

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE REGENERATION & ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 25 FEBRUARY 2013**

PRESENT: Councillor Burton (Chairman)
Councillors Black, Cox, Cuming, Newton, Paterson,
Ross and Springett

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

That all items on the agenda be webcast.

74. Apologies.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Beerling.

75. Notification of Substitute Members.

There were no substitute members.

76. Notification of Visiting Members.

Councillor Mrs Gooch attended as a Visiting Member with an interest in item 8 Core Strategy Update.

77. Disclosures by Members and Officers.

There were no disclosures.

78. 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.

79. Call for Evidence on Local Growth, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Enterprise Zones

The Chairman welcomed John Foster, Economic Development Manager to the meeting. Mr Foster informed the Committee that Kent County Council was not responding to the call for evidence.

Mr Foster explained to the Committee that employers are saying that school leavers lacked the skills required by employers such as teamwork. However; these skills are contradictory to how schools manage performance which is based on pass rates. In addition funding for skills follows participation and retention and in turn does not match up with gap

in the labour market. For example there may be 90,000 people wanting to do hairdressing but the demand may only be 10,000. This issue is not helped by when employers also do not understand the long-term skill requirements for their business. Mr Foster told the Committee that Mid-Kent College does engage with businesses and that he was also working with businesses promoting the Employers Ownership Fund which builds tailor made courses for specific business requirements.

The Committee asked if work placements and work experience was undertaken in education and how matching of skills/employment desires with employers was done. They were informed that more businesses need to take on work placements and this would allow a wider variety of placements but that some employers particularly small businesses and the self-employed saw the paperwork as a barrier.

The topic of careers guidance was discussed and it was noted that there was a national service but that one to one guidance was occurring less in schools. It was noted that this function was a responsibility of the education authority but could also be provided by a borough council.

The Committee asked about other schemes operating in the country with the aim of getting people into work, in particular offering to provide training to employers if they employ someone. Mr Foster explained that these schemes are extremely expensive but that they were promoting the wage allowance scheme which works on a grant basis.

The Committee noted that the Council took on apprenticeships each year, that informal coffee mornings with Job Centre Plus was taking place and that the Kent Youth Council was looking at issue of skills and employability.

The Committee thank Mr Foster for the update and concluded that from the update given that the Council should respond to the call of evidence on local growth and the skills system, it was requested that this response be circulated to the Committee for reference.

Resolved: That the Council should respond to the request for evidence on local growth and the skills system.

80. Core Strategy Update

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Garland, Leader of the Council, Councillor Stephen Paine, Cabinet Member for Planning, transport and Development and Rob Jarman, Head of Planning to the meeting.

The Committee were told that the evidence base was key in gaining a decision on the Core Strategy and that out of the twelve strategies that have been presented to the inspector only one had passed. It was explained to the Committee that this was the reason for the move from an aspiration strategy to a realistic strategy.

The importance of a decision being made in March was discussed and the Committee were reminded that the Council had not allocated any land in the last 15 years which left them without a five year land supply and therefore vulnerable to application in areas that the Council may not wish to develop. The committee noted that this was a real danger to the envisioned development of the borough.

The Committee were informed that there was now a local plan which was an amalgamation of the core strategy and the search for sites, with a new timeframe of 2011-2031. The reason for the timeframe change was because the DCLG 2010 demographic estimates were different to the 2008 data on which is what we had been working towards. For Local Plan the 10,000 jobs figure had been removed due to a lack of control and reverted back to employment floor space.

In response to a question it was clarified that junction 8 was strategic location rather than a specific site in the plan as there was no overarching need to release it. It was noted that the time period where full weight could be given to policies adopted since 2004 was about to close and from then on the NPPF takes precedence.

The Committee raised concerns over the proposed bus lane and other transport measures in the Local Plan. The Committee were told that there were no funds for new roads and that a demand management approach was being proposed, this means making better use of the existing roads and encouraging public transport. The proposed bus land was expected to cut the journey time for both public transport users and car users. The Committee considered that they needed more information on the transport measures being proposed and requested that they receive a presentation on these measures prior to the Cabinet meeting on 13 March. It was also agreed by the Committee that all members should familiarise themselves with the papers for Cabinet on 13 March.

There was some discussion around the possibility of the Leeds/Langley bypass and rumoured costs of this project following an article in the local press. The Officers did not have evidence to support the figures rumoured and the Committee requested that Councillor Paine contact his counterpart at KCC in order to seek clarification on the costs of this project.

Resolved:

- a) That the Regeneration & Economic Development Overview & Scrutiny receive a presentation on the transport measures as set out in the Local Plan prior to the decision being made on 13th March;
- b) That the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development contact his counterpart at Kent County Council to clarify the costs of a Leeds/Langley bypass, reporting back to the Committee;

- c) That all members familiarise themselves with the papers for Cabinet on March 13 2013; and
- d) That in recognition of the danger of premature applications for significant housing development that the options be given top priority and that members are engaged in the forming of this policy.

Meeting Closed 20:36