

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY, LEISURE SERVICES AND  
ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 16 JULY 2013**

**PRESENT:** Councillors Brindle, Mrs Gibson, Mrs Joy (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Mannering, D Mortimer, Newton and Yates

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

**It was resolved** that all items be web-cast.

**12. Apologies.**

Apologies were received from Councillors Ash, Beerling, Mrs Blackmore and Munford.

**13. Notification of Visiting Members.**

There were no Visiting Members.

**14. Notification of Substitute Members.**

Councillor Newton and Councillor D Mortimer attended as Substitute Members for Councillors Munford and Beerling respectively.

**15. Disclosures by Members and Officers.**

There were no disclosures.

**16. To consider whether items on the agenda 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.

**17. Minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2013.**

**It was resolved** that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 June be agreed as a correct record and duly signed.

**18. Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services - Priorities for the Municipal Year 2013/14**

The Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services provided an overview of his priorities for the year (attached at **Appendix A**), highlighting five priority areas:

1. Young People;
2. Road Safety (Killed or seriously injured);
3. Health Inequalities (including families with 0-5 years);
4. Housing Services; and
5. Parks and Leisure Services.

The Committee questioned young people's involvement in the youth forum and whether or not this had increased. The Cabinet Member agreed to investigate this and provide Members with an update.

A Member of the Committee highlighted an issue with play facilities for young children near to Heather House in Park Wood being misused by young adults. The Committee requested an update on this, included information on alternative facilities available for older children/young adults in the area.

In relation to priority area 4, Housing Services, the Committee requested an update on the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation by Maidstone Borough Council for temporary housing.

**It was resolved** that:

- a) Further information be provided to the Committee on the youth forum and whether or not there has been increased involvement;
- b) The Committee be updated on its concerns regarding the play facilities for young Children at Heather House and the alternative facilities available for young adults in the area who are currently using them; and
- c) An update on the use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation by Maidstone Borough Council for temporary housing be provided to the Committee.

## **19. Draft Report: Approval of a new Play Area Strategic Standard**

The Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services provided an overview of the Play Areas review and the options going forward which had first come to Scrutiny in April 2013. It was at this meeting that the Committee had agreed for further work being undertaken on 'option 3' which would be reported back to Scrutiny.

Option 3 was the strategic standard for the provision of Play Areas in the borough. The criteria for which was to have a play area within 12 minute minutes walk for all residents across the borough. It was proposed that there would be an investment of £1.8 million to bring all Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) Strategically Important Play Areas to a Green Standard. It was estimated that 20 MBC Non Strategically Important Play Areas would not be invested in. Non Strategically Important Play Areas would be offered to Community Groups and Parish Councils and MBC would offer support to these groups.

Jason Taylor, Park and Leisure Manager provided a verbal update to the Committee's recommendations (Appendix B).

In response to Members questions it was clarified that play equipment would be removed from non- strategically important sites within 1 year and returned to an open space if not taken on by another body (i.e. a community group or Parish Council).

A Member raised concerns about play areas being returned to open spaces and possible issues with misuse by older teenagers. Amanda Scott, Play Facilities Development Officer explained that older teenagers tended to go to areas where they could sit. Therefore if a play area was to become a non-strategically important play area and returned to an open space, it would become less attractive. It would also be more visible from the roadside to Police and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs).

The Chairman moved the recommendations in the report. Members agreed the recommendations as set out in paragraph 2 of the report with some additional wording.

**It was resolved** that the Committee agree the following recommendations, as set out in paragraph 2 of the draft report with some additional wording added which is highlighted in bold.

That the Cabinet Member agrees to:

- a) A new borough wide standard of play provision being "that most residents across the borough will live within 12 minutes walk of a good standard play area";
- b) Available funding in future is targeted at these Strategically Important Play Areas;
- c) That any non Strategically Important Play Areas be offered to the community **and added to the Community Right to Bid list of Assets**; and
- d) After one year any Non Strategically Important Play Areas that are not taken on by the public will have the equipment removed, but will be retained as open **space for perpetuity**.

## **20. Future Work Programme.**

The Committee considered its Future Work Programme and the Committee's training needs. Members specified that they would like training in 'challenging' or questioning skills.

**It was resolved** that no changes be made to the Committee's work programme at present and training be organised on challenging and/or questioning skills.

## **21. Duration of meeting.**

6.30 p.m. to 7.40 p.m.

