

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

Date: Tuesday 12 February 2019
Time: 7.30 pm
Venue: Town Hall, High Street, Maidstone

Membership:

Councillors M Burton, Garten, Joy, D Mortimer (Chairman), Powell (Vice-Chairman), Purle, Mrs Robertson, Rose and Webb

The Chairman will assume that all Members will read the reports before attending the meeting. Officers are asked to assume the same when introducing reports.

AGENDA

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1. Apologies for Absence
2. Notification of Substitute Members
3. Urgent Items
4. Notification of Visiting Members
5. Disclosures by Members and Officers
6. Disclosures of Lobbying
7. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.
8. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 15 January 2019 1 - 5
9. Presentation of Petitions (if any)
10. Questions and answer session for members of the public (if any)
11. Committee Work Programme 6
12. Reports of Outside Bodies 7 - 8
13. Presentations of Outside Bodies

Liz Abi-Aad on behalf of Cutbush And Corrall

Issued on Monday 4 February 2019

Continued Over/:

Alison Broom

Alison Broom, Chief Executive

14. Member Agenda Item Request - Review of "Access to the Council's Service for Disabled People 2005-2006"	9 - 79
15. Strategic Plan 2019-45 Action Plan	80 - 95
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19. MBC Safeguarding Policy	118 - 158

PUBLIC SPEAKING AND ALTERNATIVE FORMATS

If you require this information in an alternative format please contact us, call **01622 602899** or email committee@maidstone.gov.uk.

In order to speak at this meeting, please contact Democratic Services using the contact details above, by 5 p.m. one clear working day before the meeting (i.e. Friday 8th February 2019). If asking a question, you will need to provide the full text in writing. If making a statement, you will need to tell us which agenda item you wish to speak on. Please note that slots will be allocated on a first come, first served basis.

To find out more about the work of the Committee, please visit www.maidstone.gov.uk.

Should you wish to refer any decisions contained in these minutes to the Policy and Resources Committee, please submit a Decision Referral Form, signed by three Councillors, to the Head of Policy, Communications and Governance by: 29th January 2019.

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Communities, Housing and Environment Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 15 JANUARY 2019

Present: Councillors Garten, Joy, D Mortimer (Chairman), Powell, Purle, Mrs Robertson, Rose and Webb

122. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Burton.

123. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

124. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

125. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no Visiting Members.

126. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Councillor Purle confirmed that, with regard to Item 15. Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Review, his business was undertaking work for a financial services firm that was connected to a provider of emergency housing in the Borough. He would therefore remove himself from the meeting during debate and voting on the item.

127. DISCLOSURES OF LOBBYING

There were no disclosures of lobbying.

128. 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.

129. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 DECEMBER 2018

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 11 December 2018 be approved as a correct record and signed.

130. PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS (IF ANY)

There were no petitions.

131. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (IF ANY)

There were no questions from members of the public.

132. COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Mrs Jennifer Shepherd, Head of Environment and Public Realm, advised that the "Litter Enforcement Review" item could be removed from the Committee Work Programme, as it was incorporated in the "Waste Crime Update".

The Committee agreed that due to the high workload scheduled for 12 February 2019, the "MBC Provided Gypsy and Traveller Sites" item was to be considered on 19 March 2019.

The Committee requested that a visit to Heather House be arranged prior to consideration of the topic on 10 April 2019.

RESOLVED: That the Committee Work Programme be noted.

133. REPORTS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no Reports of Outside Bodies.

134. FEES & CHARGES 2019/20

Mr Mark Green, Director of Finance and Business Improvement, addressed the Committee. Mr Green explained that, in accordance with best practice, Officers reviewed fees and charges on an annual basis to account for aspects such as inflation. The report outlined the proposed fees and charges within the remit of the Committee. Mr Green advised the Committee that paragraph 1.6 of the report should be amended to:

"The overall increase in income if these changes are agreed and implemented as planned is expected to be £76,520 which amounts to a 5.9% increase in the overall budgeted income figure for this committee for the current financial year. This information excludes fees for licensing, which will be reported to the Licensing Committee for approval."

The Committee expressed concern at the proposed increased charges for the Garden Waste Service, as there was a risk that residents with lower incomes would be discouraged from using the service. Further to this, the Committee was uneasy about the price increase for Food Export Certificates. It was suggested that House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licenses were an opportunity for the generation of additional income.

In response to questions from the Committee, Mr Green stated that:

- The increased charges for the Garden Waste Service did not exceed figures that had previously been agreed by Members.
- It was necessary to consider the increased charges for services in the context of balancing the whole Council budget.
- It was preferable to generate additional income rather than cutting services.
- The Garden Waste Services charge was originally due to be increased in both 2019/20 and 2020/21. The proposal in the report ensured that customers did not experience increased charges in consecutive years, and that costs remained competitive with other Local Authorities.

Mr John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Community Services, explained to the Committee that HMO Licences lasted for three years. A reduced income from licences was therefore expected in Years Two and Three following a large number of applications in Year One. The rationale for increasing Food Export Certificate charges was to be circulated to the Committee outside of the meeting.

Mrs Shepherd stated that neighbouring Local Authorities had explored the introduction of a Garden Waste Service, and estimated that it would cost £15 more than the proposed charge. Furthermore, Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) offered residents the opportunity to use smaller bins or share bins with neighbours to ensure value for money. Customer usage figures were monitored on a monthly basis and could be shared with the Committee, while historical figures regarding price increases could also be shared outside of the Committee.

The Committee commented that it was preferable to agree the proposed increased charges and to monitor uptake of services to assess the impact of the decision. Despite the reluctance to increase prices, it was stated that there were no other viable way to save the required money.

RESOLVED: That the proposed discretionary fees and charges set out in Appendix 1 to this report are agreed.

Voting: For – 5 Against – 4 Abstentions – 0

Note: Chairman's casting vote in favour.

135. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY & BUDGET PROPOSALS

Mr Green addressed the Committee, and detailed that the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) had been aligned to the new Strategic Plan priorities. Some growth had been provided to address specific priorities, such as additional funding for street cleaning. Savings were also

proposed, which were to be delivered through improved efficiencies, generating income and reconfiguring services. Where possible, savings would not come from cuts to services. Mr Green explained that the Committee had a substantial capital programme budget including investment in property that was used to provide temporary accommodation.

The Committee acknowledged the need to balance the budget, and commented that aligning the budget to the Strategic Plan was a positive approach. It was suggested that, in future, the Council could charge other organisations who wished to access recorded CCTV footage.

In response to questions from the Committee, Mrs Shepherd stated that the increased monies made available for street cleaning would fund street washing equipment and an additional 20 hours per week of staffing to operate the machinery.

Mr Green explained to the Committee that the additional £3m for investment in temporary accommodation would allow the Council to purchase at least 10 properties. This enabled the Council to meet need more effectively, at a reduced price. This also ensured the Council had assets that could be sold if the need for temporary accommodation reduced in the future.

RESOLVED: That:

1. The revenue budget proposals for services within the remit of this Committee, as set out in Appendix A, be agreed for submission to Policy and Resources Committee.
2. The capital budget proposals for services within the remit of this Committee, as set out in Appendix B, be agreed for submission to Policy and Resources Committee.

Voting: For – 5 Against – 2 Abstentions – 1

Note: Councillor Purle left the meeting after consideration of this item.

136. HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPER REVIEW

Mr Littlemore explained to the Committee that the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Review explored homelessness trends over the previous five years. It was explained that the Homelessness Reduction Act 2018 changed how information was collected, and it was therefore difficult to retrospectively compare data. The report highlighted an increased level of homelessness each year. The key reason for homelessness was that an individual had lost accommodation after being evicted by family or relatives, while an increase in domestic abuse had been identified. The £3m investment focussed on providing temporary accommodation for families where children were homeless, as this was a priority need.

In response to questions from the Committee, Mr Littlemore explained that:

- The reasons for homelessness encompassed within the “Other” option could be circulated outside of the Committee meeting.
- The information in the report was taken from returns that were provided to the Government on a quarterly basis, and the information was therefore publicly available.

RESOLVED: That:

1. The findings of the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Review (Appendix A) are approved to be used in drafting the consultation document and in developing the next Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy.
2. The Policy and Resources Committee are recommended to invest a further sum of £3 million towards acquiring additional temporary accommodation in order to meet rising need.

Voting: Unanimous

137. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 7.41 p.m.

2018/19 WORK PROGRAMME

	Committee	Month	Lead	Report Author
Q3 Performance Report 2018/19	CHE	Mar-19	Angela Woodhouse	Anna Collier
Q3 Budget Monitoring 2018/19	CHE	Mar-19	Chris Blundell	Paul Holland
MBC Provided Gypsy and Traveller Sites - requested by Cllr Harwood	CHE	Mar-19	William Cornall	John Littlemore
Crime and Disorder Overview and Scrutiny Committee	CHE	Mar-19	John Littlemore	Matt Roberts
Adoption of the new Homelessness Strategy 2019-2024	CHE	Mar-19	John Littlemore	Hannah Gaston
Strategic Plan - New KPIs	CHE	Mar-19	Angela Woodhouse	Anna Collier
Service Level Agreements Review	CHE	Mar-19	John Littlemore	Tony Stewart
GP Provision Update	CHE	Apr-19	Alison Broom/CCG	Alison Broom
Heather House	CHE	Apr-19	William Cornall	William Cornall
Environmental Health Annual Report	CHE	Apr-19	John Littlemore	Tracey Beattie
Environmental Services - Commercial developments	CHE	TBC	Jennifer Shepherd	Jennifer Shepherd
Options to Resolve the Issue of Graffiti in the Borough	CHE	TBC	William Cornall	
Local Care Hubs	CHE	TBC	Alison Broom	
MBC Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)	CHE	TBC	William Cornall	Mark Egerton

Communities Housing & Environment
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12/02/19

External Board/Outside Body

External Board/Outside Body	Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Councillor(s) represented on the Outside Body/External Board	Cllr Derek Mortimer
Report Author	Cllr Derek Mortimer
Date of External Board/Outside Body Meeting Attended	01/01/19

Purpose of the External Board/Outside Body:
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<p>“To review and scrutinise matters relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services in Kent through exercising the powers conferred on Kent County Council under Section 244 of the National Health Service Act 2006 as amended by the Health and Social Care Act 2012.”</p>
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Update:

<p>The Committee have requested a report from the Kent & Medway STP on the work being undertaken as part of the Workforce Workstream with a specific focus on the Primary Care Workforce.</p>

<p>Main points from the meeting on GP’s services :- 90% of patients using the NHS services come from via GP referral. Lack of GP’s across Kent equated to an 11% vacancy gap and there is a substantial lack of nurses within practices. 20% of GP’s are currently over 55, which also appears to be the preferred retirement age amongst GP’s although some stay on longer but reduce their hours in the practice. A programme of retention and recruitment is planned costing 1.5 million pounds in Kent. A new Kent & Medway Medical School is planned in Canterbury. Members raised concerns that the new STP (Sustainability Transformation Programme) was fitting services to budgets as opposed to the health needs of the population.</p>
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Communities, Housing and Environment Committee

12/02/19

External Board/Outside Body

External Board/Outside Body	Maidstone Mediation
Councillor(s) represented on the Outside Body/External Board	Clive English
Report Author	Clive English
Date of External Board/Outside Body Meeting Attended	01/01/19

Purpose of the External Board/Outside Body:

To provide Mediation services to the public across a range of provisions to the people of Maidstone, Malling and in some disciplines wider parts of Mid Kent.

Update:

Maidstone Mediation continues to provide services relating to Neighbourhood Disputes, Parent and Teen interactions, Anger Management, Peer Mediation (for some 23 schools) and homelessness, and is seeking to extend this work in a number of areas, including working with additional local housing providers.

Additional courses are being run within the Prison Service to support the ongoing deployment of Prison Mediators, which can contribute both to reducing tensions and assist with rehabilitation. MMS is currently also contributing to work in the area of restorative justice and hosted the latest meeting of the Restorative Justice Forum on 31st January.

Services are capable of being referred to by Housing Providers, MBC or by self-referrals, the Police, or mental health teams, depending on the service.

The current training course for volunteers is underway but there is still a need for more volunteers and anyone interested can contact madstonemediation@gmail.com

Communities, Housing and Environment Committee

12/02/19

Member Agenda Item Request - Review of "Access to the Council's Service for Disabled People 2005-2006"

Introduction:

Some weeks ago I received a telephone call from a resident who is severely visually impaired regarding an issue to do with his bin collection and also an inappropriate comment that was made to him by a member of staff. This was when he requested, not for the first time, that he be given the details for bin collection via email as he has the equipment installed which would enable him to 'read' the date without other assistance.

I have been contacted by residents regarding a lack of empathy when dealing with disabled customers and I am concerned that we are not providing sufficient training to support this.

Both issues were dealt with, however, it did make me wonder when Councillors had last reviewed access to our services in relation to disability of all types both physical and mental, and checked that they were satisfied in relation to this and that we could genuinely pride ourselves on equality issues.

Mrs Woodhouse reminded me that the Scrutiny committee had completed an in-depth survey in 2005-2006, 'Access to the Council's Services for disabled people' but, as far as I can ascertain, councillors have not done any work in this respect since.

I requested an item be put on the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee as the complaint was in relation to an environment issue and also because the Constitution states that this committee:

"take the lead within the council for ensuring that the council delivers its strategic objectives with regard to communities, Housing, Public health and the environment; to ensure inclusive and productive community engagement...."

Desired Outcome:

My request is that, as a first step, it would be useful to see what has happened regarding the recommendations made in that in-depth earlier report and then consider whether this committee should do a further review to ensure this Council is not only legally compliant, which I am sure it is, but keeping up to date with all aspects of making the lives of residents with disabilities as independent as possible and ease of access in relation to the services we provide.

I am also requesting that the training provided to staff for dealing with customers with disabilities is reviewed.

Thank you

Councillor Fran Wilson

Report Appendices

- Appendix 1: Access to the Council's Services for Disabled People

Maidstone Borough Council

“Access to the Council’s Services for Disabled People”

Recreation and Community Services
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2005 - 2006



**This report is available in alternative formats.
For further information about this service please
contact the Scrutiny Section on 01622 602463.**

**The report is also available on the Council's
website: www.digitalmaidstone.co.uk/osc**

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Executive Summary

The Prime Minister's Strategy Unit report *Improving the life chances of disabled people* highlights that 'using the widest survey definition, it is estimated that there are about 11 million disabled adults in the UK – one in five of the total adult population – and 770,000 disabled children'¹. In light of the fact that disabled people are six times as likely as non-disabled people to be out of work², and therefore in need of support from society, it begins to become clear that there is a great need for public bodies such as Councils to make their services accessible to disabled people. Amongst other factors it was these kinds of statistics that were the drivers behind the legislative approach to putting an end to discrimination against disabled people undertaken in the last ten years.

From October 2004 'service providers' have been required to fully comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). This Act made it unlawful for a service provider to discriminate against persons on the grounds of disability. On paper, Maidstone Borough Council's approach to disability and to disabled people is relatively good. The Council has a local performance indicator that measures how accessible the Council's buildings are to disabled people. This indicates that 100% of the Council's buildings are compliant with the Act. Beyond national legislation the Council, primarily through its Social Inclusion Manager, undertakes a variety of other work with regard to disabled people and access. The Council's Social Inclusion Strategy sets out work to be undertaken and the Mobility Focus Group operates as a focal point in which organisations working with disabled people can provide feedback and act as consultees to the Council. Training on disability awareness is available to all staff members. The Council also produces a disabled shopping guide and an accessibility map for the Town Centre.

Nationally though many public services are not delivering for disabled people, and many people have real difficulties accessing basic services³. It has been our experience as Councillors that, despite compliance with the relevant legislation, access to the Council's services for disabled people is not as good as it could be. We have received representations from constituents expressing dissatisfaction with the likes of disabled parking provision in the Town, or difficulties obtaining services from the Council. As a result of such reports we, the Recreation and Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, decided to look closer at how the Council provides its services to disabled people. We wanted to look beyond the legislative box-ticking exercises and find out from the people with disabilities themselves what their experiences had been accessing the Council's services and find out from them where they thought the Council could make its improvements.

¹ Prime Minister's Strategy Unit; *Improving the life chances of disabled people – final report (Executive Summary)*; January 2005; p9.

² Evidence received in presentation from Social Inclusion Manager.

³ Social Exclusion Unit, ODPM; *Breaking the cycle – taking stock of progress and priorities for the future*; 2004.

Our principle findings are:

- **Focussing on disability**

In order to place disabled people at the heart of service provision the Council must embed access for disabled people at the heart of the organisation as both a corporate and strategic priority. If such an approach is embedded at the top of the hierarchy it can then be cascaded through the rest of the organisation. The employment of an Access Officer and the integration of access issues should be embedded into the Council's performance indicators and mystery shopping was considered integral to such an approach. The Mobility Focus Group should be re-named and formal reporting lines established to allow it to demonstrate where it has had an effect.

- **Training**

Even though disability awareness training is available to all staff, take-up of such training is low and has been declining. Our witnesses and other evidence received have all indicated that staff training is one of the key areas in which a real difference can be made. Such training should be provided by or include relevant local disabled organisations. There is a need for the Council to change the way it organises its disability awareness training to make it compulsory for all front-line staff with opportunities provided for staff to receive specialist training for particular disabilities. All staff should receive a basic level of both disability awareness and equality training.

- **Communications**

The communication of how the Council meets the needs of its disabled customers is essential to encourage people with disabilities to engage with the Council and an information leaflet that sets out such details should be produced. The Council should undertake a review of the ways in which it communicates with people with disabilities. The Council has accessibility guidelines for the production of its public documents but these do not appear to be widely used: this situation needs to be amended. All 'essential' or 'user' information should be provided automatically in alternative formats and details on the availability of information in alternative formats should be provided on all public documents and in a consistent place.

It is hoped that the recommendations that have resulted from our inquiry will provide a blueprint for the Council to refocus its efforts on how we provide our services to people with disabilities

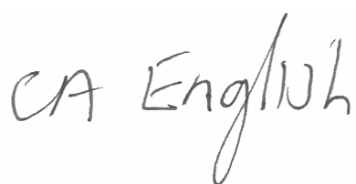
Chair's Introduction

This report is the outcome of considerable research by Members and Scrutiny Officers and is informed by a large volume of evidence concerning the operation of many of the Borough Council's services, both from internal witnesses and from members of the public and community groups.

Although the Borough Council has long had high aspirations in relation to access issues, and many noble policies, there had never been a considered attempt to look at these policies and aspirations in the round, or to assess their effectiveness in actually delivering improved access to services or promoting Social Inclusion. This review has attempted to take that broad perspective and look at a wide range of both services and those individuals and groups seeking to access these services.

As a result the report makes numerous recommendations which the Committee believes will make a significant difference to the quality of the services the Borough Council provides to people with disabilities and ease their ability to access these services.

This should be an aim which the Borough Council consider it to be a matter of fundamental principle to achieve, and these recommendations will help to facilitate this aim. The key to achieving the objective however is to recognise that this report and its recommendations, even if implemented in full, will constitute the beginning of a process and not the end of one. Much of the key work that the Council needs to do is medium or long term, and therefore the response of the Council to this report needs to take account of this.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clive English". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Councillor Clive English.

Chair, Recreation and Community Services Overview and Scrutiny
Committee 2005-06

Thanks:

The Committee would like to express its gratitude to all of the following who have assisted in some way in the production of this report.

Maidstone Borough Council:

Administrative Assistant to the Community Development and Social Inclusion Manager; Community Development and Social Inclusion Manager; Head of Regulatory Services; Head of Transportation and Environmental Services; Property, Procurement and Projects Manager; Training & Development Manager; and Web Manager; .

Organisations/Groups:

All Members of Maidstone Mobility Focus Group; Kent Association for the Blind; Kent Association for the Disabled; Kent County Council's Deaf Services Bureau; Maidstone Community Care Housing Ltd (MCCH); Maidstone MIND; Mencap (Maidstone); Sense (Maidstone); Town Centre Management; and West Kent NHS and Social Care Trust;

Individuals

Bernice Abbit, Mrs H Arthurs, Mr and Mrs Avis, Robert Baker, Maggie Brooks, Peter Budgen, John Bull, Wendy Carreras, Maureen Chappell, Merryl Chesher, Vicci Chittenden, Mr F. Costella, Angela Crooks, Mr R. W. Edwards, David Evans, Mr and Mrs Farrant, Mr R.J. Gash, Barry Ginley, Jeanne Henderson, Ann Lewis, Adam Luckhurst, Judy Mills, Mr Bill Moss, Steve Overton, Sarah Priest, Yvonne Savage, Kerry Turner, Pat Wilmshurst, Darren Wilson, Mrs M Woodger, Chrissie Yerlikaya, and Lee Young

Note on reading the report:

Letters written in bold, enclosed in brackets and written at the end of a paragraph, for example **(a)**, refer to a recommendation made by the Committee. The full list of recommendations, with the relevant paragraph number cross-referenced, can be found at the end of the report.

Terms of Reference

The Recreation and Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee decided to conduct an inquiry into access to the Council's services for disabled people. The terms of reference for the inquiry, agreed by the Committee were as follows:

- Assess the practical difference made to disabled people accessing the Council's services following the implementation of the DDA;
- Analyse plans or strategies the Council has in place to improve access to its services for disabled people;
- Consider further steps the Council could take to improve the provision of its services to disabled people;
- Assess current levels of diversity/equality (disabled) training provided to all staff, with a particular focus on training for frontline staff;
- Assess the ways in which the Council publicises services for disabled people— both the Council's own services and those provided privately or by the voluntary and community sector;
- Analyse how the Council measures its performance in providing accessible services to disabled people and assesses levels of accessibility;
- Consider the levels of accessibility of non-face-to-face service provision at the Council (telephone/website);
- Consider examples of Beacon Authorities, best practice and Government and voluntary and community sector initiatives with regard to disabled access; and
- Assess ways in which the Council could extend its influence to encourage improvements in access for disabled people beyond the Council's direct service provision;

The present membership of the all-party Committee is as follows:

Councillor English (Chair) (Liberal Democrat)
Councillor K. Stevens (Vice-Chair) (Labour)

Councillor Butler (Conservative)
Councillor Cook (Labour)
Councillor Hinder (Conservative)
Councillor Joy (Liberal Democrat)
Councillor Mortimer (Liberal Democrat)
Councillor Naghi (Liberal Democrat)
Councillor Oldham (Conservative)
Councillor Mrs Parvin (Conservative)

Approach

1. From the beginning of this inquiry we were eager to take as inclusive an approach as possible. As such in the course of the inquiry we have held discussions with people with a range of disabilities. We have used the definition of a disabled person set out in the Disability Discrimination Act (1995):

A disabled person is someone who has a physical or mental impairment, which has an effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day to day activities

2. We have also adopted what is referred to as the 'social model' of disability. This means that we are of the view that, although a person may have an impairment that can be medically defined, it is the environment in which that person finds themselves that is disabling.

3. The Committee was also minded to consider ideas of equality. The Committee acknowledge that the term 'equality' and the idea of 'treating people equally' necessitates the creation of a level playing field. "Equality means being treated with an equal level of respect and equal access to employment, services, training etc. It is proportional treatment, according to needs, that leads to equal outcomes"⁴

4. In the course of our inquiry we have received evidence from people with mobility difficulties, visual impairments, the deaf and hard of hearing, people with mental health problems, people with learning disabilities and those who care for people with multiple disabilities. Alongside the evidence received in formal Committee meetings we have also adopted a number of other means of canvassing the views of people with disabilities. These have included:

- Conducting a mystery shopping exercise of those services most used by people with disabilities;
- Distributing a questionnaire that sought an assessment of the Council's current service provision for disabled people and suggestions as to what the Council could do to improve; and
- Attending the Mobility Focus Group both to keep the group up-to-date with progress on the review and to receive expert feedback and assistance.
- A visit to Maidstone Museum

5. We have also consulted numerous documents, government guides, best practice examples at other Councils and reference books which we have endeavoured to credit in this report.

⁴ IODA: *Diversity, Fairness and Equality Information Booklet*;

The Council's Current Approach to Disability

6. This section of the report sets out the key ways in which the Council currently approaches issues that relate to disability. It sets out the corporate policies in place, how the Council provides training to its staff on disability matters and how, through its planning function, the Council approaches access for disabled people.

7. The Council as a corporate body already undertakes quite a substantial amount of work with regard to disability and it is the Council's Social Inclusion Manager who takes the lead on such matters. The Council has a Corporate Equality Plan 2005-2008 which includes a range of actions and targets that relate to the provision of services to disabled people. This plan is monitored and evaluated annually by the Cabinet Member for Communications and External Affairs. Examples of targets in the plan include:

- To update and develop the guides and maps for disabled people in Maidstone in partnership with the voluntary, community and business sector (11.7)
- To maintain the two ticks award for disability (1.6)
- To establish a strategy and action plan for making play areas and open spaces accessible to people with mobility problems (10.4)⁵

8. The Social Inclusion Manager also highlighted to us that by December 2006 the Council will be required to have a separate Disability Equality Plan as part of its Corporate Equality Plan. This is as a result of the implications of the Disability Discrimination Act (2005). The Leader's 20/20 Vision document includes an ambition to make Maidstone an inclusive place in which to live. One of the priorities for the Council's Local Strategic Partnership relates to access. Its aim is to create a more inclusive community stating 'we must take account of the needs of all people including; disabled people, young people, older people, people on low incomes and those who live in the rural areas. Only by recognising diversity and planning services for all at an early stage will we move towards full inclusion'⁶

9. The Council is currently at Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government which is considered a key indicator and a national benchmark. This puts the Council in the top 5% of Councils nationally. The Council also recently completed a pilot national disability benchmarking exercise in which it performed in the upper quartile.

10. A number of alterations have been made to Council buildings as a result of the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). This has involved an approved 3 year programme of adaptations to buildings (2002-2005)

⁵ The Full Corporate Equality Plan 2004-07 can be accessed via the [digitalmaidstone](http://digitalmaidstone.com) website

⁶ Community Strategy for Maidstone Borough; 2003; p10

funded by a special budget for this purpose of approximately £500,000. Adaptations have included:

- Hearing loops in all reception areas;
- Text telephones which can be answered quickly by the Switchboard team;
- Lifts in each building;
- Setting up 'language line', by which customers can request to speak to a member of the Council in their original language and which provides a translation service;
- Changes to Disabled toilets; and
- Automatic doors leading into all Council buildings and entrances which does not rely upon stairs;

11. The Beacon Council Round 3 Report *Better Access and Mobility* highlights that 'the complexity of accessibility and the range of ways in which it can be influenced means that developing an effective monitoring and evaluation framework is essential in developing best practice and demonstrating success'. We would like to see a method of measuring and monitoring improvements to access as part of the implementation of the adopted recommendations of this report. Both mystery shopping and a questionnaire were methods used by the Committee as part of its inquiry. The use of local performance indicators and regular access audits would also be suggested. **(a)**

12. We also learnt that the Council produces a town centre shopping guide for people with disabilities and an accessibility map of the Town Centre. The production of the 2006 shopping guide was delayed due to budgetary constraints and also to wait for the town centre shops to settle down following the completion of the Fremlin Walk development. A strategy of delaying the reproduction of the accessibility map of the Town Centre has also been implemented to ensure the accuracy of the map once published.. During the last three years over 9000 copies of the shopping guide and accessibility map have been distributed. Despite this the Committee were surprised to learn from some witnesses that they were not aware of the existence of either the shopping guide or map. We were of the view that if the Council is to go to the expense of producing such documents, and we thoroughly endorse their continued production, that it is a waste to then not market its existence properly. We would endorse a marketing campaign to accompany the launch of the 2006-7 shopping guide and the re-printing of the town centre map. The Committee also felt that the production of revised versions of the shopping guide and accessibility map should not be delayed or abandoned for purely economic reasons. **(qq)**

13. The Council's website also provides well for people with disabilities in Maidstone. The site is 'Browse-Aloud' enabled, a speech programme that enables the contents of web-pages read out loud. In August 2005 the site was 70% AAA compliant and the accessibility pages provide details about which of the pages are not AAA compliant and when compliance can be expected.

Best Practice

London Borough of Lewisham: A Beacon for Access and Mobility

Lewisham was awarded Beacon status for accessible services for 2001/02. The Beacons advisory panel concluded that Lewisham had taken a holistic view of their customers' needs through effective and regular consultation and worked effectively with other agencies and external partners to deliver integrated seamless services.

One of the critical success factors identified at Lewisham was its inclusive community consultation and involvement. This led to the Council identifying different needs of its population in relation to accessible services including:

- Employment of two signers to provide services for AccessPoint [One-Stop-Shop] customers with hearing impairments
- Availability of large print forms for partially sighted people and in Braille for people with severe visual impairment upon request.

Lewisham also carries out regular mystery shopping and its Disability Task Group conducted one exercise which highlighted issues regarding accessibility. Lewisham's corporate objectives have since been changed to reflect the need to improve accessibility to services for their disabled customers

From the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) website, Beacons for Accessible Services (Round 2)

14. The accessibility and mobility web pages on the digitalmaidstone website provide the following information:

- the accessibility standards to which the website complies;
- details about how to access information relating to accessibility online;
- links to the mobility maps and guides produced by the Council including the Shopping Guide, accessibility map, guide to getting around Whatman Park and the locations of accessible toilets, car parks and dropped kerbs;
- useful links for people with disabilities such as the Disability Rights Commission, local and national organisations and social services.

