

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 12 JULY 2011**

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Blackmore (Chairman)
Councillors Ash, Brindle, Butler, Field, FitzGerald
(Vice-Chairman) and Paterson

34. The Committee to consider whether all items on the agenda should be web-cast.

It was resolved that all items should be web-cast.

35. Apologies.

Apologies were received from Councillor Mrs Parvin, Councillor Mrs Stockell and Councillor Yates.

36. Notification of Substitute Members.

Councillor Butler and Councillor Brindle substituted for Councillor Mrs Stockell and Councillor Yates respectively.

37. Notification of Visiting Members.

There were no Visiting Members.

38. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

There were no disclosures.

39. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.

It was agreed that all items should be taken in public as proposed.

40. Minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2011

It was resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2011 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting and duly signed by the Chairman.

41. Maidstone Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Jason Taylor, Parks & Leisure Manager introduced Maidstone's Local Biodiversity Action Plan to the Committee. . Mr Taylor informed Members the biodiversity became a global agenda in 1992 when 150 governments

signed the convention on Biological Diversity at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. In 1994 the UK Biodiversity Action Plan launched and objectives and principles were agreed on. In 1995 the Kent Biodiversity Action Plan was launched and in 2003 a follow up audit was produced by the Kent Biodiversity Partnership; the result of which was 27 UK priority habitats for Kent. In 2005 Maidstone Borough Council's Green Spaces Strategy set a target to produce a Local Biodiversity Action Plan. The Officer explained that the document had been created by Dr Anna Delgado who had worked closely with the Kent Biodiversity Partnership whilst employed by Maidstone Borough Council. It was explained that the document would be adopted once the Committee's input and approval had been given.

Members were informed that in 2010 the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership (MVCP) took over the Local Biodiversity Action Plan with a reduced budget of £15,000 (from £60,000 originally). Mr Taylor explained that the organisation worked with a number of other countryside bodies and were able to pool their resources more effectively as well as being able to access alternative funding sources and utilise volunteer working, helping to maximise the Council's funding. MVCP's core funding came from Maidstone Borough Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, the Environment Agency and Kent County Council. The Officer introduced a short film by the Kent Countryside Partnership explaining the work of Medway Valley Countryside Partnership in more detail including the Valley of Vision walk along the Medway and a toolkit that was loaned to neighbourhood's to improve their local area. Members were informed that since taking on responsibility of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan MVCP had used their expertise to progress the document further. Members observed that the plan had been in existence since 2009 and questioned whether an update was due. The Committee was advised that by the time the plan was adopted it would include the latest maps available from the Kent Wildlife Trust.

The Committee asked the Officer if there were any vulnerable areas of biodiversity in the borough. Mr Taylor explained that rivers were in a poor state but that all rivers in Kent, due to phosphates from the Countryside, were considered to be poor compared to their Scottish counterparts with more open waters. Members queried whether farmers had been engaged with to combat the agricultural risk factors. Mr Taylor informed the Committee that there were stewardship programmes in place and the Kent Wildlife Trust was combating these issues with landowners.

Members questioned how the funding could be used most effectively. Mr Taylor explained that money needed to be spent where it was most useful; for example looking at habitats and improving these rather than concentrating on individual species so larger sites should be addressed. The Committee queried whether money received by the authority for section 106 agreements could be used. The Officer informed Members that many of the sites identified in the document were linked to 106 agreements and funding opportunities. Members observed that the plan covered a 5 year period (2009-2014) and were concerned that areas could be lost through development if actions in the document took too long to

put into place especially in urban areas. The Officer assured Members that plans were on target and that the reason for working with MVCP was to maximise funding by utilising the volunteers available through the partnership. The value of volunteers work was further illustrated to the Committee when Mr Taylor explained that the Mote Park project had set a target of £15,000 in volunteer hours which had already been reached. Members queried the £18,000 of lottery money received for Mote Park and when the money would be spent. The Committee was informed that the funding was drawn on every 6 months with Mote Park being one of Maidstone's biggest areas of biodiversity.

The Committee praised the work of the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership and recommended that it be promoted in the borough update. Members congratulated the Officer on the document produced and Maidstone as being one of few to produce a Local Biodiversity Action Plan; the Committee agreed that the document should be adopted.

It was resolved that:

- a) The Maidstone Local Biodiversity Action Plan should be adopted; and
- b) The work and achievements of the Medway Valley Countryside Partnership should be promoted in the Borough Update

42. Appointment of Joint Health Sub Committee

At the Committee's previous meeting on 12 June two of Maidstone's three Joint Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Health Sub Committee Members were appointed; the Chairman asked Members to consider their third nomination.

