

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

22 DECEMBER 2010

REFERENCE FROM COUNCIL

1. CONCURRENT FUNCTIONS

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Council held on 16 December 2010, a petition in the following terms was presented by Councillor Coulling on behalf of the Maidstone Area Committee of the Kent Association of Local Councils:-

"We, the undersigned, believe that the removal of the Concurrent Functions grant will seriously undermine the provision of essential local services or lead to a significant percentage increase in the tax burden on residents of Parished areas. We further believe that the proposal will cause a grossly unfair difference in the treatment of residents between Parished and unParished areas. We call upon Maidstone Borough Council to rescind its proposed abolition of the Concurrent Functions grant and replace this with cuts in line with Maidstone Borough Council's overall three year budget reduction strategy, i.e. an approximate across-the-board 10% reduction."

- 1.2 The petition, signed by over 2,000 Parish residents, sought that cuts in the Concurrent Functions grant be in line with the Borough Council's overall three year budget reduction strategy.
- 1.3 The original proposal was to phase out grant funding for Concurrent Functions over three years. Through negotiation and discussion with the Parishes, a revised proposal will be considered by the Cabinet as follows:-

To carry out a comprehensive review of the existing arrangements for the funding of Concurrent Functions, to include consultation with Parish Councils in accordance with the Parish Charter; and

To reduce the direct funding of Concurrent Functions by 30% in 2011/12.

- 1.4 Councillor Coulling called upon the Council to confirm its commitment to continue to fund its Parish Councils on a fair basis and to assure them that Officers would be reminded that Parishes had greater knowledge of local priorities and that the Concurrent Functions system, however restructured next year, should continue to fulfil its

original purpose and that it should be discussed within the spirit of the Parish Charter. He emphasised that the petition demonstrated the strength of feeling on the matter.

1.5 During the discussion on the petition, Members made a number of points, including:-

- Whilst Parish Councils accepted that there was a need for some budget cuts, there was concern about the consultation process given that in terms of the Parish Charter six weeks was the norm.
- The unfairness of the proposed cuts in Concurrent Functions funding creating a risk of double taxation of people living in Parish areas.
- The need for the proposed review of the existing arrangements to start at an early date and for consideration of an innovative, radical and consistent approach to the delivery of services for all residents of the Borough to be central to the discussion.
- The Leader of the Opposition and the Shadow Cabinet Member would be willing to be involved in the discussions.
- The importance of having regard to the strength of feeling on this matter.
- The need to appreciate that Parish Councillors with their local knowledge had a greater understanding of the priorities in their areas.
- The need for a review to be undertaken of how the Concurrent Functions grant was spent by Parish Councils.
- The cuts were first mooted some eighteen months ago, and Parish Councils were aware of the situation. Notification had been received of a 16.58% cut in the Council's direct grant from Central Government. The Council's objective was to ensure that resources were focussed on its strategic priorities. There were differences of opinion regarding the Council's priorities and those of Parish Councils, but Parish Councils had the ability to precept to deliver their priorities. It was a difficult situation, but following discussions and negotiations, a compromise had been reached. The Council would not be withdrawing support, but delivering it in a different way in consultation with the Parishes.
- The petition was very well presented and the sentiments were well meant. The Council wanted its good relationship with its

Parishes to continue. The review would take place as planned and the views expressed by Parishes would be taken into account. It was time to move forward together constructively.

- 1.6 The Council agreed that the petition and the points raised during the debate be referred to the Cabinet for consideration when discussing the revised proposal regarding the Concurrent Functions Scheme.

1.7 RECOMMENDED:

- 1.7.1 That the petition organised by the Maidstone Area Committee of the Kent Association of Local Councils and the points made by Members during the Council debate be considered by the Cabinet when it discusses the revised proposal regarding the Concurrent Functions Scheme.**