

Maidstone Borough Council

Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 5 April 2011

Cabinet Member for Corporate Services Progress Over the Year

Report of: Overview & Scrutiny Officer

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As the meeting on 30 November 2010 was cancelled due to snow, the Committee heard the service areas in particular that they wanted the Cabinet Member to address via email. The purpose of this item is for the Cabinet Member to update the Committee on the progress made over the year, and highlight future activities within their portfolio. **Appendix A** shows a written report showing the progress made over the year.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Committee interview the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services with regard to progress that has been made on the priorities within the Corporate Services portfolio.

3. Progress Over the Year

- 3.1 The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for holding to account those Cabinet Members whose portfolios fall within the remit of the Committee. The Committee interviewed the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services in July 2010, an extract of the minutes is set out below:

"The Committee thanked the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Councillor Mrs Ring for a succinct written vision statement outlining her portfolio's priorities for 2010/11 and for attending to respond to questions.

Members highlighted the importance of engaging local residents to provide them the opportunity to participate and noted that it had been historically more difficult to engage poorer residents living in places that were not defined as areas of deprivation. The Committee agreed that Councillor Mrs Ring consider methods to identify hidden areas of deprivation across the Borough, including in rural areas, to ensure that opportunities were not lost. Members considered possible opportunities to assist in this task included using the indices of multiple deprivation and the 2001 census data.

The Committee noted that it was going to be a challenging year given the impact of the recession leading to higher demands in housing and benefits. Members agreed that it was therefore critical that Councillor Mrs Ring ensured procurement opportunities were

sought to save money and also requested that she maintain a watching brief on housing and council tax benefits to ensure their efficient delivery during this period.

In response to a question, Councillor Mrs Ring agreed to provide a written response with regard to her following priorities:

- “To have a Council that is fit for purpose with the right people in the right place at the right time” – A Member asked whether she felt there were any people currently in the wrong place;
- “Ensure that we concentrate on what we as a council have in our powers to deliver to ensure residents have effective and efficient services that deliver value for money” – Members queried what was not in our power to deliver; and
- “Ensure that the Budget Setting process for 2011-12 clearly meets our priorities as a Council and therefore delivers the priorities of local people” – Members queried how she was going to ensure that the process met the Council’s priorities.

The Committee was concerned about the impact of the increasing demand for savings on the Council’s decisions regarding its assets. Members urged Councillor Ring to ensure all options were fully considered rather than just electing to sell them. Members also considered the Council’s maintenance of its assets and highlighted the increased need for cleaning and painting of buildings as a result of increasing pollution levels. The Committee agreed that it was important that the Council’s asset maintenance programme was not neglected to save money as this was likely to lead to costly problems in the future. Furthermore, the Committee noted that a tree was growing out the side of the Town Hall and agreed this be addressed as a matter of urgency.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Ring for attending the meeting.

Resolved: That the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services

- a) Identify hidden areas of deprivation across the Borough, including in rural areas, to ensure that opportunities to engage poorer residents were not lost, including the possible use of the indices of multiple deprivation and the 2001 census data;
- b) Maintain a watching brief on housing and council tax benefits to ensure their efficient delivery for customers;
- c) Ensure procurement opportunities were sought to save money;
- d) Clarify the following to the Committee with regard to her priorities:
 1. Whether she felt there were any people currently in the wrong place;

2. What was not in our power to ensure residents have effective and efficient services that deliver value for money; and
 3. How she was going to ensure that the Budget Setting process met the Council's priorities
- e) Ensure that all options be fully considered prior to the disposal of any assets;
 - f) Ensure the Council's asset management programme was adequate and not neglected to save costs; and
 - g) Address the issue of the tree growing out the side of the town hall."

3.2 The Committee could choose not to interview or receive written statements from the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, however in doing so they would not be fulfilling the crucial role of holding the executive to account.

4. Impact on Corporate Objectives

4.1 The Committee should seek to review whether the Cabinet Member's achievements are aligned to the Council's corporate objectives as set out in the strategic plan.