MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET

8 JUNE 2011

REPORT OF THE LEISURE & PROSPERITY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Report prepared by Christina Chemsi

1.   Rural Economy Review

1.1   Issue for Decision

1.1.1 To consider the recommendations within the 'Rural Economy' report attached at **Appendix A**.

1.2   Recommendation of the Leisure and Prosperity Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1.2.1 That the Cabinet agrees to the following recommendations and fills in the attached Scrutiny Committee Recommendation Action Implementation Plan:

1) The Economic Development Strategy July 2008 needs to be revised to show an equal focus on the rural and urban aspects of the Borough and reflect the recent changes concerning the Localism Bill.
2) To lobby for station improvements within the rural areas to allow better disabled access to all platforms.
3) That the Cabinet Members for Environment and Regeneration support the future work programme for 2011/12 and that the rural economy transport issues are suitably addressed as part of the Local Development Framework.
4) The Cabinet Members for Regeneration and Environment should lobby support to the Growth Without Gridlock team on the major priorities concerning Maidstone in the Rail Action Plan for Kent Strategy.
5) As the new plan is being devised, the Committee would like to see a stronger recognition of the rural transport issues and provide detail on how the Council intend to overcome the current obstacles.
6) Following the announcements of the first successful round of applications for the Superfast Broadband Pilot Fund in mid May 2011, the Committee see which applicants have been successful

within the borough, and what the next procedure is before this can be implemented.

7) The Cabinet Member for Regeneration seeks methods to educate Maidstone residents in renewable energy benefits, perhaps with the help of Distributed Generation Ltd at possible community and town events.

8) In line with the Council's Sustainable Procurement Strategy , the Council support businesses within the borough when possible

9) The Cabinet Member for Community Services investigates any licence issues regarding obtaining a business recycling point in Marden.

10) The Cabinet Member seeks the possibility of creating a 'bank roll' service, using Cornwall Council as an example, in order to support applicants in the Leader Programme.

11) The Cabinet Member liaises with the Director of Change, Planning and the Environment and the Head of Development Management to reduce the time taken for planning to write confirmation that no planning permission was required on the site concerned. This may include highlighting to the Leader Programme team the process to apply for Certificate for Lawful Developments on sites concerning the Leader Programe.

12) That the Cabinet Member and Leader of the Council should ensure planning policies reflect the contemporary needs of Maidstone's agricultural businesses. Spatial planning policies should be pro-active in encouraging planning applications for renewables and polytunnels (where appropriate and done in a sensitive manner)to help our agricultural community compete.

13) The Committee would like the Council to give encouragement for local affordable housing schemes in the rural communities. Ways of incentivising such schemes should be given consideration.

14) Cabinet Member to pursue lobbying KCC Members to review the procedure for renewing and mending brown tourism signs.

15) That the neighbourhood forum meets with the business forums from time to time to help lobby the council with issues as a community.

16) The Cabinet Member should review the possibility of adapting the boroughs neighborhood forums using Merton Council as an example.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 At its meeting on 13 December 2010, the Leisure and Prosperity Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to carry out a review of the borough's rural economy to show how the Council are currently supporting it, and how the Council could enhance this support for the future.

1.3.2 The attached report presents the findings of the Committee, the field trip and Select-Committee style interviews. Members asked each witness what they would like to be done to improve the rural economy in Maidstone and the recommendations were formulated from the responses.

1.3.3 The review is a Member-led initiative. Some of the recommendations regarding Council arrangements would need to be further explored with various departments and it should be noted that the report does not include costs. The Committee felt that its suggestions and recommendations were a helpful starting point in attempting to address key issues in the rural economy of Maidstone.

1.3.4 Cabinet is recommended to agree the recommendations within the 'Rural Economy' report as these are based on evidence found by the Working Group and Select-Committee style interviews during the course of its review.

1.4   Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.4.1 Cabinet could decide not to agree the recommendations within the ''Rural Economy'' report, however the recommendations are based on evidence from a range of sources and support the Council's objectives with regard to Maidstone having a growing economy and being a decent place to live, as outlined at 1.5.

1.5   Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.5.1 The Council's Strategic Plan 2011-15 lists "a growing economy and to be a decent place to live" as a key priorities. The recommendations within the report contribute to the fulfillment of these objectives.

1.6   Risk Management

1.6.1 There are no risks associated with the Cabinet accepting the Committees recommendations.

1.7   Other Implications

1.7.1

1.	Financial	X
2.	Staffing	X
3.	Legal	
4.	Social Inclusion	

5.	Environmental/Sustainable Development	X
6.	Community Safety	
7.	Human Rights Act	
8.	Procurement	
9.	Asset Management	

1.8 Background Documents

1.8.1 None.

NO REPORT WILL BE ACCEPTED WITHOUT THIS BOX BEING COMPLETED

Is this a Key Decision?   Yes [ ]   No [X]

If yes, when did it appear in the Forward Plan? _____

Is this an Urgent Key Decision?   Yes [ ]   No [X]

Reason for Urgency

N/a