

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 2 JUNE
2008**

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Stockell (Chairman) and
Councillors Bradshaw, Hotson, Mrs Marshall,
Mortimer, Parr, Ms Williams and Mrs Wilson.

APOLOGIES: There were none.

9. Notification of Substitute Members

It was noted that Councillor Ms Williams was substituting for
Councillor Marshall.

10. Notification of Visiting Members

It was noted that Councillor Ash was a visiting Member interested in
Item 7, Draft Best Value Performance Plan.

11. Disclosures by Members and Officers

There were no disclosures.

12. Exempt Items

Resolved: That agenda item 8, part II minutes of the meeting
held on 1 April 2008 be taken in private because of the
possible disclosure of exempt information.

13. Part I Minutes of the meeting Held on 1 April 2008

The Chairman asked that the information requested at the 1 April
2008 meeting from Cllr Batt and the Director of Change and
Support Services regarding the two tier/unitary status working
group be circulated to the Committee as originally requested.
Members expressed their disappointment that this had not already
happened. Furthermore the Committee requested that the
additional information from Mr Morgan on grant categorisation be
sought again as this was yet to be received, despite requests.

Resolved: That

- a) the minutes of the meeting held on 1 April 2008
be approved as a correct record and duly signed
by the Chairman; and

- b) the Overview and Scrutiny Partnership Manager follow-up the additional information requested at the last meeting.

14. Best Value Performance Plan 2008-11

The Chairman welcomed the Leader, Councillor Chris Garland and the Director for Change and Support Services, David Edwards to the meeting. The Committee was informed that the Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) would be submitted to Cabinet on 11 June 2008 with the Committee's comments and then to Council on 25 June 2008 for final approval. Councillor Garland introduced the draft plan to the Committee, informing Members that this was the last year the Council would be required to report on Best Value Performance Indicators as Central Government had introduced 198 national indicators with a view to monitoring performance with reduced bureaucracy. It was highlighted that the Council had exceeded or met 74.6% of Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) in 2007-08 whilst 20.6% had not been achieved. With regard to Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) which are set as local indicators by the Council 82.1% had been achieved or exceeded and 14.3% had not been achieved. Overall the Council's performance had improved since 2006-07. With regard to the Use of Resources assessment where the Council currently scored a 3 out of 4, it was clarified that appropriate processes had been put in place to position the Council to meet the criteria for a '4' next year but that this was then assessed by the Audit Commission. The Commission commented that a major contributory factor in not achieving a '4' this year was because the processes had not been embedded sufficiently.

The Leader explained that there would also be 35 targets set through the Local Area Agreement (LAA); these would be derived from the 198 in the Government's National Indicator (NI) set. The Overview and Scrutiny Partnership Manager, Angela Woodhouse, offered to circulate the report from the Kent Partnership sent to the Government Office for the South East to the Committee. The Council's performance would also be judged through a Comprehensive Area Assessment in the future, which would replace the present Comprehensive Performance Assessment. It was highlighted that a number of performance indicators had been deleted in the BVPP and the reasons for deletions were given in the Plan. Mr Edwards informed the Committee that the definitions and measurements for National Indicators were still being agreed and defined. In answer to questions, the Committee was informed that the indicators that remained in the plan to be monitored were there for a number of reasons. Some indicators were local priorities, some would still be requested nationally and some would be used to track trends over time.

Concern was expressed that the Council would be expected to be responsible for achieving targets beyond its remit. It was explained

that while the Council may not be directly responsible for provision of services, it would have a role to play through partnerships such as the Kent Partnership and the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) in working with responsible partners to improve services. The Leader added that some reward funding was attached to achieving the targets set in the LAA so the Council had a responsibility to ensure Maidstone received funding by achieving the targets set. In answer to questions the Leader explained that the LSP had improved considerably and would now be focussed on the LAA through the work that is carried out by the thematic groups.

The Committee expressed concern that Members were not fully aware of the LAA and its implications, and requested information on the training that would be provided for Councillors. The Committee agreed that there should be a presentation on the detail of the LAA to Council before Councillors agreed it. Mr Edwards indicated that this would be a two stage process and timing was critical. Possibly an overview of the LAA could be set out and the current position and on the specific targets it would be more appropriate to have a presentation on the LAA once the 35 targets had been developed further. The deadline for agreeing the district figures was the autumn and this would be heavily influenced by external factors and the LSP. The Committee also raised concerns with regard to the place shaping survey. It was explained that the questions were set by national government and the survey was due to take place in autumn this year following pilots. The survey would then take place once every three years. Mrs Woodhouse informed Members that there was a seminar on place shaping for Members on 18 June that may include information on the LSP and the LAA.

A Member asked how the Council's performance could be affected by the Kent Partnership. It was explained that the Kent Partnership could adversely affect Maidstone if the Council failed to get resources from the partnership when they were required for the community. The Audit Commission would expect to see that issues identified by the Council had been recognised by the LSP and the Kent Partnership. The Committee questioned the risk assessment of the Kent Partnership and it was explained that this would be carried out by the Audit Commission as part of the wider Comprehensive Area Assessment.

The Committee considered the indicators within the plan and expressed concern that the deletion of BVPI 202, in relation to monitoring people sleeping rough which may mean this was not monitored. The Director highlighted that this one-off survey was not particularly accurate and that other mechanisms are in place to assess the level of people sleeping rough. He offered to provide further details. The Committee asked why the target for BV64 was not higher considering the Council was so far from top quartile performance. It was explained that top quartile performance was just an overall number and was heavily dependent on the size of authority with metropolitan boroughs, unitaries and London

boroughs included. The Committee requested further information on the poor performance of a BVPI in relation to housing benefit overpayment and how this would be addressed. The Director responded that this was related to the timing of the measurement and he would provide further details. However, overall performance in Housing Benefits and Council Tax Benefit services was amongst the top authorities in the country. The Council was now also in a new fraud partnership with Tunbridge Wells and this would lead to increased performance and staff capacity.

The Chairman raised concerns with regard to the equality standards and deleting the indicator to monitor the percentage of women who were in the top 5% of earners within the work force. It was explained that the target remained at level 4 for the equality standard as the Council was one of only two local authorities who had achieved a level 4 and the resources required to achieve level 5 were significant. To continue to meet level 4 the Council would have to make progress in this area. With regard to the percentage of top 5 percent of earners that were women it was explained that as this involved just looking at the top 30 positions in the organisation small changes led to significant percentage variations. The Chairman expressed concern that this had been an area in which the Council had not performed well in the past.

In answer to questions it was explained that the reduction of 20% for BV106, percentage of new homes built upon previously developed land, reflected the development of the core strategy and green field development which would curb brown field development. The Committee was assured that this was on the advice of planning policy.

Resolved: That Cabinet be recommended to:

- a) Identify how homelessness is being monitored and tracked in light of the deletion of BV 202;
- b) Consider whether the Council should continue to monitor BV 11a, percentage of top 5 per cent of earners that were women;
- c) Identify the reasons and appropriate future action for the low performance in relation to the overpayment of Housing Benefits; and
- d) Ensure that training is provided for all Councillors on the Local Area Agreement and its implications.

15. Exclusion of the Public from the Meeting

Resolved: That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business due to the likely disclosure of exempt information for the reason specified under schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972:-

	Head of Schedule 12A and Brief Description
Grants to Outside Bodies	3 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

16. Part II minutes of the Meeting held on 1 April 2008

Resolved: That the part II minutes of the meeting held on 1 April 2008 be approved as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman.

17. Duration of the Meeting

6:30 p.m. to 7.55 p.m.