

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF THE EXTERNAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 12 JANUARY  
2010**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Hotson (Chairman)  
Councillors Batt, Hinder, Marchant, Yates and Warner

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Paterson and Sherreard

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

**Resolved:** That all items on the agenda be web-cast.

**77. Apologies.**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Paterson and Sherreard.

**78. Notification of Substitute Members.**

It was noted that Councillor Warner was substituting for Councillor Paterson.

**79. Notification of Visiting Members.**

There were no visiting Members.

**80. Disclosures by Members and Officers:**

There were no disclosures.

**81. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.**

**Resolved:** That all items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

**82. Election of Vice-Chairman.**

**Resolved:** That Councillor Marchant be elected Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2009-10.

**83. Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 November 2009.**

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2009 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman.

#### **84. Amendment to the Order of Business.**

The Chairman proposed that Agenda Item 14, "Urgent Item: CCTV Control Centre and Multi-Agency Community Safety Unit" be taken after Agenda Item 9, "Holiday Play Schemes" as all other items on the agenda did not require attendance by the officers.

**Resolved:** That Agenda Item 14, "Urgent Item: CCTV Control Centre and Multi-Agency Community Safety Unit" be taken after Agenda Item 9, "Holiday Play Schemes".

#### **85. Holiday Play Schemes.**

The Assistant Director of Customer Services and Partnerships, Paul Taylor, stated that the intention of the Hotfoot Report was to answer fundamental questions about why the scheme was run, how it was funded, what the objectives of the scheme were, whether it offered best value and how it linked with the Sustainable Community Strategy objectives. GIS (Geographical Information System) mapping had been used to identify where people were coming from to use the scheme as location was extremely important but was limited by the availability of venues. Work had taken place during the past few years to make the scheme as accessible as possible. The subscription rate for Hotfoot was currently 80-90% and more work needed to be done to identify why this was not nearer 100%. Mr Taylor emphasised that the scheme set out to educate, inform and involve children; it was well respected and received good feedback from parents.

The Chairman highlighted that Hotfoot was not a statutory service for the Council to provide and the Cabinet was under pressure to cut costs. The report demonstrated that demand for Hotfoot, however, had been strong for the past three years, and community play schemes in rural areas were also very popular. The provision of Hotfoot and grant funding for community play schemes contributed to the Council fulfilling its commitment to community well-being and the promotion of equality. It was clear from the report that Maidstone was ahead of other Kent district authorities with regard to play schemes.

A Councillor referred to figures on the income from Hotfoot and noted that while the text stated that income had increased in 2009, the figures showed a decrease. Mr Taylor agreed to check these figures. In response to a further question on the potential savings achieved by ceasing the Hotfoot scheme, Mr Taylor stated that the figures in the report were based on projections, however the actual saving expected if the scheme stopped was £14,610.

With regard to the Ofsted inspection of the Marden play scheme, which stated that the scheme "did not meet all the requirements of the childcare register", Mr Taylor stated that this was unlikely to relate to the child protection register, however the Council was not permitted to receive all of the information about this grading.

A Councillor noted that some of the feedback from parents requested activities for children over the age of 11 and Mr Taylor confirmed that this would be provided.

A Councillor stated that there was no Hotfoot scheme provided near the Senacre Community Hall, however it would be extremely worthwhile to provide the service there. Mr Taylor stated that venues for the scheme were based on access to schools, however if the Senacre Community Hall was considered a valuable potential venue then this would be investigated.

A Member highlighted that community play schemes charged less for places but received much less funding from the Council than Hotfoot. The Sports and Play Development Assistant, Michelle Fowler, explained that the community schemes were much smaller and they also received funding from parish councils; the figures in the papers showed only the Council's contribution, rather than the full cost. Mr Taylor stated that community schemes were only play schemes, whilst Hotfoot had more education content. A lot of money was also spent on staffing for Hotfoot which contributed to the high satisfaction levels from parents.

A Councillor suggested that as some community play schemes received the same Ofsted scores as Hotfoot, consideration should be given to allowing another organisation to provide the scheme, which could save money. Mr Taylor stated that Ofsted gave surety over the administration of schemes but the key consideration for him was feedback from parents, which was extremely positive for Hotfoot. Hotfoot had challenging aims and sought to inform children about social issues, rather than focussing only on play. He agreed, however, that this was an area that could be investigated further.

A Councillor asked why the Mangravet play scheme was not included in the report. Kate Pomphrey, Sports and Play Development Officer, stated that the report only included those play schemes that were supported by Maidstone Borough Council grants. Miss Pomphrey highlighted that any scheme was able to apply for the grants.

