Strategic Planning, Sustainability & Transportation Committee	08 March 2016

Is the final decision on the recommendations in this report to be made at this meeting?	**Yes**

Re-establishment of Maidstone Borough Transport User Group

Final Decision-Maker	Strategic Planning, Sustainability & Transportation Committee
Lead Head of Service	Rob Jarman: Head of Planning & Development
Lead Officer and Report Author	Steve Clarke: Principal Planning Officer Spatial Policy
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That Councillors agree to re-establish the Maidstone Transport User Group.
2. That Councillors agree to the proposed role and membership of the Maidstone Transport User Group as outlined at paragraphs 4.6 and 4.8 of the report.
3. That Councillors agree to a review of the need for the group on an annual basis

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough – A reliable public transport system is a key element in the drive to securing a successful local economy

Timetable	
Meeting	*Date*
Strategic Planning Sustainability & Transportation Committee	8 March 2016

Re-establishment of Maidstone Borough Transport User Group

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 In 2014, the former Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee, commenced a review of Transport in Maidstone Borough - alternatives to using a car. The review was completed in 2015 and the final report published in May 2015.

1.2 The final report was presented to and considered by this Committee at its meeting held on 14th July 2015.

1.3 One of the recommendations of the review report was that the Maidstone Borough Transport User Group be re-established.

1.4 This report sets out how the group could be re-established and seeks to recommend those who would be eligible for membership of the re-formed group.

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

2.1 The previous Maidstone Borough Transport User Group was disbanded in 2011 following a review of a number of such groups by the then Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services as the group was coordinated by the community engagement team within the Council.

2.2 Councillors are also advised that there were earlier calls for the group to be re-established, for example the former Regeneration & Economic Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee in gathering evidence for their report 'Traffic Congestion in Maidstone Municipal Year 2011/2012,' heard calls for this to be done.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

3.1 Two basic options are open to Councillors, the Maidstone Borough Transport User Group is either re-established or it is not re-established.

3.2 If the group is not re-established, an opportunity for direct contact between transport users and transport service providers would be lost, which in the case of rail services within the Borough, is important at this point of time in the build-up to the commencement of the process to award a new South Eastern Train Operating Franchise process later in the year. The opportunity would also be lost for greater cooperation across transport sectors in terms of for example timetable coordination between rail and bus services.

3.3 Re-establishment of the group would enable transport users to have direct contact with operators and for the representatives of the wider community within the Borough to make their views known through the group to these operators. It is anticipated that the group would allow discussion and potentially prompt resolution of any specific minor local issues relating to service provision across the public transport sector.

3.4 However, given the previous history of the group and the criticism associated with its role and purpose, if the group is re-established, its role needs to be clearly defined and it should be subject to periodic review to establish if it is still required.

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4. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The preferred option is for the Maidstone Borough Transport User Group to be re-established.

4.2 As indicated above, the re-establishment of the group would enable the resumption of direct contact between service providers and service users.

4.3 The key to the re-establishment of the group is to ensure that it remains focussed. A previous criticism levelled at the group was that it had become little more than a talking-shop prior to its dissolution, in common with other similar groups around the County (many of which have also ceased to meet).

4.4 The group needs to take on a strategic role looking at the promotion of modal shift and public transport usage/provision as it affects the Borough as a whole, including integration of buses and trains from the point of view of both service providers and users.

4.5 It should not be focussed, for example, on why a specific train or bus was delayed. The service operators all have their own existing complaints procedures in place for such circumstances.

4.6 If the group is re-established it is recommended that it should meet when necessary, but no more than four times per annum. It is also recommended that the operation of the group is subject to an annual review to ensure that it continues to fulfil a strategic Borough-wide role.

4.7 It is considered that the first issue the group could consider is the forthcoming process relating to the award of a new Southeastern Train Operating Franchise.

4.8 As part of a desire to ensure the group remains focussed but also to provide a balance between community representation and service providers, the following membership is recommended.
   - Three representatives from Parish Councils, one of which could be from the Maidstone Branch of KALC (Kent Association of Local Councils) to represent the communities across the Borough;
   - A representative from any existing formally constituted commuter/public transport action groups;

- A representative from the Community Rail Partnership (Medway Valley Line);
- An MBC and KCCCouncillor,
- A representative of South Eastern Trains (and/or any Train Operating Company that may be awarded the rail franchise in due course);
- A representative from the main bus operating companies in the Borough, and;
- MBC and KCC officer(s) as required.

In any of the publicity for the reformation of the group it would be appropriate to clearly set out the purpose of the group and the potential role of participants in the group in inviting nominations for membership.

5. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

5.1 If Councillors agree the recommendations in paragraphs 4.6 and 4.8 the next step will be to publicise the re-establishment of the group and to set a date for its inaugural meeting.

6. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The promotion and delivery of a good public transport system will assist in the delivery of the Council's corporate priorities	Rob Jarman Head of Planning & Development
Risk Management	N/A	Rob Jarman Head of Planning & Development
Financial	No implications directly arising from this report	Head of Finance & Resources
Staffing	No implications directly arising from this report	Rob Jarman Head of Planning & Development
Legal	Ni implications directly arising from this report	Kate Jardine Team Leader (Planning) Mid Kent Legal Services
Equality Impact Needs Assessment	Promotion of increased use of public transport will take account of the needs of all	Anna Collier Policy & Information

	groups including those without access to a car.	Manager
Environmental/Sustainable Development	Promotion and increased use of public transport may encourage a reduction in the use of the private car	Rob Jarman Head of Planning & Development
Community Safety	N/A	Rob Jarman Head of Planning & Development]
Human Rights Act	N/A	Rob Jarman Head of Planning & Development
Procurement	N/A	Rob Jarman Head of Planning & Development & Head of Finance & Resources
Asset Management	N/A	Rob Jarman Head of Planning & Development

7.   REPORT APPENDICES

None

8.   BACKGROUND PAPERS

None