



Keeping an eye on
Maidstone

Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report

2010-11

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Introduction to Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2010-11

Leisure & Prosperity

This work programme was made up of two major items this year - the Leisure and Culture Strategy and the Rural Economy - with many smaller but no less significant pieces of work running parallel (e.g. looking at the robustness of data used in the Core Strategy, an assessment of work to date from the Local Strategic Partnership's (LSP) Economic Development committee, and a call in dealing with the funding for Childrens' play equipment). Along the way our committee have experimented with new ideas for good practice, and revisited some old ones. For example, we held meetings outside Town Hall - in the Museum and Hazlitt Theatre - and took tours of the Leisure Centre and new East Wing extension. I also consider it good practice that we went on a field trip around various rural businesses. Something that could be improved for next year is better involvement of officers in meetings. We MUST also find ways to engage with non-scrutiny members more effectively. It has been particularly sad to see the Independent Group become disenfranchised from scrutiny, and I hope this will be rectified in the new year.

Stephen Paine ,
Chair, Leisure and Prosperity Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Corporate Services

Inevitably, against a backdrop of municipal austerity, the main focus for the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been the identification of potential corporate financial savings. To this end a small task and finish group was established to work with the Leader of the Council and Chief Executive to explore potential for savings, alternative approaches and prioritisation within the capital budget.

The Committee scrutinised the draft new model MBC Strategic Plan and though broadly supportive raised the need to be seen to champion the whole Borough, not just the town, and to provide balance through promoting protection and celebration of what is best about our area and not just focus on the faults.

A further key role has been to ensure a high level of awareness of the flurry of new initiatives and policies emanating from the incoming Coalition Government and seeking reassurance that Council staff and relevant partnerships are alive to the opportunities that change may present.

Tony Harwood,
Chair, Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Partnerships and Well-Being

Awaiting statement from Councillor Stockell, to be included before submission to Cabinet.

Paulina Stockell
Chairman, Partnerships and Well-Being Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Environment and Transportation

During the municipal year 2010/11 the Committee were very keen to scrutinise the draft Integrated Transport Strategy which forms part of the Core Strategy. This item was taken from our agenda at the last minute and our input has been delayed. The Integrated Transport Strategy is a key part of the new Core Strategy for Maidstone.

The Committee received an update about the Food Waste Initiative which was available to the majority of households in the Borough and had helped to increase recycling rates to an acceptable level.

We looked at the Supply of Water to our Borough and it is clear that this piece of work needs much co-ordination between the water companies and the different local authorities and a further in-depth study. Our water levels are stressed within the county and we need long term planning to avoid a water crisis.

The Climate Change Framework which is the overarching document was reviewed during the year and the Committee showed much support for the work already undertaken to date.

During our busy year we were given updates relating to the Air Quality Action Plan and also dog fouling and the new pilot schemes which are helping to reduce the fouling which takes place around the Borough.

Annabelle Blackmore

Chairman, Environment and Transportation Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Overview and Scrutiny at Maidstone Borough Council

Vision for Scrutiny

To have an effective and well respected service that ensures the council's services are delivered equitably, effectively and efficiently for our residents.



Centre for Public Scrutiny Principles of Effective Scrutiny

1. Ensures scrutiny provides 'critical friend' challenge to executive policy-makers and decision makers
2. Enables the voice and concerns of the public and its communities
3. Drives improvement in public services
4. Is carried out by independent minded governors who lead and own the scrutiny role



Three Overview and Scrutiny Committees supported by 2.5 officers

Overview and Scrutiny 2010-11 – A Summary

- 48 formal meetings
- 54 councillors
- 43 officers
- 30 external witnesses
- 2 major reviews
- 27 one-off topics
- 14 Commenting and Developing Budget, Policy and Strategy Docs
- 3 call-ins
- 1 working group

Ensures scrutiny provides 'critical friend' challenge to executive policy-makers.