# Minute Item 18

Overview and Scrutiny: 16 July 2013

Portfolio Holder Priority Statement

Councillor John A. Wilson, Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services

## **Introduction**

The priorities held by Councillor John A. Wilson, Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services for 2013/14:

1. Young People
2. Road Safety (Killed or seriously injured)
3. Health Inequalities (including families with 0-5 years)
4. Housing Services
5. Parks and Leisure Services

## **Priority 1: Young People**

Maidstone has approximately 18,700 young people aged 10 – 19 years.

The borough is made up of two thirds of young people living in the urban areas and one third of the young people living in the rural areas. Children and young people are being affected by deprivation in both rural and urban areas. Data demonstrates that Maidstone has a relatively high number of 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET); with the unemployment figure in 2010 for under 24 years at 30.2%. The Borough has a high proportion of schools leaving achieving five or more A\* - C grade GCSEs (87.3%). The year has seen many changes for how we achieve outcomes for young people. Savings have been made and innovative ways on how to continue valued projects achieving real outcomes for young people have been developed. Maidstone Youth Forum's online information service 'In the Stone' for young people, parents and professionals within the Maidstone Borough continues to be well used with an average of 10,000 hits every quarter.

## **Priority 2: Road Safety (Killed or seriously injured)**

The costs and impact of road collisions (killed and seriously injured) are significant in both financial and human terms. Maidstone is a large district in size with the majority of crashes located in the town centre and arterial routes leading to and from the town. Maidstone has amongst the highest population (total) for any district in Kent. Maidstone had the highest number of casualties in all Kent roads in 2009 (705). The number of killed and seriously injured (KSI) was 64 in 2009. Although figures are decreasing, they are still amongst the highest in the county. Maidstone has recorded a high proportion of people travelling to work by car and this is reflected in the statistics, as the district again recorded the highest number of car user casualties in 2009 (510). Maidstone has also recorded the highest number of 17-24 year old casualties in the last 3 years and an increased number of child casualties over the same period. Crashes involving 17-24 year old casualties are spread throughout the district, when looking specifically at the 15 KSI crashes these are split evenly between the built up and no build up areas, 47% occurred on 30mph roads. Powered two wheeler crashes in Maidstone make up 10% of the county's total. Whilst there are a high number of P2W crashes in the Maidstone town centre, they are also located on the strategic routes into/out of the town centre, particularly the A20, A229 and A274.

Safety in Action is an annual, two-week programme designed to help Year 6 pupils develop their competence and confidence in responsible citizenship and safety skills. It is hoped the programme will help students deal with potential life-threatening situations and aid their transition period from Primary to Secondary School by making them more safety aware. The Road Safety team contributes to the event by providing a 'Road Safety' scenario, focusing on pedestrian safety. 76% of children who attended Safety in

Action said they learnt a lot at the event with teachers commenting "A fantastic rotation of real life activities designed to challenge the children's choice making"

3,359 pupils were seen by the Road Safety team through the Schools education programme. The programme includes RUSH, License to Kill and Car'nage and looks at the dangers to young people on the roads and provide them with strategies to help keep themselves and others safe.

### **Priority 3: Health Inequalities (including families with 0-5 years)**

Relative deprivation impacts on a person's ability to participate in or have access to employment, occupation, education, recreation, family and social activities and relationships. People in deprived circumstances often do not present with major health problems until too late. Barriers to presentation include structural issues such as poor access to transport; language and literacy problems; poor knowledge; low expectation of health and health services; fear and denial and low self-esteem.

In Maidstone, the difference in life expectancy between the most deprived and most affluent wards in Maidstone is 8.9 years. Further analysis shows that the differences in life expectancy are directly linked with levels of deprivation, worklessness, access to healthy housing, attainment in education, good support networks and access to clean green spaces for recreation. By enabling young people to develop their life skills they will be more ready to achieve better whilst in education, become ready for employment and learn those skills and have positive aspirations to pass onto their children. The Marmot report identified that by age 6 the attainment of a child from a poor socio economic background with high cognitive skills will be overtaken by a child with poorer cognitive ability from a better off background.

50% of offenders leaving prison are unable to read and write – improving basic education attainment will reduce the cost of re-offending and crime.

Maidstone has a higher estimated percentage of obese adults than the England average – at 26.5 per cent (24.2% nationally). Reception year children classified as obese is similar to the England average, but school aged children spending at least 3 hours a week on physical activity at school is 11.3% below the national average. Kent has seen an overall reduction in teenage pregnancy of 18%, compared to a national reduction of 19%; however Maidstone figures have increased by 11%. However, rates in hotspots have significantly reduced.

