

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REGENERATION AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW  
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**27 APRIL 2010**

**REPORT OF HEAD OF CHANGE AND SCRUTINY**

**Report prepared by Esther Bell**

1. **Cabinet Member for Regeneration – Update on Progress 2009 - 10**

1.1 Issue for Consideration

1.1.1 To consider the report of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration on the progress made with the priorities set for 2009-10.

1.2 Recommendation of the Head of Change and Scrutiny

1.2.1 The Committee are recommended to consider the statement made by the Cabinet Member at the beginning of the year and ask questions with regard to progress that has been made on those issues highlighted as priorities.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 The Regeneration and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for holding to account those Cabinet Members whose portfolios fall within the remit of the Committee.

1.3.2 The Cabinet Members whose portfolios relate to the Committee are the Cabinet Members for Environment and Regeneration.

1.3.3 The areas of the Cabinet Member for Regeneration portfolio that are relevant to the Committee are as follows:

- **Local Development Plan** – to be responsible for planning strategy for the Borough including detailed consideration of planning policy and guidance; to be responsible for developing the Local Development Plan alongside the Leader of the Council for submission to Cabinet and the Council for approval; to be responsible for the preparation of development briefs and informal guidance notes.
- **Planning** – to be responsible for all Executive planning matters, including Building Control.

- **Economic Development** – to be responsible for the implementation and review of an annual strategy that will foster the local economy and bring associated benefits to the wider community; to be responsible for the development, review and application of the Council's Economic Development Strategy alongside the Leader of the Council.
- **Sustainability** – to guide, advise and provide a strategic overview on sustainability issues as they affect the Council's internal and external activities; to ensure that the Council, the non-executive Committees, Cabinet and Cabinet Members are aware of sustainability issues when formulating policy; to make recommendations to Council on sustainability issues arising from Council policies, and promote proposals to be adopted as Council Policy; to maintain the environmental quality of the Borough.
- **Housing** – to be responsible for the Housing Strategy; to be responsible for the relationship with local Registered Social Landlord's (RSLs); to be responsible for the development, operation and review of all the private housing functions of the Council and protection of private sector tenants, including the provision of the homelessness service.

1.3.4 The Committee interviewed the Cabinet Member for Regeneration on 30 June 2009, the relevant extract from the minutes is set out below:

*"The Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Councillor Malcolm Greer, congratulated Members and the Overview and Scrutiny Officer on the production of the report regarding Section 106 agreements and stated that he had taken on board the report's recommendations.*

*The Committee was informed that an Office Manager had been appointed within the Development Control Department. The Officer Manager assisted with the day to day running of the Department, this included computer systems updates, which would make the working of all departments, Development Control (DC), Building Control (BC) and Enforcement, more efficient and transparent. He highlighted that this was an ongoing process and that he would update the Committee at a future date. A Development Control Planning Manager had also been appointed to manage Planning Control and Enforcement. These combined duties within a single officer's remit ensured that a more structured system was in place with respect to both areas. This change had already showed signs of benefit, with a significant reduction in live enforcement cases.*

*The recession has had a significant influence on the number of planning applications received, which had dropped to approximately 1700 last year. This has had a major affect on money streams, including that arising from pre-application advice. This had resulted in adjusting staffing levels to address the downturn or redeployment of*

*Officers to other areas, such as Enforcement, where the work load was greater and needed addressing. The Committee was informed that all areas and processes were monitored on a regular basis, with the performance of all departments analysed. Furthermore, the new system enabled Members and Parish Councils to receive by e-mail, the current status of Section 106 Agreements, Enforcement and Planning Applications. Further work was ongoing with respect to improving the presentation of information.*

*The Committee requested that a structure diagram be produced detailing how BC, DC and Enforcement interact, together with the contact details and where in the building the team members could be found.*

*A Draft Enforcement Policy had been produced by the Planning Manager. Members would be consulted on the completed final draft. The document was to inform Members and Parish Councils how the Council conducted work with respect to enforcement issues.*

*A Developers Forum had also been established and was proving to be successful. Two forums had taken place and a third was to take place in October. The main benefit had been that dialogue had been established between Developers and Planners which made systems more efficient and cost effective. One area that was identified as a concern was the time taken to address legal issues after an application had been approved. A Legal Charter was therefore being produced which would inform Developers of what was required, within a time line, which would assist in ensuring the contract was completed. A cost framework was also to be included as part of the Legal Charter..*

*The first Enabling Committee had been established with regard to the Sutton Valence Running Track. This helped solve potential difficulties and inform interested parties, including the Parish Council, of the work which was to be carried out in the foreseeable future. A committee of this nature was also to be established with regard to the new Clinic at Junction 7 and the proposed developments at Senacre.*

### Gypsy Sites

*The Consultants, Bakers, had recently been appointed to commence work on a Development Plan Document, which included the location of gypsy sites. A joint Kent County Council steering group was meeting on 17 July 2009. Councillor Greer would be representing Maidstone at the meeting. Councillor Greer confirmed that Parish Councils would be consulted as part of the process.*

### Economic Development

*A judging panel had selected the concept design by Letts Wheeler as part of the High Street Regeneration Competition from the five short listed designs. It was envisaged that these improvements would encourage companies into the area and would have a positive impact on the surrounding locations. The Council was now in the consultation period with regard to the plans. This was scheduled to last for between six to nine months. In response to a question, Councillor Greer confirmed that local utility companies, along with other stakeholders and Disability Groups, were to be involved in the consultation process.*

*Small businesses were being supported by the Council, which offered advice clinics at the Gateway. 36 businesses had also received advertising within the Kent Messenger's 'Make it Maidstone' initiative.*

#### *General Maintenance Work*

*The Committee were informed that work was already underway to remove clutter, including excess signage and railings from the centre of Maidstone to make the area more aesthetically pleasing. Other areas of Maidstone were also being considered for de-cluttering.*

*Plans were also being discussed for the development of the river with the use of Section 106 monies.*

#### *Housing*

*The Committee was reassured that everything was being done to ensure the Council did not lose out on any potential money with regard to housing projects. Furthermore, it was particularly important to ensure the sustainability of all new developments, this included commercial development such as the Council's new Depot, which had been constructed to an extremely high standard. Councillor Greer highlighted the importance of attracting new businesses into the area in order to ensure the availability of high quality jobs.*

*A Member requested that the Committee be provided with a report regarding the development of Parkwood Industrial Estate and the possibility of attracting businesses to the area. The Committee was also informed that the Cabinet Member was working closely with the Town Centre Manager to ensure that empty shops were made to look more attractive by installing vinyl advertising to windows.*

*A Member raised concerns that Whatman Park may now be at a disadvantage in terms of parking due to the failure to agree to develop a ground for Maidstone Football Club.*

*Finally, the Committee was informed that, where feasible, devolution of power to Parish Councils would be looked into; however Councillor Greer was unsure as to whether the appetite for this existed.*



9. Asset Management