Car Parks & Park & Ride

Environment and Transportation OSC sought to evaluate the Park and Ride service throughout the 2010/11 Municipal year. The Committee pursued a holistic approach to this and were keen to consider air quality issues, the town's problem with congestion, and the importance of a transport system that would support and help the town's economy to grow. The Committee looked to the emerging Core Strategy, Maidstone's Growth Point Status and remained steadfast in their pursuit of the facts, hoping to have a valid input into what would become the Integrated Transport Strategy. The absence of the Core Strategy meant that the Committee did not have the opportunity to impact on the decision making process in 2010/11. The Environment and Transport Committee interviewed Jeff Kitson, Parking Services Manager, Clive Cheeseman, Transport Policy Officer, Brian Morgan, Assistant Director of Regeneration and Cultural Services and Paul Crick, Director of Integrated Strategy and Planning at Kent County Council. Members addressed the issue of Car Parks versus the Park and Ride in an attempt to evaluate the Council's outlook for the transport needs of Maidstone. It was established that Maidstone had excellent car parking facilities, attractively priced which on balance did not strengthen the position of the Park and Ride Service.



Members expressed concerns at the rental costs of the Sittingbourne Road Park & Ride which they were told was in excess of £140,000 per annum. Though it contributed to easing congestion in the Town Centre, there were issues relating to the structure, cost and the volume of car parking available. In their choice of witnesses Members sought to establish the strategic outlook as well as an overarching county perspective. Paul Crick discussed the Local Transport Plan 3 for Kent and gave frank and open responses to Members questions. Mr Crick was able to advise on how Maidstone's Integrated Transport Strategy would fit beneath the Local Transport Plan 3. The Committee were kept up to date throughout the year with emerging documents such as 'Growth Without Gridlock' Kent Country Council aspirational vision for an Integrated Transport System. A visit to the Traffic Management Centre in Maidstone helped the Committee in their understanding of methods available to manage traffic in Maidstone and tackling air quality, another area of concern. Members were then able to explore these ideas with Mr Crick and gauge his opinion on the use of 'gating' for example to ease congestions as well

as discuss how to make the Park and Ride a viable, long term solution for Maidstone. Towards the end of the municipal year the Committee were invited to an all Members 'Transport Modelling Workshop' which gave them the opportunity to understand the requirements of the emerging Core Strategy. It was expressed that an Integrated Parking Strategy was needed and a holistic approach should be taken; an Integrated Transport Strategy would then feed into the Local Development Framework (LDF).

National Proposed changes to Housing Benefits

As national changes with Housing Benefit were looming, Scrutiny were concerned as to how this change was being dealt with, both internally with staff (as team changes due to partnership working with Tunbridge

Wells Council were imminent) and externally to the public. The Committee heard that Benefits, Revenues, Housing, Finance, Maidstone Borough Gateway and Citizens Advice Bureau were being trained both by external and internal staff ensuring that training was completed prior to April 2011. Other agencies such as HM Revenues and Customs, Job Centre Plus and Department for Working Pensions worked closely together to ensure that transitions were made smoothly. Claimants who were on discretionary benefits were contacted by phone to have their individual situation explained. All letters sent out to the public were written clearly in plain English.

Use of Play Area Improvement Capital Programme 2010/11:

Consideration of a call-in by the Leisure and Prosperity OSC led to a change in the capital programme and agreement from the Cabinet that £50,000 of the available capital budget would be allocated to carry out works to play areas with the highest priority. This ensured that £75,000 was returned to capital budget for 2010/11.

Enables the Voice and Concerns of the Public and Its Communities

This year has seen excellent public involvement in the scrutiny process, with meetings held outside of the Town Hall and a variety of public speakers attending meetings.

Leisure & Culture Strategy



Following the new refurbishment of the Maidstone Leisure Centre, Members from the Leisure & Prosperity OSC took a tour with Parks and Leisure Manager, Jason Taylor. Facilities such as new dance studios, new member changing rooms and new gym equipment were visited, as well as the facilities provided in Mote Hall. This was reviewed as part of looking at the culture offer provided by the leisure centres and despite a feeling that more emphasis was on leisure, than culture, it was clear to see the facilities that served both aspects well.



Whilst the museum was undergoing an extension of the East Wing the Leisure & Culture OSC visited the site, enabling a true visual of the facilities that will be accommodated within the extension.