### Priority 1: Young People: 2013/14 Action Plan

Action	Description	Deadline	Assigned to
Support the Switch Youth Cafe in running Maidstone Youth Forum	Increase youth participation in the Forum and develop the Forum's link across initiatives key priorities including, alcohol and substance misuse, positive relationships and health and wellbeing	March 2014	Julia Fraser Sarah Shearsmith
Support the organisation of the Youth Sport Achievement Awards	Working in partnership with Active Maidstone to improve sports/club partnerships and deliver YSAA	February 2014	Sarah Shearsmith
Encourage youth engagement via our social media channels	Promote and develop In the Stone website and social media platforms e.g. Twitter and Facebook	December 2013	William Solly Sarah Shearsmith
Encouraging young people to take more of an active role in the council's democratic services process.	Working in partnership with Democratic Services during Local Democracy week to run a programme of activities for young people	March 2014	Julia Fraser Sarah Shearsmith

### Priority 2: Road Safety (killed or seriously injured): 2013/14 Action Plan

Action	Description	Deadline	Assigned to
Support a town centre road safety poster campaign	Promote Maidstone Road User targeted messages through the town centre and Urban Blue bus.	December 2013	Duncan Bruce
Support a parishes road safety poster campaign	Work with Kent Road Safety team to promote their 'Drinking and Driving' poster in the parishes	March 2014	Duncan Bruce/Emma Fagg
Promote a road safety event where key stakeholders promote road safety issues to the public and businesses	Promote road safety campaigns at Safety in Action and Maidstone Mela, working with KFRS	March 2014	Duncan Bruce/Sarah Shearsmith

Using the Borough Update as a means of publicising the road safety message	Promote road safety messages to residents, with input from Kent Police, Fire and Rescue Services and Kent and Medway Safety Camera Partnership;	December 2013	Duncan Bruce/William Solly
Ensure Police are consulted with regard to new large developments to identify potential road safety problems	Kent Police Crime Prevention Design Advisor advised by MBC Planning at pre-application stage of proposed large developments	Ongoing	John Grant/MBC Planning

### Priority 3: Health Inequalities (incorporating 0-5 years)

Action	Description	Deadline	Assigned to
Develop the strategic direction and priorities for action to tackle health inequalities in Maidstone	Host a Health Inequalities Stakeholder event	July 2013	Katie Latchford
	Draft a Health Inequalities Action Plan for the Maidstone Borough	August 2013	Katie Latchford
Work with Maidstone partners, including the Kent Public Health, West Kent CCG, PPG and Healthwatch, to encourage better joint working and develop funding opportunities	Re-establish a Health and Wellbeing delivery group in Maidstone	September 2013	Sarah Robson
Work with Maidstone partners to develop a joint action plan to allow better joint working and pooling of resources and funding	Host a task and finish group to develop a 0-5 years Action Plan to support key areas including; literacy and reading, road safety, healthy weight and eating and practitioner training	September 2013	Katie Latchford

## **Priority 4: Housing Services**

### 1. Homelessness Strategy

The council's current Homelessness Strategy was adopted in 2009 and runs until 2013 and a key piece for work this year will be to review the strategy and adopt a replacement.

Since 2009 Maidstone has seen levels of homelessness rise, with an increase in the number of households accepted as being homeless and in priority need from 7 households in 2009/10 compared with 198 households in 2012/13.

This sharp rise in homelessness has been driven by a range of factors that have influenced the local housing market and the wider economy. The range of welfare reforms introduced from April 2013 are also starting to impact negatively on homelessness and the replacement of Housing Benefit with Universal Credit presents a further negative pressure on homelessness.

### 2. Housing Strategy refresh

The council's Housing Strategy was adopted in 2011 and runs to 2014/15. Since the adoption of the strategy the local housing market across Maidstone has changed markedly. The strategy would benefit from a refresh to ensure that the action plans continue to meet our needs moving forward, however, we need to be mindful of the developing Local Strategic Plan and the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document, as these should dovetail with the Housing Strategy.

### 3. Reducing homelessness

The number of homeless applicants accepted as being in priority need has averaged 193 for the two years 2010/11 and 2012/13. While this is a symptom of a range of external factors it is important that our service continues to respond to changing demands and that we make use of innovative approaches to reduce homelessness and its negative impact.

### 4. Reducing the number of empty homes across Maidstone

The council's Empty Homes Plan was agreed in February 2013 and sets out how the council intends to both reduce the number of empty homes and bring empty homes back into use. Across Maidstone there are around 1,420 empty homes in total (2.11% of the total housing stock) of which around 1,350 are in private ownership. Maidstone has the third lowest percentage of empty homes across Kent and Medway, and many of these are transactional empty homes (e.g. in the process of being sold) with only around 420 homes that have been empty for more than 6 months.

