

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORTATION
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON
TUESDAY 15 JUNE 2010**

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Blackmore (Chairman)
Councillors Barned, English, Sharp, Verrall, Vizzard
and Yates

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence were received from Councillor
Beerling

1. The Committee to consider whether items 1 - 8 and 10 should be web-cast

The Committee was informed that as there were technical problems only items 1-8 could be web-cast.

Resolved: That items 1-8 be web-cast.

2. Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Beerling.

3. Notification of substitute Members

It was noted that Councillor English was substituting for Councillor Beerling.

4. Notification of visiting Members

There were no visiting Members.

5. a) Election of Chairman b) Election of Vice-Chairman

Resolved: That:

- a) Councillor Mrs Blackmore be elected Chairman for the municipal year 2010-11; and
- b) Councillor Beerling be elected Vice Chairman for the municipal year 2010-11.

6. Disclosure by Members and Officers

There were no disclosures.

7. To Consider whether any item should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information

Resolved: That all items be taken in public as proposed.

8. Minutes of the Meeting held on 20 April 2010

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of 20 April 2010 be agreed and duly signed by the Chairman.

9. 2010-11 Work Programme Workshop

Working in small groups, Members spoke to Officers about the work areas covered by the terms of reference of the Committee. Members then discussed the topics for review that had been proposed as follows:

Transition Towns

The Committee heard that Transition Towns were a community-led response to the pressures of climate change, fossil fuel depletion and economic contraction. The objective would be to deliver a local economy that was less dependent on energy by focussing on energy conservation and developing a more localised economy. Members discussed:

- Whether the subject should be addressed on a village by village basis, or as the entire Borough;
- Whether there was a national policy that could provide guidance on how best to approach the subject; and
- Members felt that the focus of the review would be linked with planning policy and therefore agreed that the matter should be referred to the Leisure and Prosperity Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration in its work programme.

Air Quality Monitoring and Traffic Congestion

The Committee was informed that the Partnerships and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee had decided to conduct a Review into how the Sustainable Communities Act could be used to introduce low emission zones. Members discussed:

- The operation of the one-way system in Maidstone and whether changes could improve congestion and reduce emission levels. The system was the responsibility of Kent County Council (KCC) Highways department and had previously been considered by the Joint Transportation Board;
- That several areas of the Borough regularly exceeded EU permitted levels, which could lead to fines being imposed;
- That experts from the car industry, and / or academics who had conducted research into the subject should be invited to give evidence;
- That a joint Review should be undertaken with the Partnerships and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and

- Councillors Barned, Vizzard and Yates should represent the Committee on a joint Review.

Bulky Waste Collections

The Committee heard that this topic arose out of concern that a pensioner had been charged £55 to have a bath removed, as this was classed as home improvement waste. There had been no consideration of the pensioner's ability to pay the charges. The Committee was informed the Cabinet Member for Environment was to make a decision on the charges for waste collection by the end of June. Members discussed:

- The interaction between the bulky waste collection and freighter services;
- The need to find more efficient ways of disposing of waste, including increased levels of recycling; and
- That in view of the expected decision by the Cabinet Member for Environment on the charges for collection of waste, the Committee should consider this topic again in three to six months time.

Integrated Transport Strategy

The Committee heard that the proposed objective of the Review was to consider the future transport needs of the Borough to:

- Promote the use of public transport;
- Reduce congestion and air pollution;
- Planned housing developments have good public transport links; and
- Ensure car parking, park and ride, walk and ride, and park and rail facilities are integrated to maximise usage.

The Committee discussed the topic as follows:

- The Review would require statistics relating to the journeys made by people in and through the Borough;
- That this should be considered urgently as the outcome could influence the strategy being produced as part of the Local Development Framework and could be of real benefit to the Borough;
- The Transport Officer was already considering these issues;
- Clive Cheeseman, the Transport Officer, Peter Rosevear, KCC's Senior Engineer on secondment to Maidstone Borough Council to produce the integrated transport strategy and a representative from KCC Highways Department should give evidence at the July meeting: and
- The Cabinet Member for the Environment should provide a written report on his priorities for the July meeting, and attend the August meeting for questioning.

Concessionary Travel and Companion Passes

The Committee discussed the topic as follows:

- Age Concern administered the scheme on behalf of the Council; and
- Because KCC would be administering the scheme from April 2011, Members felt that it was not a suitable topic for Review at this time, noting that any changes proposed may be short-lived if KCC could or would not support them

Maintenance of Communal Spaces

The Committee heard this issue arose because communal areas across the Borough were owned and maintained by different bodies, such as the Council, KCC or private owners. Some areas were neglected and there was scope to make efficiency savings and make improvements. Members discussed:

- The Committee agreed that the provision of communal spaces, such as allotments, should be included in the scope of the review;
- Members felt that the Review should also consider the benefits and feasibility of transferring some assets to other bodies, for example, Parish Councils;
- The Committee agreed to undertake the review of communal spaces and agreed to consider the following three aspects at three separate committee meetings: Maintenance of communal spaces; Provision of communal spaces; and Ownership of communal spaces; and
- Members noted Parish Councils would be able to identify land that had not been maintained and agreed to contact Parish Councils regarding communal spaces in their parishes as part of this review.