An OSC meeting was held at the museum on 12 October, when external speaker John Holden, professor at City University and Associate at Demos, gave an academic view of the value of culture informing the committee that it was now seen as a 'pick and mix' approach, rather than being something for the elite and covered a broad range of activities and work making the Committee rethink what the Leisure & Culture Strategy will mean to Maidstone.

Domestic Violence

On 12 November 2010 the Stakeholder Event 'Exploring Violence Provision in Maidstone' was held at Lenham Community Centre.

The Partnerships and Well-Being OSC meeting followed soon after this event with Domestic Violence as its focus. Statistics had shown that Domestic Violence cases were on the increase but with only an estimated 35% of incidents reported and Maidstone's 5,000 cases exceeding the national average of 1,700 it was felt that it should be addressed

The meeting included witnesses from Women's Support Services, the Police, Housing (Maidstone Borough Council) and the Safer Maidstone Partnership. It was quickly established that Maidstone was

leading the way in supporting and dealing with Domestic Violence offering victims support through to prosecution (where appropriate). It was understood that the increase in reported cases should be viewed as an achievement for Maidstone and the organisations offering help, advice and support. The main area of concern for the Committee was the uncertainty surrounding funding and the impact that this would have on the high level of support and provisions available in Maidstone. The Committee made a recommendation to raise the profile of Women's Support Services through the Borough Update and to revisit this area again in the near future.

Community Watch

The Partnerships and Well Being OSC have interviewed a number of voluntary groups over the past year as they have investigated provisions for Domestic Violence, Youth Justice and Obesity in the borough.

Women's Support Service's and Maidstone Mediation, to name a few, impressed the Committee with their dedication and work which they felt could set the precedent nationally. Obvious concerns were voiced by the groups with regards to funding which prevented long term planning or growth.

The Committee resolved to raise the profile of the organisations so their Scrutiny Officer met with the Communications team and they devised a 'Sunday supplement' style short, standard interview to be completed by a different organisation on a bi monthly basis which would feature in the Borough Update.

Drives Improvement in Public Services

Overview and Scrutiny in 2010-11, has impacted on the delivery of a number of public services in Maidstone. The Committees have looked at a range of public services, plans and strategies and made recommendations for improvement.

Rural Economy

The Leisure & Prosperity Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the Council's approach to supporting business in the rural areas. The Committee took part in a field trip to identify any problems and consider improvements that could be made, and as a result of the review, 16 recommendations were presented to Full Cabinet.

The following are the key recommendations made in the final report:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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 Programme.
- 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.

- That the neighbourhood forum meets with the business forums from time to time to help lobby the council with issues as a community.
- The Cabinet Member should review the possibility of adapting the boroughs neighborhood forums using Merton Council as an example.



Budget

Following the budget scrutiny session in January, Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee set up a working group to consider the capital programme in-depth. This was a difficult task but has enabled the Council to make savings over the next four years.

Customer Services – The Gateway

The Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee has reviewed the advantages and disadvantages of services provided in

the Maidstone Gateway, since it first opened in 2009.

Recommendations arising from the review focussed on the best value for money whilst still providing a quality service, ensuring that partnerships with other organisations were supported.



CCTV

The Partnerships and Well-Being OSC examined the proposed changes to CCTV at their meeting on 8 February 2011. The Committee interviewed John Littlemore, Head of Housing and Community Services on the decision made on 20 December 2010 to consider a partnership arrangement with Medway Council for the Council's CCTV service, including staffing, maintenance and management. Members had requested that they be included in the stakeholder events prior to the meeting which had included a visit to the CCTV centre in Medway and a

Questions and Answers Session with Officers and the Cabinet Member. The outcome from the Stakeholder Question and Answer session was discussed and the Committee were supportive of this: there would be a stakeholder steering group who would be involved in the specification for the CCTV monitoring service and recommended that a statement on behalf of the Committee be sent to the Cabinet Member in support of this.

