

# **Maidstone Borough Council**

## **Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

**Tuesday 2 August 2011**

### **'The Council as a Business' Review – The Council's Outlook**

**Report of:** Overview & Scrutiny Officer

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 'The Council as a Business?' will form the Committee's major review for the 2011/12 municipal year.
- 1.2 The Committee established the terms of reference for the review in the scoping document (Appendix A) and felt that the following points should be addressed at the earliest venture by the Chief Executive and Directors.
  - What does Maidstone Borough Council want to be and what do our residents want from us including identifying who our customers are and what their requirements are
  - Establish what the Council perceives its core function to be now and in the future and what statutory services we must provide
  - Establish where the Council sees itself in 4 years time

#### **2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 The Committee is recommended to interview Alison Broom, Chief Executive, Steve Goulette, Assistant Director Environment and Regulatory Services and lead on the development of commercial services on behalf of Senior Management Team to make recommendations as appropriate.
- 2.2 Areas of questioning could include but are not limited to:
  - What does Maidstone Borough Council consider its core function to be?
  - The investment in the gateway in recent years would suggest that front line customer service is what the public want; Does the Council have any immediate plans for customer services that could impact on the current service provided?
  - What services offer immediate commercial viability to the council's operations?

- What services could operate commercially over time?
- What obstacles do the council face as it looks at income generation and commercial opportunities and how can these be overcome?
- What could Maidstone Borough Council offer the private sector that is not on offer already?
- How could the Council operating as a business be viewed as a positive move to the residents of Maidstone and local businesses?
- How would the Council begin the task of changing the culture and outlook of its employees?
- What is the short term and long term vision of Maidstone Borough council?
- Would it be advisable for the Council to employ a dedicated Funding Officer?

### **3. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 3.1 The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee wish to 'explore the financial restraints the Council face and establish how savings and income could be generated in a more innovative manner.'
- 3.2 The Committee will seek to work with Officers already tasked to investigate and develop commercial services and opportunities within the council and in line with the development of the Budget Strategy over the coming year.
- 3.3 The context of the review is to find and establish innovative income generation in a changing economic Climate and in particular with the direct pressures faced by the public sector as a result of the coalition Government's comprehensive spending review. The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny feel that there is an alternative to the way in which spending cuts are approached; cuts to staff and services may not be the only option as efficiency and innovation become the new public sector 'buzz words'.
- 3.4 Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be consulted over the course of the municipal year, in accordance with the constitution, on the updated Budget Strategy prior to proposals to being submitted to Council in March 2012.
- 3.5 The Budget Consultation in 2010 was the first following the coalition government's spending review. In August 2010 Maidstone Borough Council began a twelve week consultation to:

- Raise awareness of the budget situation, the statutory services the Council provides, and the savings options considered by Cabinet;
- To find out which discretionary services matter most to local people;
- To encourage comments on the service options considered by Cabinet; and
- To ask for other suggestions for savings.

3.6 A road show, website pages and a consultation leaflet was designed with the theme of "MY Council, what matters to ME." This focused the consultation on the issues that mattered most to the people of Maidstone. The main activity at each road show was a 'pennies in a jar' exercise designed to encourage respondents to indicate which discretionary areas of service mattered most to them. Respondents were given a choice of eight discretionary services and asked to indicate up to four which matter most to them.

The eight discretionary areas were:

- Community Services – community safety, CCTV and community Development;
- Democratic Representation – civic occasions and events;
- Environmental Protection – health promotion and toilets;
- Transport Services – bus shelters and rural bus services;
- Recreation & Sport – Maidstone Leisure Centre, sports and youth activities;
- Open spaces, parks and recreation grounds;
- Grants to voluntary and charitable organisations; and
- Tourism, visitor information centre, town centre management, conference venue marketing and Christmas light.

3.7 The Committee will utilise the information available to them as they investigate the topic 'The Council as a Business?'

#### **4. Impact on Corporate Objectives**

4.1 The Committee will consider reports that deliver against the following Council priority:

- 'Corporate and Customer Excellence'