The council is currently engaged in an innovative lease repair scheme for long-term empty homes working in partnership with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and the work that the council is delivering has attracted national media interest.



## 5. Improving private rented housing

The private rented sector continues to grow and now exceeds the subsidised housing sector in terms of the number of units of accommodation. In Maidstone, due to the limited supply of subsidised housing, particularly one and two bedroom properties, the private rented sector is key to providing a range of housing options to our residents.

To support this the Private Sector Housing Team enforce the statutory requirements for private rented accommodation to be free from severe health and safety hazards, as well as the mandatory licensing requirements for larger HMOs. To provide a robust response and to support the private rented sector as a sustainable long-term housing solution, we will deliver a proactive inspection programme targeting high-risk accommodation.

## 6. Delivering a new approach for temporary accommodation

Due to the large number of homeless applicants approaching the council for advice and assistance, the number of applicants to whom the council owes a duty to provide interim accommodation has also risen. This has resulted in emergency temporary accommodation costs escalating.

To help address this demand we are working as part of the Commercialism Project to purchase suitable properties to use as emergency temporary accommodation which will both reduce the financial impact and improve our service to homeless applicants who require emergency accommodation.

## 7. Reviewing the council's Allocation Scheme

The council's Allocation Scheme for nominating housing register applicants was replaced from April 2013 with a new scheme which replaced the previous points-based system with a banded scheme where applicants are given priority based on the date they joined the register.

The new scheme requires that applicants have a local connection to Maidstone, along with a housing need, and has resulted in a reduction in the number of housing register applicants from over 3,000 to just over 1,100.

As the new scheme introduces a series of radical changes it is important that we review both the operation of the scheme and the impact on our customers to ensure that the scheme meets our aspirations moving forward.

## 8. Maximising capacity in the private rented sector

As demand for limited amount of available subsidised housing continues to outstrip demand, the use of the growing private rented sector as a sustainable housing option becomes more important. In February, the council also adopted a policy for ending the council's housing duty to certain homeless applicants by making an offer of private rented accommodation in accordance with the relevant legislation and guidance.

For the council to make best use of the private rented sector, we are re-launching our Bond Scheme which provides an incentive to private landlords where they offer tenancies to homeless by setting up Maidstone Homefinders which will provide a service for private landlords to advertise their accommodation to housing register applicants. The scheme will

also provide a range of incentives to private landlords with the aim of increasing the number of properties that are available to homeless applicants.

#### 9. Improving home energy efficiency

Sadly, compared with Kent and Medway, there continue to be a higher than average number of excess winter deaths across Maidstone - largely as a result of poor thermal performance of homes as well as the incidence of fuel poverty. We are working closely within the Kent and Medway green Deal Partnership to deliver a range of cross borough interventions to provide improved home energy efficiency. These will include no cost insulation and energy efficiency measures, the introduction of collective switching for energy bills, and the extension of oil purchasing clubs in rural areas.

#### 10. New affordable housing

We remain on track to deliver just under 200 new affordable homes this year. We will continue to promote the Help to Buy equity loan scheme makes new build homes available to all home buyers (not just first time buyers) who wish buy a new home through developers participating in the scheme. The government has just announced that it will continue funding new affordable housing post 2015; the details have yet to be provided but it will be an extension of the current programme that has to date enabled us to provide nearly 600 homes for families.

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

**Committee: COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Meeting Date: 22 April 2013**

**Minute N<sup>o</sup>: 84**

**Topic: Play Areas Review**

<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>
<p><b>It was recommended that:</b></p> <p>The Committee agrees that the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services continue to investigate Option 3 and report back to the Committee with further details which should include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Detailed costings about the proposals including potential savings relating to the economies of scale that may be achieved;</li> </ul>	<p>Councillor John A Wilson</p>	<p><b>Costings</b> <b>Current situation</b></p> <p>There are currently 69 MBC Play areas across the borough. On average play areas need complete replacement at least every 15 years with the busier ones, such as Mote Park, needing major refurbishment every 7-8 years.</p> <p>Currently 51 of MBC’s play areas will need work of varying degrees in the next 5 years to get to and maintain them at green standard.</p> <p>The current capital budget for replacement/ refurbishment of MBC play areas is £100,000 a year.</p> <p>To replace all of the MBC play areas would cost over £3m and with current budgets would take over 40 years. This takes no account for increases in costs of equipment or budgets.</p> <p>This demonstrates that maintaining the current number of play areas, with the current level of capital, is not a realistic</p>		<p>Jason Taylor</p>