15. The Council introduced a new content management system for its website in the summer of 2005 and this has contributed to its much-improved accessibility. We welcome this development and the attendance of the Council's Web Development Manager at meetings of the Mobility Focus Group to receive feedback on the website. However we are again concerned that the existence of such a source of information is not widely

publicised amongst people with disabilities and would like to see a marketing campaign to correct this. (qq)

Mobility Focus Group

16. The Council runs a Mobility Focus Group (MFG). This group was established to allow a wide range of disability organisations to be consulted with and to express their views to Cabinet members and Officers. It meets approximately every two months. The Chairman of the group, the relevant Cabinet portfolio holder, is the means by which the views of the group are communicated through the Council. In addition the group has been made a formal sub-group of the Local Strategic Partnership (two representatives of the group sit on the Local Strategic Partnership) and is the specialist consultative group for the Local Development Plan on disability planning issues. The terms of reference for the group are as follows:

To set up, develop and maintain a focus group on mobility, involving a cross-section of community groups, in order to:

- (a) act as a focal point on all mobility issues*
- (b) discuss and offer advice on Council plans*
- (c) put forward suggestions, concerns and proposals to the Council*
- (d) get Council feedback*

17. We have received evidence from a number of individuals that suggested that the MFG did not seem to have the power that its previous incarnation (the Disability Advisory Sub-Committee (DAG)) had. We heard evidence from witnesses who had sat on the DAG that it was previously responsible for considering planning applications that had been flagged to it by the Council's then Part-Time Access Officer (a post that has now been deleted) and would also consider other Council policies and strategies when flagged to it due to issues of accessibility. However, the Social Inclusion Manager indicated that the majority of planning applications did not go to the group nor were many of the council's plans and strategies discussed at it. The Disability Advisory Sub-Committee was a formally constituted Committee of the Council prior to the reorganisation of local government that took place following the Local Government Act 2000. In contrast the Mobility Focus Group appears very much a consultative focus group with no fixed constitution. Although the Mobility Focus Group is a valuable tool for canvassing the views of disabled organisations within Maidstone we feel that it could benefit from a more formal structure in which it could be used as a standard point for consultation and encourage greater involvement of disabled people in the work of the Council. We are also concerned that the title *Mobility Focus Group*, and the group's terms of reference, do not acknowledge or embrace the full range of disabilities. Considering the outcomes of the DRC report (below) and the concerns expressed by Members and

witnesses regarding the MFG we recommend that a review of the group be undertaken. (c)

Best Practice

"Local groups of disabled people are often still perceived as a cheap or free source of advice and not as a valued community asset. Sometimes the enthusiasm and energy of individuals wanes in the face of constant struggle to meet demands...and feeling under-valued"

"There is broad consensus from national and umbrella organisations about what makes a successful local access group. It is the combination of an enthusiastic membership with appropriate training and resources, which engages the active involvement of local people. In turn, the local access group needs appropriate support comprising input from the local access officer; a room to meet and transport support for members; administrative support; involvement with a network / forum. If these essential ingredients are in place then the outcome is an impact on local decision making, for example, planning"

"In looking at what needs to be in place in order to ensure the improved and continued success of local access groups, national and umbrella organisations summarise this by suggesting that there needs to be:

- *Recognition for local access group involvement within the planning and development control processes;*
- *A sustainable network with adequate information and support, possibly similar to Age Concern England;*
- *Capacity within the group to actually do things;*
- *Responsive, flexible and sympathetic funding and support packages from a dedicated source (local or national)".*

Disability Rights Commission; Towards Access Standards: The Work of Local Access Groups in England and Wales; 2004

Training

18. As part of the Committee's inquiry we received evidence from the Council's Learning and Development Manager. Prior to the Officer taking up her post staff training that related to disability had been organised by the Social Inclusion Manager. The organisation of training was centralised in 2005 and is now handled by the Human Resources department. In recent years the number of staff members coming forward to take disability awareness training had reduced significantly and that, for example, in the period between January and March 2005 only the deaf awareness workshop had been run. From September 2005 the Learning and Development Manager had put in place a range of more broad-based attitude changing programmes for managers and staff that focussed on valuing diversity and a programme that focussed on welcoming customers with special requirements. A specialist disabilities programme had also

been established that would be organised when sufficient members of staff had signed up to it. The Learning and Development Manager indicated that her approach was to change the attitudes of people at work, but emphasised that such work needed to be accompanied by development in the organisation as a whole to enable people to apply their new skills.

19. We also learnt that the Learning and Development Manager had introduced a new system of appraisals. The focus of the new system was for staff to identify their objectives and establish a training plan to enable them to achieve those objectives. The corporate training programme would then be based on the training needs of staff identified through the appraisal process.

However it was acknowledged that equalities and diversity training did not emerge as staff priorities from

The most effective [disability equality or awareness] training programme always involves disabled people
Resource Disability Portfolio Guide 3;

this process. We felt that it would always be unlikely that a member of staff would sit down with their manager and highlight that they felt they had a problem with handling customers with disabilities. We recommend that all staff be required to undertake disability awareness and equality training, and would suggest that appraisals are updated to include evidence of an employees understanding of equality and diversity issues and highlight any further training that may be required. (q)

Planning

We [the Local Strategic Partnership] will:

- Ensure that plans for new developments focus at an early stage on good access for everyone;
- Comment on plans for new development and encourage individuals and local organisations to do the same

The Community Strategy for Maidstone.

20. The Committee received evidence from the Head of Regulatory Services who is responsible for the planning function at the Council. He explained to the Committee the national and local requirements for the consideration of access issues with regard to new buildings and developments. All new buildings are required to comply with the following standards and regulations:

- British Standard (BS)8300: 2001 Design of buildings and their approaches to meet the needs of disabled people;
- Building Regulations Approved Document M: Access to and use of buildings 2004⁷

⁷ Resource Disability Portfolio Guide 9; *Accessible Environments*; 2004; p9.

21. Part M of the building regulations stipulates that reasonable provision shall be made for people to gain access to and use of a building's facilities. Developers are required to provide an access statement to Building Inspectors that sets out how the building will comply with Part M and it is for the Inspector to decide whether or not the requirements of Part M have been met.

If inclusivity and accessibility are considered at the design stage of a new building... it will not make it more expensive than any other design solutions and aesthetic quality need not be compromised
Resource Disability Portfolio Guide 9; Accessible Environments; 2004; p14.

22. We also learnt that, contrary to popular belief, the Council did have a Supplementary Planning Guidance document that related to access for people with disabilities. This is a document that sets out requirements, beyond those of building regulations, of the Council for developers to adhere to, in this case with regard to access. However this was a document that was effectively lying dormant and was not used as part of the planning application process. Evidence we received both from the Social Inclusion Manager, the Mobility Focus Group and individuals suggested that Supplementary Planning Guidance, and its enforcement, was perhaps one of the single most effective ways in which the Council could bring about positive benefits for people with disabilities. The Head of Regulatory Services indicated that it was his intention to bring this document up-to-date in light of the new planning laws that were being implemented, the local development framework. A Supplementary Planning Document (the replacement for Supplementary Planning Guidance) relating to access for people with disabilities would be brought forward in mid-2006 as part of the development of the Local Development Framework Document. The Committee were assured that the Local Development Framework was also more robust than the previous planning system so enforcement of any Supplementary Planning Documents would be easier. We welcomed this development and received assurances that the Committee would be consulted when this document was developed and going through the approval process. We would also recommend that the Mobility Focus Group is involved in this process. **(t)(u)**

New Council Offices

23. In December 2007 the Council will relocate from its current offices to offices in the town-centre. The mystery shopping exercise, meetings of the mobility focus group and responses to the questionnaire have all referred at some point to difficulties with accessing the Council's buildings. As part of the office move a purpose built customer reception area will be built on King Street close to the Bus Station. The Committee consider the office move to be a huge opportunity to make the Council's accommodation conform to the highest possible accessibility standards. The Committee welcome the appointment of an access consultant to the

project by the Mall Corporation (which will be undertaken following planning approval) following the recommendation of the Mobility Focus Group to do so. The Committee recommend that such close partnership working between Council Officers, the Architects, the access consultant (when appointed) and the Mobility Focus Group continue. **(n)**

Evidence Received by the Committee from its external witnesses

24. This section of the report sets out evidence that the Committee has received, primarily in its formal evidence sessions. The evidence has been collated under broad headings that relate to the particular impairment.

Mental Illness

25. It is estimated that 'roughly a quarter of the adult population will, at some point in their lives, experience mental distress'⁸. The Committee received evidence from representatives of Maidstone Community Care Housing's (MCCH) Club Connects and also from Maidstone MIND. Our witnesses outlined the varied nature and seriousness of mental illnesses and how people with mental illnesses are not necessarily consistently ill to the same extent. MCCH supports its clients to increase their self-esteem and confidence with the aim to get clients into employment.

26. We discovered that one of the key barriers to accessing the Council's services for people with mental illnesses was a 'fear-factor'. For people with mental illnesses there can be a huge amount of fear associated with the arrival of an official looking envelope on their doorstep. Such communications from the Council can often be hugely important, relating to such things as the receipt of benefits or Council Tax arrears. However for people with mental illnesses, particularly if receipt of such a letter occurred during a time when the illness was going through a serious phase, such letters could go unanswered for weeks resulting in serious consequences. The Committee were concerned that such situations be avoided at all costs and discussed with the witnesses potential solutions to the problem. The following suggestions were made:

- The Council could establish a database of its service users which would identify, at the point of sending such letters, that the customer had a mental illness. Having flagged-up the existence of the condition Council staff could then take alternative action if the letter is unanswered. **(e)**
- Benefits forms could include a question such as 'Do you have a disability, including mental health, physical disability...?'. It was felt that such a statement should explicitly state 'including mental health' as people with a mental illness would not often classify themselves as 'disabled'. **(f)**
- The Council could enable customers to appoint an advocate if appropriate. If this was done the advocate could be notified that, for example, a Council Tax arrears letter had been sent and ensure that a response was forthcoming. **(g)**

⁸ Mainstreaming Mental Health: An Introduction for Councillors; *Democratic Health Network*; 2005; p3.

We felt that all of these suggestions could be easily implemented by the Council and that such steps would allow the Council to better cater its services to people with mental illnesses.

27. The Committee learnt that this 'fear-factor' did not just apply to letters but to accessing the Council's buildings as well. Mental illnesses can also affect people's self esteem and as such the thought of entering a Council building could be very intimidating. The Department of Health's Equality and Human Rights Group document *Guidance on developing Local Communication Support Services and Strategies* highlights that 'one of the central experiences of mental ill-health is a sense of being insignificant, powerless and out of touch'⁹. The staff at MCCH encourage their clients to be as honest as possible about their illnesses but despite this we did not feel that it should necessarily be incumbent on the person with the mental illness to inform every member of staff that they came into contact with. It was suggested that a named-staff member, perhaps who had undertaken specialist training with regard to mental illnesses, could be appointed from within the relevant departments or from amongst the front-line staff for people with mental illnesses to have as a first-point of contact. We believe that the reassurance that could be gained from knowing that there is someone who understands your situation and has the patience and time to deal with you would go a long way to overcoming this fear factor. **(o)**

28. Both Maidstone MIND and MCCH offered their services in a training capacity. We recommend that training opportunities be taken up with local organisations working in the field of mental health. **(r)**

Learning Disabilities

29. It is understood that there are over one million people country wide who have learning disabilities¹⁰. We had a further witness session from MCCH, the second time from representatives of Club Connects, a service provided by MCCH that provides adults

People with learning disabilities need information about every area of life. Being able to access information is an important part of playing a full part in society

Learning Disabilities Research Initiative (Department of Health); Information for All Guidance; 2004

and young people with learning and physical disabilities and mental health problems with a range of day, vocational, social and leisure opportunities. Some of the suggestions that had arisen from the Committee's previous discussions regarding mental health were also applicable to people with learning disabilities. The Council can also be an intimidating institution to people with learning disabilities. Our witnesses emphasised that staff training was key to improving access for people with learning disabilities.

⁹ Guidance on Developing Local Communication Support Services and Strategies; Department of Health: The Equality and Human Rights Group; 2004.

¹⁰ Ibid. p35

30. With regard to training a number of points were raised:

- The importance of politeness and patience when dealing with customers with mental health problems or learning disabilities¹¹;
- That a designated person trained to a higher level in dealing with customers with learning disabilities and mental health problems should be provided. It was felt that if a customer with a learning disability or mental health problem had a named person to ask for at Council offices the levels of fear and intimidation would be reduced;
- The importance of involving people with learning disabilities and mental health problems in staff training, including through attendance at services such as Club Connect. It was noted that Kent Police currently undertook such training.

We are eager to see these points picked up and highlight Kent Police's use of the services available at MCCH in their training as an example of local best practice. Our witnesses emphasised their willingness to be involved in such training with the Council. **(o) (q) (r)**

Staff attitudes have a profound effect on people with learning disabilities. Staff training must therefore be improved to help meet the needs. Providers of disability awareness training should seek greater input from organisations which represent people with hidden disabilities, such as learning disabilities. This could include involving people with learning disabilities in the training so they can meet members of staff.

House of Commons' Transport Committee; *Disabled People's Access to Transport: A Year's worth of improvements?*; 2005

31. For people with learning disabilities physically accessing the Council's services we were also provided with some useful information. Our witnesses acknowledged the existence and importance of private interview rooms as instrumental in reducing levels of intimidation. It was also suggested that Council staff could in certain situations visit customers in their own homes or in familiar environments. Although we acknowledge this as a positive idea we are also aware that this could have potential consequences from a staffing and health and safety perspective. However we are aware, not least from the mystery shopping exercise we undertook, that this is already practised by some sections of the Council. **(h)**

32. We learnt from our witnesses that Council communications can frequently be very hard for people with learning disabilities to understand. The avoidance of jargon was flagged by many of our witnesses, not just

¹¹ This point is also emphasised by the Guidance on Developing Local Communication Support Services and Strategies document which emphasises that people should be given time and respect, that their sentences should not be finished for them and that staff should not be patronising in language or tone.

those representing people with learning disabilities¹². We know that the Council assisted Maidstone Housing Trust to produce a leaflet for people with learning disabilities at the time of housing transfer and we were encouraged by our witnesses to undertake such work as a matter of course for the Council's more important communications. We felt that, the RNIB's recommendation that 'essential' or 'user' information be produced as a matter of course in alternative formats (see below), be expanded to include the use of suitable formats for people with learning disabilities. The Department of Health's Equality and Human Rights Group guidance document points out 'often people with learning disabilities cannot read and understand print, so there is a need for a user-friendly method of making your point'¹³. As with so many of the recommendations within this report, when you make things accessible for people with disabilities you are actually making them more easily accessible for everyone. We acknowledge the offer by the representatives of MCCCH to assist the Council in producing documents accessible to people with learning disabilities. (jj) (kk)

Making your information easier can be better for all the people you want to reach. Readers prefer plain language. Making easy information can save you time and money. Staff can spend a lot of time sorting out mistakes when information is not clear

Learning Disabilities Research Initiative (Department of Health); *Information for All Guidance*; 2004

33. We also heard that the ability to appoint advocates would also be of great assistance to people with learning disabilities. Some of the forms and documents that the Council issues, such as housing benefits forms, are subject to legal requirements for how the information is set out, and accessibility is not at the top of the list of requirements. However we felt that where local solutions to such issues could not be found the appointment of advocates would be essential. Complex information could then be copied to the advocate to flag the need for action. Again the question of establishing a database flagging the existence of a learning disability in a household was raised and endorsed by the Committee. (e) (g)

Mobility Difficulties

34. We received evidence from people with mobility impairments from many sources. The Committee conducted a witness session with a resident of the Borough who is a wheelchair user, held a meeting with a representative of the Disabled Person's Liaison Committee and received valuable information from Kent Association for Disabled People. We also

¹² Kent Association for the Disabled highlighted this as an issue in their comments on the draft heads of this report and it is also acknowledged as good practice in the Guidance on Developing Local Communication Support Services and Strategies document.

¹³ Guidance on Developing Local Communication Support Services and Strategies; Department of Health: *The Equality and Human Rights Group*; 2004; p35.

received a number of telephone calls and responses to our questionnaire from people with mobility difficulties. From a Kent perspective Maidstone is considered an accessible town when compared to many other towns in the area¹⁴. The disabled shopping guide and accessibility map were flagged as examples of best practice and such documents have attracted the attention of access groups elsewhere in Kent because of this. However it is notable that for residents of the Borough who have mobility difficulties it is felt that there remain a number of significant barriers.

35. Chief amongst the concerns of people with mobility difficulties was the provision of accessible parking. The Council has met the national target of providing 6% accessible public parking spaces of total spaces. However, it was felt that this statistic was something of a misnomer as we received evidence that, although the 6% figure was admirable, the more important factor was the location of such parking spaces. During this report's gestation period there was considerable press coverage surrounding this issue, particularly with regard to the removal of several accessible parking bays on Earl Street as part of the redevelopment of the area as a result of the Fremlin's Walk development.

36. One contributor to the inquiry reported that he returned to the Town Centre on four occasions to attempt to purchase his wife's Christmas present and had finally had to give up as he was unable to find an accessible parking space close enough to the Town Centre for him to be able to walk to the shops. The Blue Badge scheme was (formerly the orange badge scheme) 'devised to help with very severe walking difficulties. It enables those people to park their vehicles close enough to their destination to enable them to work, fulfil their domestic responsibilities and enjoy leisure pursuits'¹⁵. If there are insufficient accessible bays close to the Town Centre the whole purpose of the blue badge scheme is null and void. If we are to make our Town Centre as accessible as possible to all residents of the borough then the problem of the location of accessible parking bays must be tackled. The Committee were in favour of a review of accessible parking bays being conducted to allow a proper assessment of provision and use. **(y)**

37. We were disappointed to hear at the Mobility Focus Group from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transportation that he was more likely to place further loading bays in Earl Street than return accessible parking spaces to the location. We acknowledge the difficulties faced in such locations with the need for deliveries to be made to shops. However it appears that there has been a gradual increase in the number of loading restrictions placed around the Town Centre, preventing people with blue badges from parking on yellow lines. The Earl Street spaces are in an excellent position to access the centre of the town and the Committee recommend that the removed spaces be replaced. We also recommend that the Council undertakes a review of its accessible parking provision

¹⁴ Oral feedback at Mobility Focus Group from Kent Association for Disabled People.

¹⁵ Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee; *Review of the Orange Badge Scheme*; p7

with the emphasis on the location of the spaces rather than the number. (y) (z)

38. We undertook as part of our research a largely unscientific assessment of accessible parking provision in the Town Centre. On a Friday lunchtime we drove to every car park highlighted on the Town Centre accessibility map and noted the number of accessible spaces and their occupancy rate. As can be seen from fig.1 just under half of the accessible spaces were available. However, when one considers the locations of these spaces it becomes clear that those closest to the Town Centre were nearly all occupied. (y)

Fig. 1

Location	Spaces	Availability
County Hall	4	4
Lucerne Street	1	1
Maidstone East Station	4	4
Station Road	5	1
Brewer Street (Lower)	2	0
Brewer Street (Upper)	4	0
Wheeler Street	5	0
Union Street (Upper)	3	2
Union Street (Lower)	2	2
St Faith's Street	3	2
Hazlitt Theatre	3	0
Wyke Manor Road	14	0
King Street Multi-storey	16	1
King Street	3	0
Brooks Place	1	0
Medway Street	2	2
High St (Royal Star Arcade)	6	2
High St (TIC)	3	0
Sainsbury's	12	2
Mill St	2	1
Palace Av	2	0
Mill Street	7	3
Mill Street (Archbishop's)	3	2
College Road	4	2
Mote Road	6	3
Barker Road	4	4
Lockmeadow	18	17
Mote Park Leisure Centre	20	16
Total	159	71

39. The Committee was pleased to see that there have been recent positive steps with regard to accessible parking provision. At the February meeting of the Mobility Focus Group it was announced that the accessible parking spaces in the Town Centre were to become 24 hour. This has

been the subject of significant lobbying from the likes of the Mobility Focus Group and residents of the borough with mobility difficulties and we were surprised to learn at the beginning of our inquiry that accessible bays were not 24 hour. However, this is positive news and the Committee welcome the Cabinet Member's decision.

40. We heard both from individual residents and from those responsible for the care of clients with mobility impairments (see below) that height restriction bars on car-parks can also be a serious barrier to access to the Town Centre. Vehicles that have been adapted to accommodate wheelchairs are often significantly taller than the standard 6'6" restriction placed on many of the Town Centre Car Parks, thus restricting those using such vehicles to 'on-street' accessible bays. We acknowledge the reasons for the existence of such barriers but believe that their existence, coupled with the fact that we have learnt that the on-street accessible spaces in the Town Centre are often the first to fill up, should motivate the Council to increase its efforts to provide sufficient accessible bays on-street and in the right locations. **(y)**

41. The inaccessibility of local public transport was also highlighted, particularly with regard to bus services serving rural parts of the Borough and the accessibility of train stations. There has already been significant work undertaken to raise kerbs at bus stops in the Town Centre but the Park and Ride service remains the only fully accessible mode of public transport in the borough. It was also noted that certain train stations, for example Lenham, were not accessible to the disabled. Members also considered the definitions of accessibility used by public transport providers. Maidstone East station was considered 'accessible' but passengers wishing to change from platforms 2 and 3 to platform 1 are required to leave the station completely to make the change. Members did not consider such a requirement to qualify the station as being 'accessible' to people with disabilities. It was noted that, particularly with the appointment of a new franchisee (GoVia) for the provision of rail services in the area and the redevelopment of Maidstone East Station an opportunity existed to lobby to make accessibility a top priority. The Committee felt that the Council could be proud of the Park & Ride bus service but felt that it highlighted the absence of such provision elsewhere in the borough. Opportunities for lobbying for improvements existed through the Council's position on the Quality Bus Partnership, the Community Rail Partnership and through direct lobbying of the rail companies and Members felt that such opportunities should be maximised. **(aa) (bb) (cc) (dd) (ee)**

42. We also heard evidence with regard to buildings and accessibility. The role that supplementary planning guidance could play is key to making new developments in the borough properly accessible. We were pleased therefore to hear of the development of a supplementary planning document as part of the local development framework process¹⁶. However it was felt by a number of our witnesses that, no matter whether or not such a document existed, what was planned and what was built

¹⁶ See paragraph 24 above.

often did not necessarily match. A suggested solution to this problem would be the appointment of an Access Officer. We learnt that the Council previously had a part-time Access Officer but that this post was subsumed into the Social Inclusion Manager's post following a reorganisation of the Council's internal structure. However we received strong representations with regard to the appointment of a full-time Access Officer. Such a post-holder could take the lead on professionally assessing plans for future developments from an access perspective but also enforce planning obligations and conduct audits of access issues across the Council, like that suggested for accessible parking above. It was also suggested that such an officer could assist in the coordination of the provision of disability equality training. We acknowledge that some of the tasks undertaken by the Social Inclusion Officer include those of an Access Officer. However, if we as a Council are to take seriously the access needs of our residents then we recommend that the Council consider the appointment of a professional Access Officer, qualified to assess planning applications and audit the accessibility of our services. **(i)**

It is easier and cheaper for everyone if accessibility is built in to services from their design and inception, rather than being added in expensively later. If this is to happen, management needs to be aware of accessibility issues, and those responsible for designing buildings, vehicles and infrastructure should be trained to ensure that their designs do not inadvertently exclude disabled people.

House of Commons' Transport Committee on Disabled People's Access to Transport; 6th Report; Nov 2003-March 2004; 31.

43. A significant amount of comments and complaints were made concerning accessible toilets in the Town Centre. Such provision is largely inconsistent and can frequently consist solely of widened doors and often inconveniently placed handles. If we are to encourage people with mobility impairments to come to the Town Centre then providing accessible toilets is essential. We suggest that the Council undertake a full audit of its accessible toilet provision with a view to improvement work being undertaken in consultation with people with disabilities. **(gg)**

44. The Committee received evidence from witnesses with mobility impairments that suggested the Council should introduce disability equality training alongside the current *awareness'* training. Awareness training tends to focus on practical knowledge to incorporate into service provision and can improve the confidence of staff when providing services to disabled people. Disability equality training tends to explore the social model of disability in more depth and can positively demonstrate what an organisation needs to do to change attitudes to disabled people and remove barriers to access for them¹⁷. Such training it was suggested should be provided by qualified disability equality trainers. We heard evidence that our staff were not sufficiently trained on disability equality issues even when they could be considered aware. **(q)**

¹⁷ Resource Disability Portfolio Guide 3: *Training for Equality*; 2003; pp9-10.

Visual Impairment

45. We received a substantial amount of assistance from Kent Association for the Blind (KAB) in the course of our inquiry both in the form of a witness session , through representations made at the Mobility Focus Group, in providing mystery shoppers and in a meeting with our councillors to assess the accessibility of council publications.

46. The Committee heard that the key barriers to access for visually impaired people were physical access and access to information. KAB operate a talking newspaper with a circulation of 6,000 throughout Kent and, despite a popular misconception, only 4% of visually impaired people use Braille. The Department of Health Equality and Human rights Group document highlights that there are 'at least 1.7 million people in the country unable to read standard print, many visually impaired people will not be able to understand information unless it is made available in other formats'¹⁸.

Best Practice

The Local Government Management Board's *Clear Access: Visually impaired people's access to Local Government* guide raises some useful recommendations as well as providing general guidance about access for visually impaired people. Amongst its key recommendations are that:

- Visually impaired service users should be consulted on all aspects of service provision to the public, through a locally-established mechanism
- Councils should adopt a strategic training programme designed to increase the level of visual awareness of all front line staff
- All council publications should follow print guidelines designed to enhance the accessibility of text to people with moderate visual impairments and others with reading difficulties
- Council information should be available to Talking Newspapers and other groups which serve visually impaired people
- Individual communications with service users, tenants and voters should be in the recipient's chosen format and appropriate records should be kept
- Council buildings should be subject to an access audit with the needs of visually impaired people in mind

Local Government Management Board *Clear Access: Visually impaired people's access to Local Government; 1996*

¹⁸ Guidance on Developing Local Communication Support Services and Strategies; Department of Health: *The Equality and Human Rights Group*; 2004; p28

47. With regard to access to information we held a meeting with representatives of KAB to assess the accessibility of recent Council publications. The Council has a set of guidelines for good practice in written documentation for visually impaired people developed in association with KAB (who also produce their own accessible information guidelines). However this appears to be a little known document around the Council. The majority of departments in the Council are responsible at some point or the other for sending out documentation to the public and we are therefore concerned that this document appears to be little used. We recommend that its existence is highlighted to all managers and cascaded through their teams. **(II)**

48. Through our assessment of Council documents we learnt a number of things. Firstly a distinction needs to be drawn between 'essential or citizen' information and other communications by the Council. Some of the most inaccessible documents were those that were advertising the Council's campaigns against dropping fast-food litter or cigarette butts. Taking these two examples there was printing at angles over images without clear colour contrast between the text and the pictures. The rear of these leaflets frequently contained large amounts of print, often in small type-faces and with poor contrast between the type and the background. There were similar problems with graffiti campaign flyers and with the Hazlitt Theatres brochure. There were no details of how to access the information in alternative formats on any of the above examples. Although the Hazlitt Theatre brochure did provide the Council's website on its rear cover this was in very small print. However, these documents can not, except perhaps the Hazlitt guide, be considered to be either 'essential or citizen' and we acknowledge the need to make such communications eye-catching for them to have their desired impact. Despite this we do feel that the Council would benefit from making explicit accessibility requirements to both printers and designers when creating such communications. It was a general comment that nearly every communication contained far more words than was necessary. A reduction in the amount of wording on publications would assist both the visually impaired and people with learning disabilities. **(jj) (mm)**

Best Practice

Delivering all your communications in plain language is the single most important step you can take towards making your information accessible to the widest possible audience.

Wendy Gregory; *The Informability Manual: Making Information more accessible in the light of the Disability Discrimination Act; 1996; HMSO; p48*

49. We also considered some 'essential or citizen' information as part of our meeting. The comments made on these documents are more significant:

Document	Comments
Council Satisfaction Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Font size too small but sufficient space to increase font size if tick-boxes made smaller • Tick box edges weak • Generally quite a good document and would be excellent if improvements made
A-Z Guide to our services 2006/07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor contrast (including information on availability of alternative formats which was not in a particularly large font) • website information provided as blue type on blue background
How to petition your local council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overprinting • Is space for larger print but this is not used. • No details of the availability of alternative formats
Recycle for Maidstone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The contrast in the document was described as 'appalling' despite the high quality of the information • Table of recycling locations too small • No details of alternative formats although the web address was clearly printed.
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Appeals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contrast good, although black type would have been better. • No alternative format information. • Font size too small • Application to appeal form too small (especially the disclaimer)
Maidstone 20/20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glossy documents much harder to read with magnifiers. • No information about alternative formats • It was suggested that an increase in the font size by 1pt. would have achieved a great improvement. • Contrast very poor in places
Strategic Plan 2005-08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor contrast • Glossy • Print too small • No information about alternative formats • Address and website information on rear cover very small.
Council Notices of Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Print too small • It was suggested that Notices be printed in a much bolder print and a larger font, especially as these are placed on notice boards. (oo)

50. We were obviously disappointed that so many of the Council's important documents were not easily accessible to visually impaired people. It appeared that consideration of these documents' accessibility to visually impaired people had not been made. Greater consideration must be given to the needs of visually impaired people in the production of citizen or essential information and such information should be

produced in an accessible manner from the outset. We do not believe visually impaired people should be put out of their way to access this information. We were also disappointed at the inconsistent inclusion of information about the availability of alternative formats. All such information should provide a clear indication of how it can be accessed in alternative formats and this information should be provided in a consistent position on all documents so that a visually impaired person knows where to look. Having the Head of Communications sign-off all such publications for accessibility was suggested as one solution to this problem. **(ii) (kk) (nn)**

51. KAB were eager to help the Council both in improving the accessibility of its written communications but also in communicating the services and events available from the Council. We would like to see a closer working relationship with KAB and greater utilisation of the services, such as the talking newspaper, that are available through them. It was felt that the Council should provide a 'how we meet the needs of our disabled customers' document to improve the communication of the efforts the Council will undertake to accommodate people with special requirements. **(pp) (rr)**

52. We were pleased to hear that the Council's website was 'Browse-Aloud' (a speech enabling software) enabled. However concerns remain about the volume of documents produced in .pdf format on the Council's website and the accessibility of such documents. We understand that Acrobat 7 has enhanced accessibility options and we would like to see this programme rolled out across the Council and users trained in its accessibility applications. However, there remain concerns about the level of skill necessary to make an accessible .pdf document¹⁹. It is also recommended that the Council undertake an audit of its website from a visually impaired perspective and that RNIB 'See it Right' accreditation be sought. **(ss) (tt) (uu)**

Even if Acrobat 7 is available in an organisation, there is no guarantee that authors will take advantage of its accessibility features. When the RNIB wanted to publish its recent annual report as a PDF for the first time, the organisation's experts found it hard-going, although they managed it in the end.