In response to a question, Mr Taylor stated that he believed the best option for holiday play schemes for 2010 was to keep Hotfoot and the funding for community schemes, but to reduce the number of weeks for the Hotfoot summer scheme. The summer scheme did not run at 100% capacity and the last week had the lowest take-up, so cancelling this week could save a significant sum.

With regard to a reduction in take-up of Hotfoot places in 2009, Mr Taylor stated that analysing the data available had not provided a clear explanation, therefore future parental evaluations would look for more empirical evidence. There was a possible link with the economic downturn, however this was considered unlikely as the cost of the scheme was very competitive. The report also noted that the fall in numbers could be an anomaly and a longer term view needed to be taken.

A Councillor asked about junior volunteers for Hotfoot and suggested that it could be counterproductive having 12-year-old volunteers as they were too close in age to the oldest children using Hotfoot, who were 11. Mrs Fowler explained that junior volunteers were recruited from the age of 12, and this worked well as they were seen as mentors by children on the Hotfoot scheme. Miss Pomphrey informed Members that junior volunteers attended staff training and workshops to emphasise that they were now attending Hotfoot to work rather than play. A Councillor suggested it could be useful to advertise in secondary schools for junior volunteers.

With regard to timescales for any new scheme, Mr Taylor advised that advertising for the Easter scheme would begin shortly. Fees and charges were also due to be set in the coming weeks and any change would apply to the summer scheme.

The Committee then considered the recommendations outlined within the report and agreed that all were appropriate; it was therefore resolved:

That the Committee recommends that

- i. The Cabinet Member formally endorses the objectives and purpose of the scheme as set out in the report i.e. 'to promote the personal and social development of children with a particular focus on the child's role in respect of the wider community of Maidstone';
- ii. Further work be undertaken as part of the parental evaluations of the 2010 scheme in order to provide empirical evidence on the reasons for the apparent decline in children taking up places on the Hotfoot programme; and
- iii. The Cabinet Member consider the appropriate level of subsidy and the options in respect of the future provision of the Hotfoot play scheme as outlined in the report.

The Committee also agreed to carry out further work of its own on holiday play schemes to identify whether there was a more appropriate way of delivering them, and requested information on the total funding available for play schemes, including grants awarded by the Council, and community play scheme plans for 2010.

The Chairman thanked the witnesses for a clear and informative presentation.

**Resolved:** That

- a) The Committee recommends that
  - i. The Cabinet Member formally endorses the objectives and purpose of the scheme as set out in the report i.e. 'to promote the personal and social development of children with a particular focus on the child's role in respect of the wider community of Maidstone';
  - ii. Further work be undertaken as part of the parental evaluations of the 2010 scheme in

order to provide empirical evidence on the reasons for the apparent decline in children taking up places on the Hotfoot programme; and

- iii. The Cabinet Member consider the appropriate level of subsidy and the options in respect of the future provision of the Hotfoot play scheme as outlined in the report.
- b) The figures within the report regarding income be checked for accuracy;
- c) Senacre Community Hall be considered as a possible future venue for the Hotfoot play scheme;
- d) Advertising in secondary schools for Hotfoot junior volunteers be considered;
- e) Information on the total funding available for play schemes, including grants awarded by the Council, be provided to the Committee;
- f) Community play schemes be contacted for information on their plans for 2010; and
- g) The Committee review the provision of holiday play schemes.

## **86. URGENT ITEM: CCTV Control Centre and Multi-Agency Community Safety Unit**

The Chairman welcomed the following witnesses who were in attendance to present the report on the CCTV Control Centre and Multi-Agency Community Safety Unit:

- Councillor Chris Garland, Leader of the Council;
- Councillor Marion Ring, Cabinet Member for Community Services;
- David Petford, Chief Executive;
- Paul Taylor, Assistant Director of Customer Services and Partnerships; and
- Steve McGinnes, Head of Revenues, Benefits and Community Safety.

Councillor Garland explained that when the original decision to move the CCTV Control Room had been taken, the Council's financial situation was better, and the impact of the recession had called for a review of the capital programme. Moving the CCTV Control Room to make it part of the Community Safety Unit (CSU) would cost £700,000, therefore the project had been revisited and it had been confirmed that the health and safety risks in the existing CCTV Control Room could be mitigated. Some of the saving achieved through not moving would be invested in 5 additional mobile CCTV cameras. Councillor Garland also informed Members that an audit of existing CCTV cameras would be carried out to test their effectiveness and value for money, as the service was very expensive and was funded only by the Council. Councillor Ring emphasised that CCTV was not just a town centre initiative, as the 5 additional mobile cameras could be used to target anti-social behaviour hot spots around the Borough.