The Committee was fulfilling the protocol agreed in Maidstone's Overview and Scrutiny procedure rules based on the principles that Overview and Scrutiny 'should minimise the additional administrative burdens on local authorities on NHS bodies'. The Joint Committee would consider local service issues and ensure cross-district issues were dealt with jointly.

Councillor Yates was nominated by Councillor Blackmore and the nomination was seconded by Councillor Field. The Committee voted in favour of the appointment.

The Scrutiny Officer informed Members that a first meeting for the Sub Committee would take place at the beginning of August to examine the NHS Quality Accounts 2010/11 and revisit the recommendations made as a result of the Committee's review into Adult Mental Health Services in 2010.

It was resolved that Councillor Yates should be appointed as the third member of the Joint Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Health Sub Committee.

43. Waste Review

The Committee considered the scoping document for the review 'Making Waste Work for Maidstone.' The Committee was informed that the Tendering Strategy – Waste and Recycling Contract 2013 that was due to come to their August meeting would be postponed until September. Members felt that it was extremely important that they saw this document and agree to move their scheduled September meeting as the Crime and Disorder Overview and Scrutiny Committee back to October.

At the previous meeting Members had asked the Scrutiny Officer to provide background information on a suggested witness, Dr Jane Beasley. Having read the information provided they felt that Dr Beasley should be added as an expert witness and be invited to attend a meeting.

The Committee discussed the Waste and Recycling facility based in Tovil. Members were aware that this was the responsibility of Kent County Council but felt that there would be some benefit in understanding how recycling rates were recorded and what the actual figures for Maidstone were. Some Members felt that the changes to household waste and recycling collections had increased the use of the facility and wanted to understand the impact this was having, if any.

The Committee discussed the freighter service and questioned what was being reused and recycling from this service as well as the 'bulky' collection service offered by the Council. Some Members had received reports that residents were having difficulties with bulky collections with some large items being refused and requested that this be investigated.

The Chairman informed the Committee that Paul Vanston, Kent Waste Partnerships Manager was available to come to the next meeting. An informal meeting with the witness was suggested by the Scrutiny Officer to include Officers who could provide the Committee with relevant background information, helpful to the review. It was agreed that a meeting should be arranged and any Members unable to attend should be provided with the key points raised.

Members discussed the possibilities of reusing waste and self contained waste within developments to provide energy. The Committee recalled a review by the Local Government Agency and asked the Scrutiny Officer to research this on their behalf.

The Scrutiny Officer informed Members about a plastic recycling plant called Closed Loop that would be beneficial to visit as part of the review. The Committee were in agreement and discussed a possible date.

It was resolved that:

- a) The Tendering Strategy – Waste and Recycling Contract 2013 should be the focus of the September meeting, moving the Crime and Disorder Meeting to October;
- b) Dr Jane Beasley should be added as an expert witness for the review and contacted by the Scrutiny Officer regarding attending a meeting;
- c) The Recycling figures for the Waste and Recycling Centre in Tovil should be investigated by the Scrutiny Officer and a visit added to the scoping document;
- d) The reuse and recycling of waste collected by the Freighter Services and Bulky Collections should be investigated with the Waste Team and reports of residents having difficulties with the bulky collections should be passed on to the Waste Team;
- e) An informal meeting with Paul Vanston, Kent Waste Partnerships Manager should be arranged; to include the Committee, Steve Goulette, Assistant Director Environment & Regulatory Services and the Waste Team and Members unable to attend should be provide with the key points raised;
- f) The Scrutiny Officer should investigate and report back to the committee on findings relating to the reuse of waste as an energy source; and
- g) A visit should be arranged for 12 August to Closed Loop, a plastic recycling facility based in Dagenham.

44. Future Work Programme and Scrutiny Officer Update

Members discussed their future work programme and the forward plan. Some Members raised concerns regarding the forward plan. They felt that the success of the Waste review as the Committee's main body of work could suffer if they were continually altering and revising their future work programme to include items from the forward plan. The Chairman reasoned that those items chosen so far had been entirely relevant to the Committee's remit and the Committee would always have a responsibility as part of a consultation process to adapt its work programme to include emerging documents.

The Scrutiny Officer updated the Committee on the recent Housing Strategy. The Committee had been part of the consultation process for the Draft Housing Strategy and had made a number of recommendations at their last meeting. The Scrutiny Officer informed Members via the completed Scrutiny Committee Recommendation Action and Implementation Plan (SCRAIP) that each recommendation had been taken

forward and implemented and the further information required had been requested.

It was resolved that the Committee should continue to consider relevant items on the forward plan for inclusion in their future work programme.

45. Duration of Meeting

6.30 p.m. to 7.45 p.m.