The Guardian; *Make e-documents accessible to everyone, says RNIB; 23/11/05*

53. We also learnt about the hazards to visually impaired people of physical access such as streets with no hazards, crossings with the right types of pavings and buildings that are marked and lit clearly. Street furniture such as A-boards or pavement cafes create potential hazards for visually impaired people. Members were informed that A-boards and street-café furniture were frequently discussed at Town Centre Management meetings. Although the responsibility of either Kent County

¹⁹ The Guardian; *Make e-documents accessible to everyone, says RNIB; 23/11/05*

Council (Highways) or the businesses themselves Members learnt that a code-of-practice for street-café furniture had been established following the development of Fremlin's Walk. We welcome the attempts made by the Council to introduce a café culture to Maidstone but would request that existent street cafes conform to the code of conduct and new street-café licensees be provided with a copy of the code. **(j) (k)**.

54. We learnt that KAB offer a rolling programme of training with the Council but there was a feeling that such programmes were not as well attended now as they used to be. KAB were also keen to see Councillors undertake training. **(s)**

Deaf and Hard of Hearing

55. We attended a social meeting organised by the Deaf Services Bureau (DSB) in January 2006 to gather information about how deaf and hard of hearing people access the Council's services and some of the barriers they may face. There are approximately 9 million deaf or hard of hearing people in this country²⁰. As is highlighted in one guidance document: 'Services must be able to cater for deaf people in relation to everyday meetings and enquiries...some people with hearing impairments from a young age may experience difficulty in accessing and understanding the written or printed word'²¹.

56. We learnt from our meeting about Council's that could be considered to be leading on the provision of services for deaf people. Devon County Council's website sets out a great deal of information about providing services to deaf people. It includes a guidance page for employees and members that sets out what can be done to make it easier for deaf people to access the Council's services. This information includes a link to an RNID/BDA quick reference guide on the DDA responsibilities of service providers to provide interpreters and how to do so. The site also includes a list of approved local interpreters, their qualifications and contact details and links to other websites. We believe that the Council could make greater use of its website along similar lines to the example of Devon providing information for both the deaf community and for staff. **(vv)**

57. We were also pleased to receive information about the use of video interpreting currently used by Westminster Council²². Although not considered a replacement for face-to-face interpreting the service has proved particularly useful for quick chats with customer service staff. Considering the length of time it can often take to book an interpreter (they sometimes need to be booked up to a month in advance) we would encourage the Council to look carefully at securing funding for such equipment, perhaps as part of the move to the new offices. The existence of such a service would encourage members of the deaf community to use

²⁰ Guidance on Developing Local Communication Support Services and Strategies; Department of Health: *The Equality and Human Rights Group*; 2004; p31

²¹ Ibid.

²² *One in Seven* June/July

the Council more. We were unsure just how widespread knowledge is amongst front-line staff about how to obtain an interpreter. (vv)

Best Practice

The Employers Organisation and Dialog (Diversity in Action in Local Government) have produced a good practice guide *Sound Practice: Deaf People's Access to Local Government*. Amongst the recommendations in the document, many of which Maidstone Borough Council already adheres to, are the following:

- A register of permanent and portable loop systems and infra red systems accessible to hearing aid users in the locality should be held by the council
- Permanent systems should be switched on whenever the room or facility is in use rather than waiting for a hearing impaired person to request them
- Minicom users should be consulted in order to find the optimum site(s) for placing council minicomms
- All staff should know how to send and receive calls by both minicom and Typetalk
- Staff should be encouraged to develop an interest in the study of BSL as a continuation of their Deaf Awareness Training – but not instead of it
- A system for booking a Sign Language Interpreter (SLI) for council functions, given appropriate notice, should be widely advertised within front-line services. SLIs should be provided for important public meetings and advertised as such. All SLI services should be advertised directly to the Deaf community
- The Council should keep a central register of SLIs available in the locality and their availability, especially if they have got local government experience
- A strategic system of deaf awareness training should be employed amongst Members and front-line officers
- Training should be ongoing to account for staff turnover
- All council members and officers should be made aware of the appropriate behaviour to adopt when meeting a deaf person

Employers Organisation/Dialog (Diversity in Action in Local Government); *Sound Practice: Deaf People's Access to Local Government*; 2001

58. We heard the view expressed that staff at the Council were not sufficiently trained to deal with the needs of deaf people. It was felt that there was a greater need for both disability awareness and deaf awareness training and that deaf people should be involved in any training of staff. A representative of the Deaf Services Bureau suggested that most Council and public service staff have a very limited knowledge of deaf awareness²³. We noted that one attendee at the club had previously experienced difficulties with accessing services at West Kent NHS and

²³ Written contribution of Deaf Services Bureau; 17 February 2006.

Social Care Trust. She was now working with the Trust to improve the way it provides its services to deaf people. **(r)**

59. We also heard suggestions that the Council should make better use of advertising boards to advertise the services provided by the Council. Many of those present did not seem clear about the different functions of Maidstone Borough Council and Kent County Council. It was also noted that the Deaf Services Bureau provided an advocacy service on behalf of its service users if they wished to contact the Council or other organisations. **(g) (pp)**

60. The Committee learnt from the interpreter that there are numerous different specialisms amongst BSL interpreters. Our interpreter at the social club meeting was a Maidstone resident and also a specialist in dramatic interpretation. We were disappointed to hear that she had contacted the Hazlitt Theatre to enquire about making her services available for certain performances but had not received any feedback. We think that the presence of a British Sign Language interpreter at Hazlitt performances, accompanied by the requisite publicity, would be a valuable addition to the theatre opening performances to the deaf community. **(l) (ww)**

Multiple Disabilities

61. We conducted a witness session with a representative of West Kent NHS and Social Care Trust who worked with people with profound learning disabilities, many of whom were also wheelchair users. We gained from this witness a particular insight into the needs both of people with multiple or profound disabilities and the views of their carers. It takes an extraordinary level of planning to undertake any activity with such a client group. The witness pointed out that she considered Maidstone to be poor in terms of its access. However this was a pattern that was repeated across the County. Particular barriers that were noted were the use of height restriction bars preventing mini-bus access and poor toilet facilities. With regard to accessible parking frequently the driver of the group's mini-bus would also have responsibilities for the care of a client. Due to a lack of parking on the street and the inability to enter normal car parks due to height restrictions the driver would need to drop the group off, find a parking space and then return to the group which in the driver's absence had been a carer down. We would like to see the Council undertake whatever work possible to improve the ability of such groups to get in and out of the Town easily. **(x)**

62. We also learnt that, for the profoundly disabled, there were no toilets that were considered fully/suitably accessible in Maidstone. People with multiple disabilities need more than a widened door and some handles to make a toilet accessible. Benches substantial enough to take the weight of an adult were necessary and sufficient room to fit two adults plus one. The witness indicated that, rather than bringing such problems to the attention of the Council, her team's approach would be to go somewhere else where they knew facilities were available. We believe that the

Council should provide at least one fully accessible toilet in the Town centre and recommend that the construction of such a facility be undertaken taking account of the needs of people with multiple disabilities. **(gg) (hh)**

63. We learnt that the witness was also unaware of the existence of a Social Inclusion Manager at Maidstone Borough Council. There is scope for much greater partnership working between the Council and the Trust. There is a multi-agency District Partnership Board that meets every two months that represents learning disabilities in Maidstone. We heard that this was a Board that had been attended in the past by the Social Inclusion Manager and the Committee are eager to see him begin to attend the Board regularly as a first step towards greater partnership working. This is considered particularly important because partnership boards look at where people are being denied local services and include representation by people with learning disabilities and family members of people with a learning disability²⁴. **(m)**

²⁴ British Institute of Learning Disabilities; *Factsheet no. 2: Partnership Boards*.

Other Evidence Collected by the Committee

Visit To Maidstone Museum

64. On 21 March 2005 Cllrs English, Hinder, Horne, Joy, Naghi and K Stevens visited the museum to discuss access with the Museums Manager. The Museum Manager took the party round some of the galleries to demonstrate some of the work that is being done, followed by a visit to three of the museum's stores to highlight what needs to be done with the museum's collections and what is being proposed.

Physical access

65. Given the nature of the building there are many parts where the building restricts the options available. One example is the current tea room and gift shop, which lacks plumbing therefore restricting the cafeteria options. Mr Lace informed Members that the estimated cost of work undertaken to ensure DDA compliance was approximately £104,000.

Works being undertaken on physical access:

- A ramp is planned for the current entrance.
- A platform lift is to be installed to make the ground floor completely accessible.
- With changes to the way the museum collection is stored, and better use of the current loading bay, it is anticipated that the lift will be available for public use.
- Chairs are located at various points throughout the museum.

Storage of the collection

66. The Museum Manager outlined proposals to change the way the Museum stores its collection which should improve access to all of the museum's artefacts and not just those on display. Mr Lace showed Members some of the problems of their current storage, namely poor use of space in some stores, and the knock on effects of this, for example the use of potential public gallery space for storage rather than exhibitions. Mr Lace outlined plans to introduce wheelie racking in one of the main stores to increase the space being used for storage and to allow the public access to the stores if they are interested in certain artefacts at an estimated cost of around £500,000. These changes would be coupled with cataloguing of the items and photography, culminating in an on-line catalogue which the public could access on the museum's website therefore making the museum's collection accessible to anybody. It would also result in members of the public being able to request viewings of museum artefacts which currently is not possible. It is estimated that that the main elements of the cataloguing could be done within two years and cataloguing the entire collection would take somewhere in the region of 10 years.

67. Members were also shown Chillington house and the storage conditions there, which were pretty bad. Currently no access to these stores would be possible and it is only through changes to the main stores in the museum that these problems could be tackled.

Galleries

68. . Paintings are also to be photographed, catalogued and put on the internet. One suggestion for further improvements was the introduction of a facility for members of the public to order prints of items held by the museum, similar to schemes being run by other museums. Such a scheme could also be used to raise income for the museum.

Conclusion

69. Different types of access are clearly being considered by the museum at the moment: physical access; access to the collection currently in the stores; and ways to improve engagement with the exhibitions. Members

The Museum, Libraries and Archives Council produces a self-assessment toolkit to encourage positive developments in relation to access for disabled people. The checklist allows users to conduct an audit, identify evidence and areas of development, develop and implement plans for areas of improvement and then monitor and evaluate progress against improvement plans.

were impressed by the improvements that have been made and were pleased to learn that the museum is developing a more outward focus in terms of allowing volunteers access to artefacts, benefiting both volunteers and the museum. Placing the collection online was seen as particularly beneficial and the opportunity to use technology to improve access for those with disabilities, such as sight or hearing impairments, was recognised. We would recommend that the Museum utilise the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council's *Access for All Self-Assessment Toolkit* to assist it in considering accessibility issues for people with disabilities. **(aaa)**

Questionnaire

70. At the beginning of the inquiry we drafted a questionnaire as a method of gathering additional information from disabled people about their experiences of accessing the Council's services. The questionnaire sought views on the services provided by the Council and also suggestions as to how the Council could improve its services. The questionnaire was distributed upon request following local publicity, via the Town's Shopmobility scheme and through local organisations for disabled people. We received 17 responses to the questionnaire and, although we can make no claims about the sample being representative the responses are nonetheless of interest. We would like to view the questionnaire as a first attempt to assess how people with disabilities feel about the accessibility of Council services and would like to see such a questionnaire improved and distributed regularly with the full backing of the Council as a means of

assessing the effectiveness of improvements to access for disabled people.

71. More effective and useful for the Committee's purposes than the statistical output of the questionnaire were the views expressed under the comments and suggestions sections of the questionnaire.

72. On barriers encountered to accessing the Council's services:

- *On the whole access standard are quite high, however improvements could still be made for wheelchair access to the Council's services for disabled people swimming pool*
- *More accessible parking bays please (y)*
- *No problems at all – I wish other organisations were as efficient!*
- *Re Council Tax – Simple and straightforward information should be given by staff*
- *Empathy for other people and families who are less fortunate than staff needs to be injected. If they knew what we had to go through every day it would make them more considerate.*
- *Millennium Park access pathways are gravelled which makes it hard to push a wheelchair*
- *Toilets in Mote Park often locked*
- *Accessible parking bays only designed for cars and not minibuses (x)*
- *Disabled toilets have keys [RADAR], I wasn't made aware of how to get one. No facilities in toilets for disabled children, all aimed at adults. Space is very important for disabled toilets. (hh)*
- *Access at the Hazlitt Theatre for wheelchair users is minimal.*
- *Accessible parking in Maidstone is worse than ever (y)*
- *Poor communication of services (such as grants to fit ramps to a home) available to people with disabilities*
- *Dropped kerb provision is inconsistent*
- *More accessible parking bays are needed particularly at the top end of Week Street and at the Hazlitt Theatre (y)*
- *Gentlemen's toilet in Brenchley Gardens is too small for a mobility scooter*
- *It is difficult to access London House because there is no access to it with dropped kerbs. (ff)*
- *Tonbridge Road out-of-hours letter box is up a step.*

73. On ways the Council could improve access to its services for disabled people:

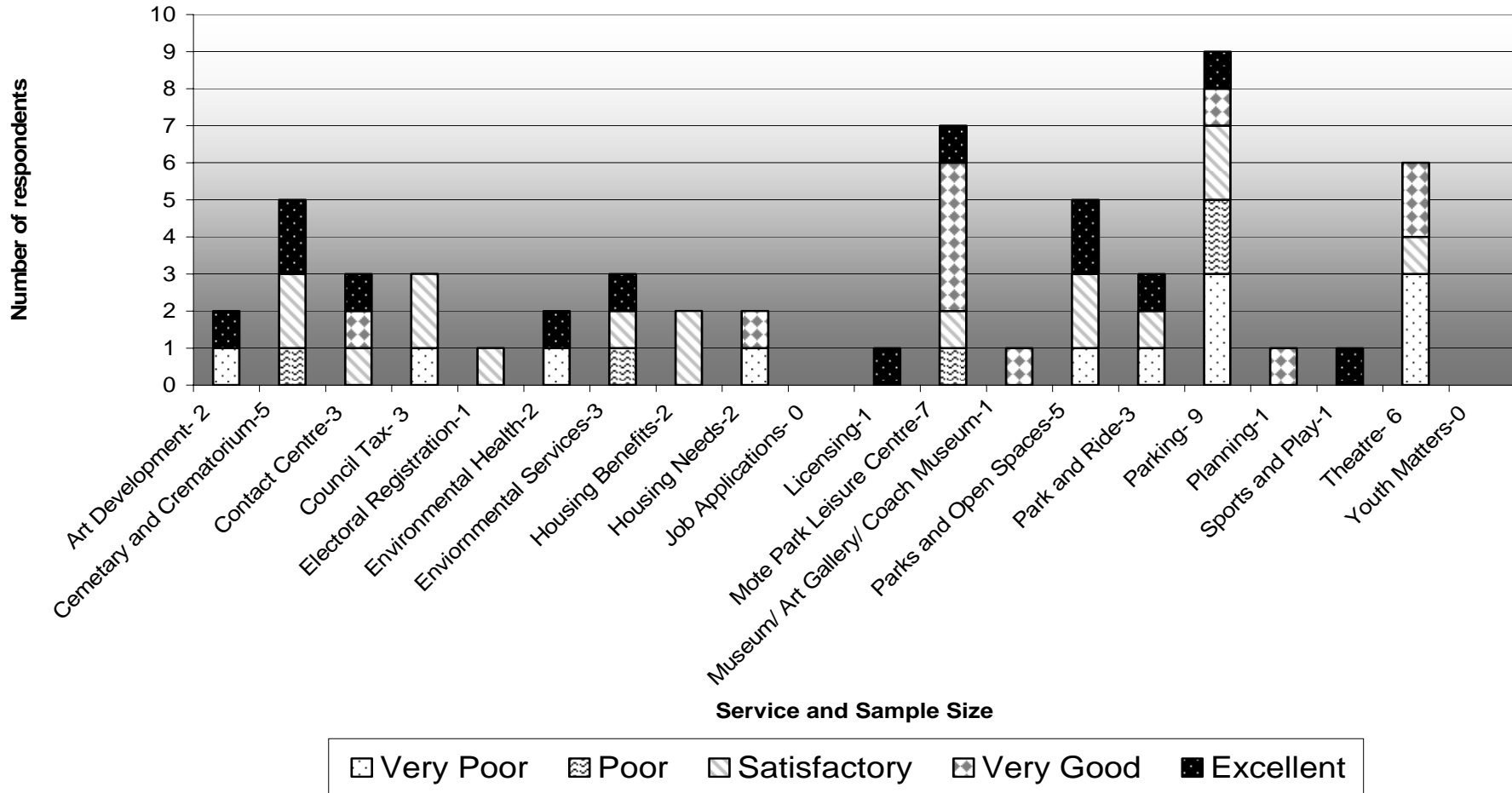
- *Make more ramps available*
- *Knock down the toilets and start again!*
- *Put dropped kerbs on all the kerbs in Rocky Hill*
- *Place handrails on slopes*
- *Put footpaths in order all over town*

- *Making our lives a bit more easy and a little bit more caring and understanding of our feelings. I am 91, I cannot ask for a lot but every little helps*
- *Listen to people with disabilities – involve them in planning from the beginning*
- *Visit people in mental health day centres to meet the people concerned and get to know them, staff and public attitudes can make people with mental illnesses' ability to access more of a trial*
- *More accessible parking spaces and enforcing the blue badge system better (x)*
- *Better access and staff awareness at the Leisure Centre and changing benches at the swimming pool.*
- *Publicising the availability of accessible parking bays better*
- *Tarmac all surfaces in parks*
- *Ensure staff attend the training courses the Council organises for them*
- *Talk to the disabled person as if they were not disabled and not over them to the person accompanying them*
- *Always involve disabled people at the consultation stage*
- *Listen to disabled people, they are the ones that know best.*
- *Raise staff awareness through training*

74. On any further points to add to the inquiry:

- *I am pleased you are consulting with disabled people*
- *Your disabled map is very good and being able to drive onto Week Street and Gabriels Hill is a godsend!*
- *Difficulty navigating over-stocked shops*
- *Training is important but treating people with disabilities as a person and giving them the same courtesy and respect as you would give anyone else*
- *I need somewhere to park my electric Chair*
- *Some towns have town-wide discount cards for disabled people, it is frustrating that I have to apply for a new discount card everywhere I go. (v)*
- *The King St entrance to the Chequers Centre is very difficult to access*
- *The main problem we encounter is badly parked cars...correct parking needs to be enforced*
- *Could shops in the town be given awards for accessibility? (w)*
- *Council Officers do not show an interest not understanding, they are rude and quite offensive and are very upsetting to people with mental illness.*

1b) Which of the Council's services have you accessed over the last year, and how would you rate the accessibility of service?



75. We were pleased with the number of responses received to the questionnaire and particularly with the suggestions made by respondents. The majority of the responses related either to staff training, communication or parking issues, topics which had already been picked up on by the Committee through its witness sessions. 52% of respondents to the questionnaire considered the Council's staff's disability awareness to be 'very good' or 'excellent', with only 24% saying it was 'poor' or 'very poor'. This evidence contrasts somewhat to that found during the mystery shopping exercise and during evidence sessions.

Mystery Shopping

76. The Committee also arranged a mystery shopping exercise as an additional means of gathering evidence. We decided to 'shop' those services that had proved to be most used by people with disabilities in the questionnaire. These were:

- Council Tax
- Housing Need
- Housing Benefits
- Mote Park Leisure Centre
- Hazlitt Theatre

The aim of the exercise was to find out how well prepared these services were and how well trained the Council's staff were to meet the needs of people with disabilities. All of our shoppers were either people with disabilities or those who work with people with disabilities and all were instructed to be up front about their impairment during the exercise.

Mote Park Leisure Centre

77. The Leisure Centre was 'shopped' by three shoppers, one with a visual impairment, another who was responsible for the care of a group with multiple disabilities and another who was the mother of a child who used a wheelchair/buggy. The results of the shop were relatively mixed. Two of our shoppers felt that the staff had been helpful but our visually impaired shopper experienced some difficulties and felt that the member of staff did not have the necessary understanding of the difficulties faced by a visually impaired person. The difficulties experienced by another of our shoppers (automatic doors not in use to prevent staff getting cold and access to the lifts) also indicate that the levels of disability awareness amongst staff are not as high as should be expected.

With regard to access to the services or information about them there were also mixed results. Our visually impaired shopper was provided with information leaflets in a standard format and came away from the tour feeling that the Centre was not somewhere she would feel confident returning too on her own. The approach to the centre for people with mobility difficulties was flat and navigation around the centre itself

considered quite easy (although there was a problem with dealing with fire-doors whilst using a wheelchair). The existence of a hoist at the swimming pool was welcomed. However, comments were made about the disabled changing facilities which it was felt would benefit from a bench suitable for larger people with disabilities. One shopper also commented that access from the changing rooms to the poolside was difficult with a wheelchair/buggy and necessitated returning to the reception.

78. From the three shops conducted at the Leisure Centre we can conclude that there is room for improvement both with regard to providing disability awareness and equality training to staff and the accessibility of the service. Improvements to lighting, the use of floor markings and installing a fully sized bench in the disabled changing rooms were all suggested as improvements by our shoppers. Overall the staff were considered to be helpful and there seemed to be no problems at all with the provision of accessible parking bays.

Council Tax

79. A visually impaired shopper conducted a telephone shop of the Council Tax service requesting a Council Tax relief form. The staff member immediately offered a large print form and also informed the shopper that a member of staff could be made available to assist in completing the form. The form was then hand-delivered and assistance offered again. The Committee felt that this was an example of excellent customer service and should serve as a beacon to other sections in the Council.

Hazlitt Theatre

80. The Hazlitt poses a number of problems as a venue for people with disabilities. From a mobility perspective there are only 3 accessible parking spaces and at the time of writing these bays were not 24 hour. The lift to the theatre itself is round the corner from the main entrance in a poorly lit alleyway. Upon exiting the lift our shopper was led through a passage (which appeared also to be used for storage) to the auditorium. In the theatre itself a wheelchair user would be sat in the corridor next to the standard seats and there is space for only 4 wheelchair users per performance. From a visually impaired perspective there were slightly fewer difficulties and our shopper was able to easily get information about potential problems with accessing the service and the availability of staff to assist. **(xx)**

81. All of our shoppers were impressed with the helpfulness and awareness of the Hazlitt staff. The majority of the problems experienced relate to the building itself but it was felt by our shoppers that improvements could still be made. The path from the main entrance to the lift was in need of lighting and was also considered to be uneven. Similarly the Committee felt that it was important that the passageway from the lift to the theatre was kept clear so as not to create the impression that the customer was being brought through a storage area. Members also felt that a wheelchair user should not be required to pay full-price for a ticket when through their attendance they are creating extra capacity for the venue. That the accessible parking bays outside the theatre will shortly become 24 hour was welcomed by the Committee. **(yy)**

Housing Need

82. The Housing Need service was mystery shopped by a visually impaired customer who requested an application form to go on the housing register. Our shopper felt that the staff member was helpful but did not fully appreciate the need for the shopper to preserve his independence and complete the forms himself. However the staff member did indicate that the shopper was welcome to visit the Council's offices to receive assistance in filling out the form. Part of the reason for such an offer being made is that there is no larger or alternative formats of the application form or guidance notes. The shopper received a bundle of documents from the Housing Services section including guidance leaflets which were 'printed in the worst possible combination of colours for a visually impaired person' and in a standard format. Our shopper felt that improvements could be made through making the forms available in alternative formats (tape and larger print) and also with regard to staff training to ensure that staff did not assume that the only option for completing the form was by visiting the Council.

Housing Benefits

83. The Housing Benefits section was shopped by a completely blind mystery shopper by telephone requesting information on the benefits application process. The application form requested was not available in alternative formats either larger print or Braille/tape. The shopper received a printed version of the housing benefits application form a couple of days after conducting the shop. No assistance was offered to the shopper by the staff member. This shop was probably the worst of all those conducted as part of the exercise with no access to the service and no assistance from staff.

Conclusions

84. The results of the exercise highlighted some examples of disability awareness that the Council can be rightly proud of. Particularly of note were the professionalism of the staff at the Hazlitt Theatre and in the Council Tax section. However there were also examples of poor awareness, a completely blind shopper was sent a printed Housing Benefits form after informing the staff member that he was blind and staff members at the leisure centre displayed little disability awareness with both our visually impaired shopper and our shopper who cared for daughter in a wheelchair.. For people with disabilities, being received by a member of staff who understands your needs is a hit-and-miss affair. We are of the view that the only way to correct this situation is by ensuring that all customer-facing staff, whether by telephone or face-to-face are trained to a minimum level in disability awareness and equality issues. Such training should not be a one-off affair and regular reminder training should also take place. It is the responsibility of managers to ensure that their staff undertake such training. **(p)**

85. With regard to the accessibility of the service itself there was also a mixed set of results. The availability of Housing Benefits and Housing Needs forms only in print format is regrettable and our shopper found the leisure centre to be very difficult to access physically with her disabled daughter, both entering the facility and once inside. The Leisure Centre also appeared to struggle for visually impaired people due to the poor lighting and random floor tiles. Access to the theatre is only available via poorly lit side entrance and then in a lift and through a corridor also used for storing boxes. Once inside the theatre a person in a wheelchair will be sat in the aisle and no more than four people in wheelchairs can be accommodated per performance. Many theatres have seats that can be removed to accommodate wheelchairs. It is also regrettable that, despite essentially creating extra capacity in the theatre people in wheelchairs and those accompanying them are expected to pay full ticket price for non-Hazlitt performances (the accompanying person goes half-price for Hazlitt performances). We would recommend that these situations be amended. **(xx) (yy) (zz)**

86. Aside from the recommendations with regard to training, the incorporation of disabled access into the Council's corporate mystery

shopping exercise and those arising from the shops themselves the Committee also wished to have the results of its exercise reported to the heads of the sections shopped.

