

Cabinet Member for Environment

As you would expect from an individual who has chaired an Overview and Scrutiny Committee for all but one year since the inception of the system I am totally committed to working closely with the Regeneration and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee over the coming year. If Maidstone Borough Council is to regain its hard won reputation for innovation and high quality service delivery it is vital that the Improvement and Development Agency's oft quoted 'parity of esteem' between Overview and Scrutiny and Executive is restored.

I will work towards an environment where Overview and Scrutiny can resume its rightful role as the brains and conscience of the council, with a central role in policy innovation, development, refinement and monitoring. To achieve this I will ensure that draft policy initiatives and supporting information are supplied to Overview and Scrutiny as early as possible in the policy process and crucially that corporately agreed recommendations from past and future reports and seminar findings are acted upon diligently by the Executive. I am struck that during the recent refuse collection debate key information was only released to Overview and Scrutiny after critical decisions had been made. I will never allow Overview and Scrutiny to be used as a fig leaf to cover policy directions and decisions already effectively decided.

I am keen that the policy development profile of Overview and Scrutiny is enhanced. To achieve this I will ensure that full credit is given to Overview and Scrutiny for its 'think-tank' and 'critical friend' roles through joint policy and campaign launches (as a model I would quote the significant local and national media coverage achieved by a partnership of Overview and Scrutiny and Executive on the MBC campaigns to tackle the scourge of abandoned vehicles and fly tipping). Overview and Scrutiny Members should have bolder public profiles than their relevant Cabinet Members because of their freedom to pick and choose subject areas in response to real public concerns – rather than the whim of Government. Effectively, Overview and Scrutiny can select more 'sexy' and high profile topics than any Cabinet Member, who is procedurally tied to staid Forward Plans and bureaucratic tick boxes and strategies.

The role of the Executive is to implement the Council's will through implementation of the Corporate Plan and 20/20 Vision. Overview and Scrutiny has a public duty to ensure effective delivery of these guiding documents.

I am not going to set out a dramatic, ambitious but ultimately unachievable vision for my portfolio in the coming year, rather I will pledge to work alongside councillors, officers and partners to deliver good quality and cost effective core services. I will not countenance expensive municipal follies or waste of any kind within my portfolio. Officers are very aware of my view on such extravagances as the binning of costly trees and their replacement with the metal structure near Blockbusters.

We all know the key challenges on basic services facing us and the communities we represent, including:

- How can we make partnerships with private, voluntary and public sector bodies deliver for our residents and avoid creating expensive time consuming talking shops, achieving little but buck-passing;
- How do we provide more and better transportation options whilst stemming the inexorable rise in traffic related air and noise pollution.

Overview and Scrutiny will be central to shining the bright and incisive light onto these topics which will illuminate the way forward.”