

Maidstone Borough Council

Partnership and Well Being Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 12 April 2011

End of Year Progress Update from the Leader of the Council

Report of: Overview & Scrutiny Officer

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Committee are advised to consider the report of the Leader of the Council on the progress made with the priorities set for 2010-11.
- 1.2 The Committee should consider the statement made by the Leader of the Council at the beginning of the year with reference to his mid year update at their meeting on 11 January 2011 and ask questions with regard to progress that has been made on those issues highlighted as priorities. The Partnerships and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for holding to account those Cabinet Members whose portfolios fall within the remit of the Committee. The Cabinet Members whose portfolios relate to the Committee are the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Community Services.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Committee interview the interview the Leader of the Council with regard to progress that has been made on the priorities within his portfolio over the last municipal year.

3. Background

- 3.1 The areas of the Leader's portfolio that are relevant to the Committee are as follows:

Licensing

- To ensure the delivery of an efficient and effective licensing regime.

Local Strategic Partnership

- Improve the delivery of community services to local people through an effective local strategic partnership.

Sustainable Community Strategy

- To take responsibility for the Sustainable Community Strategy and to work with the LSP in delivering its objectives.

Mid-Kent Improvement Partnership

- Working with partners to deliver more efficient and effective council services

3.2 The Committee interviewed the Leader of the Council on 13 July 2010, the relevant extract from the minutes is set out below:

"The Chairman welcomed Councillor Chris Garland, Leader of the Council, to the meeting.

The Leader referred to the earlier discussion on maternity services in the Borough and informed the Committee that he had just received an emailed letter from Steve Phoenix [West Kent Primary Care Trust]. The letter confirmed the Secretary of State had not referred the decision for review.

The Leader said that partnership working would be increasingly important over the coming years. The financial situation meant the way services were delivered would have to change and the Borough would need to use partnership working to help deliver savings and services. In many cases the Council may become a facilitator instead of a service provider.

In response to questions concerning investment in the Borough, the Leader said that Homes and Communities Agency funding had been cut by half. This would affect housing and community development. Indications earlier in the year that the recession was ending now appeared less likely and it was becoming increasingly difficult to obtain grants. The Museum Trust was required to raise £1.3 million for the development of the Museum, but that may not be achievable.

A Member asked about the relevance of the Local Development Framework (LDF) now the Regional Strategy had been abolished. The Leader replied there were rumours the LDF would be replaced in time, but the Council would continue working with it until that occurred. Whilst centrally imposed housing targets had been abolished, the Leader believed the Borough needed to deliver new housing that reflected the local infrastructure, which in places was under pressure. Another major element of the LDF was the provision of gypsy and Traveller sites. The Borough was now only required to provide the sites it needed, so there may be a change in plans once the detail of the announcement is known.

Members asked how the Leader intended to increase the transparency of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). He agreed there was a need for improved transparency and communications. He believed minutes of LSP meetings should be circulated more

widely, and suggested the Committee could consider calling the Chairman of the LSP to scrutiny twice a year. Members agreed that the Chair and Vice chair of all Committees should receive a copy of LSP meeting minutes and that this Committee should have a standing item on the LSP.

A member asked if the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) would need re-writing as a result of the government scrapping National Indicators [performance indicators set by central government]. The Leader said he did not believe the SCS would need major changes as it reflected the goals of the Council, but acknowledged more relevant indicators may need to be developed.

The Chairman thanked the Leader for assisting the Committee.

Resolved: That:

- a) The Chairman and Vice Chairman of each Overview and Scrutiny Committee should receive a copy of the minutes of LSP meetings;
- b) Regular updates on the progress of the LSP be received; and
- c) The Leader's plans and priorities for 2009-10 be noted."

- 3.3 The leader provided the Partnerships and Well-being Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a Mid-Year Update on 11 January 20. The relevant extract from the minutes is set out below:

"The Chairman welcomed the Leader of the Council, Councillor Chris Garland to the meeting to update the Committee on the relevant areas of his portfolio.

The Leader began by updating the Committee on the Mid-Kent Improvement Partnership. He explained that Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells had now entered into a formal arrangement to share the back office functions for Revenues and Benefits. The original arrangement had included Ashford, Swale, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells as the partnership had progressed two of the partners had withdrawn so it was now a joint venture with Tunbridge Wells. The savings will be £250,000 year on year but did involve an initial investment of £500,000 for set up costs which was shared between the two partners, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells. The Leader responded to the Committee's questions about how the service works explaining that Maidstone were equal Partners with Tunbridge Wells. Councillor Garland also confirmed that the service was monitored to ensure it was working well the service delivery was not reduced. Other areas of MKIP were also reported to be working well including the Audit Partnership. Ashford had withdrawn from MKIP but Swale, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells were all committed to driving the partnership forward.

The Leader referred to the last meeting and Maternity Services moving to Pembury. He confirmed that Maidstone did not approve

of the recent decision and that they would be writing a joint letter with Paul Carter, Leader of Kent County Council (KCC), to the Secretary of State. The Committee discussed the issue of a decision being made without GP's formal support and possible financial implications being the main reason for the scheme to go ahead. It was suggested that there would be £6 million costs incurred if it did not. KCC had urged the Secretary of State to wait until there has been a review. The Committee agreed to discuss the matter further under Item 9 on the agenda.

The Leader moved on to Localism and suggested to the Committee that it would be development issues that people would come together on as they had done with the Kent International Gateway. He said he envisaged groups forming within communities with referendums on planning issues. His concerns were with the lack of power that would remain with the Council if Localism arrived via the Planning System. He warned that communities could become divided and this could create fragmented communities with disparate goals. The financial implications were also discussed and it was suggested that the referendums that come forward would be paid for by the local authority but the 'New Burdens' grant from central government would be available to finance this.

Cllr Garland updated the Committee on the progress of The Local Strategic Partnership. He explained that the last year had been taken up with governance issues and refocusing which had resulted in four main delivery groups: health and well-being; the Safer Maidstone Partnership; Economic Development; and Regeneration and Environmental Quality. He explained that the groups' priorities were relevant to Corporate and Strategic Issues. The groups had considered any exceptions and National Indicators that were not present. The task of Resource Mapping had been completed which was analysing where public money was being spent to avoid duplication.

The Leader informed the Committee that The Local Development Framework would come to Cabinet in January. He explained that the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives had worked closely on this and there would be Public Consultation. The Leader felt a Political consensus had so far been achieved and suggested that the figure for new housing would be 10,080, 1000 less than under the last government. He explained that this would maintain the growth point status and make use of the existing infrastructure as there was no more money for development in this area. This would be a Dispersal option rather than an Urban Extension. It was emphasised that this could change during the consultation process.

In terms of current funding issues the Committee brought to the Leader's attention matters arising from the previous meeting regarding the future of voluntary organisations such as Women's Support Services. Councillor Garland could only confirm that funding was tight and highlighted to the Committee the 93m reduction in funding at the County Council which would have an

affect on the Voluntary Sector. His advice was to lobby hard as money would have to be found from other sources.

Finally Licensing was addressed; the partnership with Sevenoaks was working well with a shared back office. Another example the Committee were told of where shared services are working well.

The Chairman thanked the Leader for attending.”

- 3.4 The Committee could choose not to interview or receive written updates from the Leader 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 Leader’s priorities for his portfolio are aligned to the Council’s corporate objectives as set out in the strategic plan.