Results of the Committee's Mystery Shopping Exercise

Request	Access to Information/ Service	Staff Awareness	Recommendations for Improvement
MOTE PARK LEISURE CENTRE (MULTIPLE)			
<p>Accessing Leisure Centre with group of people with multiple disabilities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + lots of disabled parking bays near building + pavements are flat for wheelchair access on approach to the centre + easy access to all areas of interior + hoists available with a slope to access the pool + Gentleman's changing area spacious - Main road needs to be crossed on approach to the centre - Main path to front door steep 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Reception staff very helpful and aware of facilities offered to disabled people + Mystery Shopper informed that the centre provides for lots of groups of disabled people on a weekly basis + Staff offered to contact the Duty Manager if necessary + Staff 'very positive' about access for disabled people to the leisure centre. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrance should be signposted
MOTE PARK LEISURE CENTRE (VISUAL IMPAIRMENT)			
<p>To find out if there were any special arrangements in place for a visually impaired person with a view to swimming and using the facilities/health suite</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Booklets and leaflets offered immediately + Short wait for tour - Leisure guide leaflet and price list in standard print - A friend had to stay with the mystery shopper due to various obstacles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gentleman giving the tour failed to introduce himself and was 'obviously in a hurry' - Information extended by the gentleman giving the tour was general and aimed at the able bodied. - The member of staff giving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved lighting in the stairways and fitness suite • visitors given more time by Members of staff • Floor markings could be different colours leading to activities • train up staff, particularly on the needs of disabled

Request	Access to Information/ Service	Staff Awareness	Recommendations for Improvement
	<p>encountered during the tour, such as bad lighting and slippery surfaces</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mystery shopper would not feel 'at all confident attending the leisure centre alone'. 	<p>the tour appeared 'oblivious to the problems faced by a visually impaired person'.</p>	<p>people</p>
MOTE PARK LEISURE CENTRE (MOBILITY)			
<p>Request to see facilities for the disabled</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Disabled toilets are available on every level and clearly marked. + Lifts available on all floors - Disabled toilets small - Access to lifts difficult; entry through a fire door is necessary to get to them - Automatic doors not in use (due to staff getting cold) so access via two very heavy doors marked 'theatre' (assistance not offered) - Swimming facilities currently being refurbished and larger female changing facilities not available. - Disabled cubicle has no 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Duty manager and staff helpful and pleasant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrance to pool near the automatic shower would make access to the pool easier; visitors would require no assistance from staff. • A bench or a chair should be available in changing cubicles. • The automatic doors should be in use all the time

Request	Access to Information/ Service	Staff Awareness	Recommendations for Improvement
	bench - Existing benches too small for larger disabled people - Access to poolside with buggy extremely difficult; the visitor, once changed, would have to return to reception to find a member of staff to open the gate to the poolside. - Only other entrance to pool is through an automatic shower.		
COUNCIL TAX (VISUAL IMPAIRMENT)			
Request an application form for Council Tax relief as a partially sighted person	+ Young lady immediately offered to send out a large print form + Mystery shopper told that a member of staff would be able to help her fill out the form if she was unable to do so herself and to contact the office if this was the case	+ The member of staff had a very pleasant manner and gave the impression that it would not be any trouble asking for more help + A member of staff called at the mystery shopper's house to hand deliver the form and offer help with filling it in; he also offered contact details should more assistance be required.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The mystery shopper commented that she 'could not have had a better response'.
HAZLITT THEATRE (MENTAL HEALTH/LEARNING DISABILITY)			
Access for two people in	+ Information given	+ Staff very helpful, offering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Easier access to lifts

Request	Access to Information/ Service	Staff Awareness	Recommendations for Improvement
<p>wheelchairs</p> <p>Availability of theatre staff to help if visitor was supporting two people with a learning disability</p> <p>Suitability of the seating in the auditorium for people with a physical disability</p>	<p>promptly and easily</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Shown a layout of the auditorium. + All requirements met. - Access to lift difficult 	<p>detail and directions in a clear professional way.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Visitors not made to feel rushed, even though they were not buying tickets and there was a queue 	
HAZLITT THEATRE (VISUAL IMPAIRMENT)			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Very easy to get information about potential problems with visual impairment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + The staff were able to inform the visitor of availability of staff during a performance, lift access and numbers of steps in each area. + The visitor was informed about which seats would be best suited for a visually impaired person during a performance + The staff were extremely helpful, with a high level of visual impairment awareness; they offered a great amount of helpful information + There was 'willingness for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No improvement necessary. Visitor extremely impressed

Request	Access to Information/ Service	Staff Awareness	Recommendations for Improvement
		staff to put themselves out to help'.	
HAZLITT THEATRE (MOBILITY)			
Asked after access for wheelchairs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Informed was lift but at side of building - Path to lift uneven and badly lit - From lift to auditorium have to pass through passage with boxes in it - Need to pass through auditorium to get to toilets and bar before show 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + If is a Hazlitt show carer goes for ½ price (though not if is an external performance) + Staff were polite and helpful at all times - No special area for wheelchair users to sit, placed in corridor essentially creating an extra seat but having to pay full price - Maximum of 4 wheelchairs per performance - No accessible parking available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Placing disabled toilet by the stage door • remove storage from corridor between lift and auditorium • Improve lighting in Rose Street • Cut costs, especially as a wheelchair user is creating extra capacity • Improve accessible parking around theatre
HOUSING NEED (VISUAL IMPAIRMENT)			
Request to go on housing register and whether forms were available in alternative formats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Application sent immediately + Offer of assistance with forms made but only at the Council's offices - Informed what documents needed but told that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Helpful - Staff did not appreciate shoppers desire to complete the forms himself, preserving his independence. When informed staff member 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff should be provided with information about sizes of font needed for visually impaired people to be able to read themselves. • Staff should not assume the only option is visiting

Request	Access to Information/ Service	Staff Awareness	Recommendations for Improvement
	<p>guidance notes would give details of why</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Large print form and guidance notes not available - When form sent contrast of type against background made document totally inaccessible 	<p>that his wife may not be available to help him at home offer to come to offices repeated and staff member losing patience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff seemed unaware of shoppers specific needs 	<p>Council offices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make large print forms available • Cassette versions of forms should be available in the event of complete blindness
HOUSING BENEFITS (VISUAL IMPAIRMENT)			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informed could get information from internet, assumed that internet could be used - Information requested in Braille or tape but not available in any other format but print. - Print Housing Benefits application form sent to shopper. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Staff Member offered no assistance to shopper with completing the form – that he could get assistance elsewhere was assumed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential to develop forms in alternative formats. • Increased staff awareness of both disability awareness and equality issues.

CONCLUSION

Measures which help disabled people make life easier for everyone

87. We have received a substantial amount of evidence that suggests that there is a great deal of work that the Council could undertake to improve access to its services for disabled people. Many of these improvements are relatively low cost and simply require a refocusing on the needs of people with disabilities. To facilitate this we are in agreement with the recommendation of the Local Government Association and Disability Rights Commission's guidance document *Disability Equality in Local Government* which states that 'A corporate commitment to disability equality should be established and specific roles allocated. Chief officers and leading councillors should adopt the key roles in promoting disability equality among staff and the wider community and in overseeing the co-ordination and development of a council's disability equality strategy'²⁵. This document recommends the establishment of a working group of senior officers from across the council to coordinate the development and implementation of a disability equality strategy and action plan²⁶. Although we believe this process should be led by the Social Inclusion Manager to ensure consistency of provision and access across the Council, buy-in is necessary from all parts of the Council and throughout the internal hierarchy. Access should be incorporated into the Council's vision and priorities and accommodated within the development of all plans and strategies of the Council to ensure this top-down approach.

88. To further assist this re-focussing of the Council's service provision towards improving access we also believe an Access Officer should be employed as part of the Social Inclusion unit. Such an Officer would enable professional advice on the planning process and building control to be dispensed as well as assistance with training provision, audits and consultation. Such an Officer would free the Social Inclusion Manager to concentrate on implementing a strategic focus on access across the Council at a corporate level.

89. Through our research we have also learnt the value of consulting with people with disabilities. Time and again the Committee have been thanked for finally taking an interest in the needs of people with disabilities. This momentum can now be built upon and we recommend that a revised and empowered consultation group, along the lines of an enhanced Mobility Focus Group be consulted regularly to identify the barriers and needs of people with disabilities.

90. The Prime Minister's Strategy Unit report *Improving the life chances of disabled people* states:

²⁵ Local Government Association; *Disability Equality in Local Government (Executive Summary)*; p6

²⁶ Ibid. p2

Disabled people's experience of government support and services needs to change. Too often disabled people feel that they are fighting a system which is fragmented, complex and bureaucratic, and which does not put the needs of disabled people at the heart of service provision. Public service reform and investment has not yet benefited disabled people to the extent it should²⁷

91. We believe Maidstone Borough Council has the opportunity, through the recommendations contained within this report and the momentum it generates to place disabled people at the heart of service provision.

²⁷ Prime Minister's Strategy Unit ; *Improving the life chances of disabled people*; January 2005; p11

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION ACTION AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN (SCRAIP)

Report Title: ACCESS TO THE COUNCIL'S SERVICES FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

Report of: RECREATION AND COMMUNITY SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Report Approval: 21 MARCH 2006

Dates to report back to Committee:

Update	Date	Completed?	Note
1 st	October 2006		6 months after publication
2 nd	April 2007		12 months after publication
3 rd	October 2007		

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Recommendation	Cabinet Member	Response	Time-table	Lead Officer
Council as a corporate body				
(a) the Council incorporate the assessment of provision of services to disabled people into its local performance indicators as a method of measuring and monitoring improvements to access to the Council's services for disabled people Council's services (11; 17 (text box); 86) .				
(b) the Council develop and implement a vision for access to its services through an amendment to its corporate priorities (17 (text box); 87)				

Note: Numbers in **bold** refer to the paragraph in the main body of the report from which the recommendation has arisen.

Recommendation	Cabinet Member	Response	Time-table	Lead Officer
<p>(c) A review of the Mobility Focus Group be undertaken and for the review to include consideration of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) methods by which it could encourage greater participation and representation of disabled people and organisations in Maidstone; (ii) how the group could establish itself as a formal consultee with regards to the development of the Council's Plans and Strategies to ensure that the views of people with disabilities are heard; (iii) an amendment to the terms of reference to include all forms of disability rather than a focus on mobility; (iv) the establishment of formal lines of reporting; (v) an amendment to the title of the group; (vi) an analysis of the Disability Rights Commission; <i>Towards Access Standards: The Work of Local Access Groups in England and Wales</i>; 2004 (17) 				

Note: Numbers in **bold** refer to the paragraph in the main body of the report from which the recommendation has arisen.

Recommendation	Cabinet Member	Response	Time-table	Lead Officer
(d) the Council incorporate the assessment of provision of services to disabled people into its mystery shopping exercise. (17 (text box))				
(e) a system be introduced, subject to data protection issues being resolved, whereby staff responsible for communicating with the public can be made aware of a customer's impairment and pursue alternative communication pathways (26; 33)				
(f) Council forms specifically put the question 'Do you have a disability, including mental health, physical disability...?' to encourage the communication of special requirements to Council Officers and that this information be recorded in the database recommended in (e) above. (26)				
(g) Formal guidelines for the appointment of and consultancy with advocates be introduced (26; 33; 59)				

Note: Numbers in **bold** refer to the paragraph in the main body of the report from which the recommendation has arisen.

Recommendation	Cabinet Member	Response	Time-table	Lead Officer
(h) the Council investigate the implications of customer service staff visiting customers with special requirements in their own homes/familiar environments to the customer and report back to this Committee (31)				
(i) the Council appoint an Access Officer within the Social Inclusion Manager's team and that such an Officer have the professional ability to undertake assessments of plans, enforce planning obligations and lead on matters linked to access for disabled people in the Council and community (42)				
(j) the Council use its partnership work, such as with Town Centre Management, Kent Highways and through the Social Inclusion Manager to maximise the opportunities to remove the use of A-boards on pavements in the Town Centre. (53)				
(k) new street-café licensees be provided with the street-café code of conduct as a matter of course (53)				

Note: Numbers in **bold** refer to the paragraph in the main body of the report from which the recommendation has arisen.

Recommendation	Cabinet Member	Response	Time-table	Lead Officer
(l) the Council seek to secure funding for the introduction of a video interpreting service (60)				
(m) the Social Inclusion Manager attend the District Partnership Board (63)				
(n) the Council consult from a design stage onwards with representatives of local disabled organisations with regard to the accessibility of the new Council Offices. (23)				
Training				
(o) specialist mental illness/learning disability training be undertaken by a number of customer facing staff to enable selected officers to act as a 'first-point-of-contact' for customers with mental illnesses and learning disabilities. (27; 30)				
(p) customer facing staff be required to undergo enhanced disability awareness and equality training (84)				

Note: Numbers in **bold** refer to the paragraph in the main body of the report from which the recommendation has arisen.

Recommendation	Cabinet Member	Response	Time-table	Lead Officer
(q) all staff be required to undergo disability awareness and equality training (19; 30; 44)				
(r) disability awareness training to be provided in conjunction with and directly involving local disabled groups and people. (28; 30; 58)				
(s) disability awareness training also be provided to all Members to better enable their community leadership role (54)				
Planning				
(t) the Committee be consulted on the draft forms of the access supplementary planning document (22)				
(u) the Mobility Focus Group be consulted on the draft forms of the access supplementary planning document (22)				
Access in the Town Centre				

Note: Numbers in **bold** refer to the paragraph in the main body of the report from which the recommendation has arisen.

Recommendation	Cabinet Member	Response	Time-table	Lead Officer
(v) in consultation with local businesses the Council introduce a town-wide disability card for reduced entry fees to consolidate existing concessions (leisure centre/mote park/cinema etc) (74)				
(w) the Council introduce a good access 'tick' scheme for businesses in the Town Centre (to be incorporated into the Town Centre Shopping Guide – businesses to benefit from the advertising they get via the guide as an incentive) to encourage businesses to be as accessible as possible (74) .				
(x) Communication lines be opened with organisations that seek to bring groups of people with disabilities to the town with regard to steps the Council could take to make access (e.g. for mini-buses) better. (61)				
Parking				

Note: Numbers in **bold** refer to the paragraph in the main body of the report from which the recommendation has arisen.

Recommendation	Cabinet Member	Response	Time-table	Lead Officer
(y) the Council undergo a full review of accessible disabled parking provision in the Borough. Such a review to include an assessment of the location; physical accessibility of the bay itself; height restrictions and loading restrictions in and around the town centre. (36; 37; 38; 40)				
(z) space be provided for the provision of additional accessible parking bays in Earl Street (37)				
Public Transport				
(aa) the Council champion the cause of its disabled residents through the Quality Bus Partnership (41)				
(bb) the Council's representatives on the Community Rail Partnership be instructed to represent the access needs of residents on the Medway Valley Line (41)				
(cc) representatives of the Council open dialogue with GoVia with regard to the accessibility of train services and stations in the Borough. (41)				

Note: Numbers in **bold** refer to the paragraph in the main body of the report from which the recommendation has arisen.

Recommendation	Cabinet Member	Response	Time-table	Lead Officer
(dd) the planning section ensure issues of access be fully addressed in the redevelopment of Maidstone East station (41)				
(ee) the Council lobby for greater focus on access for disabled people to public transport services and terminals (41)				
Kerbs				
(ff) the lack of dropped kerbs around Council buildings (such as the Hazlitt Theatre, London House) be addressed (72)				
Accessible Toilets				
(gg) a full audit of accessible toilet provision be undertaken, with a view to improvement work be undertaken in consultation with people with disabilities. (43; 62)				
(hh) a fully accessible toilet of sufficient size and quality for use by people with multiple disabilities be built in a central location in the town (62; 72) .				

Note: Numbers in **bold** refer to the paragraph in the main body of the report from which the recommendation has arisen.

Recommendation	Cabinet Member	Response	Time-table	Lead Officer
Communications				
(ii) no Council publication be permitted to be published without a clear statement of the availability of the information in alternative formats and this statement be provided in a consistent place in all documentation (50)				
(jj) all Council communications conform to the Plain English Campaign's Crystal Mark standard and consideration be given to reducing the amount of wording in communications. (32; 48)				
(kk) all essential or 'citizen' information be available from the outset in alternative formats (32; 50)				
(ll) Managers responsible for producing 'essential or citizen' information be fully briefed with regard to the Council's accessible documents guidance and this be cascaded through their teams (47)				

Note: Numbers in **bold** refer to the paragraph in the main body of the report from which the recommendation has arisen.

Recommendation	Cabinet Member	Response	Time-table	Lead Officer
(mm) briefs provided to design companies for council publications include the accessibility standards to which the Council aspires (48)				
(nn) proofs of proposed Council documents be signed off as accessible by the Head of Communications (50)				
(oo) notices of meetings be printed in an increased font size (49)				
(pp) an assessment of the ways in which the Council communicates its services to disabled people be undertaken (51; 59)				
(qq) the production of documents such as the Town Centre Shopping Guide and improvements to the accessibility of the Council's website be accompanied by targeted marketing campaigns (12; 15)				
(rr) a generic 'how we meet the needs of disabled customers' leaflet be produced (51)				
IT				

Note: Numbers in **bold** refer to the paragraph in the main body of the report from which the recommendation has arisen.

Recommendation	Cabinet Member	Response	Time-table	Lead Officer
(ss) Council documents be produced online using the highest specification of Acrobat and with regard to Acrobat's accessible documents guidelines. (52)				
(tt) the Council undertake an accessibility audit on its website conducted by the RNIB (52)				
(uu) the Council aspire to achieve 'see it right' accreditation from the RNIB for it's website. (52)				
(vv) the Council develop both its internet and intranet pages to provide a quick reference guide to deaf services in the borough, including details with regard to Sign Language Interpreters and their availability (56; 57)				
Hazlitt Theatre				
(ww) the Hazlitt Theatre engage the services of a specialist Sign Language Interpreter (60)				
(xx) Works be undertaken to the Hazlitt Theatre to improve the accessibility of the lift and to ensure the corridor between the lift and the theatre is kept clear. (80; 85)				

Note: Numbers in **bold** refer to the paragraph in the main body of the report from which the recommendation has arisen.

Recommendation	Cabinet Member	Response	Time-table	Lead Officer
(yy) the Hazlitt theatre undertake a review of its wheelchair-user ticketing policy for both Hazlitt and external productions. (81; 85)				
Mote Park Leisure Centre				
(zz) Work be undertaken to improve the lighting and signposting in the Leisure Centre with a view to improving its accessibility for people with visual impairments. (85)				
Museum				
(aaa) The Museum utilise the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council's <i>Access for All Self-Assessment Toolkit</i> to assist it in considering accessibility issues for people with disabilities				

Note: Numbers in **bold** refer to the paragraph in the main body of the report from which the recommendation has arisen.

Notes on the completion of SCRAIP

¹ Report recommendations are listed as found in the report.

¹ Insert in this box the Cabinet Member whose portfolio the recommendation falls within.

¹ 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.

¹ The Officer/Cabinet Member responsible for responding to the recommendation should indicate in this box when the action indicated in the previous box will be implemented.

¹ 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.

Bibliography

Disability Rights Commission: *Shaping the future of equality discussion paper*

Prime Minister's Strategy Unit: *Improving the Life Chances of Disabled People; Final Report*, January 2005.

Local Government Association Rough Guides: *Disability Discrimination Act 2005*.

Local Government Association/Disability Rights Commission: *Disability Equality in Local Government*, October 2003.

Valuing People Support Team: *The Story So Far...Valuing People; A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century*.

Audit Commission Public Sector Briefing: *Services for Disabled Children; A review of services for disabled children and their families*.

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council: *Access for All Self-Assessment Toolkit; Disability Access for Museums, Libraries and Archives*.

Office for National Statistics: *Disabled people in public sector employment 1998 to 2004*, May 2005.

Easyinfo: *Information for all Guidance*.

British Institute of Learning Disabilities (BILD): *Partnership Boards factsheet*

Transport Committee on Disabled People's Access to Transport 6th Report: Notes from meetings.

Merseyside Metropolitan Councils and Merseytravel: *Code of Practice on Access and Mobility*.

Northern Ireland Office: *Barriers to Access to Essential Services*

The Guardian: *Make e-documents accessible to everyone, says RNIB*, article published in Society Guardian, 23 November 2005.

Publicnet Briefing: *Public Sector urged to give serious thought to disability act*, Article outlining speech given by Anne McGuire, Minister for Disabled People, 23 September 2005.

Royal Academy Magazine: *What are Museums for?* Article discussing the view that access issues are taking precedence over art, Autumn 2004.

Opportunities: *Council takes a lead in equality for disabled people.*
Article on the efforts of Kent County Council and its Disability Equality Scheme.

Assorted articles and letters published in the Kent Messenger.

The Guardian: *Easy riders.* Article on accessible buses. Published in the Society Guardian, 29 June 2005.

Local Government News' 'Early Riser': *Council Takes a Lead in equality for disabled people.* Article along the same lines as 17 above.

Miscellaneous notes from telephone conversations from Members of the Public.

The Museums, Libraries and Archives Council: *Re:source Disability Portfolio Guides:*

- Training for Equality (no. 3)
- Access on a Shoestring (no.8)
- Accessible Environments (no. 9)
- Employment at Every Level (no.12)

The MLA Council produced 12 guides. The Scrutiny Section holds the above four in hard copy, the remaining 8 are available as downloads from the MLA website.

Haringey Overview and Scrutiny Report: *Progress on the Disability Discrimination Act 1995* (available from the IDeA website)

Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions: *Beacon Council Research – Round 3 Theme Report; Better Access and Mobility*

London Borough of Lewisham, *ENGAGEMENT Case Study; Beacon for Accessible Services (Round 2)*

IDeA Knowledge: *London Borough of Lewisham; A Beacon for Access and Mobility*

Community Strategy for Maidstone: *Access to services and Inclusion priority*, adopted April 2003.

Web Resources

National Statistics Online – Disability
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/nscl.asp?ID=6345>

Museums, Libraries and Archives Council – Disability
http://www.mla.gov.uk/action/learnacc/00access_03.asp

The Building Conservation Directory: *Disability Access Provisions for Historic Buildings*
<http://www.buildingconservation.com/articles/accessbcd98/access.htm>

Eden District Council: *Supplementary Planning Document – An Accessible and Inclusive Environment*
http://www.eden.gov.uk/PDF/ca_env05_24mar_08app.pdf

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: *Planning and Access for Disabled People; A Good Practice Guide.*
<http://www.odpm.gov.uk/index.asp?id=1144644>

Ribble Valley Borough Council: *Guidance on the Use of Part M of the Building Regulations*
http://www.ribblevalley.gov.uk/downloads/Approved_Document_M.pdf

Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee website:
<http://www.dptac.gov.uk/>

Royal National Institute for the Blind: *See it Right Pack.* Advice on designing, producing and planning for accessible information
http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/PublicWebsite/public_seeitright.hcsp

Reigate and Banstead District Council: *Town Centre Disabled Access Scrutiny Panel*
http://www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/PublicWebsite/public_seeitright.hcsp

Eastleigh Borough Council: *Accessibility Awards*, a scheme introduced to encourage local retailers to make their shops accessible. <http://www.idea-knowledge.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=407455>

Adobe: *Using Accessible PDF Documents with Acrobat Reader 7.0 – A guide for disabled people*
http://www.adobe.com/enterprise/accessibility/reader/pdfs/reader7_accessibility.pdf

Cabinet Office: *E-accessibility of Public Sector Services in the EU*
http://cabinetoffice.gov.uk/newsroom/news_releases/2005/051124_eaccessibility.asp

Disability Rights Commission: *Access Code of Practice* http://www.drc-gb.org/uploaded_files/documents/2008_223_drc_cop_rights_of_Access.doc#Chapter5

Agenda Item 15

Communities, Housing and Environment Committee

12 February 2019

Strategic Plan Actions 2019-2024

Final Decision-Maker	Council
Lead Head of Service/Lead Director	Alison Broom Chief Executive
Lead Officer and Report Author	Angela Woodhouse Head of Policy Communications and Governance and Anna Collier Policy and Information Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

Following agreement of a new vision, priorities and outcomes by Council in December 2018 this report sets out the proposed high level key actions the Council will take in the short term to deliver against the outcomes.

This report makes the following recommendations to Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee

1. To consider the high level key actions as identified in Appendix A and provide feedback to the Policy and Resources Committee

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee	29 January 2019
Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee	5 February 2019
Communities Housing and the Environment Committee	12 February 2019
Policy and Resources Committee	13 February 2019
Council	27 February 2019

Strategic Plan Actions 2019-2024

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In December 2018 Council agreed the new vision, priorities and outcomes for the Borough until 2045.
- 1.2 The formation of the new vision, priorities and outcomes has been reached following an intensive process of engagement, research and involvement which included a number of councillor workshops and public and partner consultation to ensure what was developed reflects the key issues facing the borough in the long term.
- 1.3 This report identifies proposed high level key actions that the Council will take in the short to medium term to ensure that the Council is on course to achieve the agreed outcomes. The focus is on significant projects and changes to the Council's approach and work programmes. The intention is not to include every business as usual activity in the high level key action plan. Each council service produces an operational service plan and this is where actions to maintain or evolve these services is articulated.





Key Actions

- 1.4 Proposed key actions can be seen in the sections beginning with "between 2019-24 we will place particular importance on" under each priority in Appendix A.
- 1.5 The vision in the Strategic Plan is to 2045, so key actions reflect the Council's focus of resources in the short to medium term (1-5 years). Actions will be regularly reviewed to ensure that the Council's resources are always focused in the right areas, reflecting the needs of the borough at the time.
- 1.6 The actions identified are brief and strategic, following assessment of the Council's current plans, our ambitions and the resources needed. It should be noted that not every outcome will have actions at this point in time as the Council has finite resources and the plan stretches until 2045 allowing some topics to be addressed now and others to be considered at a later date, in other words the action plan acknowledges that the Council will not be able to tackle all the outcomes straight away. The proposed actions reflect current promises and outcomes where current issues are most acute for example housing. Some areas for example community development currently have limited resource and will require careful planning and further work as well as looking at funding before we can progress.
- 1.7 The Council has a comprehensive range of topic specific strategies each of which has an associated action plan. Our Strategic Plan document will include a full strategy map. As noted above operational actions will be covered in departments' service plans which will be refreshed (as is our usual practice) in February/March 2019 to coincide with the new municipal year; they will

reflect the budget provision for 2019/20 and any preparations needed for operational changes or budget changes agreed for the period beyond.

Cross cutting objectives

1.8 Where actions will have an impact on a cross cutting objective/s this has been identified by the use of a symbol. A key of the symbol can be seen in the table below, this is also reflected on the Council’s one page summary of the visions and priorities in the plan for consistency.

Heritage is respected	
Health inequalities are addressed and reduced	
Deprivation is reduced and social mobility is improved	
Biodiversity and Environmental sustainability is respected	

As projects progress impact on crosscutting objectives may change. This will be assessed as part of the Council’s existing decision making process.

Monitoring of Actions

1.9 Members will be able to keep oversight of progress of these key actions through the service Committees in a number of ways:

- Quarterly and annual key performance indicators
- Strategy and briefing updates
- 6 monthly strategic plan updates.

2. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

2.1 The Committee is asked to review the strategic plan at Appendix A and identify any improvements and/or amendments for consideration by the Policy and Resources Committee. The Vision, Priorities and Outcomes have already been approved by Council and cannot be amended.

2.2 A number of options are open to the committee:

- Review and make amendments
This would allow the committee to influence the document prior to submission to Council and make suggestions for improvement to Policy and Resources for example additional actions or changes to actions under the priorities.

- Review and make no amendments
This would demonstrate that the committee is content with the document.
- Choose not to review the plan
This course of action is not recommended as the Committee would be forfeiting influencing a key strategic document outlining actions for services within its remit for 2019/20 onwards.
- Recommend a rewrite of the Plan and/or request further work
Careful consideration will need to be given to this option as this may compromise the timetable for the plan.

3. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Committee is recommended to review the plan and make recommendations to the Policy and Resources Committee as appropriate. A key role for the committee is ensuring that the Council delivers its strategic objectives with regard to Communities, Housing and Environment.

4. RISK

- 4.1 The Strategic Plan sets out the Council's priorities and how they will be delivered informing the council's risk register which will pick up any actions from the Strategic Plan. A Member and Officer corporate risk workshop was delivered on 22 January 2019 to review and identify risks in relation to the new plan and the product of this will be reported to the Policy and Resources Committee with monitoring by Audit, Governance and Standards Committee in the usual way.

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 As the Committee will be aware from previous reports and discussions on the new Strategic Plan, consultation has been undertaken with residents, Parish Councils, Councillors and Committees to develop the agreed vision, priorities and outcomes. This report provides an opportunity to comment on the actions that have now been developed prior to consideration by Policy and Resources.

6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 The Service Committees will all have an opportunity to comment on and influence the strategic plan actions. Policy and Resources Committee will then consider all the feedback at its meeting on 13th February 2019 and make recommendations to Council for adoption on 27 February 2019.

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The plan sets out the short to medium term high level key actions to achieve the outcomes associated with Council's corporate priorities.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Risk Management	Refer to section 4.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Financial	This report sets out the key actions the Council will take in the short term to deliver Strategic Plan outcomes. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), approved by Council on 12 December 2018, sets out how the Strategic Plan will be delivered in financial terms. The actions described here are consistent with the MTFS.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
Staffing	The Plan will inform the Council's Service Plans which in turn inform individual appraisals setting out the direction and key tasks for staff.	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Legal		Legal Team
Privacy and Data Protection	We recognise the plan actions will impact what information the Council holds on our residents. As projects are developed which involve the collection and/or processing of personal data the project managers/owners of specific tasks will ensure that privacy impact assessments have been undertaken	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance

Equalities	As decisions are made on each of the projects and actions equality impact assessments will be undertaken as needed	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Public Health	The plan has actions to improve health and wellbeing of our residents	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Crime and Disorder	The plan sets out high level priorities for community safety	Head of Policy, Communications and Governance
Procurement	No implications	

8. REPORT APPENDICES

- Appendix A: Draft Strategic Plan 2019-2045

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Report to Council: New Strategic Plan Vision, Priorities and Outcomes 2019-2045
<http://aluminum:9080/documents/s63863/New%20Strategic%20Plan%20Vision%20Objectives%20and%20Outcomes%202019-45.pdf>

Front Cover: Strategic Plan 2019-2045

Artwork to be added

Contents

Page 3: Leader and Chief Executives' foreword - TBC

Page 4: Vision and priorities on a page

Page 5: Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure

Page 6: Safe, Clean and Green

Page 7: Homes and Communities

Page 8: Thriving Place

Page 9: Strategy Map – TBC

Leader and Chief Executive's Foreword, to be added prior to submission to Policy and Resources Committee

Our Strategic Plan 2019-2045

PRIDE IN OUR BOROUGH
A Borough that works for everyone



- Cross Cutting Objectives:**
- Heritage is respected
 - Health inequalities are addressed and reduced
 - Deprivation is reduced and social mobility is improved
 - Biodiversity and Environmental sustainability is respected



Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure

We want Maidstone Borough to work for the people who live, visit and work; now and in the future. We want a Borough where there is a variety of jobs, housing need is met and infrastructure is in place to meet the growing needs of our residents and economy. We also want to ensure we lead and shape our place as it grows, including leading master planning and investing to bring about high quality housing and jobs in the Borough.






