

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE REGENERATION AND SUSTAINABLE
COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2010**

PRESENT: Councillor Sherreard (Chairman)
Councillors English, FitzGerald, Paine and Hinder

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence were received from Councillors
Beerling, Ross and Thick

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

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

93. Apologies.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Beerling, Nelson-Gracie, Ross, Thick and Vizzard.

94. Notification of Substitute Members.

It was noted that Councillors English and Hinder were substituting for Councillors Vizzard and Nelson-Gracie respectively.

95. Notification of Visiting Members.

There were none.

96. Disclosures by Members and Officers.

There were no disclosures.

97. 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.

98. Minutes of the Meeting held on 26 January 2010.

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2010 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman.

99. Economic Development Update.

The Chairman welcomed the Economic Development Manger, John Foster and the Economic Development Officer, Keith Grimley to the meeting to

discuss the progress of the Economic Development Strategy that had been published in November 2008.

Mr Foster stated that the economy was fundamentally sound and that companies had shown a continued interest through Locate in Kent in Maidstone as a place to invest. However demand following initial inquiries had not been significant given the current state of the economy. Mr Foster highlighted that employment rates in Maidstone remained relatively low in comparison to South East averages, despite rising from 1.3% in 2008/09 to 2.8% in 2009/10. Employees in Maidstone continued to receive low wages and were predominately low skilled, with significant proportions of Maidstone's highly skilled residents commuting out of the borough for work. Mr Foster then outlined the progress made against the Economic Development Action Plan, highlighting the following:

- A report was being presented to the Local Development Document Advisory Group (LDDAG) as part of the Local Development Framework process to define a town centre boundary and to split the town centre into five sectors;
- A Local Strategic Plan sub group had been set up to monitor and review the Economic Development Strategy and the Sustainable Communities Strategy;
- The Media Tree network continued to be funded by Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) and Kent County Council (KCC). ASB Law had recently joined the Media Tree Steering Group and this had given a new perspective on their work;
- A number of rural Maidstone businesses had received a total of £80–100,000 in grant funding;
- The implementation of the Tourism Strategy had been delayed pending the results of the Heart of Kent review because it had a significant role in the strategy;
- Maidstone was part of the Kent 2012 Olympics Working Group. The Maidstone Dream project to support local athletes continued to be successful, and Leeds Castle was supporting this by hosting a dinner party;
- A memorandum of understanding had been signed with Business Link, and a programme of tailored training opportunities relevant to the Maidstone economy had been agreed. This included topics such as licensing, planning and business rates;
- Mr Foster had been invited on to a Mid Kent College panel to help develop the Oakwood Park adult education curriculum;
- Locate in Kent was working with MBC to determine how to promote Maidstone's offer to businesses;
- A directory of businesses in Maidstone had been produced; and
- The vocational skills centre in Senacre Community Hall was larger than originally planned and would provide evening classes and youth activities. The vocational skills training was planned to correlate to job opportunities in Kent.

There was a policy in the regional plan to locate further education and investment opportunities together on a university campus. This was intended to enable opportunities to share knowledge between the two

sectors. The old Springfield site had been identified as a possible location given its proximity to local amenities and its accessibility. A number of Members were concerned that too much emphasis had been placed on Higher Education growth and that Further Education growth had been overlooked. The Committee was also concerned that too much importance had been placed on opportunities with UCA (University for the Creative Arts) and that opportunities with other education establishments were being overlooked. The Committee therefore agreed that these opportunities should be sought.

Mr Foster explained that MBC was working with KCC to address long term unemployment issues, with specific focus being placed on the public sector to take on new employees. The Committee queried what MBC was doing as an employer to help unemployed young people and was advised that MBC had an apprenticeship scheme and had facilitated work experience opportunities. The Committee felt that the Council could do more and agreed that it should explore employment of unskilled workers as trainees in vocational based vacancies. Members also felt that it was important that the needs of 18-24 year olds be explored to help promote further education and work opportunities to them.

In response to a question, Mr Foster advised the Committee that the main piece of additional work required was the development of a greater consensus on how Maidstone was perceived to establish what its business offer was. He felt that more discussion was needed on how best to brand Maidstone to make sure its marketing was appropriate. The Committee agreed that this was an integral piece of work and that the Cabinet Member for Regeneration should make a commitment to developing this.

The Planning Policy Statement 4 (PS4) was implemented in December 2009 and had set out a framework for the Government's policy for planning for sustainable economic growth in urban and rural areas in a single Planning Policy Statement. This had given a more flexible definition of employment and a Member suggested that this may present further opportunities for Maidstone. Mr Foster advised that he had not explored if there were any potential policy problems resulting from PS4 as it had only been recently released and discussion was required with Planning Officers. A Member raised concern regarding the deliverability of office development as much of the strategy was linked into the core strategy. Mr Foster clarified that existing Council Policies and PS4 enabled the required investment opportunities. A Councillor noted the traffic and planning constraints on developments and felt that the PS4 presented an opportunity to the Council as the constraints may not apply to education establishments. The Committee therefore agreed that the accessibility constraints on developments be explored in light of PS4 to help identify possible new and existing sites.

