

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND LEISURE OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 28
OCTOBER 2008**

PRESENT: Councillors Mrs Blackmore (Chairman) Butler, Chittenden, Daley, Field, Mrs Gooch, Hinder, Verrall and Yates.

APOLOGIES: There were no apologies.

62. Web- Casting

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

63. Notification of Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members.

64. Notification of Visiting Members

There were no visiting Members.

65. Disclosures by Members and Officers

There were none.

66. Exempt Items

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

67. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2008 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman

68. Public Conveniences Review

The Chairman welcomed the Property and Procurement Manager, Mr Tibbit to the meeting. The Committee interviewed Mr Tibbit in relation to their in-depth review of public conveniences and discussed the following topics:

- The British Toilet Associations Review of Maidstone's Public Conveniences. It was confirmed that their recommendation for a further review of the service had not yet been undertaken by Environmental Services;
- The Maintenance of Public Conveniences. It was explained that cross department joint meetings and condition surveys

from a five year rolling programme were used to identify future maintenance work;

- The cost of maintenance. Approximately £100,000 was allocated for responsive and reactive, and planned maintenance. Members requested a breakdown of how the money allocated to maintenance and refurbishment was spent, including capital refurbishment monies;
- Concealed needle boxes were installed as part of major refurbishments. However, surface mounted needle boxes were installed, as required, when public conveniences were redecorated due to costs. The Committee requested that Mr Tibbit investigate whether the Council's public liability insurance would cover claims made in relation to accidental injuries caused by needles in public conveniences;
- A number of public convenience's toilet seats had been the subject of vandalism and theft. Maidstone Borough Services had therefore installed and kept in stock cheaper toilet seats to reduce costs in the event of theft or damage. Members felt that the new style of seat-less toilets, such as in Clare Park, would also reduce costs and avoid any accidents from broken seats;
- Hastings Borough Council had found that a green paint deterred drug users in public conveniences. Maidstone Borough Council had adopted this colour in a number of its public conveniences
- Plans to replace the Palace Avenue public conveniences with a permanent building had been delayed because of proposals for the All Saints Link Road;
- Members requested officers investigate the potential to distribute RADAR keys for disabled public conveniences to local businesses in case of emergency;
- The cleaning of public conveniences. It was explained that they should be cleaned at least once a day and restocked by cleaners. Cleaners were also responsible for reporting any maintenance issues;
- Baby changing facilities had been incorporated into public conveniences wherever there was space for a robust facility, which meant in some cases that this had been carried out in locked disabled facilities. It was also noted that there was a need for disposal bins in baby changing facilities;
- The Property and Procurement Service would support consideration of a community toilet scheme to increase provision or private sector sponsorship of, or advertisement in public conveniences and would also support consideration of the benefits of charging a nominal fee for the use of public conveniences and the possibility of introducing this as a pilot scheme.

The Chairman thanked Mr Tibbit for attending.

The Web cast from this session is available at <http://clients.westminster-digital.co.uk/maidstone/archive.aspx> (00.02.00 to 00.54.30).

Resolved: That

- a) Mr Tibbit investigate whether the Council's public liability insurance would cover claims made in relation to accidental injuries caused by needles in public conveniences;
- b) Mr Tibbit provide a breakdown of how the money allocated to maintenance and refurbishment was spent, including capital refurbishment monies;
- c) Mr Tibbit investigate the feasibility of providing RADAR keys to local businesses in case of emergency; and
- d) The evidence of the Property and Procurement Manager be included in the Committee's review of public conveniences.

67. Memorial Safety Update

The Committee interviewed the Leisure Management Officer, Mr Jefferson in relation to memorial safety. Following a brief introduction from Mr Jefferson, the Committee discussed the following topics:

- The work undertaken to discourage young people from playing in cemeteries. This included letters to schools and the formulation of a targeted 'Respect' campaign. Only one incident of anti-social activity had been reported this year. Members requested further information with regard to the 'Respect' campaign;
- The rolling programme of inspections, the insurance company had been approached following a recommendation made by Scrutiny. Officers had been advised that, provided there were no signs of erosion and following an individual assessment, inspections could take place on a frequency between five years and ten years. Significant re-inspection savings could therefore be made from this reduction;
- Inspection and reinstatement work - the average number of memorials that had failed safety tests in the last section to be tested had increased to between 60 and 70%.
- Modern memorials tended to have more problems. Mr Jefferson explained that metal dowels should be used to reinforce the joints in memorial stones. However, these were often missing or an inadequate material had been used in a number of the more modern memorial stones. The scheme run by Harrogate Borough Council was discussed, whereby a small proportion of a mason's new memorials were inspected by dismantlement and reinstatement and the mason was prevented from operating if they repeatedly failed inspections. Members agreed a similar scheme should be

introduced in Maidstone and suggested the reported savings on memorial re-inspection could be used to fund the scheme.

- Records of burials and cremations, keeping records digitally would prevent the risk of accidental loss or damage to records.
- Members agreed that the website should be updated with before and after photos showing the work undertaken. A number of Members of the Committee also requested a visit to see the work undertaken.

The Chairman congratulated Mr Jefferson and his team for progress they had made.

The Web cast from this session is available at <http://clients.westminster-digital.co.uk/maidstone/archive.aspx> (0.55.00 to 01.40.20).

Resolved: That

- a) In order to improve safety in memorials, the Council introduce a similar scheme to Harrogate Borough Council;
- b) Members visit the memorials in Maidstone to see the work undertaken;
- c) The introduction of historic digital burial records be supported but it was recognised the associated costs and agreed that this should be slowly introduced as part of a long term goal; and
- d) The Council's crematorium and cemeteries website be updated to include both before and after photos of work undertaken.

68. Free Swimming

The Committee considered the free swimming information note and noted their disappointment in the short response time given by Government to this important issue. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer informed the Committee that the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee had also expressed their dissatisfaction and had written to the Local Government Association to this effect. Members looked forward to their response.

A number of Members felt that there were still a number of unanswered questions with regard to how the Council had arrived at the costs and were advised to discuss this with the Leisure Management Officer.

Resolved: That the Leisure Management Officer provide a breakdown on the costing given in the information note.

69. Forward Plan

The Committee noted the sections of the Forward Plan that were relevant to the Committee's remit and agreed to maintain a watching brief.

Resolved: That the Forward Plan be noted.

70. Future Work Programme 2008-09

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer discussed the future work programme with the Committee, highlighting that the implementation of the final Pitt Review recommendations was due to be considered at the Committee's next meeting on 25 November 2008. The Committee agreed that this item should be deferred until Government had made their official response. It was agreed that officers be invited to discuss the lessons learnt from the big weekend and that they continue their in-depth review of public conveniences.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer circulated the previously requested litter enforcement note from the Environmental Enforcement Manager.

The Committee reviewed their meeting dates and agreed to re-schedule December's meeting from Tuesday 30 December 2008 to Monday 22 December 2008.

Resolved: That

- a) The consideration of the implementation of the final Pitt Review recommendations be deferred until the Government's response had been given;
- b) Officers be invited to attend the Committee's meeting on 25 November 2008 to discuss the lessons learnt from the Radio One Big Weekend; and
- c) Decembers meeting be rescheduled to Monday 22 December 2008.

71. Duration of the Meeting

6:30pm to 8.55pm.