Snapshot

- As of 2017 we had 167,700 people living in the Borough
- Our population is forecast to grow by 24.3% between 2016 and 2036
- From 2011/12-2017/18 a total of 5,291 new homes have been built in the Borough
- In 2017/18 the employment rate was 78.5% (83,400 people) up from the same period in the previous year by 3.9%
- In 2018 the average home broadband speed was around 46.2Mbps, up from 36.2Mbps in 2017
- Better transport systems is the second highest priority for our residents

Our Outcomes:

- The Council leads master planning and invests in new places which are well designed
- Key employment sites are delivered
- Housing need is met including affordable housing
- Sufficient infrastructure is planned to meet the demands of growth

Between 2019-24 we will place particular importance on:

- Engaging with our communities on the Local Plan review 
- The Council will take a proactive role in creating and investing in new places 
- Expanding the Council's role in the delivery of affordable and market rent housing 
- Working with partners to get infrastructure planned, funded and delivered 
- Intervening where necessary in the market, to deliver key employment sites 

Safe, Clean and Green

We will keep Maidstone an attractive and clean place for all. Maidstone is a safe place to live and we want our residents to feel safe. We want to protect and where possible enhance our environment and make sure our parks, green spaces, streets and public areas are looked after, well managed and respected.

Snapshot

- Over 50% of waste is recycled
- The town centre and its immediate surrounds have been designated as an Air Quality Management Area
- Maidstone has 30 large parks, four of which are Green Flag parks and 80 Neighbourhood greenspaces
- Just over 40% of residents use amenity green space once a week
- Overall, 70.5% of respondents were very or fairly satisfied with their local area as a place to live
- 93% of residents feel safe in their own home, but 22% don't feel safe walking in their local area at night

Our Outcomes:

- People feel safe and are safe
- A Borough that is recognised as clean and well cared for by everyone
- An environmentally attractive and sustainable Borough
- Everyone has access to high quality parks and green spaces

Between 2019-24 we will place particular importance on:

- Taking action against those who don't respect our public spaces, streets, green spaces and parks 🏡+🌳
- Improving community safety by working with our partners to make people less vulnerable to crime 🏡+👮
- Raising resident satisfaction with the cleanliness of the Borough 🏡+🌳
- Implementing the "Go Green Go Wild" project to embrace and encourage biodiversity and protect and enhance our green spaces 🏡+🌳+🌿
- Improving air quality 🏡+🌳

Homes and Communities

We want to have a place that people love and where they can afford to live. This means ensuring that there is a good balance of different types of homes, including affordable housing. We will have safe and desirable homes that enable good health and wellbeing for our communities. We will address homelessness and rough sleeping to move people into settled accommodation. We will work with our partners to improve the quality of community services and facilities including for health care and community activities. Residents will be encouraged and supported to volunteer and play a full part in their communities.






Snapshot

- In 2018 we provided emergency accommodation for in excess 30 people sleeping rough
- On average people could expect to pay 9 times their annual earnings in 2018 compared to 7 times in 2007
- Only 22% of residents agree their neighbourhood is a place where homes are affordable
- Three of our wards rank in the top 10% for deprivation in Kent

Our Outcomes:

- A diverse range of community activities is encouraged
- Existing housing is safe, desirable and promotes good health and well-being
- Homelessness and rough sleeping are prevented
- Community facilities and services in the right place at the right time to support communities

Between 2019-24 we will place particular importance on:

- Reducing rough sleeping in a sustainable way 
- Reducing the use of temporary accommodation for homeless families 
- Improving housing through use of our statutory powers to promote good health and wellbeing 
- Increasing our interventions with Houses of Multiple Occupation 
- Supporting the health service to improve access to primary care including local care hubs 

A Thriving Place

Maidstone is a Borough that is open for business, attractive for visitors and is an enjoyable and prosperous place to live for our residents. Maidstone is the Business Capital of Kent; we will continue to grow our local economy with high employment, good local jobs and thriving local businesses. We want our town and village centres to thrive and be fit for the future. We will lead investment in the County town and rural service centres through our regeneration projects and working with partners. We are proud of our heritage and will continue to grow our leisure and cultural offer.













Snapshot

- We attract over 4.5 million visits a year with over £284 million spend in the local economy
- 45% of residents view the economy as thriving or on the way up
- Maidstone has the highest total GVA (£3,842m) of all the Kent districts
- Unemployment (job seeker allowance claimants) is 1.1% (Nov 2018)
- 1160 more businesses have started up or located to the Borough since 2010

Our Outcomes:

- A vibrant leisure and culture offer, enjoyed by residents and attractive to visitors
- Our town and village centres are fit for the future
- Skills levels and earning potential of our residents are raised
- Local commercial and inward investment is increased

Between 2019-24 we will place particular importance on:

- Reviewing and delivering leisure and cultural services that are fit for the future   
- Building the innovation centre at Kent Medical Campus, promoting inward investment in the borough 
- Working with partners to redevelop the Maidstone East site and modernise the bus station in the County Town  
- Developing and delivering plans for the five opportunity sites in the town centre and the Staplehurst regeneration project  
- Working with parishes and community groups on neighbourhood plans    

How we do things

- Community Engagement and Leadership
- Partnership working
- Proactive Investment
- Outcome focussed commissioning and service delivery

We recognise that our vision is ambitious and the outcomes we are seeking to achieve will require us to work with our partners and key stakeholders in the Borough. We are keen to take an active role in shaping the Borough through investing our resources in housing and regeneration as well as leading the development of new communities. We will do all this whilst engaging and listening to our communities.

We are a confident organisation, so whilst central government funding has reduced, we are prepared to generate resources locally to fulfil our ambitions and aspirations to deliver our priorities. Building on our strengths - assets, knowledge and expertise and our track record for innovation and improvement we are creating a financially sustainable future so that we can continue with our undiminished plans.

Our Values:

Service

It is important to understand that everything we do impacts on our customers, both internal and external. We will listen to and understand their needs, then take action to provide the right service in a positive and professional manner.

Teamwork

Working together to achieve our objectives and goals in a way that utilises the talents and creativity of everyone in our organisation.

Responsibility

Knowing that we work in an environment that encourages us to take ownership for our actions. Making the right choices and decisions that lead to a satisfactory outcome for all.

Integrity

Having the courage to act on our convictions to build trust and honesty within the organisation. Working with our partners and customers to create a feeling of openness and transparency in all that we do.

Value

Taking care and weighing up our options, aiming to get the maximum effect for every penny of public money we spend.

Equality

Valuing our differences and understanding how they can contribute to a better working environment and services that are fair and easy to access.

Strategy Map – to be added

Agenda Item 16

Communities, Housing and Environment Committee

Tuesday 12
February 2019

Waste Contract Review

Final Decision-Maker	Communities, Housing and Environment Committee
Lead Head of Service/Lead Director	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration and Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	Jennifer Shepherd, Head of Environment and Public Realm
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All Wards

Executive Summary

The Mid Kent Waste Contract has been operational for over 5 years and is half way through the contract term. This report outlines the performance of the contract over the past 5 years.

This report makes the following recommendations to the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee

That the performance of the Waste Contract be noted.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Communities, Housing and Environment Committee	Tuesday 12 February 2019

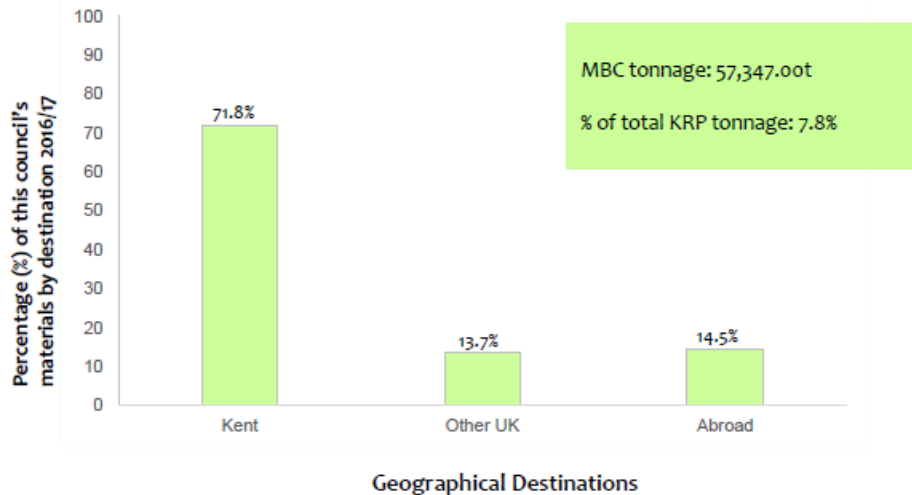
Waste Contract Review

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In 2013, the Council entered into partnership with Ashford and Swale Borough Councils as well as Kent County Council to let a 10 year contract for the collection of household waste and for some street cleansing services to Biffa Municipal Ltd.
- 1.2 This contract delivers all of Maidstone's frontline waste collection services including:
- Refuse collection (£1 million)
 - Mixed recycling collection (£900k)
 - Food waste (£500k)
 - Garden waste (£300k)
 - Bulky waste (£100k)
 - Clinical waste (£10k)
 - Textiles and WEEE (waste electrical and electronic equipment)

The approximate cost is shown against each service.

- 1.3 The Mid Kent Waste Contract has delivered over £1million in savings per year for Maidstone with the cost of the service falling to around £34 per household. The contract currently costs the Council £2.8 million per year which is funded from Council Tax, support from Kent County Council and external income such as garden waste subscriptions.
- 1.4 Across Mid Kent the contract carries out almost 21 million collections every year, with 8 million of those in Maidstone collecting over 300,000 tonnes of waste. Over 99% of these collections are carried out successfully.
- 1.5 Since the start of the contract, Maidstone's garden subscriptions have also increased significantly from 16,390 to 23,915, which is 34% of households within the Borough. This has generated a 45% increase in garden waste recycling across the Borough since 2012.
- 1.6 The vast majority of the waste collected remains in Kent, with refuse sent for energy recovery in Allington, garden and food waste going to Blaise Farm, Kings Hill. The mixed recycling is sent to Crayford for separation before being sent to reprocessors in this country, Europe and Asia. As shown in Graph 1 only 14.5% of Maidstone's waste is sent out of the Country.



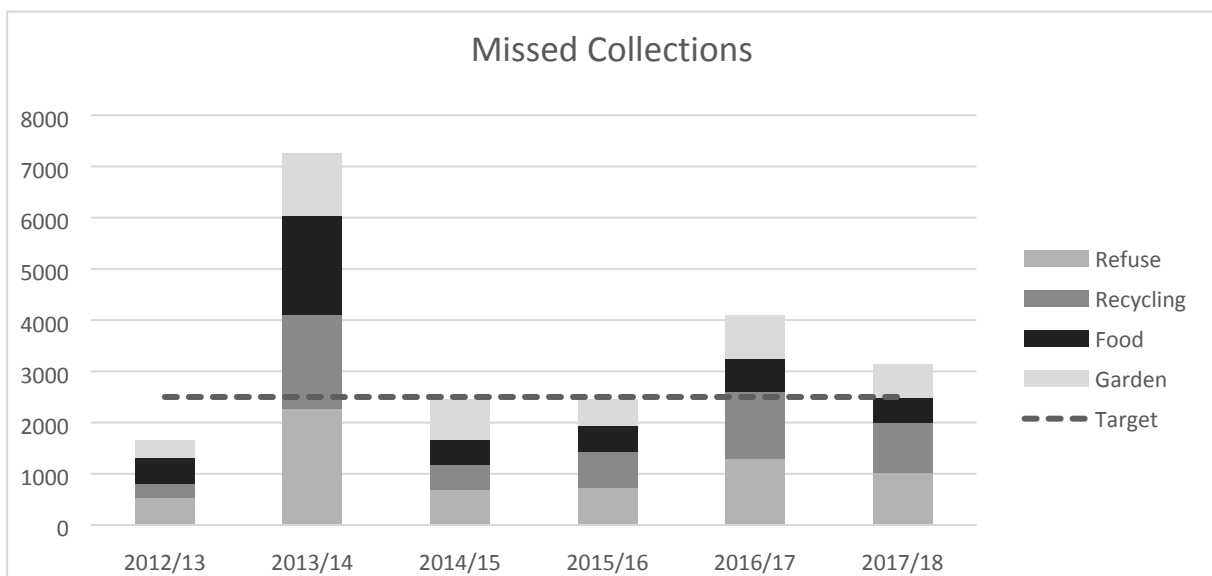
Graph 1: End destination of Maidstone's waste

Contract Performance

1.7 Contract performance is monitored monthly and is reviewed through the contract's Partnership Board. This Board consists of senior management at Ashford, Maidstone and Swale Borough Councils, Kent County Council, the Kent Resource Partnership and Biffa Municipal. Whilst there have undoubtedly been service failures over the past 5 years, overall the contract has achieved its original objectives:

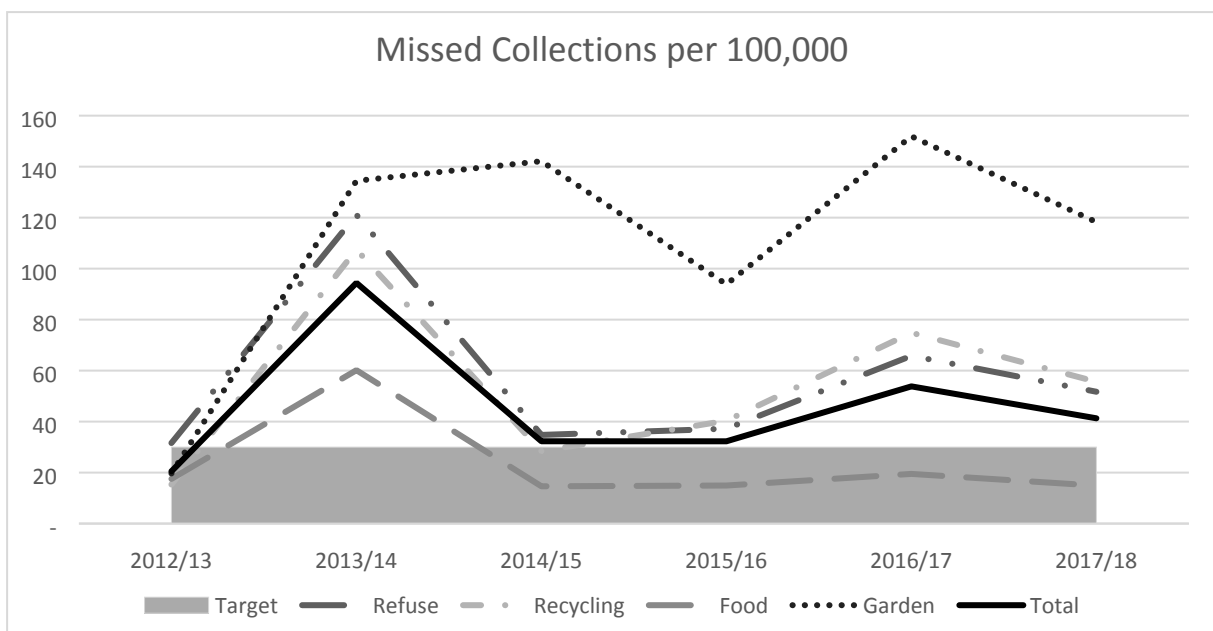
- To achieve the Boroughs' savings targets
- To increase recycling performance
- To provide a consistent service across Mid Kent

1.8 Missed collections remain the key measure of the performance of the contract and although they continue to be higher than the target of 30 per 100,000, in Maidstone only 3,140 collections out of the 8 million carried out were missed last year.



Graph 2: Total number of missed collections per service over the contract term

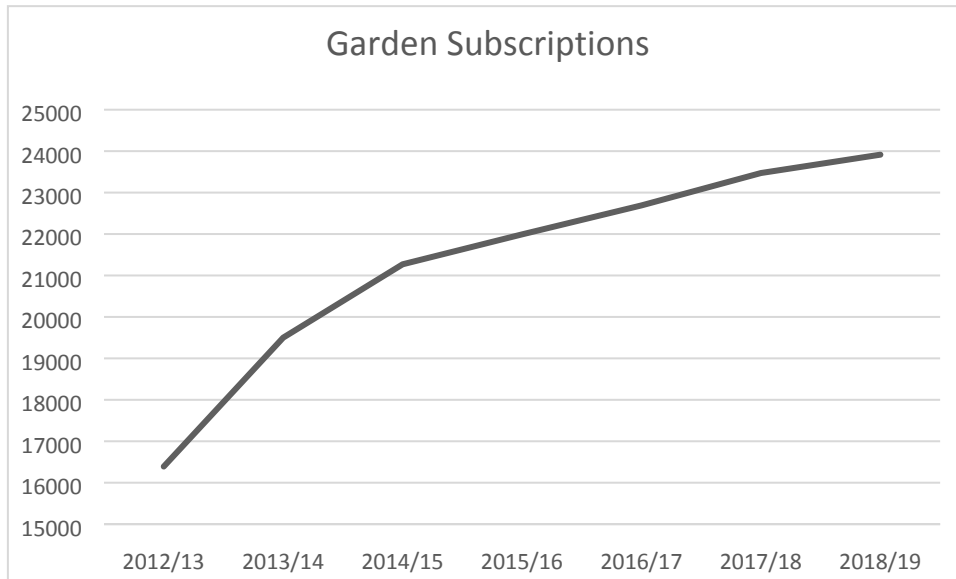
1.9 Graph 2 above shows the number and type of missed bins since 2012. There was a significant peak in 2013/14 which can be attributed to the complete rerouting of the collection rounds. This took some time to embed whilst the collection crews got used to their new routes particularly in the rural areas. Missed collections are the primary KPI for the service and contract and therefore are monitored through the Partnership Board. The peaks in missed collections over the last couple of years generally relate to vehicle reliability issues which have been escalated through Biffa's senior management team and their third party maintenance provider. Biffa have invested in a number of new and additional vehicles to support the frontline fleet and missed bin figures have continued to fall.



Graph 3: The number of missed collections per 100,000 collections made, shown per service

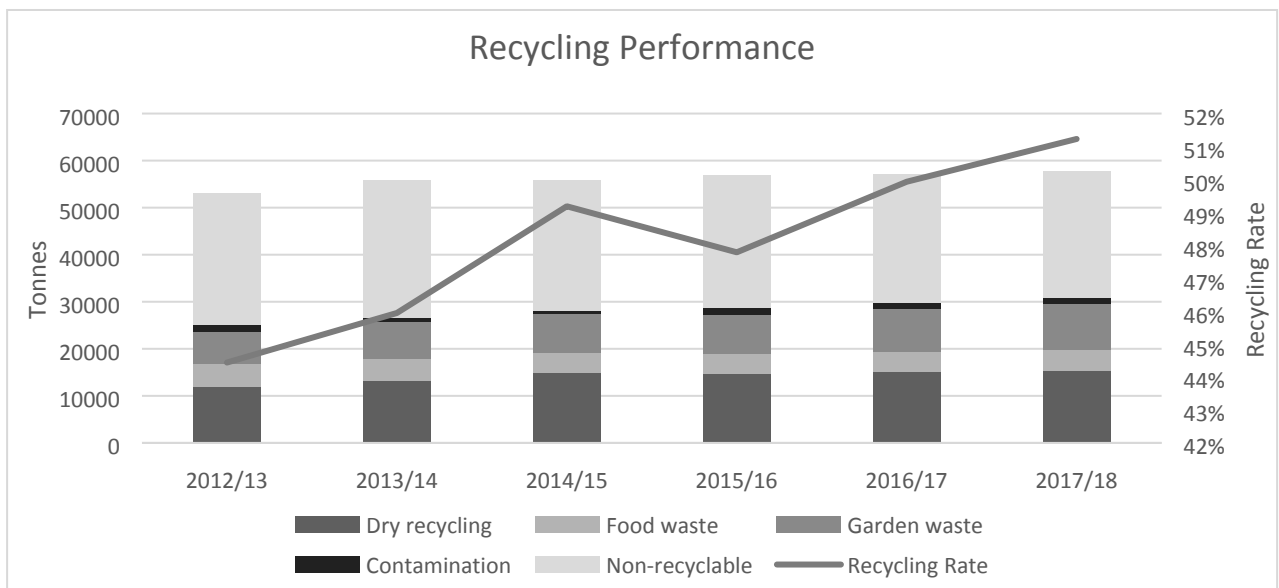
1.10 When presented as missed collections per 100,000 (Graph 3), it is evident that there has continued to be a disproportionate number of missed garden bins compared to the number of properties serviced. Prior to 2013, residents had the option to purchase compostable bags from local retailers and therefore the collection crews had to visit every property. However since the bags were discontinued, the crews only visit properties subscribed to the service.

1.11 The level of garden subscriptions has continued to exceed expectations with over 33% of households now subscribing to the service, as shown in Graph 4. This is thought to be one of the highest uptakes for a chargeable scheme in the country. The graph below shows the rise in subscriptions over the contract period.



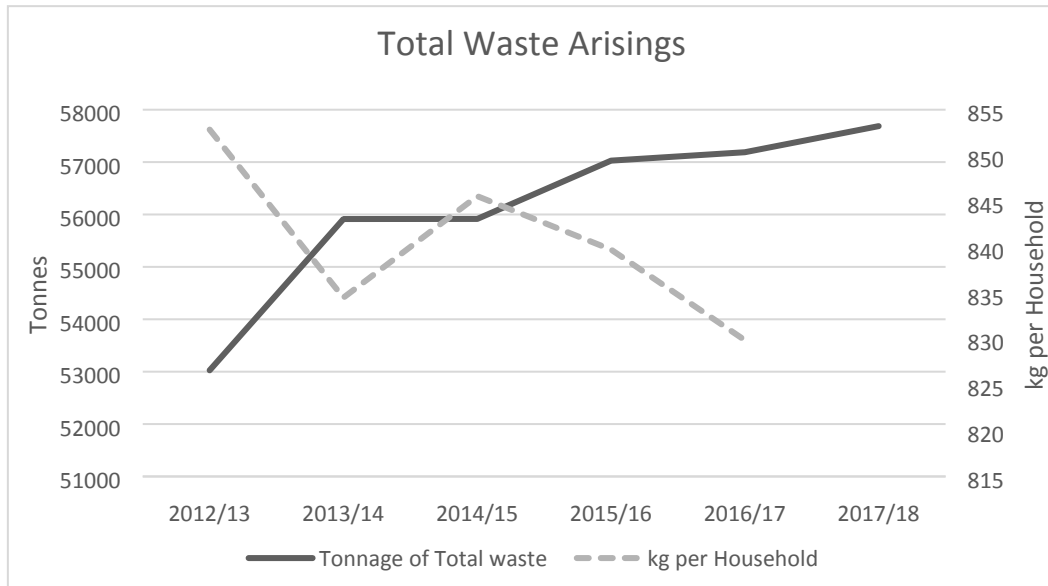
Graph 4: Number of garden waste subscriptions per year

1.12 Recycling performance is also an indicator of the success of the contract and although Ashford's performance has eclipsed Maidstone's, the Borough has achieved the national target and has defied the national trend of falling recycling rates (Graph 5).

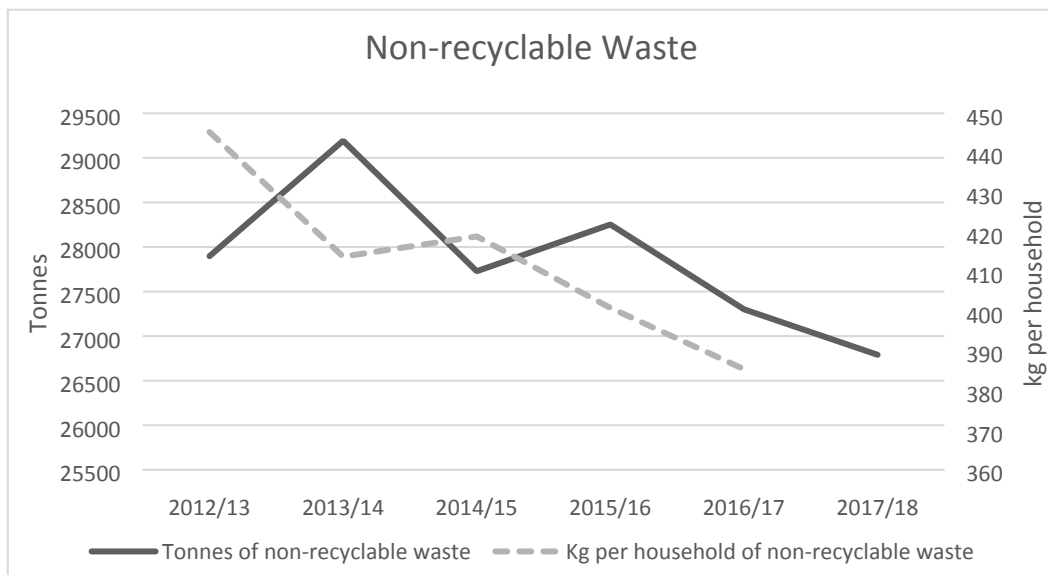


Graph 5: Tonnage of waste and recycling collected over the contract term and the resultant recycling rate

1.13 Overall total waste arisings have increased over the contract period (Graph 6) and can be linked to the economic climate and increased consumer confidence. Non-recyclable waste levels have continued to fall as more waste is diverted to recycling (Graph 7).

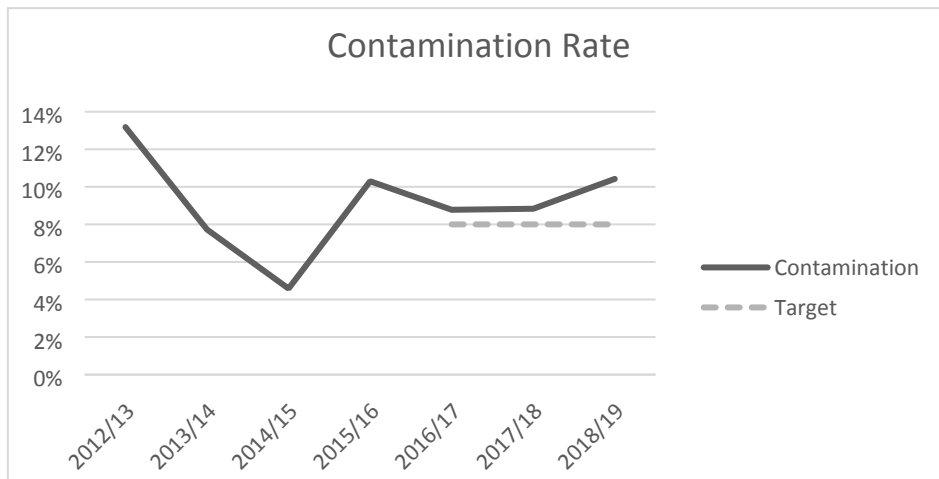


Graph 6: Total waste collected



Graph 7: Tonnes of non-recyclable waste collected

1.14 A review of the waste partnerships carried out in 2017 on behalf of the Kent Resource Partnership identified that compared with the original modelling for the contract, performance has been lower than expected. It was anticipated that Maidstone could achieve a recycling rate of 54.6% however to date has not been about to achieve this. This is predominately attributed to the increase in contamination of the recycling (Graph 8).



Graph 8: Amount of contamination (non-recyclable waste) collected in the recycling bins

1.15 The higher contamination rate is likely to be due to a number of reasons:

- Stricter regulations for MRF (material recycling facility) operations
- Changes to MRF specification
- Confusion over textile collections
- Misuse of the recycling service
- Crew oversight

1.16 The contamination levels are fairly consistent across Mid Kent and are also comparable with East Kent districts. It is a common issue which is regularly discussed through the Kent Resource Partnership and a Kent-wide communications group are working on initiative to target and reduce contamination.

1.17 Appendix A provides further information about the composition of the recycling including the objectionable and prohibitive materials collected.

1.18 This issue of contamination is addressed through the Annual Action Plan and the regular meetings with Biffa and Kent County Council. A number of actions have been identified including reviewing the separate textile collections as textiles remain a significant contributor to the contamination of the recycling bins.

1.19 Financially, the contract is still performing well from Maidstone's perspective, although additional costs to process the mixed recycling at Allington have resulted in no additional savings being generated. There is an annual pricing review for the contract which takes into account property and service growth as well as indexation. The Mid Kent Contract applies a basket of indices to the annual price which includes average earnings, diesel and CPI. Over the course of the 5 years, there have been 3 years of positive indexation and 2 years of negative indexation.

2. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

2.1 This report is for information only.

3. RISK

- 3.1 This report is presented for information only and has no risk management implications.
- 3.2 However it is important to highlight that there is a significant risk of increased contract costs at the end of the contract term. This is captured within the Service’s risk register and is not specifically related to this report.

4. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 4.1 Public satisfaction with the refuse and recycling services remains high and the Committee have previously recognised the good performance of the service.
- 4.2 Prior to the procurement of a new contract in 2023, analysis of the Borough’s waste composition and a public consultation will be carried out to determine the most appropriate service provision for the future.

5. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 5.1 The contract term is for another 5 years until October 2023. In the next 12 months work is due to start with the Partner Authorities to identify the options for the procurement of the next contract. It is anticipated that the procurement process for this will start in 2021.
- 5.2 Promotion of the recycling services will continue to maintain and improve the Borough’s recycling rate and reduce contamination levels.

6. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The delivery of the Waste Collection Contract supports the Council’s priority for a “Clean, Green and Safe Borough”.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Risk Management	This report is presented for information only and has no risk management implications.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Financial	The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary	Paul Holland, Senior Finance Manager

	headings and so need no new funding for implementation	
Staffing	N/A	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Legal	The report is for information only and there are no contractual implications	Team Leader, Contracts and Commissioning
Privacy and Data Protection	N/A	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Equalities	N/A	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Public Health	N/A	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Crime and Disorder	N/A	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Procurement	N/A	Head of Environment and Public Realm

7. REPORT APPENDICES

Appendix A: Sample Composition of Recycling

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

Appendix A: Sample Composition of Recycling

Month	October 2018													
Supplier	KCC - ALLINGTON													
Raw Material	Co-Mingled Loose Glass	Date												
ContaminationCategory	Material	01/10/2018	03/10/2018	04/10/2018	09/10/2018	10/10/2018	11/10/2018	15/10/2018	19/10/2018	25/10/2018	26/10/2018	31/10/2018	Grand Total	End Process
Acceptable	Aluminium Cans	1.48%	1.10%	1.37%	0.91%	1.81%	1.23%	1.57%	0.66%	1.10%	0.94%	1.61%	1.25%	Recycled
	Cardboard	16.67%	14.27%	11.07%	22.56%	8.31%	14.50%	16.56%	12.49%	16.29%	4.73%	7.47%	13.20%	Recycled
	Glass Mixed	17.57%	18.71%	13.02%	14.55%	35.83%	19.10%	20.94%	18.46%	22.81%	29.08%	19.09%	20.79%	Recycled
	HDPE Coloured	0.78%	0.30%	1.16%	1.15%	0.10%	1.09%	0.31%	0.46%	0.45%	0.44%	0.31%	0.60%	Recycled
	HDPE Natural	1.29%	2.29%	1.99%	2.72%	1.68%	1.37%	2.38%	1.49%	0.55%	0.79%	2.44%	1.72%	Recycled
	Mixed Paper	25.37%	19.48%	21.46%	19.77%	19.50%	19.03%	22.64%	29.58%	19.21%	27.99%	24.75%	22.64%	Recycled
	News & Pams	11.55%	14.56%	25.40%	17.95%	13.08%	20.09%	12.29%	15.81%	12.40%	14.89%	15.01%	15.74%	Recycled
	PET Clear	2.30%	2.46%	1.94%	2.04%	3.26%	2.81%	3.30%	2.09%	1.70%	1.70%	3.15%	2.43%	Recycled
	PET Coloured	1.48%	0.58%	0.80%	1.67%	0.46%	0.78%	0.63%	0.11%	0.73%	0.82%	0.50%	0.78%	Recycled
	Pots Tubs and Trays	6.68%	5.14%	5.43%	4.10%	4.38%	6.02%	4.86%	3.51%	6.01%	5.41%	6.23%	5.25%	Recycled
	Steel Cans	2.96%	2.23%	2.11%	1.56%	2.88%	2.85%	1.64%	2.00%	1.52%	2.85%	2.67%	2.30%	Recycled
	Tetrapack / Foil Lined	0.71%	0.84%	0.84%	0.41%	0.64%	0.62%	0.78%	1.04%	0.89%	0.95%	0.49%	0.75%	Recycled
	Total Acceptable	88.86%	81.97%	86.59%	89.41%	91.93%	89.49%	87.88%	87.71%	83.67%	90.57%	83.71%	87.44%	
Objectionable	Hard Plastics	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	Recycled
	Plastic Bags Clear & Coloured	1.34%	9.61%	2.99%	2.96%	1.09%	1.39%	2.07%	1.13%	2.88%	1.09%	2.04%	2.58%	Recycled
	Plastic Film Clear	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	Recycled
	Plastic Laminates / Waxed Paper	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	Recycled
	Scrap Metals	1.65%	1.11%	0.84%	2.23%	1.24%	0.61%	2.10%	1.08%	1.22%	2.41%	1.70%	1.47%	Recycled
	Textiles	0.49%	0.62%	1.15%	1.22%	1.09%	1.60%	2.80%	9.25%	4.80%	0.32%	5.03%	2.60%	Not Recycled
	Wet Paper	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	Not Recycled
		Total Objectionable	3.48%	11.35%	4.98%	6.41%	3.42%	3.61%	6.96%	11.46%	8.90%	3.82%	8.77%	6.65%
Prohibitive	Black Plastic Waste/Sacks	2.69%	1.25%	4.33%	1.21%	0.00%	2.10%	2.16%	0.00%	5.68%	2.24%	0.00%	1.97%	Not Recycled
	Ceramics & Pyrex	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.09%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.13%	0.02%	Not Recycled
	Expanded Polystyrene	0.26%	0.12%	0.15%	0.76%	0.23%	0.20%	0.09%	0.11%	0.37%	0.21%	0.07%	0.24%	Not Recycled
	Food	2.47%	2.97%	1.32%	1.43%	3.20%	1.98%	0.30%	0.35%	0.70%	1.96%	3.15%	1.80%	Not Recycled
	Green Waste	0.44%	0.04%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.77%	0.18%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.13%	Not Recycled
	Oil/Pesticides Container	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	Not Recycled
	Other Hazardous Waste	0.21%	0.00%	0.03%	0.00%	0.00%	0.29%	0.11%	0.02%	0.00%	0.53%	3.55%	0.43%	Not Recycled
	Sand/Building Materials	0.14%	0.85%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.11%	0.07%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.42%	0.14%	Not Recycled
	Sanitary/Nappies	1.45%	0.88%	1.52%	0.72%	0.86%	0.49%	0.36%	0.19%	0.36%	0.35%	0.14%	0.67%	Not Recycled
	Wood	0.00%	0.57%	1.08%	0.06%	0.35%	0.95%	1.79%	0.16%	0.32%	0.32%	0.05%	0.51%	Not Recycled
	Total Prohibitive	7.66%	6.68%	8.43%	4.18%	4.64%	6.90%	5.15%	8.83%	7.43%	7.52%	5.91%		
	Total Contamination	11.14%	18.03%	13.41%	10.59%	8.07%	10.51%	12.12%	12.29%	16.33%	9.43%	16.29%	12.56%	
	Total Sample %	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	
	Specification Tolerance	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%	5.00%	
	Sample Weight (kg)	64.36	61.24	62.50	62.88	61.40	62.53	60.88	64.21	62.40	61.75	62.18	686.31	

Agenda Item 17

Communities, Housing and Environment Committee

**Tuesday 12
February 2019**

Waste Crime Update

Final Decision-Maker	Communities, Housing and Environment
Lead Head of Service/Lead Director	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration and Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	Jennifer Shepherd, Head of Environment and Public Realm
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All Wards

Executive Summary

In July 2018, the new Waste Crime Team was established to target littering and fly tipping. Since then they have had a number of successful initiatives including vehicle seizures, joint operations with the Police and enforcement action against fly tippers. This report outlines the results achieved.

This report makes the following recommendations to the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee

That the Waste Crime Update be noted.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Communities, Housing and Environment Committee	Tuesday 12 February 2019

Waste Crime Update

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 In 2018, a new Waste Crime Team was established to tackle waste related crimes across the Borough. The team comprises of a manager, waste crime officer and two street scene enforcement officers and targets littering, fly tipping, duty of care offences and abandoned vehicles.
- 1.2 The Street Scene Enforcement Officer posts were created following the end of the litter enforcement contract in order to provide a visible presence and patrols in littering hotspots to issue Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) to offenders.
- 1.3 As well as investigating evidence relating to fly tippers, the team have also taken a proactive approach carrying out joint operations with other agencies including the Police and HMRC.
- 1.4 A Waste Crime Response Team has also been created within Street Cleansing and works more closely with the waste crime team on fly tipping removal. This enable evidence to be captured in a single visit and for the waste to be removed more swiftly.
- 1.5 The penalties issued by the team vary according to the level of the offence:
 - Fly tipping – for a first offence, where the waste dumped is relatively small, a £400 Fixed Penalty Notice is usually issued. However for larger or repeated offences, or if an FPN is not paid, a prosecution will be pursued through the Courts. This can result in an unlimited fine and up to 5 years imprisonment. However the Council only retains the value of any FPNs paid as court fines are retained by the Treasury, although the Council the Council can seek repayment for both the Client and Legal costs of prosecuting offenders and can request compensation for clean-up costs incurred.
In addition to the fine, the Council also has the ability to seize the offenders vehicle, and if not claimed may sell or crush the vehicle.
 - Littering – littering can include a single item e.g. cigarette end, up to a couple of black sacks. Generally for littering a £120 FPN is issued, however this reduces to £90 if paid within 14 days. Unpaid FPNs are pursued through the Courts.
 - Duty of Care – the collection and transport of all waste, whether from a household or business, requires Duty of Care paperwork to show who owns the waste, who is transporting it and where it is going. Where a business or householder is unable to produce a Duty of Care either for their waste or if they are the waste carrier, a £300 FPN can be issued.
- 1.6 Since the start of the team we have invested over £3,000 on new covert cameras and have deployed these continuously with some positive results. We are about to invest a further £10,000 on additional cameras by the end

of the financial year including ANPR and covert cameras as well as purchasing new fly tipping and littering signage.

RESULTS

1.7 Since July 2018, the team have achieved the following results:

Offence	Number	Value
Fly tipping	9	£3,600
Littering	450	£40,500
Dog Fouling	3	£240
Duty of Care	22	£6,600
Other Waste FPNs	34	£10,200

1.8 Following the team's launch of the Vehicle Seizure Policy, four vehicles have been seized in relation to waste carrier offences and three vehicles have been crushed or sold due to fly tipping offences.

1.9 So far 16 joint operations have been carried out with the Police resulting in over 60 vehicles being stopped and checked, 6 vehicle seizures and a number of the Duty of Care FPNs issued. The success of this initiative has also resulted in a "Day of Action" being carried out across Kent with a number of arrests and FPNs issued. It is planned to continue these joint operations throughout 2019 as both agencies have seen the combined benefits.

1.10 In addition, the team have investigated 279 reports of abandoned vehicles which has resulted in 43 vehicles being removed.

1.11 The Street Scene Enforcement Officers have issued the highest amount of FPNs, however have only received 6 complaints. Following these complaints the body-worn camera footage was reviewed and the conduct of the officers was found to be appropriate. In all instances the FPNs were paid.

1.12 Since July 2018, over £60,000 worth of FPNs have been issued by the team which contributes to their funding. The payment rate is currently around 70% with unpaid FPNs being pursued through the Courts. There are a number of investigations currently underway which are likely to result in prosecutions being sought.

1.13 The team have also supported the Waste Team with the enforcement of household waste issues including the issuing of Section 46 Notices, Community Protection Warnings and Notices where waste in communal bin stores is not being managed appropriately. This enforcement action is taken against managing agents and housing trusts and has a high level of success in ensuring waste does not accumulate. This is demonstrated by over 79 Section 46 Notices being issued but only 31 Community Protection Warnings and 4 of these leading to Community Protection Warnings.

NEXT STEPS

1.14 The team have been working on the new legislation for Littering from Vehicles which came into force last year. Unlike other waste crime offences this is a civil offence rather than criminal and therefore the processes are very different. The offence is dealt with by a Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) in a similar way as parking offences. This has required significant work to get processes in place and the arrangements for a secure connection to the DVLA are currently being set up.

1.15 The 18 month trial of the in-house Street Scene Enforcement Officers is due to continue until December 2019 and will be reviewed again in September 2019.

2. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

2.1 This report is for noting only.

3. RISK

3.1 This report is presented for information only and has no risk management implications.

4. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

4.1 The contents of this report outline the results of the decision made by the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee in October 2017 to invest in the waste crime team. The Committee agreed that litter enforcement should be carried out in-house on an 18-month trial.

5. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

5.1 The successes identified in this report targeting waste crime will continue to be promoted through social media to deter these illegal activities.

6. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The success and continued delivery of the Waste Crime Team supports the Council priority for a "Clean, Green and Safe Borough."	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Risk Management	The report is for information only.	Head of Environment and Public

		Realm
Financial	The activity set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation.	Paul Holland, Senior Finance Manager
Staffing	N/A	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Legal	N/A	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Privacy and Data Protection	N/A	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Equalities	N/A	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Public Health	N/A	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Crime and Disorder	The work of the team, in particular the joint operations with the Police, support the reduction of crime in the Borough.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Procurement	N/A	Head of Environment and Public Realm

7. REPORT APPENDICES

None

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

COMMUNITIES, HOUSING and ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE	12th February 2019
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Temporary Accommodation for Homeless Households

Final Decision-Maker	Communities, Housing and Environment Committee
Lead Head of Service	John Foster, Acting Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Andrew Connors, Housing Delivery Manager.
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

The success achieved in providing Council-owned temporary accommodation has been reported previously to the Committee. The first phase of acquiring properties for temporary accommodation via the purchase and repair programme has been completed and was delivered within budget, with an underspend of £180,000. The second phase of the programme is well underway and will once again be delivered within budget with an estimated under spend of around £63,000 once completed.

The increase in homelessness represents a current and extremely important matter that needs to be addressed. This report therefore makes a recommendation in relation to any underspend within the existing previously approved capital budget for Housing Investments, being released for investing in further property for use as temporary accommodation for homeless households.

This report makes the following recommendation to this Committee

That:

1. The underspent sum of £180,000 within the previously approved capital budget for Housing Investments be released for investing in further property for use as temporary accommodation for homeless households.

2. Any further additional underspend within the previously approved capital budget for Housing Investments be released for investing in further property for use as temporary accommodation for homeless households.

Timetable	
<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Date</i>
Communities, Housing and Environment Committee	12 th February 2019

Temporary Accommodation for Homeless Households

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 A report regarding the Temporary Accommodation Strategy was presented to the Committee on the 13th December 2016, which set out the requirement for a range of temporary accommodation including; a small portfolio of 13 units to be bought and retained by the Council. The Committee approved in principle to acquiring through purchase or lease 13 additional units of temporary accommodation to be agreed on a case by case basis, in order to provide a portfolio of temporary accommodation that matches demand.
- 1.1 There was £3.9m in the Housing Investments Capital budget to support this purchase and repair programme, which equated to £300,000 per property (fully inclusive of all works, fees, SDLT). It was also previously suggested that there may exist an opportunity for the Committee to decide to acquire more properties, if a business case still exists, and the properties so far acquired have 'underspent' in terms of the total budget available for this project.
- 1.2 The Temporary Accommodation Strategy was reviewed by this Committee on 12th December 2017, with a further recommendation that the Council increase the portfolio of Temporary Accommodation stock further. The initial (phase one) purchase and repair programme, being extended (phase two) to acquire 15 additional properties, within an agreed budget £4.5m.
- 1.3 The Committee subsequently gave delegated authority to the Director of Finance and Business Improvement on the 20th March 2018, to determine the number, size and type of temporary accommodation to be acquired in accordance with the decision made by the Committee on 12 December 2017, within the previously agreed budget.
- 1.4 The initial (phase one) purchase and repair programme is completed and was delivered within budget, with underspend of £180,000. Phase two of the purchase and repair programme is now fully underway with 15 properties already completed and handed over, with a further 2 anticipated by the end of March this year.
- 1.5 Phase two of the programme will once again be delivered within budget and there is estimated to be an under spend of around £63,000, giving a total estimated combined under spend for programme phases one and two of approximately £243,000. The final under spend for phase two will be confirmed upon completion of the programme.

- 1.6 The success achieved in providing Council-owned temporary accommodation has been reported previously to the Committee. The increase in homelessness still represents a current and extremely important matter that needs to be tackled now. This report therefore makes a recommendation that any underspend within the existing previously approved capital budget for Housing Investments, be released for investing in further property for use as temporary accommodation for homeless households.
 - 1.7 If the underspend is not spent by the end of this financial year (2018/19), as a matter of course, such remaining sums of underspend will be carried forward for expenditure in 2019/20.
 - 1.8 Based on the previous total costs of individual property type and sizes delivered so far within the first two programme phases, it is anticipated that the combined underspend will yield a further additional property. The number, type and size will be determined by the delegated authority given to the Director of Business Improvement in accordance with the previous aforementioned decision made by the Committee on the 20th March 2018
 - 1.9 In addition, the Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Review was presented to Committee on the 15th January 2019. The Committee approved that the Policy and Resources Committee are recommended to invest a further sum of £3 million towards acquiring additional temporary accommodation (phase 3) in order to meet rising need. The Policy and Resources Committee will finalise the budget proposals after considering comments from all Service Committees, at its meeting on the 13th February 2019, prior to submission to Council on the 27th February 2019.
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2. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The Committee could choose not to follow the recommendation and make a budgetary saving or utilise the under spend in another service area. To do so however would not enable the Council to fully realise the benefit that could be obtained by purchasing additional property within previously agreed budgets.
 - 2.2 The Committee choose to approve that the sum of £180,000 and any further additional underspend within the existing previously approved capital budgets for Housing Investments, be released for investing in further property for use as temporary accommodation for homeless households.
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3. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The preferred option is within paragraph 2.2, as this will allow the Council to make best use of the funds previously agreed to purchase additional temporary accommodation for homeless households.
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4. RISK

- 4.1 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.
-

5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 None required.
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6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 The Council can proceed with investing the underspend towards the completion of property purchases upon approval of the recommendation. Property being considered and approved for purchase will continue to be approved on a case by case basis (in consultation with the Chair of the Committee) and be in accordance with the relevant temporary accommodation standards and acceptance criteria. Ward Councillors will also continue to be notified of the Council's intention to purchase any property that falls within their ward.
- 6.2 The relevant searches and due diligence by Mid Kent Legal Services will be carried out to help progress agreement through to exchange and completion of contracts.
-

7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	Preventing homelessness is a key priority of the Housing Strategy. 'A home for everyone' is a priority within the Strategic Plan.	John Foster, Acting Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Risk Management	Already covered in the risk section.	John Foster, Acting Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Financial	The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings within the capital	Paul Holland, Senior Finance Manager

	programme and so need for new funding for implementation.	
Staffing	The work towards completing any property purchases will be established using existing staff resources and the appointed Employers Agent.	John Foster, Acting Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Legal	Accepting the recommendations will fulfil the Council's duties under the Housing Act 1996 and the Homelessness Act 2002. Failure to accept the recommendations without agreeing suitable alternatives may place the Council in breach of these acts. Acting on the recommendations is within the Council's powers as set out in the Constitution.	Team Leader, Contracts and Commissioning
Privacy and Data Protection	No implications	Team Leader, Contracts and Commissioning
Equalities	The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment.	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals.	John Foster, Acting Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Crime and Disorder	No implications.	John Foster, Acting Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
Procurement	Contractor for works, Employers Agent and management service providers are already appointed in accordance with the Council's	John Foster, Acting Head of Regeneration and Economic

	procurement procedures.	Development.
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8. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- None
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9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Temporary Accommodation Strategy Report – December 2016
Temporary Accommodation Strategy Review Report - December 2017
Temporary Accommodation Strategy Review Report – March 2018

Communities, Housing & Environment Committee

12 February 2019

MBC Policy for Safeguarding Children & Adults at Risk

Final Decision-Maker	Communities, Housing & Environment Committee
Lead Head of Service	John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Community Services
Lead Officer and Report Author	Matt Roberts, Community Partnerships & Resilience Manager
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

Maidstone Borough Council has a statutory and moral responsibility to safeguard children and vulnerable adults who may be at risk of harm. This policy has been written to give staff, contractors and elected Members guidance around relevant legislation, signs and types of abuse and what to do next to refer the concern to the most appropriate agency so that the subject of that concern can receive suitable help.

This report makes the following recommendations to Communities, Housing & Environment Committee

That:

1. The draft version of MBC's Safeguarding Policy be approved for consultation.
2. Delegated authority be granted to the Head of Housing & Community Services to formally adopt the Policy, subject to any minor amendments in consultation with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee.
3. A safeguarding training session be arranged by the Head of Housing & Community Services for all Councillors in the 2019/20 municipal year.
4. Council be recommended that the Chairman of the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee is automatically appointed to the role of Member Safeguarding Champion.
5. Council is recommended to amend the delegations to the Head of Housing and Community Services to include specific reference to responsibility for Safeguarding.
6. Delegated authority is granted to the Head of Legal Partnership and Monitoring Officer to make the appropriate amendments to the Constitution to give effect to the decisions.

Timetable	
<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Date</i>
Communities, Housing & Environment	12 February 2019
Council	27 February 2019

MBC Policy for Safeguarding Children & Adults at Risk

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 On the 18th October 2016 the Communities, Housing and Environment Committee (CHE) approved the adoption of a combined Safeguarding policy covering both Safeguarding of Children and Adults at Risk, the formation of an MBC Safeguarding Board and the creation of Safeguarding Champions across the organisation, including a Member Champion.

2. Key Changes from the Current Policy

- 2.1 Kent County Council has introduced changes to the way referrals are handled and made to the authority. The Policy has been updated to include the Kent Support Levels Process and the Integrated Front Door service and instructs staff on how referrals can be made. These issues are covered in the Quick View flow chart and the body of the Policy.
- 2.2 The Policy now highlights the need for staff to be professionally curious and to seek further information if they have a concern, this is important in ensuring that concerns are not overlooked.
- 2.3 A section on Missing Children has also been included due to the concern about children who go missing being at increased risk of being groomed for sexual exploitation or becoming involved in gangs or criminal activity.
- 2.4 Clare's Law and how someone might apply for a disclosure of information under the Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme (DVDS) has been added. There is still a lack of awareness about this important process.
- 2.5 A key change to the current Policy is the inclusion of a section about Mental Health, Suicide Awareness and Suicide Prevention guidance. Suicide has recently become one of the key safeguarding concerns raised by staff, particularly those in Revenues and Benefits and Housing, where dealing with customers facing financial hardship or risk of homelessness can have a detrimental effect on their mental health.
- 2.6 The guidance provided by the Policy is intended to guide staff in responding to concerns of this type. The Mental Health First Aiders, Designated Safeguarding Officer and the Safeguarding Champions are also there to provide support and advice to staff.
- 2.7 Information sharing guidance has been updated in line with the Council's Data Protection Policy and GDPR requirements. The Kent & Medway Information Sharing Agreement continues to be the platform for information exchange between agencies.

3. MBC Internal Safeguarding Board

- 3.1 The group meets on a quarterly basis and provides an excellent platform to discuss safeguarding arrangements and ensure liaison between

departments. Where appropriate, joint working takes place between Council departments and Kent County Council's Children and Young People's and Adult Care & Support Services.

- 3.2 The Board also discusses learning drawn from any Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs), Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) undertaken for children and Domestic Homicide Reviews (DHRs) that have occurred in the borough. The Board will be involved when Maidstone Council has participated in the review by providing information about the Council's contact with the subject of the review.
- 3.3 Any new legislative guidance, best practice or issues raised from referrals made to KCC are also discussed to make sure that we are supplying a high stand of appropriate referrals.
- 3.4 The Board has been closely involved in the development of the updated Policy.

4. Safeguarding Champions

- 4.1 The Safeguarding Champions are now in place across the organisation. Six of the Champions have completed the 'Designated Officer' training provided by the Kent Safeguarding Children's Board which gives them the higher level of knowledge required, including understanding the thresholds for accessing children's services, best practice for safeguarding considerations and how to make referrals.
- 4.2 Each of the following departments has a Safeguarding Champion in place or are in the processes of identifying a suitable person:
 - Community Partnerships
 - Housing & Community Services
 - Housing Outreach Service
 - Customer Services
 - Museum & Learning
 - Maidstone Borough Services (Depot)
 - Bereavement Services
 - Revenues & Benefits
 - Legal Services
 - Planning - TBC
 - Communications – TBC
 - Member Champion – TBC

5. Member Training

- 5.1 A Members Safeguarding workshop was held on the 11 October 2017, the session was delivered by Sue Gower, Programme Development Manager for the Kent Safeguarding Children's Board and Matt Roberts, Community Partnerships & Resilience Manager. The session was attended by 11 Members.
- 5.2 It is recommended that a further workshop is arranged for the latter half of 2019.

6. Member Champion for Safeguarding

- 6.1 Included with the proposal to create Safeguarding Champions was the role of an elected Member to both act as a champion for the organisation and to promote awareness of safeguarding practices amongst fellow elected members.
 - 6.2 Cllr Shellina Prendergast was chosen to be the Champion due to her position as an elected member for Kent County Council, and Deputy Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education. However the role has been vacant since Cllr Prendergast stepped down as a Maidstone Borough Councillor.
 - 6.3 To ensure that the function of Member Safeguarding Champion does not become vacant for any length of time in future it is proposed that the Chair of the CHE Committee takes on the function as Champion.
 - 6.4 Recognising that the Chairman of CHE holds a number of responsibilities, it is proposed that the Chairman has the ability to delegate this responsibility to another Member as required.
 - 6.5 If the Committee agrees to adopt this proposal to fill the Member Champion role, full Council must make the final decision and appropriate appointment. The necessary adjustments to the Constitution will be made and will be appended to the Council report as tracked changes. It is also recommended that specific reference is made to the responsibility for Safeguarding within the delegations to the Head of Housing and Community Services, as currently this is implied but not specifically stated.
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7. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 7.1 Option one: Do nothing. This is not recommended as the current safeguarding policy is now out of date and does not reflect changes in guidance, best practice and the thresholds for accessing Kent County Councils' new 'front door' referral process to access Children's services.
 - 7.2 Option two: Adopt this policy and agree the recommendations in this report. The report will be released for consultation over a period of 28 days by making it available to staff via the intranet and to key stakeholders. As the Policy has had significant input from the Safeguarding Board, it is anticipated that any changes will be minor. If this is the case, the Policy will be adopted as agreed in this report. If material changes are required to the draft document an amended version will be reported to the next Committee for consideration.
-

8. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 Option two is recommended. If the Council does not have a Policy which sets out expectations on staff and current best practice then the

organisation will not be able to adequately discharge its duties and ensure that suitable referrals are made to safeguarding children and adults at risk.

9. RISK

9.1 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council’s Risk Management Framework. That consideration is shown in this report. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council’s risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.

10. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

10.1 The Policy will be distributed to Heads of Service, the Safeguarding Champions, Mental Health First Aiders and key stakeholders from Kent County Council, Maidstone & Mid Kent Mind and others, with a request for them to review the policy and suggest any alterations to ensure it is fit for purpose.

10.2 The Policy will be made available via the Safeguarding Portal on the Council’s Intranet and included in the next Wakey Wakey publication to all staff.

10.3 In order to ensure that all staff are aware of the policy it should be pushed out to staff via NETConsent, in addition to being circulated electronically. A paper copy will be provided to each Safeguarding Champion so that it can be accessed by staff who do not have easy access to the intranet.

10.4 Managers will be asked to deliver a Team Talk on Safeguarding practices.

11. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	This policy will contribute towards the corporate priorities by ensuring that all staff, contractors and elected Members understand the Council’s Safeguarding obligations, children and vulnerable adults who are at risk harm can be referred to the appropriate agencies.	Head of Housing & Communities
Risk Management	The adopted policy will contribute to reducing the risk	Communities Partnerships

	of the Council failing to achieve the standard of safeguarding required.	& Resilience Manager
Financial	There are no specific financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.	S 151 Officer and Finance Team
Staffing	Contained within the report	Communities Partnerships & Resilience Manager
Legal	The Policy covers a number of areas of legislation and responsibility for the Council. These include the Care Act 2014, which covers responsibilities on local authorities for safeguarding adults and the Children Act 2004 as amended by the Children and Social Work Act 2017, which impose duties on councils and agencies to work together to promote the welfare and safeguarding of children in their area.	Principal Solicitor (Contentious and Corporate Governance).
Privacy and Data Protection	N/A	Communities Partnerships & Resilience Manager
Equalities	The additions to the Policy as detailed in the report, for example, Clare’s Law, are likely to have a positive impact on groups with protected characteristics, However, it is important that the EqIA is revisited to ensure that the implementation of the policy changes fully considers the needs of those affected and most vulnerable in its processes, with appropriate practices put in place	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population	Senior Public Health Officer

	health or that of individuals.	
Crime and Disorder	The policy supports the priorities identified by the Safer Maidstone Partnership, particularly gangs and child sexual exploitation.	Communities Partnerships & Resilience Manager
Procurement	N/A	Communities Partnerships & Resilience Manager

12. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix 1: Maidstone Borough Council – Policy for Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk



Maidstone Borough Council

Policy for Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk

Version 2.0
January 2019

Document Purpose:	Guidance
Document Name	Policy for Safeguarding Children and Adults at Risk.
Author	Matt Roberts, Community Partnerships & Resilience Manager
Target Audience	All staff and Members
Additional Audience	Contractors & commissioned services.
Description	This document sets out the requirements for Maidstone Borough Council to discharge its appropriate accountability to safeguarding children, young people and adults at risk.
Cross Reference	This documents should be read alongside; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedures • Induction Procedure • DBS checks • Comprehensive Equalities Policy • Employee and Member Codes of Conduct • Health, Safety and Welfare Policy • Disciplinary Policy and Procedure • MBC Data Protection Policy • Whistleblowing Policy • Mental Health First Aider Policy
Action Required	Read and embed Policy into normal practice.

Document History

09.01.19	MBC Internal Safeguarding Board
12.02.19	Communities, Housing & Environment Committee

Document Version

Version	Created By	Date	Main Changes
2.0	Matt Roberts	January 2019	New version including guidance on KCC's Integrated Front Door service, Mental Health, Suicide Awareness and Prevention guidance.