		<p>option.</p> <p>Currently not all of our play areas are in a position where they need total refurbishment but 51 out of the 69 MBC play areas do need work of varying degrees to get them up to green standard. The longer it takes to get a proactive programme in place the greater the speed at which the quality of the councils play areas will decrease.</p> <p><b>Information on costings for proposed</b></p> <p>In the last meeting a number of options for managing MBC Play Areas in the future were discussed.</p> <p>The third option discussed at the meeting would mean instigating a new standard of play provision across the borough of "the majority of residents being a maximum of 12 minutes walk from an amber or green play area"</p> <p>In this option once a play area decreased to the amber standard it would then be targeted for improvement, before it dropped to red standard. These green, amber and red standards refer to the current standards detailed in the play area scoring matrix.</p> <p>The mapping exercise carried out identified that if the standard of "the majority of residents being a maximum of 12 minutes walk from an amber or green play area" were to be adopted then there would potentially be 20 MBC play areas</p>		
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		<p>that were not strategically important in achieving this standard. These non Strategically Important Play Areas (SIPA's) would be offered to the community to take over or closed in time.</p> <p>The cost to bring the SIPA's from their current to green standard would be approximately £1.8m as detailed in the presentation. There is a slight variation in whether this is done in 1 or 5 years.</p> <p>This £1.8m is based on the standard of all of the play areas when they were last scored at the beginning of 2013 and further deterioration will have an effect on the cost of getting them back to green standard.</p> <p>Information showing the standard of all of the play areas across the borough when they were inspected in January this year is enclosed with this response. Information detailing what is required to bring all MBC play areas to green standard is held by the Parks section.</p> <p>The current revenue budget for play area maintenance would also need to be increased as detailed in the presentation to scrutiny.</p> <p>The 12 minute standard refers to toddler and Junior play areas. Youths facilities such as Skate Parks and Multi Use Games areas were not included, as teenagers travel further to use the facilities that they want to use rather than the one which is local to them. However all existing youth facilities will be brought up to green standard as part of this proposal.</p>		
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information on ownership and different ownership models for play areas, this should include Parish ownership and the support through the Parish Service Scheme;</li> </ul>		<p><b>Ownership</b></p> <p>Currently 40 play areas in the borough belong to parish councils, KCC and housing associations. A number of the SIPA's network will belong to the parishes and these other bodies. Currently if a parish council provides a play area in an area that MBC does not, a revenue payment is given to that Parish council, as they are effectively providing play on behalf of MBC.</p> <p>If in the future MBC were to no longer provide a play area and the Parish Play area became the SIPA then the Parish Council would receive a revenue payment from MBC through the parish services scheme</p> <p>Option three also proposes that a grant of £10,000 be available to Parish Councils that provide SIPA's to be used toward new equipment.</p> <p>Currently the parishes receive no contribution from MBC towards the improvement of their play areas.</p> <p>Non-SIPA's that are owned by MBC will be offered to community groups, such as parishes, Housing Association, Community Groups, Trusts, etc, to take on. MBC cannot offer financial support to these groups, as these play areas would not be strategically important, they would provide help and support to these groups in areas such as play area management, maintenance suppliers and sources of funding. It may also be possible to carry out safety inspections.</p>		
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Further information on the 12 minute standard for most residents; and</li> <li>Clarity on which payments are from the Capital Budget and which monies are from the Revenue Budget.</li> </ul>		<p>These non SIPA's could be taken on either by lease from MBC or the Freehold ownership could be passed on.</p> <p><b>Walking Distances</b></p> <p>GIS mapping of all play areas was carried out to establish walking distances between play areas and homes. This identified areas of over and under provision.</p> <p>Using an average walking speed of 3 miles an hour the following distances were tested as reasonable walking times from the play areas.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>804m = 10 minutes walking time</li> <li>965m = 12 minutes walking time</li> </ul> <p>When mapping this out boundaries such as the river, main roads and the railways were taken into account.</p> <p>GIS maps were built showing the walking distances from play areas and the overall provision of each play area.</p> <p><b>Capital and Revenue</b></p> <p>Revenue is used for repairs of play equipment or safety surfacing</p> <p>Capital is used to refurbish, replace or renew play equipment, safety surfacing, supplementary items or whole play areas.</p>		
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## Notes on the completion of SCRAIP

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- <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.
- <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.