Tackling Obesity

The Partnerships and Well-Being Overview and Scrutiny Committee looked at 'Tackling Obesity' at a one off meeting in February 2011. The focus was the Healthy Lifestyles Programmes run by Maidstone Borough Council as part of a 2 year Service Agreement with the Primary Care Trust. Jill Maynard from Zeroth Active Zone attended as a witness along with Donna Kavanagh and Sara Matthews from Maidstone Leisure Centre. Members had visited Zeroth Active Zone in preparation for the meeting and met with those on the "Weight for Life" Programme, described as an adult programme for those with a BMI of over 28. The "Weight for Life" Programme at Zeroth was found to be more successful than the version run at the Leisure Centre and those

participating in the programme at Zeroth told visiting members that they enjoyed the privacy that they did not feel they would have at a public gym. Along with Jane Coombes, Healthy Lifestyles Coordinator and Jim Boot, Community Development Manager the Committee explored the Healthy Lifestyles Programmes and ways in which obesity could be tackled, reviewing Maidstone's Health profile against the rest of the Country and the current GP referral process.

Following on from the meeting the Scrutiny Officer met with Jill Maynard from Zeroth, Jim Boot and Kate Pomphrey from the Community Development team. All discussed the way forward for the Healthy Lifestyles Programmes they looked at the referral form that would be used by GP's. On behalf of the Committee the Scrutiny Officer observed that the addition of a simple flow chart, answering simple questions on patient preference as well as identifying their needs could help the GP make a decision about the right facilitator for the patient. It would also overcome the problem of letting GP's know what was on offer without bombarding them with information; Zeroth for those craving a friendly, intimate space and the Leisure Centre for those preferring a modern, hi-tech facility.

Carried out by independent-minded governors who lead and own the scrutiny process

Scrutiny in Maidstone has a national reputation for best practice and an integral part of this is the ownership members have of the scrutiny committees and the work they carry out.

Select Committee Visit

On 10 November 2010 the scrutiny officers had the opportunity to go to Parliament and view a Select Committee along with Councillors Butler, Paine, Vizzard and Yates. They chose the Works and Pensions Select Committee who were scrutinising the work of the Future Jobs Fund in relation to Apprenticeships and Youth Unemployment. They found the structure and the format of the meeting very similar to our Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The time frame of the meeting was strictly two hours and drew to a close in anticipation of the Parliamentary bell that rang moving business along.



Working Groups

A Member working group gave councillors the opportunity to lead and own the scrutiny process by carrying out their own research and

review work in small groups. This year working groups covered the capital budget and air quality issues.

Alternative sentencing powers of magistrates

The Partnerships and Well-Being OSC set the topic 'alternative sentencing powers of magistrates' at the start of the Municipal Year. On 7 December 2010 the Ministry of Justice published a green paper 'Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders' which formed a timely basis for the Committee to explore the subject.



Ministry of JUSTICE

The Committee invited witnesses from The Youth Offending Service (YOS) and Maidstone Mediation Centre to investigate Youth Justice and Referral Orders, as part of an overarching theme; reparation and restorative justice. The Committee were presented with the performance measures and the outcomes used by the YOS by Charlie Beaumont, Effective Practice and Performance Manager with the YOS. The outcomes measured were the number of first time entrants to the Youth Justice System and the rate of reoffending. The Statistics provided showed a 31.9% reduction in offenders for Maidstone. For first time entrants it showed a 43.3% reduction for Maidstone since October 2008. The YOS processes

used to achieve this included Kent Police's commitment to diversion and the use of restorative processes, prevention and multi agency partnership working which linked criminal justice, social care and education. In terms of Restorative Justice it was the provision of support for victims through Victim Liaison Officers, community based reparation to achieve 'payback' and the opportunity for victim/offender mediation. The 43.4 drop in reoffending by first time entrants was reemphasised in relation to the proposals set out in the Green Paper as it was said that the further young people went into the system the more likely it was for them to reoffend.

Annette Hinton, Manager of Maidstone Mediation Centre explained that the broad use of terminology used: mediation; restorative justice; restorative conferencing; restorative practice; reparation; victim/offender mediation; and neighbourhood panels were all mediation/restorative practice. Neighbourhood panels (an element discussed in the Green Paper) had been in place in Maidstone for 20 years using members of the community. Ms Hinton explained peer mediation and that there were 36 schools now trained in Maidstone, the use of Restorative Justice Conferencing for minor assaults was common and the police were also trained in and used mediation techniques.