QUICK VIEW – REFERRAL PROCEDURE

What to do if you have witnessed, have concerns about or receive a disclosure regarding abuse or neglect involving a child or an adult at risk.

Remember, Say Something if you See Something!

Is there an immediate threat or risk of harm or is it an emergency?

Yes

No

Inform the Police immediately via **999**

Still have concerns?

Yes

No

Complete an [Incident Notification](#) form.

Discuss the matter with your Line Manager, your department [Safeguarding Champion](#) or the Designated Safeguarding Officer ([Matt Roberts](#)) for advice.

You may then be asked to call Kent County Council for further guidance and to make a referral for the child or adult who is the subject of the concern.

Children 03000 41 11 11 / Adults 03000 41 61 61 or proceed directly to referral using the [Single Request for Support form](#) (for all child referrals) **or** [Adult Safeguarding Alert Form](#) (for adult referrals).
(For *urgent* out of hours referrals call **03000 41 91 91**)

Have you received confirmation, via email or telephone, from Kent County Council within 72 hours that your referral has been accepted?

Yes

No

Discuss the matter with your Line Manager, your department Safeguarding Champion or the Designated Safeguarding Officer ([Matt Roberts](#)) for advice and complete an [Incident Notification](#) form on the [Safeguarding Portal](#).

Once a referral has been made you must seek confirmation that Kent County Council has received the referral. The onus is on you, as the referring officer, to ensure that Maidstone Borough Council fulfils its statutory obligation to receive confirmation from Kent County Council that they have actively considered your referral.

If you are still concerned and/or the referral has not been accepted please refer to the matter to the Designated Safeguarding Officer.

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1. POLICY STATEMENT & FRAMEWORK

- 1.1 As a public body, Maidstone Borough Council expects high standards of conduct from all of its employees and councillors, in line with the key principles of the constitution. Maidstone Borough Council aspires to the highest standards of excellence and professionalism in the people it employs, the education, training and development they receive and in the leadership and management of the organisation.
- 1.2 This policy sets out Maidstone Borough Council's (MBC) commitment and intent towards its statutory and moral duties to safeguard children and adults who come into contact with its services and activities and ensure that they are protected from harm, exploitation and abuse. It follows the principles of the Kent Safeguarding Children's Board and the Kent & Medway Adult Safeguarding Board.
- 1.3 It is important that all members of staff, councillors and those operating as part of a commissioned services, either at a strategic or operational level, understand that;
- 'Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility'***
- 1.4 So whether you are a permanent member of staff, are on a temporary contract, are a casual or agency worker, volunteer, contractor or an elected Member, everyone carrying out the business of MBC has the same duty to report any witnessed or suspected concerns of abuse or neglect.
- 1.5 It is not the responsibility of Maidstone Borough Council, its employees, elected members or contracted staff to determine whether abuse has or is taking place nor investigate any claims made, rather it is our duty to inform the most appropriate authority. This policy sets out the procedures that must be followed to report a suspicion or allegation to Kent Police or to Kent County Council or to another service in order to meet Maidstone Borough Council's responsibility.
- 1.6 Maidstone Borough Council also supports the Home Office Counter Terrorism strategy **CONTEST**, which includes a specific focus on **PREVENT** (preventing violent extremism / radicalisation). The safeguarding of children, young people and adults at risk includes those who are at risk of becoming radicalised, either through their own action (becoming self-radicalised) or by an external agent.

Professional Curiosity

- 1.7 It is important that all members of staff understand the need for 'Professional Curiosity'. This has been described as 'brilliant and professional people recognising how significant the seemingly insignificant might be¹'.
- 1.8 We ask that you be professionally curious in your role; if something seems out of place or does not feel right then seek to obtain enough information to reassure yourself that all is well. Maintain a good standard of documentation; record what you have seen or heard, be factual and avoid making assumptions. If you make use of paper records then ensure they are stored securely.

¹ Chief Superintendent Nik Adams, National Police Prevent lead.

2. SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE

2.1 **The Children Act 1989** (as amended) states that every child has a right to protection from abuse, neglect and exploitation. Statutory guidance on making arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children under the **Children Act 2004** was published in August 2005 and came into force on 1 October 2005.

2.2 Maidstone Borough Council's duties under the Act are:

2.2.1 **To co-operate to improve children's wellbeing: Section 10 of the Act requires** each local authority to make arrangements to promote co-operation between the authority, each of the authority's relevant partners and such other persons or bodies working with children in the local authority's area as the authority considers appropriate. The arrangements are to be made with a view to improving the wellbeing of children in the authority's area, which includes protection from harm or neglect.

2.2.2 **To safeguard and promote the welfare of children:** Section 11 requires a range of organisations (including district councils) to make arrangements for ensuring that their functions, and services provided on their behalf, are discharged with regard to the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

2.3 Expectations on Maidstone Borough Council include:

- The **commitment of the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT)** to the importance of safeguarding and the promotion of wellbeing and clear accountability for work on safeguarding and promoting wellbeing.
- A **clear statement of responsibility** to employees and elected Members (contained in this policy),
- Take the **voice of children and young people** into account to help shape services.
- **Safe recruitment** procedures for those who work with or come into contact with children and young people and vulnerable adults.
- Provide **appropriate training**, learning and development for employees.
- Ensure **effective working relationships** are in place, both within the authority and with other agencies to safeguard and promote wellbeing, and to share information effectively and appropriately.

2.4 Other legislation and guidance relevant to safeguarding includes;

- Working together to Safeguard Children (revised 2018);
- Counter Terrorism Act 2015
- Modern Slavery Act 2015
- The Care Act (2014).
- The Health and Social Care Act (2008)
- No Secrets (2000);
- The Public Disclosures Act 1998;
- The Crime and Disorder Act (1998) and;
- Housing Act 1996;

3. SAFEGUARDING ADULTS AT RISK

- 3.1 The legal responsibilities for safeguarding adults at risk of abuse or neglect are set out in Part 1 of the Care Act 2014 with Care and Support Statutory Guidance issued in 2014 to support implementation.
- 3.2 Kent County Council is the lead agency who provides social care services. Maidstone Borough Council is a key partner and has a duty to co-operate in order to protect adults from abuse or neglect. In exercising their duties Kent County Council must:
- **Make Safeguarding Enquiries:** or request others to make them, if an adult is subject to or at risk of abuse or neglect.
 - **Establish a Safeguarding Adults Board:** which develops, shares and implements a joint safeguarding strategy
 - Carry out **Safeguarding Adult Reviews (SARs):** when an adult dies as a result of abuse or neglect, whether known or suspected, and there is concern that partner agencies could have worked more effectively to protect the adult. Or if an adult has not died, it is known or suspected that the adult has experienced serious abuse or neglect.
 - **Arrange an independent advocate:** to represent and support an adult who is subject to a Safeguarding Enquiry or Adult Review
 - **Co-operate with its relevant partners:** in order to protect adults experiencing or at risk of abuse or neglect.
- 3.3 All sectors, including district councils are expected to apply the following six key principles in its adult safeguarding role:
- **Empowerment:** people being supported and encouraged to make their own decisions and be able to give informed consent.
 - **Prevention:** it is better and more cost effective to take action before harm occurs.
 - **Proportionality:** provide the least intrusive response appropriate to the risk presented.
 - **Protection:** support and representation for those in greatest need
 - **Partnership:** local solutions through services working with their communities. Communities have a part to play in preventing, detecting and reporting neglect and abuse
 - **Accountability:** accountability and transparency in delivering safeguarding
- 3.4 Safeguarding activity should be person-led and outcome-focused. It is about engaging the person in a conversation about how best to respond to their safeguarding situation in a way that enhances involvement, choice and control as well as improving quality of life, wellbeing and safety.

4. ROLES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- 4.1. Whilst safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, there are a number of key roles that partner agencies and employees within Maidstone Borough Council hold.
- 4.2. **Kent County Council (KCC)** is the lead authority for safeguarding children and adults at risk. The Specialist Children's Services and Adult Care and Support Service are responsible for making enquiries in to allegations of abuse and neglect, determining whether it has or has not taken place and taking action to protect the child or vulnerable adult.

- 4.3. **Kent Safeguarding Children Board** sets out how different partner agencies should co-operate to safeguard children and has a role in making sure that arrangements work effectively for the purposes of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.
- 4.4. **Kent and Medway Safeguarding Adults Board** makes sure that all member agencies are working together to help keep adults safe from harm and protect their rights.
- 4.5. **Kent Police** has a duty to investigate criminal offences and refer any suspicion, allegation or disclosure that a child or vulnerable adult is suffering and likely to suffer significant harm to Kent County Council.
- 4.6. **Maidstone Borough Council** the Chief Executive Officer has ultimate accountability for safeguarding; this means ensuring that employees and elected Members comply with the principles contained in this policy and providing assurance that the Council complies with its statutory requirements. The CEO discharges these functions by appointing a Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) In Maidstone Council the DSO is the Community Partnerships and Resilience Manager.
- 4.7. **MBC's Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO)** is a senior officer who leads on all safeguarding issues and acts as the child and adult protection professional on behalf of Maidstone Borough Council. The DSOs responsibilities include:
- Supporting the CEO and Wider Leadership Team to provide strategic direction for the safeguarding agenda including the protection of children and adults at risk.
 - Champion the importance of safeguarding and promote the welfare of children and adults at risk throughout Maidstone Borough Council.
 - Provide quarterly updates to the Internal Safeguarding Board.
 - Ensure compliance with legislation including that contained within section 11 of the Children Act 2004, Part 1 of the Care Act 2014 and Government guidance.
 - Ensure that there is an up to date policy and procedure in place relating to Maidstone Borough Council's roles and responsibilities for the safeguarding and protection of children and adults at risk.
 - Ensure that employee and Member training is both available, undertaken and refreshed as required.
 - Provide advice and support to staff to discuss concerns and ensure those concerns are respond to appropriately.
 - Maintain the intranet Safeguarding Portal and Safeguarding Reporting tool.
 - Represent Maidstone Borough Council at inter-agency meetings and liaise with other organisations as necessary.
- 4.8. **MBC Safeguarding Champions** work with the DSO to provide advice and support to colleagues to ensure that concerns are responded to quickly and correctly. Each Champion agrees to undertake additional training to be able to perform this role. The Champions meet on a quarterly basis to share best practice and awareness of current topics and issues.
- 4.9. **MBC's Internal Safeguarding Board:** monitors this policy and any safeguarding referrals which are made by Maidstone Borough Council. Chaired by the CEO, this

group meets quarterly to discuss any reports of abuse or neglect raised through the reporting system, whilst ensuring that Maidstone Borough Council is taking its safeguarding responsibilities seriously and complying with legal requirements. Representative on this group include local managers for Kent County Council's Children's and Adult Social Care teams.

- 4.10. **Human Resources:** works to ensure that stringent recruitment procedures are in place for ensuring safe working practices and that safe recruitment practices are followed for job roles that may involve working with children and adults.
- 4.11. **Line Managers:** ensures that appropriate checks are made for all job roles that involve working with children and adults at risk. They also carry out the correct induction process for all new employees including booking the appropriate training and ensuring they are made aware of this policy and have the appropriate ongoing training
- 4.12. **All employees, contractors, volunteers and Members:** ensures that the activities in which they are involved in during the course of their work are carried out in accordance with this policy and that they follow any guidance relating to it and to have undertaken basic safeguarding training, such as the ELMS training packages.

5. SAFEGUARDING CHAMPIONS

- 5.1. Safeguarding Champions have been introduced across the authority to ensure that any safeguarding concerns are quickly and adequately responded to and to assist the Designated Safeguarding Officer in ensuring the Council is compliant with its requirements.
- 5.2. Each Champion is required to be trained to be 'Designated Officers' and undertake a broad range of safeguarding training to meet the Level 3 requirements (set out in this policy) in order to undertake their role which includes;
 - Promoting awareness of good safeguarding practices in their department;
 - Be a source of advice and support to assist colleagues in responding to any concerns;
 - Ensure that referrals are made to the right agencies;
 - Ensure that an internal safeguarding notification is completed via the Safeguarding Portal on the intranet and;
 - Attend the quarterly Safeguarding Champions forum.
- 5.3. The training covers professional curiosity, the grooming line, Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) and good practices, such as keeping suitable case notes and the thresholds required for a referral to be made to children's services, the practices being virtually identical for adults.
- 5.4. The following people are currently Safeguarding Champions;

• Community Partnerships	Matt Roberts (DSO)
• Housing Services	Jill Rogers (CSE Lead)
• Housing Outreach Service	Allan Rooke-James
• Customer Services	Cerian Lythgoe
• Museum & Learning	Rosalind Meredith
• Maidstone Borough Services (Depot)	Daren Guess

- | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| • Bereavement Services | Sharon Smith |
| • Revenues & Benefits | Hina Nagar |
| • Legal Services | Andy Bell |
| • Planning & Development Control | TBC |
| • Member Champion | TBC |

6. TRAINING

- 6.1. Maidstone Borough Council provides training and development opportunities to all members of staff, as a minimum level of training all staff are expected to complete the ELMS eLearning courses for Safeguarding Children, Safeguarding Adults and Prevent.
- 6.2. Managers are expected to ensure that staff have completed the eLearning packages and to themselves have complete the Safer Recruitment training.
- 6.3. More in-depth training is available which is provided through the Kent Safeguarding Children's Board. This training is set over four levels as set out below;

Level 0 – No contact with children/young people, vulnerable adults and/or their parents or carers.

Level 1 - Limited contact with children/young people, vulnerable adults/and/or parents/carers with no unsupervised contact.

Level 2 - Regular contact with children/young people/vulnerable adults and/or parents/carers or any unsupervised contact

Level 3 - Professional advisers and designated leads for children's and/or vulnerable adults safeguarding irrespective of the level of contact with children/young people/vulnerable adults and/or parents/carers.

7. CHILDREN: RECOGNISING ABUSE AND NEGLECT

- 7.1. Safeguarding children is defined in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018 as:
- Protecting children from maltreatment
 - Preventing impairment of children's health or development
 - Ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and
 - Taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.
- 7.2. A child is anyone under the age of 18 years. The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently or is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital or in custody in the secure estate, does not change his/her status or entitlements to services or protection.

Child Neglect and Abuse

- 7.3. Abuse of children can take many forms but is usually divided into four main categories; **physical, sexual, emotional and neglect**. These normally fall in to one of two case types managed by Specialist Children's Services;
- **Child in need (CHIN):** where the child is unlikely to achieve or maintain a reasonable standard of health or development or development is likely to be significantly impaired (section 17 of the 1989 Children Act)
 - **Child protection (CP):** where a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm, through neglect, physical, emotional or sexual abuse (section 47 of the 1989 Children Act)

Kent Support Levels

- 7.4. Most children and young people have a number of basic needs that are well supported through a range of universal services. These services include schools, early years education and childcare, health, housing, youth services, leisure facilities and services provided by voluntary organisations.
- 7.5. However, some children have more additional or complex needs and may require access to additional, intensive or specialist services to support them. These are set out as support levels;
- **Universal Services;** are provided to or are routinely available to all children and families. These services are accessed in the local community and delivered by partners including schools, GPs, hospitals, community health services, children's centres, youth hubs, police, fire service and voluntary and community groups.
 - **Additional Support;** these are services are accessed in the local community and delivered by partners including schools, GPs, hospitals, community health services, children's centres, youth hubs, police, fire service and voluntary and community groups.
 - **Intensive Support;** can be offered to children and families where they have complex or multiple needs requiring local authority services to work together with universal services to assess, plan and work with the family to bring about positive change. Includes intensive family support, early help and child in need services.
 - **Specialise Support;** is for Children who are considered to have been harmed or are likely to suffer significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect/ removal from home/or will suffer serious lasting impairment without the intervention of local authority statutory services under high level concern Child in Need (CIN) or high-risk Child Protection (CP) Services and Specialist Youth Justice work. Children whose disability affects all aspects of development.
- 7.6. In order to be referred for support the threshold for accessing children's services must be reached whereby the child and family need either **Intensive** or **Specialist** support, the [Kent Support Levels Guidance Sheet](#) and [Kent Support Levels Process](#) includes illustrative examples about the threshold levels and process.
- 7.7. If you feel the needs of the family sit below Support Levels 3 or 4, and you would have previously considered completing an Early Help Notification, please contact the

Maidstone Early Help Team to discuss what support may be available via 03000 42 23 40 or by emailing MaidstoneEarlyHelp@kent.gov.uk.

- 7.8. Your request for advice should be responded to within 2 working days by an Early Help Manager and you will then be able to discuss the needs of a child, young person or family and be provided with advice about the most appropriate type of support available within the community at Support Levels 1 and 2.
- 7.9. Before making a referral or seeking advice it is important that you discuss your concerns with a Safeguarding Champion or contact the Designated Safeguarding Officer for advice. Any concerns must be recorded on the Safeguarding Portal on the intranet.

Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE)

- 7.10. Sexual exploitation of children and young people involves exploitative situations, contexts and relationships where young people (or a third person or persons) receive 'something' (e.g. food, accommodation, drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, affection, gifts, money) as a result of them performing, and/or another or others performing on them, sexual activities.
- 7.11. The Kent and Medway [Safeguarding Children Abused through Sexual Exploitation Procedures](#) can be used to respond appropriately to safeguard children who are or are at risk of being groomed and subjected to CSE.
- 7.12. If there are concerns about a child or young person being sexually exploited, employees should first discuss their concerns with their Line Manager, a Safeguarding Champion or the Designated Safeguarding Officer. The Kent and Medway [Child Sexual Exploitation Risk Assessment Toolkit](#) should be used to make an assessment of risk of harm to the child.
- 7.13. Any intelligence on CSE can also be shared using a new electronic CSE partner information sharing form: [eINTEL](#)
- 7.14. eINTEL has been set up by the Kent Safeguarding Children's Board to enable staff from any agency to share any information with regard to Child Sexual Exploitation that may be important and relevant for the Multi-Agency Child Sexual Exploitation Team (CSET) in order to build intelligence about CSE and better target the response to prevent and disrupt it.
- 7.15. The submission of an Information Report using the eINTEL system does not replace a safeguarding referral and should not be relied upon to safeguard an individual at risk. The existing safeguarding processes, as set out in this policy should therefore still be followed in tandem with any Information Reports and the appropriate referral/notification made.
- 7.16. For help completing the form contact the CSE Champion, a Safeguarding Champion or the Designated Safeguarding Officer. Any concerns must be recorded on the Safeguarding Portal on the intranet.

Missing Children

- 7.17. Every situation is different and there are no set rules about when a child should be considered missing; however if you are concerned about a very young child you should contact the emergency services immediately via 999. For young people, if you have any doubts about whether to formally report them missing, for example, when a teenager fails to return after a time they have agreed, contact the police.
- 7.18. Children and young people who regularly go missing from home or care have been found to be at significant increased risk of:
- Becoming involved in crime, from stealing to survive to criminal gang involvement;
 - Sexual exploitation and abuse;
 - Drug and alcohol misuse;
 - Mental and sexual health issues;
 - Exclusion from school and failure to meet educational milestones.
- 7.19. Children and young people may be absent from where they should be for many reasons, not least wanting to spend more time with their friends. But this could put them at risk of harm and any prolonged or repeated absence can be caused for concern.
- 7.20. In such circumstances parents and practitioners need to respond and act on concerns. Seek advice from a Safeguarding Champion or the Designated Safeguarding Officer if you have concerns about a child who maybe missing.

8. SAFEGUARDING ADULTS AT RISK

- 8.1. An adult is anyone aged 18 or over. Where someone is 18 or over but is still receiving children's services and a safeguarding issue is raised, the matter should be dealt with through adult safeguarding arrangements. For example, this could occur when a young person with substantial and complex needs continues to be supported in a residential educational setting until the age of 25.
- 8.2. Safeguarding duties apply to an adult who has needs for care and support (whether or not the local authority is meeting any of those needs) and; is experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect; and as a result of those care and support needs is unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of abuse or neglect.
- 8.3. Under the Care Act 2014 safeguarding concerns should be referred to Kent County Council Social Care departments as they have responsibility for agreeing that the s42 Duty to carry out enquiries are necessary.
- 8.4. If s42 enquiries are required, the local authority can carry out the enquiries or require another more appropriate agency /service to carry out the enquiries on their behalf. E.g. if a crime has or appears to have been committed the police will carry out a criminal investigation, other agencies/ services may contribute to the process to ensure that the s42 duties are met
- 8.5. Under section 42 of the Care Act 2014, safeguarding duties apply to adults who:

- Have needs for care and support (whether or not they are receiving any services); and
 - Are experiencing, or at risk of, abuse or neglect; and
 - As a result of those care and support needs are unable to protect themselves from either the risk of, or the experience of abuse or neglect
- 8.6. Care and support needs is the mixture of practical, financial and emotional support for adults who need extra help to manage their lives and be independent – including older people, people with a disability or long-term illness, people with mental health problems, and carers.
- 8.7. Care and support includes the assessment of people’s needs, provision of services and the allocation of funds to enable a person to purchase their own care and support. It could include care home, home care, personal assistants, day services, or the provision of aids and adaptations.

Abuse and Neglect

- 8.8. The [Multi-Agency Safeguarding Adults Policy, Protocols and Practitioner Guidance for Kent & Medway](#), provides a guide to the various categories of abuse and details the indicators. The main categories of abuse include:
- Physical
 - Sexual
 - Psychological
 - Financial or material
 - Discriminatory
 - Exploitation
 - Isolation or withdrawal from services or support networks
 - Neglect and acts of omission
 - Self-neglect and self-injurious behaviour
 - Modern Slavery (this encompasses Human Trafficking etc.)
 - Domestic Abuse
 - Female Genital Mutilation
- 8.9. **Abuse** is a violation of an individual’s human and civil rights by any other person or persons. Abuse can happen to anyone, regardless of age, gender, class or ethnicity. Abuse may be a single act or repeated over a period of time and affect one person or more. It may take one form or a multiple of forms or follow a pattern of abuse. The lack of appropriate action can also be a form of abuse.
- 8.10. **Neglect** is a failure to care for someone with whom you have a responsibility to care for or represent, for example, by failing to provide adequate food, clothing, medical aid or accommodation. It can be a form of abuse if it is intentional, however, not all incidents of neglect are intentional and may be because a care giver is finding it hard to cope or is not receiving sufficient help.

Self-Neglect & Hoarding

- 8.11. **Self-neglect or self-injurious behaviour** covers a wide range of behaviour where a person neglects to care for one's own personal hygiene, health or surroundings, this can often have a negative effect on the wider community and sometimes exhibits as anti-social behaviour, while not exhaustive the list includes behaviours such as;
- Obsessive hoarding;
 - Living in very unclean, sometimes verminous circumstances;
 - Neglecting household maintenance, thereby creating hazards within and surrounding the property;
 - Erratic or eccentric behaviour/lifestyles;
 - Declining or refusing prescribed medication and / or other community healthcare support;
 - Repeated episodes of anti-social behaviour – either as a victim or perpetrator.
- 8.12. An individual may be considered as self-neglecting and therefore maybe at risk of harm where they are:
- Either unable, or unwilling to provide adequate care for themselves,
 - Not engaging with a network of support,
 - Unable to or unwilling to obtain necessary care to meet their needs,
 - Unable to make reasonable, informed or mentally capacitated decisions due to mental disorder (including hoarding behaviours), illness or an acquired brain injury,
 - Unable to protect themselves adequately against potential exploitation or abuse,
 - Refusing essential support without which their health and safety needs cannot be met, and the individual lacks the insight to recognise this.
- 8.13. By not engaging with individuals who are not looking after themselves (whether they have a mental condition or not) may have a profoundly detrimental effect on, an individual's health and wellbeing and can also have an impact the individuals family and the local community.
- 8.14. Public authorities, as defined in the Human Rights Act 1998, must act in accordance with the requirements of public law. In relation to adults perceived to be at risk because of self-neglect. Instead, authorities are expected to act within the powers granted to them. They must act fairly, proportionately, rationally and in line with the principles of the Care Act 2014, the Mental Capacity Act (2005) and consideration should be given to the application of the Mental Health Act (1983) where appropriate.
- 8.15. The [Kent and Medway Multi-Agency Policy and Procedure to Support People who Self-Neglect](#), should be referred to for procedures on how to respond to cases of self-neglect. Under this, the identifying agency will need to co-ordinate a multi-agency meeting at which the lead agency will be identified and agreed. If the adult at risk is in need of care and/or support then Kent County Council is likely to be the lead agency.
- 8.16. If you identify someone who you believe is self-neglecting seek advice from a Safeguarding Champion or the Designated Safeguarding Officer. A referral to Adult Social Services may be needed. Any concerns or referrals must be recorded on the Safeguarding Portal on the intranet.

Modern slavery

- 8.17. This encompasses slavery, servitude, forced and compulsory labour and human trafficking. Traffickers and slave drivers coerce, deceive and force individuals against their will into a life of abuse, servitude and inhumane treatment.
- 8.18. From 1 November 2015, public authorities have a duty to notify the Secretary of State of any individual identified in England and Wales as a suspected victim of modern slavery. This duty includes district councils and applies to both children and adult victims. The information provided in a notification will be used to build a better picture of modern slavery in England and Wales, and to improve law enforcement response, by sharing the information with the National Crime Agency and other law enforcement agencies.
- 8.19. The Home Office [Guidance: duty to notify the Home Office of potential victim of slavery](#), should be referred to and the [MS1 Notification of Potential Victim of Modern Slavery Form](#), should be used to submit a notification via secure GCSX email to dutytonotify@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk.
- 8.20. Or call the Modern Slavery Helpline: 0800 0121 700
- 8.21. This notification does not replace a safeguarding referral and should not be relied upon to safeguard an individual at risk. The existing safeguarding processes, as set out in this policy, should therefore still be followed in tandem with a notification.

9. DOMESTIC ABUSE

- 9.1. The term domestic abuse has replaced domestic violence, because it includes any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are, or have been, intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. The abuse can encompass, but is not limited to psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional abuse.
- 9.2. Other forms of domestic abuse can include so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation and forced marriage.
- 9.3. Maidstone Borough Council has trained employees who are able to complete the Risk Indicator toolkit (DASH) where it is identified that an adult at risk is in a domestic abuse situation. Contact a Safeguarding Champion or the DSO for advice.
- 9.4. The Kent and Medway [Multi-Agency Protocol for Dealing with Cases of Domestic Abuse to Safeguard Adults at Risk](#), provides guidelines on dealing with cases of domestic abuse where this affects adults with care and/or support needs.

One Stop Shop

- 9.5. A person who maybe the victim of domestic abuse can be signposted to the **One Stop Shop** (OSS) Which operates every Tuesday morning between 09:30 and 11:30 at the Salvation Army, Union Street, Maidstone. The OSS offers free advice, information and support from a range of agencies including legal advice from a qualified solicitor, specialist police officers, housing advice and signposting to counselling and therapeutic services.

- 9.6. The **National Domestic Violence Helpline (0808 2000 247)** is a 24hr helpline for women experiencing domestic abuse, their family, friends, colleagues, and others calling on their behalf. The Helpline can give support, help and information wherever the caller might be in the Country. It is staffed 24hrs a day by fully trained female helpline support staff. Translation facilities for callers whose first language is not English and a service for callers who are deaf or hard of hearing are also available. All calls are completely confidential.

Clare's Law

- 9.7. The [Domestic Violence Disclosure Scheme \(DVDS\)](#) is often called '**Clare's Law**' after the landmark case that led to it. Clare's Law gives any member of the public the right to ask the police if their partner may pose a risk to them. Under Clare's Law, a member of the public can also make enquiries into the partner of a close friend or family member.
- 9.8. Once an application is made, police and partner agencies will carry out a range of checks. If these reveal that their partners has a record of abusive offences, or suggest a risk of violence or abuse, the police will consider sharing this information.
- 9.9. The aim is to help people to make a more informed decision on whether to continue a relationship and provide help and support when making that choice. The decision to reveal this information is also called making a 'disclosure', this will usually be directly to the person at risk. This is unless, in the circumstances, someone else is better placed to use the information to protect the person at risk from abuse.
- 9.10. There may be occasions when the police will not confirm to the person making the application whether a disclosure has or hasn't been made. Any disclosure will be made in person; none of the disclosure is made in writing and you won't be given any documents.
- 9.11. To make an application contact Kent Police, either visit a police station or phone 101. You can also report domestic abuse online at www.kent.police.uk/services/report-online. If you believe there is an immediate risk of harm to someone, or it is an emergency, you should always call 999.

10. EXTREMISM AND RADICALISATION

- 10.1. The Counter Terrorism and Security Act 2015 places a duty on authorities to have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism, referred to under the term 'Prevent'. This statutory duty includes district councils and applies to both children and adults. Prevent forms part of Contest, the Governments plan for tackling terrorism; Prevent, Prepare, Protect and Pursue.
- 10.2. The Prevent duty is addressed through a multi-agency approach to identify and provide support to individuals who are at risk of being drawn into committing acts of terrorism through a process known as 'Channel'. A 'Channel Panel' comprising of agencies who have a role in the Prevent process look at putting into place interventions and a tailored support package to safeguard those at risk based on an assessment of their vulnerabilities.
- 10.3. If a child or adult are identified as being at risk radicalisation, either by themselves, the actions of others, or drawn into committing act of terrorism, then employees

should first discuss their concerns with their Line Manager or a Designated Safeguarding Officer. The DSO should also be consulted to assist the Community Safety Unit with intelligence gathering.

