

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY 6 JULY 2010

REPORT OF HEAD OF CHANGE AND SCRUTINY

Report prepared by Esther Bell

1. Member Consultation and 2010 Election

1.1 Issue for Consideration

1.1.1 To consider the Council's consultation with Councillors on Council decisions.

1.1.2 To consider the lessons learnt from the May 2010 Elections.

1.2 Recommendation of Head of Change and Scrutiny

1.2.1 That the Committee interviews the Democratic Services Manger with regard to consultation with Councillors on Council decisions and makes recommendations if required; and

1.2.2 That the Committee interviews the Democratic Services Manger, and considers the briefing paper attached at **Appendix A**, with regard to the lessons learnt from the Elections held on 6 May 2010 and makes recommendations if required.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 Member Consultation

At its meeting on 2 February 2010, the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered its future work programme and agreed to expand its item on consultation to consider consultation with Members. The relevant extract from the minutes of the meeting is as follows:

"A Councillor requested that, as part of the 'Council Consultation' item at the 2 March 2010 meeting, consultation with Councillors be considered, as currently some information sessions were being referred to as consultation, and giving information was not the same as meaningful consultation."

1.3.2 Individual service managers are responsible for consulting councillors on forthcoming decisions, however overall responsibility for this lies with the Democratic Services Manager, Neil Harris. The Committee considered the Council's consultation methods and tool-kit at its meeting in March; however Mr Harris was unable to attend its meetings in March and April 2010 to discuss Member consultation.

1.3.3 The Committee considered its work programme at its meeting on 1 June 2010 and agreed to interview the Democratic Services Manager regarding Member consultation on Council decisions at its meeting on 6 July 2010.

1.3.4 **Elections**

At the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 1 June 2010, Members considered potential items for the Committee work programme and agreed to consider the 2010 election. The relevant extract of the draft minutes of the meeting is as follows:

"Members agreed that ... the Democratic Services Manager also respond to questions regarding the 2010 election at this meeting. Members agreed that it would be particularly useful for the Democratic Services Manager to provide the Committee with a written report detailing his experience of the election and the lessons learnt. Specific issues to be addressed in the report included: suitability and accessibility of Detling Show Ground for the count; parking; delivery of the boxes; refreshments; and issues of concern".

1.1 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.1.1 The Committee could decide not to review the Council's consultation with Members with regard to Council decisions, however as the Strategic Plan 2009-12 highlights, "it is important that we engage effectively with communities, share information, listen to views and then plan and deliver services that people want and can easily access"; Overview and Scrutiny can help to ensure that Council consultation is effective by considering the Council's approach to consultation in its role as a 'critical friend'.

1.1.2 Furthermore, the Committee could decide not to review the 2010 elections, however a number of problems occurred regarding polling stations and staffing provisions nationally in the 2010 election. The Electoral Commission recommended that "Local authorities in Great Britain should take steps immediately to begin the process of conducting reviews of polling districts and polling places, reflecting on

the problems identified at the May 2010 elections”¹ and Members could therefore ensure this is being undertaken.

1.2 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.2.1 The Council’s Strategic Plan states that it is the Council’s intention to deliver services that residents want, therefore the Council’s consultation processes must be fit-for-purpose.

1.3 Other Implications

1.3.1

1. Financial
2. Staffing
3. Legal
4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment
5. Environmental/Sustainable Development
6. Community Safety
7. Human Rights Act
8. Procurement
9. Asset Management

¹ http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/99091/Interim-Report-Polling-Station-Queues-complete.pdf