, b and c if multiple)
 - o Actions
- e) Under Priority 3 in the document there should be an additional paragraph to cover large landlords, offering the assurance that there will be action taken against any landlord providing poor living conditions;
- f) The outcomes should be harder hitting in their wording, providing a powerful statement rather than a diluted explanation;
- g) The document provides a reference to risk factors and other areas of Housing that have their backing in another overarching document. Where this is the case there should be a footnote or a link to the relevant website;
- h) The Committee expressed their interest in the development of the West Kent Local Investment Plan and the Kent Supported Plan. John Littlemore to provide copies or links to these documents via the Scrutiny Officer; and
- i) That Assisted Living be addressed and be brought into the Housing Strategy.

20. Appointment of Joint Health Scrutiny Committee

The Chairman asked for nominations for representatives for the Joint Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Health Sub Committee. The Committee was requested to enable the protocol agreed in Maidstone's Overview and Scrutiny procedure rules based on the principles that Overview and Scrutiny 'should minimise the additional administrative burdens on local authorities or NHS bodies'. It was also stated in the protocol that District Councils should coordinate or have joint committees to consider local service issues to ensure cross-district issues are dealt with jointly.

Absent Members Councillor Paterson and Councillor Mortimer were nominated and appointed as representatives for the Joint Health Sub

Committee. A third represented could not be appointed due to the level of absence and Substitute Members present.

It was resolved: that a Joint Health Sub Committee with Tunbridge Wells be formed with Councillors Paterson and D Mortimer nominated with an invitation for the 3rd appointment to the Joint Health Sub Committee should be sent by email to all Members of the Committee and the appointment made at the next meeting.

21. Waste Review

Members were asked to consider the draft scoping document for the 'Making waste work for Maidstone' review.

The Committee discussed ways in which evidence could be sought and the possibilities of co-opting other bodies, members of the public and internal Officers. The Committee felt that it was important to firstly establish where the Council was nationally in the area of waste. Members also felt that it was important to understand how satisfied businesses were with waste services and in particular the smaller businesses. The emphasis of the review was stressed as being about reuse and recycling. The Committee also considered the Scrutiny Officers briefing note which gave the informed perspective of the Waste Services Manager, Jennifer Gosling on the draft scoping document and relevant dates to consider in relation to the tendering process for the new Waste Contract, provided by Steve Goulette, Assistant Director Environment & Regulatory Services. In relation to the advice given by Ms Gosling that the focus should be on medium and small businesses, the Committee felt that their focus should be smaller and independent businesses.

It was resolved that:

- a) Steve Goulette, Assistant Director Environment & Regulatory should be contacted regarding an invitation to co-opt officers to the Committee for the purpose of the waste review;
- b) A representative from Defra should be invited as a witness to inform the Committee;
- c) Background information on Dr Jane Beasley should be provided to the Committee so an informed decision could be made on her suitability as an expert witness;
- d) A public meeting held in the Business Community at either the Federation of Small Businesses or the Marden Business Forum should be added to the scope. The meeting should provide an open forum for businesses;
- e) The Federation of Small Businesses should be added to the witnesses already suggested;

- f) A visit to the Incinerator and Blaise Farm should be added to the scope as site visits to be organised;
- g) The 'invitation to tender' document should be circulated to all Members; and
- h) The briefing note provided should be circulated to absent Members and the updated scope should be circulated to all Members, including Substitute Members present.

22. Future Work Programme

The Committee considered their future work programme and the relevant reports for decision in the Forward Plan.

It was resolved that the Community Development Strategy 2011 to 2016 should be added to the future work programme and the relevant Officers invited to the next meeting.

23. Duration of Meeting

6.30 p.m. to 8.02 p.m.