

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE EXTERNAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON Tuesday 17 FEBRUARY 2009**

PRESENT: Councillors Hotson (Chairman), Marchant (Vice-Chairman), Mrs Gibson, Mrs Parvin, Paterson Vizzard and Williams.

APOLOGIES: Councillor Schnell

72. Notification of Substitute Members

It was noted that Councillor J Wilson was substituting for Councillor Schnell.

73. Notification of Visiting Members

There were no visiting members.

74. Disclosures by Members and Officers

There were no disclosures.

75. Exempt items

None.

76. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 8 January 2009 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman.

77. The Sustainable Community Strategy

The Chairman invited the Assistant Director of Development and Community Strategy, Brian Morgan and the Community Planning Coordinator, Jim Boot to provide an introduction to the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS).

The Committee was informed that the SCS was the overarching plan for the Council and the wider community in addition to forming the basis of other plans and strategies such as the Core Strategy of the LDF. The Council was legally required to produce the Strategy, which was produced in conjunction with the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP). Mr Morgan informed the Committee that because of changes to government guidance the SCS contained detailed action plans, which the previous Community Strategy did not. Empirical evidence had been used in order to establish the challenges and weaknesses of the borough which were used to

define the vision and objectives of the SCS. The Strategy also took into consideration the priorities established within the Kent Area Agreement Two and the resulting Borough Local Action Plan. The priorities of these were reflected within the action plans of the SCS. The targets contained within the Strategy would be revised where public consultation identified that this was necessary.

Mr. Morgan raised six key actions from the strategy which he believed to be particularly important for the council. These were;

- The creation of a Regeneration Strategy;
- Neighbourhood planning focused particularly on High Street, Parkwood and the Shepway wards;
- The availability of affordable housing.
- The development of a Parking Strategy;
- Whether the licensing policy should be revised; and
- Tackling provision in areas which had particularly low levels of educational achievement.

The final area of focus for the SCS established how the objectives and actions were to be implemented and monitored. The Chairman identified that the Strategy was a clear paper, however it relied heavily on outside agencies for delivery of the actions and therefore monitoring was essential.

Mr. Boot added that the Strategy was a major undertaking and was particularly evidence based. He identified that the SCS may need to be amended in light of the results of the Place Survey. Finally, Mr. Boot highlighted a number of amendments that had been made to the housing targets in light of the economic down turn.

A Councillor questioned whether, considering the importance of the SCS, every department within the Council was aware of it and knew how to report to those monitoring the SCS. It was also questioned whether the members of the LSP had appropriate officer determination to ensure actions were implemented. In response Mr Morgan stated that a number of council departments were closely involved in the production of the Strategy. This involvement would continue through monitoring of targets by lead officers, some of whom represented external partners. He also identified that it had been stressed to external agencies that this was a multi-agency plan and the consequences of this had been discussed with them to ensure a shared understanding of the required involvement. Mr. Boot added that unit managers had been briefed on the SCS and it had been suggested that the report template for Cabinet reports include a section for officers to consider how their report met/didn't meet the objectives of the Strategy.

A Councillor questioned why there was no area within the SCS which gave detailed focus to the issue of mental health problems. Mr. Boot identified that mental health issues were covered within the Children, Young People and Families chapter of the Strategy

and within the actions relating to the Choosing Health Programme (4.2) which would include a focus on mental health provision. Mr Boot also stated that the limited local empirical evidence available concerning mental health provision had hindered the prioritisation of mental health issues. It was requested that greater emphasis be given to issues concerning mental health within the Strategy.

In response to a question of why a representative of the Area Committee of Kent Association of Local Councils was not a member of the LSP board, Mr Morgan identified that this was a separate issue to the SCS and a recommendation to consider this issue could be raised with the LSP board.

A Councillor identified that it should be stated more clearly that areas which had, for example, high numbers of teenage pregnancies such as Parkwood, also had particularly high levels of social housing. It was also requested that positive improvements which had been seen recently within these areas be identified within the SCS.

It was requested that the end of paragraph 3.4.3 of the Strategy be amended to clarify that although the borough has a high proportion of residents with a degree level qualification; it also has a higher proportion of residents with lower level qualifications than the South East average.

