

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE LEISURE AND PROSPERITY OVERVIEW
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY
26 OCTOBER 2010**

PRESENT: Councillor Paine (Chairman)
Councillors Mrs Gibson, Mrs Joy, Nelson-Gracie,
Mrs Smith and Mrs Wilson

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

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

56. Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillors Pickett and Burton.

57. Notification of Substitute Members

It was noted that Councillor Fran Wilson was substituting for Councillor Pickett.

58. Notification of Visiting Members

It was noted that Cllr Ash was a visiting Member.

59. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

There were no disclosures.

60. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information

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

61. Minutes of the Meeting Held on 28 September

Resolved: That subject to the amendment of minute thirty nine, to include Councillor Chittenden as a visiting Member, the minutes of the meeting held on 28 September 2010 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman.

62. Review of Hotfoot Scheme

The Chairman welcomed Miss Kate Pomphrey, Community Development Officer and Mr Jim Boot, Community Development Manager to the meeting, and invited them to present the report.

Kate Pomphrey summarised the report stating that the scheme had been a success as demonstrated by the 98 percent uptake and reduced cost of the scheme. The reduction in cost was a result of an increase in the income and a reduction in expenditure, as the sites were smaller. This year the scheme had benefited from 'Your Choice' funding from Kent County Council as well as the funds given from 'Councillors' devolved budgets.

Jim Boot stated that as the new manager for the Community Development Team he had been impressed by the team's hard work and he highlighted that the scheme had many benefits including the children being able to learn about healthy eating, interacting with Police Community Support Officers, promoting social cohesion, and the opportunity to participate in sporting activities.

In answer to a question Miss Pomphrey informed Members that the sites used had changed, as the Sandling School site was not available the venue had been changed to St Paul's. It was explained that the change of one venue had not made any major change or impact on the scheme, as St Paul's had proved to be equally popular. In relation to Ofsted inspections it was explained that they had expected three inspections, however as these had not been carried out they would expect inspections in 2011.

The Committee noted that the report showed 100 percent attendance at some sites, and asked if this could have been more, should the facilities have been able to cater for more people. Miss Pomphrey stated that they were not aware of having to turn people away. The Committee congratulated the team on the effective management of the scheme.

Miss Pomphrey informed Members that vulnerable children's places on the scheme were funded from a number of sources including Social Services and Your Choice funding. It was explained to the Committee that the team was continuously looking at how they could reduce costs and secure funding to support the scheme. Staff time has been and will continue to be reduced - both in relation to the management of the scheme and in the support provided from HR through improved recruitment processes. It was highlighted that social services supported the scheme as it provided places for children during the school holidays. The Community Development Manager said that it was an affordable scheme for most parents, which offered good value however they were looking for efficiencies, and alternative options for the scheme including external providers. It was noted that this had not been identified as providing better value for

money. The Committee requested that both the social and economic benefits of the scheme be made clear.

The Committee noted that the Council funded 8 community play schemes and spot checks were carried out accordingly. The Community Development Team was in the process of reviewing these schemes and informed the Members that this information would be circulated to the Committee once finalised.

Jennifer Fairfax from Staplehurst Parish Council addressed the Committee in relation to the Staplehurst Community Play Scheme. Councillor Fairfax thanked the Community Development Team for their support and hard work. It was highlighted that the Staplehurst Scheme had been run externally and not by the Parish Clerk. Councillor Fairfax stated that the parish council was concerned that the scheme's funding may be cut next year and requested notice from the Council as to its intentions for future funding.

Resolved: That the Community Development team be thanked for their work and it be recommended that:

- a) Additional information be provided on the community play schemes funded by the Council, including the funding and attendance statistics;
- b) The Cabinet Member be requested to comment on whether funding will be available for community play schemes in the future; and
- c) The Community Development Team review the report to ensure it contains clear and also specific information on the social and economic value of community play schemes.

63. Amendment to order of Business

Resolved: That Agenda Item 10 Housing Allocation Scheme be taken before Agenda Item 9, draft Housing Strategy Presentation.

64. Housing Allocation Scheme

The Chairman welcomed John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Community Safety to the meeting.

Mr Littlemore gave a brief overview of the changes proposed to the housing allocation scheme to provide a more transparent mechanism for the prioritisation between applicants for social housing. It was highlighted that the draft framework attached to the report had been developed through the Kent Housing Group. In answer to a question regarding the cost of the scheme it was explained that the cost would be spread amongst the Kent Home Choice Partnership.

The Committee was pleased that the scheme enabled consideration of low earners- as this group was often overlooked. The Committee requested clarification on the eligibility criteria and urgent medical need. It was suggested that a definition or examples be included for applicants.

The Committee noted this system would be clearer for applicants however the way the report was framed made it difficult to establish if its purpose was to improve the system for the public or, whether it was to save money. Mr Littlemore agreed that this would be clarified in the final document.

The Committee raised concerns regarding over crowding issues and requested clarification on whether the new system would overcome this. Mr Littlemore informed Members that determining property sizes for families would still lie with the landlord, so this system will not solve that problem. The Chairman enquired if the Council could help set the standard for Landlords. Mr Littlemore responded that the Council could try to persuade landlords.

Members raised questions around the altering of the preference of local connection and ensuring balance was maintained with Maidstone residents. Mr Littlemore responded that despite there being more opportunity for this within the new scheme applicants tend to take a local view of where they want to live. A8 applicants (applicants from accession countries) were also considered in this discussion. In answer to a question Mr Littlemore informed the Committee that the Rural Exception scheme will remain at district level, as the policy framework which has been built around this will continue, therefore we will be able to continue to give priority to those who have connections in the first instance.

Concerns were raised about those who would usually be dealt with in a discretionary manner under the current points system of allocation. The officer assured the Committee that the new system would be tested by looking at existing applicants and outcomes against the new system. Mr Littlemore offered to send the Committee further details on the present allocation of points for a local connection.

With regard to informing applicants of the changes to the system, Mr Littlemore informed the Committee that as 90 percent of bids were submitted online they would use the internet, and other methods to communicate the changes to tenants.

Resolved: To recommend that:

- a) Clarity on the scheme for the eligibility criteria and urgent medical needs terminology be provided;
- b) The scheme be clearly focussed on benefiting residents as well as providing value for money; and
- c) The following information be provided:
 - i. A breakdown of the local connection of applicants housed in the past six months;
 - ii. A model showing the impact of the new scheme when available;

- iii. The number of A8 nationals who we accepted a homelessness duty to in the last six months; and
- iv. A copy of the Kent Home Choice Consultation Package when available.

65. Draft Housing Strategy Presentation

Duncan Bruce, Housing Policy Officer gave a presentation to the Committee on the emerging housing strategy (attached at **Appendix A**). The Committee was informed the new policy would give consideration to both national and local issues. The Strategy would be presented to the committee for consideration in December.

Resolved: That the draft Housing Strategy be considered on 13 December 2010.

66. Future Work Programme

The Committee considered the future work programme, in answer to a question regarding the Core Strategy and Local Development Framework, it was explained that dates had not been confirmed with the Spatial Planning team. It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held at the Hazlitt Theatre.

Resolved: That the date for consideration of the Core Strategy and Local Development Framework be sent to the Committee, and the work programme be noted.

67. Duration of the meeting

6.30pm to 8.25pm.