An enquiry made by the Scrutiny Officer on behalf of the Committee to the Magistrate in the Community Project (MIC) regarding the use of Restorative Justice resulted in a statement being presented at the meeting by Visiting Member (and local Magistrate) Councillor Vizzard

from John Fassenfelt, Chairman of the Judicial Policy Committee. The response cited the Green Paper as a Liberal Democrat Proposal taken from their Manifesto. The response questioned the example given in the Green Paper in relation to the Neighbourhood Justice Panel set up in Chard stating that 'it is rather ironic that this Panel was set up under pressure from the local people after the local court house was closed some years back.' Mr Fassenfelt wrote that as Chairman of the Judicial Policy Committee he would be asking members to look at this issue as part of their review of the Green Paper.

It was concluded that a lot of the proposals set out in the Green Paper were already being achieved in Maidstone. Members decided that they would respond to the questions in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 of the Green Paper: Youth Justice and Working with communities to reduce crime on the basis of the discussion and information presented as a way of letting Government know of the good work being done in Maidstone.

Work Programme Setting

This year we held a work programming workshop within each committee to gather ideas for the scrutiny work programmes for 2011-12. Councillors had the opportunity to speak with officers and reviewed scrutiny suggestions from the public, members and officers. A full list of ideas put forward for reviews was researched by the scrutiny team prior to each Committee agreeing its work programme for the year.



themselves that is at the root of health inequalities.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny held a conference on 28 February 2011 which was attended by a Scrutiny Officer. It provided a background on their Resource Kit which is being developed as part of a 2 year programme 'to raise the profile of overview and scrutiny as a tool to help councils and partners understand and address health inequalities within their local community.' The programme was commissioned by Local Government Improvement and Development in response to the increasing need to develop and strengthen the role of Local Government in tackling Health Inequalities.

The two main outputs of the programme are the Scrutiny Development Areas and the Scrutiny Resource Kit. 10 areas across the Country have had the role of using their live scrutiny reviews to develop approaches to using scrutiny to help to understand and tackle Health Inequalities. This will then help build the Scrutiny Resource Kit using key attributes: leadership, local understanding, effective engagement and partnership working.

Many reviews were discussed by delegates on the day and they included veteran health, life expectancy and the effect of the night time economy on health. Attempting to differentiate and separate contributing factors to health inequalities proved difficult. The fundamental cause, with reference to the Marmot review and social gradients, proved to be that it was how people feel about

Partnership Working

Health with Tunbridge Wells

Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's share a common Primary Care Trust and with the success of the Mental Health review, decided to establish a Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April 2010, when details were beginning to emerge that major changes to Health services were on their way. The Committee began by scrutinising the Trust's Quality Report for the previous year, making recommendations to improve the clarity of the report.



It was in September that the Committee really proved its value, meeting to consider a joint response to the various Department of Health consultations grouped under the 'Liberating the NHS' White Paper. We hoped that we could achieve a shared response across the two authorities (in the event, both authorities adopted the Committee's response), providing a stronger response to the Consultation than if the two authorities had responded separately. By considering the consultation papers through a scrutiny committee, we were also able to feed in a wider range of

external viewpoints than we would otherwise have been able to. The process was fairly intense, with the Committee meeting for a day to consider the various consultation papers and the written evidence submissions we had obtained from Officers and residents. Following the publication of the Public Health White Paper and subsequent Strategy Documents clarifying many of the issues, the Committee is set to reconvene to provide responses to the current Department of Health consultation documents.