A Councillor questioned why the Children's Services Partnership did not have a Councillor representative, and raised concern that this may result in insufficient monitoring of children's services. Mr Morgan responded that lead officers will be expected to provide progress reports to the LSP which will allow the Board to monitor all working groups. It was recommended that a Councillor should be represented on this group. Mr. Boot also confirmed that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would play a key role in monitoring the working groups and ensuring that the objectives established within the SCS would be achieved.

The following points of amendment and clarification were discussed by the Committee:

- It was requested that paragraph 3.4.8 be checked for accuracy to ensure the reference to 'South' ward was correct as some members believed that this should be a reference to 'Shepway South'. With regard to paragraph 3.4.9 the committee requested that it be clarified that this referred to results as higher than the Kent average.
- Paragraph 2.4 be amended to remove the reference to 'small market towns'. A Councillor raised concern that the Strategy did not contain any reference to ensure that services were not removed from Maidstone Hospital.

- The accuracy of data which suggested that there were larger numbers of people commuting into the borough than out should be confirmed.

In response to a question concerning the likelihood of a revision of the Council's Licensing Policy, Mr. Morgan informed the Committee that as the report concerning this issue had been to the Council's Management Team and to Cabinet, if these bodies agreed that reform of the Licensing Policy was necessary, it would be taken forward.

The Committee questioned where funding was going to come from to enable improvements within deprived areas. Mr. Morgan responded that discussions with KCC, the PCT and the police had taken place. These bodies would aim to establish whether additional funding was required or whether existing money should be spent differently. Furthermore, work undertaken for the purpose of the Local Development Framework (LDF) may also enable extra funding within these deprived areas of the Borough.

A Councillor questioned whether, in view of the apparent deadlock of the development of the LDF, the information given concerning the Park and Ride and the South East Relief road was accurate. Mr. Morgan confirmed that the LDF continued to support these objectives, and Kent County Council had not withdrawn its support of the Relief roads development. It was, however, agreed that reference to the Leeds and Langley bypass in 3.6.2 should be removed.

The Officers confirmed that it was intended that the Strategy would undergo six weeks of public consultation, beginning in March 2009, and would be brought back to Cabinet in April 2009.

The Chairman discussed the effectiveness of the Partners and Communities together scheme (previously known as Police and Communities Together Scheme. The Committee agreed that an update on the progress of this initiative would be beneficial

Resolved: That

- a) It be ensured that the Sustainable Community Strategy adequately addresses mental health issues within the Borough;
- b) It be recommended to the Local Strategic Partnership Board that a member of the Area Committee of the Kent Association of Local Councils be a member of the Board to ensure rural communities are represented at Board level;

- c) As previously recommended by the Committee the statistics for teenage pregnancy in Parkwood are clarified in-light of factors such as the type of accommodation available in the area and that the improvements made in Parkwood be highlighted in the strategy;
- e) It be recommended to the Local Strategic Partnership that a Councillor be appointed to the Children's Service's Partnership to ensure adequate monitoring of children's services;
- f) Ward Councillors and local communities are involved in the development and implementation of neighbourhood action plans;
- g) The phrase 'smaller market towns' be removed from paragraph 2.4;
- h) The wards referred to in paragraph 3.4.8 be confirmed as correct or amended;
- i) That paragraph 3.4.9 be amended to refer to a higher proportion of school leavers compared to Kent;
- j) The accuracy of the statement that a higher number of people commute into the borough than commute out be confirmed and
- k) The request that there must be no diminution of hospital services be included in the strategy.

78. Future Work Programme

The Committee discussed the future work programme and possible items for the March meeting which included the review of past reports, services for young people, the diverse communities review and Police and Communities Together.

Resolved: That

- a) The Diverse Communities Review Report be presented to the Committee;
- b) The Cabinet Member for Community Services, Cllr Mrs Ring be invited to the next meeting to be interviewed by the Committee with regard to the provision of services for young people;
- c) a report on the review of past scrutiny reports relating to the Committee be submitted to the next meeting; and

- d) A review of progress made by the Mental Health working group be presented to the Committee.
- e) The Community Safety Co-ordinator be invited to the next meeting to provide an update about Partners and Communities Together.

79. Duration of the Meeting

6.30 p.m. to 8.05 p.m.