Street Cleansing in Towns and Rural Areas

Members heard that:

- This topic had been suggested by several residents. Concern arose at the apparent lack of cleansing of rural roads, and the level of chewing gum and cigarette debris on the streets;
- Since April 2010, streets were not being cleansed to a schedule; instead, all streets were assessed for cleanliness on a five-weekly cycle. Cleansing was arranged when the assessment showed this was required;
- The new regime meant that resources were now available to cleanse areas, such as rural roads, that had not been on a regular cleansing schedule; and
- Environmental services had two new methods for removing gum from streets. Both worked well on hard surfaces, but gum deposits on tarmac remained an issue as the surface would be damaged by the cleansing process.

Members discussed the following:

- Members felt that there appeared to have been a significant decline in enforcement activity. A Member noted that enforcement worked best if it was part of a continuing process and felt that short-term campaigns had short-term impact;
- That the Officer should attend Committee to explain the new cleaning programme; and
- That an update on enforcement issues should also be provided.

Members concluded an update should be provided in the Autumn, with officers present to explain the enforcement and cleansing policies. Members requested enforcement figures be reported to the Committee as part of the update and agreed that it would also be useful to consider resident's comments about street cleansing to inform its monitoring.

Parking Enforcement Contract

Members heard that the contract for parking enforcement was due for renewal. Invitations to tender would be issued in August / September. Members discussed:

- Reviewing the tender documents and concluded this could lead to significant cost savings; and
- The commercial sensitivity of the tender process.
- Members agreed to review the tender documents in August and noted that the item could not be heard in public because of its commercial sensitivity.

Water shortages

Members discussed the risk of future water shortages. Members heard:

- Annual rainfall in the area was lower than in many arid areas;
- Applications for major reservoirs in the region had been rejected;
- That the Local Development Document Advisory Group (LDDAG) developed a water resource strategy in 2009 and this had not been considered by a Scrutiny Committee; and
- A public Inquiry into the South East Water's water resource management plan had recently been held.

Members agreed to add a water shortages item to its work programme and agreed to consider the LDDAG water resource strategy and the 2006/7 Environment and Transportation Overview and Scrutiny Committee's 'Water Shortages Report' as part of this item.

Resolved: That:

- Transition Towns should be referred to the Leisure and Prosperity Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration in their work programme;
- That a joint Review should be undertaken with the Partnerships and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee into how the Sustainable Communities Act

could be used to introduce low emission zones and reduce congestion;

- And Councillors Barned, Vizzard and Yates should represent this Committee on that joint Review;
- The Committee maintain a watching brief on charges for bulky waste collection and receive an update in the Autumn;
- Clive Cheeseman, Peter Rosevear and a representative from KCC Highways Department report on their integrated transport strategy at the Committee's meeting on 20 July 2010;
- The Cabinet Member for the Environment provide a written report on his priorities for 2010/11 at the Committee's meeting on 20 July 2010, and attend its meeting on 17 August 2010 to be interviewed regarding his vision;
- A review of Communal Spaces be undertaken by the Committee and that the following three aspects be considered at separate meetings :
 - Maintenance of communal spaces;
 - Provision of communal spaces; and
 - Ownership of communal spaces.
- An update be provided in the Autumn on the cleansing of streets and rural areas, including enforcement activity;
- The parking enforcement contract tender documents be reviewed in August; and
- A water shortages update item be added to the Committee's work programme and as part of this, the Committee consider the LDDAG water resource strategy and the 2006/7 Environment and Transportation Overview and Scrutiny Committee's 'Water Shortages Report'.

10. The Committee to consider whether the remainder of the meeting should be web-cast

The Committee was informed the previous technical issues with the web-cast had been solved.

Resolved: That the final Agenda Item be web-cast.

11. Future Work Programme and Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The Chairman set out the work programme for the following months.

July:

- Officers be invited to present a report on the Integrated Transport Strategy; and
- Cabinet Member for the Environment to provide a written report.

August:

- Cabinet Member for the Environment to answer questions on his priorities for the year; and
- Scrutiny of the Parking enforcement contract.

September:

- Communal Spaces: Maintenance, provision and ownership.

A Member also noted the Regeneration and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee review of road safety in Maidstone and requested an update on this.

Resolved: That:

- The Chairman and Members of LDDAG be invited to the July meeting to participate in the item on the Integrated Transport Strategy;
- The Committee receive an update on the road safety in Maidstone review; and
- The future work programme for 2010-11 be noted.

12. Duration of the Meeting

6:32 p.m. to 9:06 p.m.