A number of Members were concerned about the perceived lack of work being undertaken to develop and assist the rural economy. Members felt there may have been an issue with rural employment as business sites were being transferred to residential sites. Mr Foster advised the Committee that the number of businesses which employed people was

very small due to the nature of their work. Opportunities for funding for rural market towns from the South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) had closed and a Member felt that opportunities had been missed by some areas and that some rural villages had been unable to bid for funding due to peculiarities in the defined rural boundary lines. In response to a question, Mr Foster advised that he hoped a vision statement would be produced as part of the Local Development Framework. The Committee was concerned about the delay in potentially producing a rural vision statement and agreed it was urgently required. Members also agreed that greater importance should be placed on the rural economy when the Economic Development Strategy was reviewed.

A Member felt that greater economic benefit for Maidstone could be achieved by ensuring that whole site planning briefs were delivered holistically, rather than piecemeal. Mr Foster explained that greater opportunities would be achieved through the Area Access Plan. The Committee was concerned that other local authorities had produced development briefs that were later discharged and it was therefore agreed that the Council should make a commitment to ensuring that they would be delivered in Maidstone.

The Committee considered the future demand for retail in Maidstone and was advised that it was difficult to forecast. Based on housing growth forecasts, it was anticipated that demand for retail would also grow. Mr Foster highlighted that the updated retail capacity forecasts had determined that capacity demand over the next twenty years would require a retail space of the size of Fremlins Walk.

The Committee thanked Mr Foster and Mr Grimley for an informative presentation and congratulated them on their progress.

Resolved: That the Cabinet Member for Regeneration:

- a) Undertakes a branding exercise to establish Maidstone's business offer;
- b) Explores opportunities for employment of unskilled workers as trainees in vocational based vacancies;
- c) Explores the needs of 18-24 year olds to help promote further education and work opportunities to them;
- d) Considers the accessibility constraints on new and existing developments in light of PS4 to identify possible sites;
- e) Develops a rural vision statement and places greater importance on the rural economy when reviewing the Economy Development Strategy;
- f) Ensures that Economic Development Briefs for whole sites and area developments are holistically delivered;
- g) Notes the importance of Further Education and seeks opportunities for additional Further Education establishments as well as for Higher Education; and
- h) Explores opportunities with other education establishments in addition to those with the University of Creative Arts.

100. Forward Plan and Future Work Programme.

The Committee noted its future work programme and the Chairman highlighted that the gypsy and traveller site update would be brought to the meeting on 27 April 2010.

The Committee considered the draft junk mail scoping document (attached at Appendix A) and agreed to contact the Overview and Scrutiny Officer with any suggestions or amendments. Members agreed it would be useful to visit the take away companies that posted menus to discuss the Committee's review and any possible alternatives. Furthermore, the Committee agreed it may be more appropriate to hold an informal workshop style meeting to undertake its review and that an additional daytime meeting may be required in order to cater for all possible witnesses.

Resolved: That

- a) The future work programme be noted; and
- b) Committee Members contact the Overview and Scrutiny Officer with suggestions and amendments to the draft junk mail scoping document.

101. Duration of the Meeting.

6.30 p.m. to 8.15 p.m.

<p>Topic: Junk Mail</p>
<p>What are the objectives and desired outcomes of the review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do we define as junk mail?; • What type and level of 'junk mail' is considered appropriate by residents?; • Is there evidence of the effectiveness of junk mail as an advertising tool?; • What alternatives to junk mail are available to local businesses as a cost-effective method of advertising?; • Establish whether any local authorities have had any success dealing with unwanted junk mail and make recommendations as appropriate; • Determine how junk mail is distributed nationally and locally; • Identify methods to prevent unauthorised mailings and make recommendations as appropriate; and • Explore the feasibility of a 'no junk mail sticker' endorsed by the Council and whether a 'code of conduct' can legally be agreed with distributors.
<p>Which witnesses are required?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Royal Mail • Direct Marketing Association • Federation of Small Businesses • Town Centre Management • Maidstone Borough Council's Communications team • 'Stop Junk Mail' campaigners • Citizen Advice Bureau
<p>Other ways to seek evidence? E.g. site visits, involving members of the public</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BBC Radio Kent interviews on 16/2/10 • Unauthorised Mailings literature in Maidstone • Research on scams • Request feedback from residents using the local press
<p>What information/training is needed?</p>
<p>Suggested time for review and report completion date</p> <p>1 meeting</p>
<p>How does the review link to council priorities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A place to achieve, prosper and thrive • A place that is clean and green
<p>How does this item deliver CfPS effective scrutiny principles?</p> <p>Enables the voice and concerns of the public</p>

Any co-optees or expert witnesses?

DRAFT