Mental Health Review

The Joint Adult Mental Health Services Review led to a desire to explore other aspects of Mental Health provisions and hear from all sectors, Public Sector, Voluntary and Community Organisations. On 10 December 2010 a roundtable event was hosted by William Benson, Chief Executive at Tunbridge Wells and chaired by Greg Clark MP this was the second in a series of meetings following on from a joint scrutiny review into Adult Mental Health Services. On the agenda was:

- a) Update on Live it Well and access to primary care psychological therapies services, Laretta Kavanagh, Director of Commissioning for Mental Health and Substance Misuse, Kent and Medway PCTs

- b) West Kent Service Redesign and First Response [FRIS], Erville Millar, Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust
- c) Supported Volunteering – A Proposal, Chris Grogan, Kent Supported Employment and Kate Anker, VAWK
- d) Exercise on Prescription for Mental Health – Helen Wolstenholme, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council and Stewart Wild, Fusion Lifestyle

The issues identified to take forward were employment and creating a networking opportunity for voluntary and community groups.

It was Maidstone’s turn to host on Friday 20 May at the Blackthorn Trust in Barming. Helen Grant MP and Cabinet Member John A Wilson attended the networking part of the event which was followed by presentations from the Blackthorn Trust, MCCH , Job Centre Plus and a joint presentation by Job Centre Plus and Lynn Marchant from Mindful Employer on ‘Integrated Pathways’. The discussion was chaired by Dr Kulvinder Singh, Chairman of the GP Consortium.

The Blackthorn Trust was a fitting venue as it is renowned in Maidstone for providing ‘medical care, specialist therapies and rehabilitation through work placements in the Blackthorn Garden, offering help to people with mental or physical health difficulties or learning disabilities based on the work of Rudolf Steiner, aiming to assist individuals to progress towards their potential.’

The meeting focused on employment and the effect of the current economic climate was clear. The integrated pathway and ‘passport’ for employment was a particularly noted as having value in the workplace and contact details were circulated to all those invited as part of the minutes. The meeting served to increase the awareness of Adult Mental Health and widen the network of stakeholders.

Maidstone felt that they would use the meeting to seek the feedback of all those involved to provide direction. It was recommended that the original 13 recommendations made in Adult Mental Health Services report should be revisited to establish what progress had been made.

Joint Health Scrutiny – Responding to National Consultations

Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone Councillors met on 16 March to form a response to the White Paper: Healthy Lives, Healthy People making their recommendations through the consultation process which ended on 31 March 2011.



Meradin Peachey, Director of Public Health, working across Eastern and Coastal Kent, Helen Wolstenholme, Healthy Lifestyles Coordinator at Tunbridge Wells and Jim Boot, Community Development Manager attended the meeting held in Tunbridge Wells. With their expert witness knowledge the Committee

were able to formulate a response to both consultation documents.

Both authorities sought the permission of their respective Cabinet Members and once their decisions had been made a joint response was sent to the Department of Health on behalf of both Councils.

Looking Forward

2011-12 Work Programme

The Overview and Scrutiny function has been in operation at Maidstone Borough Council for 10 years. It was agreed at April's Annual Council, following a review of all Committees, that Overview and Scrutiny would begin the New Year with three Committees; Corporate Services, Communities and Regeneration and Economic Development, rather than the previous four. Overview and Scrutiny would also include the Local Development Document Task and Finish Scrutiny Panel which would replace the Local Development Document Advisory Group, and a Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council.



Overview & Scrutiny

The Strategic Plan 2011-15 sets out Maidstone Borough Council's three new priorities; For Maidstone to have a growing economy, For Maidstone to be a decent place to live and Corporate and Customer Excellence. This is reflected in the structure and terms of reference of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees to ensure a cohesive approach is taken when scrutinising the Council's policies, plans and actions on behalf

of the local community. This will maintain a strong work programme for each Committee continuing the 'critical friend' role of Scrutiny in challenging the decisions of the executive and monitoring the Council's performance.

Contacting Scrutiny

Any Councillor can ask for an issue to be placed on a scrutiny agenda if they feel that it needs looking into, and the scrutiny team always welcomes feedback and ideas to keep improving.

Members of the public, representatives of partner organisations, and groups from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors can also contribute to scrutiny reviews and suggest items for the work programme.

The team can be contacted at osc@maidstone.gov.uk or on 01622 602524. Further information on the Scrutiny process and past reports are available at:

www.maidstone.gov.uk/scrutiny