Mr Petford reminded Members that the Best Value Review of CCTV had recommended leaving the CCTV Control Room in its current location. Staff, police and other partners did not believe it necessary to have the CCTV Control Room and the CSU in the same location. It was essential to ensure services were being delivered as efficiently as possible in the current economic climate, and leaving the control room where it was would save £278,000 after all health and safety issues had been mitigated.

A Councillor asked why the decision on the CCTV control room had changed. Councillor Ring stated that the recession had necessitated a review of the Council's capital programme. Previous advice had suggested that partners were keen for the CCTV control room to be located within the CSU, and that there were serious health and safety concerns with the current location, however more recent advice indicated that this was not the case.

A Councillor expressed some concern over the proposal to include a fire suppression system in the CCTV cabinets in the control room, as the control room was a confined space with limited oxygen available. The Committee therefore requested written assurance that the fire suppression system would not present a further health and safety risk to CCTV operators in the event of a fire.

In response to a question, Mr Taylor stated that the new CCTV cameras could be maintained by existing staff. The audit of the existing cameras would identify the number of arrests attributable to each camera so that the cost benefit of each camera could be identified. GIS mapping would be used to target mobile cameras effectively.

With regard to the budget for the CSU, Mr McGinnes stated that the capital cost of the project was £73,000 of which the police was contributing £45,000. A further £20,000 funding from the police would allow police technology to be securely connected to the Council's. Strong expressions of interest had been received from a range of partners to have a presence in the CSU.

A Councillor referred to recent press reports that CCTV cameras were being used to issue fines to illegally parked cars, and Mr Taylor confirmed that this was not planned for Maidstone.

The Committee noted its support for the report.

**Resolved:** That:

- a) written assurance be requested from the Cabinet and the Assistant Director of Customer Services and Partnerships that the fire suppression system to be installed in the CCTV cabinets in the CCTV control room will not present a further health and safety risk to CCTV operators in the event of a fire; and

b) The Committee's support for the report be noted.

### **87. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership Scrutiny Protocol.**

The Senior Overview and Scrutiny Officer, Louise Smith, advised the Committee that Home Office guidance on the implementation of powers to scrutinise Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) recommended establishing a protocol with CDRP partners to outline mutual expectations and responsibilities. The draft protocol had been developed with the Committee Chairman and the co-Chairmen of the Safer Maidstone Partnership.

A Councillor asked why paragraph 10.2 stated that the co-opted member from the Kent Police Authority would "be an officer rather than an elected member where possible". Miss Smith advised that when the issue of co-optation had first been raised with the Committee, Members had agreed that an officer would be preferred to avoid any political conflict. It was, however, agreed that this line would be removed to give flexibility in the future.

In response to a question, Miss Smith confirmed that the protocols had been approved by the co-opted member for CRDP scrutiny.

**Resolved:** That the draft CDRP Scrutiny Protocols be approved subject to the removal of the sentence "This member will be an officer rather than an elected member where possible" from section 10.2.

### **88. Update on Implementation of Diverse Communities Report.**

The Committee considered the update on the Diverse Communities Report. In response to queries, the Senior Overview and Scrutiny Officer explained that one further update would be requested in 6 months, after which updates would only be sought upon request from Members. Following the retirement of the Community Development and Social Inclusion Manager, responsibility for these areas was currently with the Assistant Director of Customer Services and Partnerships.

**Resolved:** That the update on the Diverse Communities Report be noted.

### **89. Sustainable Communities Act Update.**

A Councillor raised that no second round for local authorities to make submissions to the 'national selector body' under the Sustainable Communities Act had been announced and recommended that the Committee lobbied local MPs for a second round. The Committee approved this recommendation.

**Resolved:** That a letter be sent on behalf of the Committee to local MPs lobbying for a second round for submissions to be made under the Sustainable Communities Act.

**90. Future Work Programme and Forward Plan of Key Decisions.**

The Senior Overview and Scrutiny Officer informed the Committee that a representative of Southeastern would be attending the 9 February 2010 meeting, along with Councillor Robertson, the Council's railways champion, to discuss rail services in the Borough. A representative of Kent County Council would also be invited to discuss holiday play schemes.

It was noted that a meeting would be held at 10 a.m. on 24 March 2010 in Maidstone House to scrutinise the Safer Maidstone Partnership.

**Resolved:** That the Future Work Programme be noted.

**91. Duration of the Meeting.**

6:30 p.m. to 8:35 p.m.