- 10.4. A Channel [Referral Form](#) should be used to make a referral to the Kent Channel Panel, via secure GCSX email to prevent.referrals@kent.pnn.police.uk. The submission of a referral to the Channel Panel should not replace a safeguarding referral and should not be relied upon to safeguard an individual at risk. The safeguarding processes, as set out in this policy, should therefore still be followed in tandem with a referral to the Channel Panel.

11. MENTAL HEALTH & SUICIDE AWARENESS

What is Mental Health?

- 11.1. The term mental health can be defined in a number of ways, some centre on a person's positive psychological wellbeing; others describe it as the absence of mental illness or mental health issues.
- 11.2. In essence good mental health is;

*"...the emotional and spiritual resilience which allows us to enjoy life and survive pain, disappointment and sadness. It is a positive sense of well-being and an underlying belief in our own, and others', dignity and worth."*²
- 11.3. A mental health issue is a broad term including both mental illness and symptoms of mental illness that may not be severe enough to warrant the diagnosis of a mental illness, as well as a mental health related crisis such as having thoughts of suicide.
- 11.4. Mental illnesses are common and often occur in combination. It is not unusual for a person with anxiety disorder to develop depression, or for a person who is depressed to misuse alcohol or other drugs, perhaps in an effort to self-medicate. Terms used to describe having one or more mental health illness include dual diagnosis, comorbidity and co-occurrence.
- 11.5. Some people who are distressed deliberately harm their bodies, usually secretly, using self-harm as a way of dealing with intense emotional pain. They may cut, burn, scald or scratch themselves, injure themselves, pull their hair or swallow poisonous substances.
- 11.6. Many people with mental illnesses or mental health issues don't receive any professional help. While those with severe mental illnesses, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorders, will generally get professional help eventually, it can sometimes take years before they are correctly diagnosed and receive effective treatment.

² Health Education Authority. Mental Health Promotion: A quality framework. London: Health Education Authority; 1997.

- 11.7. There are different types of mental illness, some of which are common, such as depression and anxiety disorders, and some which are not as common, such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. However, mental illness, as with any health difficulty, cause disability, which is sometime severe. This is not always well understood by people who have never experienced a mental illness.

About Suicide

- 11.8. Suicide is a major public health issue, each year people of all ages, ethnicities and backgrounds die as a result of taking their own life. Many more experience suicidal thoughts at one time or another.
- 11.9. It is estimated that for every completed suicide there are between 10-25 attempts.
- 11.10. Suicide is preventable. Most suicidal people do not want to die; they simply do not want to live with the pain they are experience any longer. We can learn to spot the warning signs so we can help identify and support someone experiencing suicidal thoughts and sign post them to agencies and services who can help them.
- 11.11. **Openly talking about suicidal thoughts and feelings can save a life.** Although the seriousness of the topic can make it easy to shy away from, for fear of doing the wrong thing, we should not underestimate our ability to help a suicidal person, and possible save a life.
- 11.12. Suicide should not be viewed as attention seeking but a sign that someone needs help to cope. Any indication that someone is considering suicide should be treated respectfully.
- 11.13. Suicide is not an illegal act and so is no longer 'committed', it is instead referred to as 'completed' when someone takes their own life.
- 11.14. The Council is committed to ensuring that all employees are fully supported with mental health therefore in partnership with Mental Health England the Council has trained some staff in Mental Health First Aid (MHFA).
- 11.15. Internally trained Mental Health First Aiders' primary role is to give a mental health first aid service to internal staff. The role will also equip them to do deal with mental health situations with external customers/general public, however this is not the primary purpose of the role.
- 11.16. MHFA is the help offered to someone developing a mental health problem, experiencing a worsening of an existing mental illness or a mental health crisis. The first aid is given until appropriate professional help is received or the crisis resolves.
- 11.17. More information on MHFA can be found on the intranet or read the [MHFA Policy](#).

12. SUICIDE PREVENTION GUIDANCE

- 12.1. It is important to act promptly if you think that a client or someone you are in communication with is suffering from mental health issues and who may be considering suicide. Tell the person your concerns about them however understand the person may not want to talk to you, in this situation offer to help find them someone else to talk to.

- 12.2. If you can do so without breaking communication with the person contact a MHFA, a Safeguarding Champion or the Designated Safeguarding Officer for advice. However if you suspect the person is actively seeking to take their own life and is at imminent risk call 999.
- 12.3. If you are on the phone to the person at the time then ask a colleague to support you by phoning 999 while you continue to speak to the person
- 12.4. The needs assessment indication below has been created to help establish the level of need for someone who may be thinking or is talking about taking their own life. It includes questions to assess risk and whether there are any protective factors in place.

Needs Assessment Indicator



Thoughts but no intent	Thoughts & Intent	Intent & Plan to Complete
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- 12.5. **Thoughts but no intent:** if you suspect someone is in crisis, suffering from mental health issues, having feelings that could lead to or are having suicidal thoughts;
- Reassure them that there is support out there for them, manage the conversation using the techniques below;
 - Suggest that the person speak to their GP about the way they are feeling and to make an urgent appointment.
 - Offer contact details for the Samaritans (freephone **116 123**) and other support services (see information below);
 - Encourage contact with Mind.
- 12.6. **Thoughts and intent:** if someone tells you that they have had suicidal thoughts ask if they intend to act on these feelings;
- Ask if they intend to act on their thoughts, if yes try to manage the conversation using the steps below;
 - Give them the contact details for the Samaritans (freephone **116 123**) or Release the Pressure (**0800 107 0160**) or one or more of the agencies listed in the Helpful Resources section below;
 - Contact the Crisis Team (CRHT) on **0300 22 0123**.
- 12.7. **Intend and a Plan to Complete:** The person may be at imminent risk. If you suspect or have reason to believe that someone is at immediate risk of taking their own life or has attempted to take their own life, stay with them and take one of the following steps;
- If they are on the phone to you keep them talking, ask a colleague to call **999** and ask for the police or an ambulance, and stay on the line with the person until the emergency services arrive;
 - Contact the Crisis Team (CRHT) on **0300 22 0123**.

13. MANAGING THE CONVERSATION

- 13.1. It is untrue that using the term 'suicide' will escalate the situation. Allow the client to talk freely; listen. Do not use language that could be perceived as judging and avoid responses such as "cheer up" and "it'll be alright"
- 13.2. Don't refer to previous attempts as failed/unsuccessful as this could suggest that death is preferable. Try to avoid the term 'commit suicide' as it could make it sound like they are about to commit a crime.
- 13.3. Keep the person engaged and ensure you are listening to their needs, do not ask leading questions instead let them guide you. They need to be complicit in their recovery.
- 13.4. Try to establish what protective factors they have in place, have they thought about discovery (who will find their body)? Use C.P.R.;
 - **C**urrent Plan,
 - **P**rior attempts or exposure,
 - **R**esources.
- 13.5. **Risk Questions:** these can help to establish the persons need, if they answer yes to any of the following then they have a higher level of need;
 - Have you made a plan to end your own life?
 - Have you set a date or location for your suicide?
 - Do you have the equipment you need?
 - Have you had suicidal intentions before?
 - Have you made an attempt before?
 - Have any family or close friends completed suicide?
- 13.6. **Protective Factor Questions:** if they answer yes to the following they may indicate a lower level of need;
 - Do you have anyone you can talk with?
 - Are you accessing any support services?
 - What has stopped you attempting up to now?
 - Do you have any life plans or current commitments in place (such as visiting friends or family or taking a holiday)?
 - Do you have any effective coping strategies?
- 13.7. Someone answering yes to the many of the Risk Questions is likely to have a higher need and may be at imminent risk, consider calling the Crisis Team on **03000 222 0123** or Kent Police on **999**.
- 13.8. If they answer yes to the protective factor questions you will need to judge whether there are more risk factors than protective factors. Consider referring the person to one of the services in the Resources to Support Those at Risk of Suicide below.

What Not To Do

- 13.9. Do not minimise the intensity of their feelings, analyse their motives, argue or lecture them or try to use guilt to prevent them from attempting suicide.
- 13.10. Do not try to solve all of their problems or give them therapy, you are not expected to be professional counsellors.

13.11. Do not relate to what they are going through, you can't and it may devalue their feelings and emotions. Try to empathise 'I am sorry to hear that you feel that way', 'it sounds like what you are going through must be really difficult'.

What Can Help

13.12. Help them to design a mini safety plan, try to get the client to focus on what they "should do" to make themselves safe. They don't have to act on suicidal thoughts. Try to help the person to feel hope and optimism as even in small amounts these can make a big difference. **Reassure them that help is available.**

14. RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THOSE AT RISK OF SUICIDE

Services for Adults	
<p>The Samaritans</p> <p>Freephone 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org These services are available 24/7 all year round.</p> <p>Visit https://www.samaritans.org/</p>	
<p>Release the Pressure</p> <p>A 24/7 helpline with trained professionals. Call 0800 107 0160</p> <p>A webchat is also available at; https://www.kent.gov.uk/social-care-and-health/health/release-the-pressure</p>	
<p>Maidstone Community Mental Health Team</p> <p>Call 01622 766900 or email Kamnascpt.maidstonecmht@nhs.net</p>	<p>CRISIS Team</p> <p>Call 0300 222 0123 for urgent support for someone who is not already open to services.</p> <p>For people already receiving support call the Medway and Swale Crisis team: 01634 833738 or 01634 830000</p>
<p>The Hope Café Maidstone</p> <p>Hope Café is an out-of-hours crisis support service in Maidstone for anyone who may be experiencing a mental health or emotional health problem.</p> <p>It operates from Fridays 5pm to 8:45pm & Sundays 1pm to 4:45pm At the Maidstone and Mid Kent Mind wellbeing center: 23 College Road, Maidstone, ME15 6YH Contact Maidstone & Mid-Kent Mind 01622 692 383 or email mindhelp@mmkmind.org</p>	

<p>The Silver Line</p> <p>Helpline for older people, they offer a service which is available 24/7.</p> <p>Call 08004 708090</p> <p>https://www.thesilverline.org.uk/</p>	<p>Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)</p> <p>CALM is a charity dedicated to preventing male suicide.</p> <p>Call 0800 58 58 58 5pm to midnight every day.</p> <p>They also offer a live webchat; https://www.thecalmzone.net/help/webchat/</p>
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Services for Children

Papyrus

Are the national charity for the prevention of suicide by young people (people under 35), they run HOPE Line UK, a dedicated suicide prevention hotline for anyone up to the age of 35 who maybe feeling suicidal or anyone who is concerned about a young person.

Call **0800 068 41 41**
Monday to Friday 10am to 10pm,
Weekends 2pm to 10pm,
Bank holidays 2pm to 5pm.

You can also text 07786 209 697 or email pat@papyrus-uk.org

Grassroots

Grassroots is a small charity focused on suicide prevention.

Email: office@prevent-suicide.org.uk

They have developed a mobile app for those at risk of suicide and people worried about someone. Available from the Apple Apps store or Google Play.

https://www.prevent-suicide.org.uk/stay_alive_suicide_prevention_mobile_phone_application.html

Student Minds

Student Minds is the UK's student mental health charity.

Email: info@studentminds.org.uk or visit www.studentminds.org.uk

Childline

For children and young people under 19.
Call **0800 111**

The number will not show up on a phone bill.

Place 2 Be

Place2Be is a children's mental health charity providing school-based support and in-depth training programmes to improve the emotional wellbeing of pupils, families, teachers and school staff.

Call: **0207 923 5500** or Email: enquiries@place2be.org.uk

Young Minds

Young Minds is the UK's leading charity championing the wellbeing and mental health of young people.

They offer a parents helpline, call: **0808 802 5544**
Mon-Fri. 09:30am to 4pm
Email: ymentquiries@youngminds.org.uk

15. RESPONDING TO A DISCLOSURE

- 15.1. If anyone discloses abuse or neglect, stay calm and try not to show shock or disbelief. Listen carefully to what they are saying, be sympathetic ('I am sorry that this has happened to you') and be aware of the possibility that evidence might be needed by the police, including medical evidence.
- 15.2. Tell the person that:
- You will treat the information seriously;
 - Reassure them that they did the right thing to tell you;
 - The alleged abuse was not their fault;
 - You have to inform an appropriate person;
 - You/the service will take steps to protect and support them;
- 15.3. Use open questions, such as 'can you tell me what happened / can you tell me what was said / can you describe that to me?' Write down what was said as soon as possible and report the abuse.
- 15.4. Do not:
- Press the person for more details; this will be done at a later date
 - Stop someone who is freely recalling significant events, as they may not tell you again
 - Ask leading questions that could be interpreted as putting words or suggestions to the person
 - Promise to keep secrets. You cannot keep this kind of information confidential
 - Make promises you cannot keep
 - Contact or confront the alleged abuser
 - Start an investigation on your own
 - Be judgmental e.g. 'why didn't you run away?'
- 15.5. Pass on the information to anyone other than those with a legitimate need to know, such as your Line Manager, a Safeguarding Champion or the Designated Safeguarding Officer.

Information Gathering

- 15.6. Any referrals made must be as comprehensive as possible, hence the necessity for making a detailed report at the time of the disclosure/concern. Information included should cover the following as a minimum:
- The nature of the allegation,
 - A description of any visible bruising or other injuries,
 - The effect on the child or adult at risk,
 - The child or adult at risk's account, if it can be given, of what has happened and how any bruising or other injuries occurred,
 - Witnesses to the incident(s),
 - Any times, dates or other relevant information,
 - A clear distinction between what is fact, opinion or hearsay.
- 15.7. When recording the incident of abuse or neglect:
- Note what was said, using the exact words and phrases with ink that can be photocopied,
 - Describe the circumstances in which the disclosure came about,
 - Note the setting and anyone else who was there at the time,

- Be aware that your report may be required later as part of a legal action or disciplinary procedure,
- Make every effort to preserve any evidence which may be relevant to a Police investigation, however taking into account that the wellbeing of the child or adult at risk is your first priority.

Consent

- 15.8. If you are making a referral to access Kent County Council's Children's Services and the necessary threshold has been met then consent should be obtained from the parent or guardian. Should a parent or guardian refuse to consent to a referral being made, consideration should be given to the impact this may have on the level of concern for the child's welfare, and the parent's or guardian's ability to meet the child's needs. If the child is likely to be placed at increased risk by a referral not being made then it should be
- 15.9. If you are making a referral, immediate advice should be sought from either a Safeguarding Champion or the Designated Safeguarding Officer on whether to advise the parent or carer about the referral. If you remain unsure you should seek a consultation from the KCC Integrated Front Door service.
- 15.10. Remember that the safety of the child is of paramount importance and consider whether informing a parent or guardian may place the child at increased risk or may compromise evidence gathering.

Mental Capacity

- 15.11. Every adult has the right to make their own decisions and it is assumed they have mental capacity unless it is proved otherwise by a formal mental capacity assessment.
- 15.12. Mental capacity is the ability to understand and retain the information relevant to a specific decision, to use the relevant information as part of the process of making that specific decision, to weigh up potential consequences and to communicate the decision, at the time the decision needs to be made. When in communication with someone you must establish, to the best of your ability, whether the person understands what you are telling them and the risks that may apply to them.
- 15.13. It is important to consider whether the person has the capacity to give consent to a referral. Where there is any doubt around capacity and/or their ability to consent, further advice should be sought from your Line Manager, a Safeguarding Champion or the Designated Safeguarding Officer or via a consultation with Adult Social Services.
- 15.14. Where an adult who is deemed to have capacity has made a decision that they do not want action taken to address the alleged abuse or neglect, whether caused by others or themselves, this should be respected unless failure to act will leave them at greater risk or where they are or are likely to become a repeat victim of anti-social behaviour or a crime has or will be committed.
- 15.15. Care Act Guidance states: "Where the adult who is or is at risk of abuse or neglect has capacity and is still refusing an assessment, local authorities must undertake an assessment so far as possible and document this. They should continue to keep in contact with the adult and carry out an assessment if the adult changes their mind, and asks them to do so".

15.16. The outcome of any consultation, any advice provided and any subsequent referral that is made should be recorded on the safeguarding portal.

16. MAKING REFERRALS FOR CHILDREN

16.1. The Quick View referral procedure at the beginning of this policy outlines the referral procedure for reporting a safeguarding concern regarding children and/or adults at risk and contains links to the referral forms.

16.2. The Kent County Council Integrated Front Door has now replaced the Central Referral Unit. The Front Door brings together the Central Duty Team and Early Help Triage Team into a single integrated team that has been established to seek to ensure that KCC sends service requests to the appropriate destination and get the service need right first time for the majority of families.

16.3. The Integrated Front Door is responsible for dealing with all Request for Support at an Intensive Level and above (Kent Support Levels 3 and 4).

16.4. The old Inter-Agency Referral Form (IAR) and Early Help Notification (EHN) have been replaced by a single Request for Support Form. To view the new Request for Support Form and accompanying guidance please visit: <http://www.kscb.org.uk/procedures/child-in-need-chin>

16.5. The decision making around the most suitable services to meet the needs of children who are referred on a Request for Support will now take place within the Front Door.

16.6. Support Level Guidance (previously the Threshold Document) has been developed to assist partner agencies when considering where children and young people sit within the continuum of need. The guidance sheet is colour coded for ease of use; [Kent Support Levels Guidance Sheet](#) and the accompanying [Kent Support Levels Process](#).

16.7. The telephone number for the Integrated Front Door is **03000 41 11 11**. Out of Hours Services can be contacted on **03000 41 91 91**.

16.8. For advice and guidance on local resources for families living in Maidstone at Kent Support Levels 1 or 2, please email: MaidstoneEarlyHelp@kent.gov.uk. Or speak to a Safeguarding Champion or the Designated Safeguarding Officer.

16.9. You will be expected to have had a discussion with the parent, carer or young person regarding the concerns and sought consent to a referral being made prior to contacting the Integrated Front Door. This discussion may lead to a greater understanding of the concerns and enable identification of appropriate support for the child, young person or family without the need for seeking a consultation.

16.10. **If there are concerns that a child may be suffering significant harm**, or where seeking consent for a referral from the parent or guardian and discussing the concerns may place the child at an increased risk of harm, the information must be **telephoned directly through on 03000 41 11 11 or to Kent Police via 999**.

17. Making Referrals for Adults

- 17.1. [The Kent and Medway Multi-agency Safeguarding Adults Policy, Protocols and Guidance](#) document has been re-developed to meet and work within the safeguarding adult lawful requirements set out in the [Care Act 2014](#).
- 17.2. To check whether an adult at risk is known to Social Care Health and Wellbeing, please call the Central Referral Unit for a consultation: **03000 41 61 61**. They will be able to confirm whether the adult already has a Case Manager or Care Coordinator.
- 17.3. If you have had a consultation and they have advised you to raise a safeguarding concern, you must do so within 48 hours of the discussion to avoid any increased risk.
- 17.4. It is expected that professionals who raise a concern will have completed the KASAF Stage 1 as fully as possible using all of the prompts provided within the form, to support the timely evaluation of the risks. Failure to do so may impede the process.
- 17.5. The Kent Adult Safeguarding Alert Form (KASAF) can be found on [Kent County Council's website](#).
- 17.6. If the adult is already known to Kent County Council, the referral will need to be sent directly to the relevant Case Management Team, either the Learning Disability, Mental Health or Older Persons and Physical Disability Team.
- 17.7. Reporting a concern should not be delayed by an attempt to obtain more information. A summary of any consultation with, or referral to, the Central Referral Unit will be issued to the referring officer. This needs to be held on file and included on the alert raised on the Safeguarding Portal. Speak to a Safeguarding Champion or the Designated Safeguarding Office if you have any questions about how to do this.
- 17.8. If your concerns require urgent attention outside of normal office hours (8.30am-5.00pm Monday-Friday, excluding bank holidays) and cannot wait until the next working day contact the **Out of Hours Team on 03000 41 91 91**.
- 17.9. If a response is not received within 72 hours of making a referral, the referring officer should follow up with the Central Referral Unit or the relevant case management team. If a case has been referred to the Police due to an immediate risk of harm or emergency, the Police crime report number should be noted and included in case notes and on the Safeguarding Portal.
- 17.10. Referrals made need to be sent securely, password the document and send the password via a separate email, do not include it in the body or heading of the email containing the file.
- 17.11. If you have access to a secure GCSx email then that should be used in preference of password protecting the file or ask the DSO to forward the referral on their behalf. The Designated Safeguarding Officer (DSO) should be copied into the email for all safeguarding referrals via their secure GCSx email: matt.roberts@maidstone.gcsx.gov.uk
- 17.12. Before making a referral consider speaking to a Safeguarding Champion or the Designated Safeguarding Officer for advice. Any referrals made need to be recorded on the Safeguarding Portal.

18. ESCALATING A REFERRAL

- 18.1. On rare occasions Maidstone Borough Council employees may feel that the response to a referral does not represent, in their opinion, the best course of action in relation to the referred case. If so, then concerns should be raised with the Designated Safeguarding Officer.
- 18.2. The Designated Safeguarding Officer will make the final decision as to whether a case will be referred back to Kent County Council, expressing Maidstone Borough Council's continuing concerns in relation to the welfare of the individual(s) concerned and may bring the case in question to the attention of the Internal Safeguarding Board members.

19. ALLEGATIONS OF ABUSE INVOLVING STAFF

- 19.1. Any accusation made about an employee being involved in abuse towards a child or adult should be reported to their Line Manager, a Head of Service or the Designated Safeguarding Officer immediately. Alternatively concerns may also be reported according to Maidstone Borough Council's Whistleblowing Policy.
- 19.2. If the allegation involves a senior member of staff, such as the persons Line Manager, Head of Service or if the Designated Safeguarding Officer is the subject of the suspicion/allegation, the report must be made directly to a Director and Human Resources.
- 19.3. Kent Police, Kent County Council or the regulatory authorities may be consulted at any time regarding suspected abuse.
- 19.4. Advice will be sought from the Kent County Council Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) who may involve Kent Police. A disciplinary investigation team will be formed to oversee the internal investigation.
- 19.5. Any employee accused of abuse will, if necessary, be suspended or redeployed pending further investigation by Kent Police, Kent County Council and/or the internal investigation team formed to address the concern.
- 19.6. Irrespective of the findings of the Kent County Council or of Police inquiries, Maidstone Borough Council will assess all individual cases under disciplinary procedures to decide whether an employee has breached Maidstone Borough Council policy and will reach a decision based on the available information and decide on a balance of probability whether an allegation is founded. The welfare of the child or adult at risk will always remain paramount.

20. COMPLAINTS

- 20.1. On occasions members of the public, partner agencies or Maidstone Borough Council employees may feel that insufficient action has been taken by Maidstone Borough Council.
- 20.2. **Members of the public and partner agencies:** should be encouraged to first raise their concerns directly with the staff member they have been dealing with or contact our Customer Services team if they are unsure who they have been dealing with. If the matter is not resolved informally then they should be directed to [Maidstone Borough Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure](#).
- 20.3. **Maidstone Borough Council employees:** should report their concerns to their Line Manager or the Designated Safeguarding Officer. Alternatively, employees may also report this through Maidstone Borough Council's Whistleblowing Policy.
- 20.4. If employees do not wish to raise their concerns internally they can report their concerns to the national Child Abuse Whistleblowing Helpline (0800 028 0285 or email help@nspcc.org.uk).

21. INFORMATION SHARING, DATA PROTECTION AND GDPR

- 21.1. Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) is committed to complying with the data protection principles when processing personal data and special categories data or sensitive data under the General Data Protection Regulation 2018 (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA).
- 21.2. Both the GDPR and the Human Rights Act (1998) (HRA) Article 8, make it clear that the processing of personal data must respect the rights and freedoms of the data subject (the individual), but at the same time be adequate enough for the council to carry out its functions effectively.
- 21.3. The sharing of information is vital to safeguarding, a key factor in many case reviews has been a failure to record information, to share it or to understand its significance and then take appropriate action.
- 21.4. Government guidance, [Safeguarding Practitioners: Information Sharing Advice \(July 2018\)](#), highlights the seven golden rules for information sharing regarding children, young people, parents and carers. This advice is for all frontline practitioners and senior managers who have to make decisions about sharing personal information on a case-by-case basis.
- 21.5. The first of these rules is to remember that **the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), Data Protection Act 2018 and human rights law are not barriers to justified information sharing**, but provide a framework to ensure that personal information about living individuals is shared appropriately.

The Kent & Medway Information Sharing Agreement

- 21.6. Maidstone Borough Council is a signatory of the [Kent & Medway Information Sharing Agreement](#) (ISA) which provides a framework to enable a number of organisations and public bodies across Kent and Medway to share personal information.
- 21.7. The Agreement provides for openness and transparency in information sharing, as well as appropriate governance and support, in order to assist signatory organisations and public bodies to share personal information lawfully, safely and securely and reflects the requirements of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018).
- 21.8. The ISA contains a form which can be used to record and evidence why information sharing was necessary and can be used as part of an audit trail.
- 21.9. Ensure that the information you share is necessary for the purpose for which you are sharing it, is shared only with those individuals who need to have it, is accurate, up-to-date and is shared in a timely fashion. Keep a record of your decision and the reasons for it whether it is to share information or not. If you decide to share, then record what you have shared, with whom and for what purpose.
- 21.10. Consider using the mnemonic **JAPAN** to help frame your thinking:
- **J**ustified, is what you are considering the right thing to do?
 - **A**uthorised, are you authorised to do it?
 - **P**roportionate, is the action proportionate to the issue? i.e. not using a sledge hammer to crack a nut.
 - **A**uditable, is there an audit trail to evidence your decision making? And is it
 - **N**ecessary, do you NEED to do it, are there other ways to achieve a positive outcome?

22. SAFE RECRUITMENT

- 22.1. All Maidstone Borough Council employees will be appointed in accordance with its Recruitment and Selection Policy and Procedures and its policy on Disclosures Barring Service checks on employees. These are designed to provide a rigorous and thorough selection process and to carry out all necessary checks, particularly on individuals seeking to work with children, young people and adults at risk.

Disclosure Barring Service (DBS)

- 22.2. There are three types of Disclosure Barring Service (DBS) checks: standard, enhanced and enhanced with a barred list check;
- 22.3. **Standard DBS checks:** are for people entering certain professions, such as members of the legal and accountancy professions. Standard checks contain the following: Convictions, cautions, reprimands and warnings held in England and Wales on the Police National Computer (PNC), relevant convictions in Scotland and Northern Ireland may also be included. Standard checks no longer include a check of the old or new barred lists from 12 October 2009.
- 22.4. **Enhanced DBS Checks:** Also referred to as an enhanced disclosure. These are for posts that involve a far greater degree of contact with vulnerable groups including children. In general the type of work will involve regularly caring for, supervising, training or being in sole charge of such people. Examples include a Teacher, Scout or

Guide leader. Enhanced checks are also issued for certain statutory purposes such as gaming and lottery licences.

- 22.5. This level of check involves an additional level of check to those carried out for the Standard DBS check - a check on local Police records. Where local Police records contain additional information that may be relevant to the post the applicant is being considered for, the Chief Officer of Police may release information for inclusion in an enhanced check.
- 22.6. Enhanced DBS Check with barred list check – (child), (adult), (child and adult): Enhanced checks with information from the DBS' children and adults barred list is only available for those individuals engaged in regulated activity with vulnerable groups including children and a small number of posts as listed in the Police Act regulations, for example prospective adoptive parents.
- 22.7. Source of information [Guidance](#) and [Disclosure and Barring Service](#).
- 22.8. Maidstone Borough Council requires employees to have an enhanced DBS check if they have unsupervised contact with children, young people and adults at risk or fulfil a safeguarding role such as a Designated Safeguarding Officer.
- 22.9. Line Managers are responsible for deciding which of their employees require a DBS check and for ensuring that DBS checks are kept up to date, through liaising with Human Resources.
- 22.10. For contractors and agency staff, Maidstone Borough Council has a policy of requiring all relevant contractors and agency staff who have access/contact with children, young people and adults at risk to undergo an enhanced DBS check. The contract must stipulate whether a current DBS disclosure is required.

23. TRAINING

- 23.1. Employees must accept and be able to recognise their responsibilities with regard to their own good practice and the reporting of signs of suspected abuse or neglect to either the Police or Kent County Council and understand Maidstone Borough Council's statutory obligation to ensure confirmation is received from Kent County Council that any referrals made are being actively dealt with. Everyone with access to children and adults at risk shall have regular training.
- 23.2. Training needs and opportunities relating to child and adult safeguarding and protection issues will be identified and addressed through Maidstone Borough Council's Induction and Appraisal Procedures, and in response to any changes in legislation. Training may include internal courses/workshops, externally accredited courses/seminars or workshops.
- 23.3. Staff acting as Safeguarding Champions will be required to refresh their training every two years.

24. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

- 24.1. The Equality Act 2010 places a legal obligation on public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation; to advance equality of opportunity; and to foster good relations, between persons with different protected characteristics.
- 24.2. The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 24.3. Maidstone Borough Council will have full and proper regard to the Equality Act 2010 when making safeguarding referrals under this policy, so as to avoid any possible indirect discriminatory impact on particular groups.

25. REVIEW AND OVERSIGHT

- 25.1. All referrals made by Maidstone Borough Council and the responses that they receive from Kent County Council, need to be recorded centrally on the [Intranet Safeguarding Portal](#) and will be reviewed by the Safeguarding Champions Group and the Internal Safeguarding Board.
- 25.2. This policy will be reviewed in line with any changes in legislation, Government guidance and the periodical reviews of the Kent and Medway Safeguarding Policy, Protocols and Guidance.

26. CONTACT INFORMATION

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