

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY EXTERNAL OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 17 MARCH
2009**

PRESENT: Councillors Mrs Gibson, Hotson (Chairman),
Marchant, Vizzard, Warner and Williams.

APOLOGIES: Councillor Mrs Paterson.

80. Notification of Substitute Members

It was noted that Councillor Warner was substituting for Councillor Mrs Paterson.

81. Notification of Visiting Members

There were no visiting Members.

82. Disclosures by Members and Officers

There were no disclosures.

83. Exempt Items

Resolved: That all items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

84. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 17 February 2009 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman.

85. Partners and Communities Together (Formerly Police and Communities Together)

The Chairman invited the Community Safety Co-ordinator, David Hewetson, Sergeant Mick Hayes from Kent Police and Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) Supervisor Trevor Knowler to outline the progress of Partners and Communities Together (PACT) over the last twelve months.

Mr Hewetson informed the committee that PACT groups provided local residents with the opportunity to identify, to the local partners, their three key priority concerns for the local area. PACT groups then aimed to address these three concerns.

The Committee was told that PACTs continued to receive support and enthusiasm and had assisted in achieving a decrease in crime of 8.2% within the last year. PACTs had adopted a less formal approach to ensure feasibility of adequate public engagement.

Sergeant Mick Hayes identified that PACTs receive more direct support within rural than urban areas of the borough. Within the rural areas the number of PACTs and the resources available for each had increased. There were 33 PACTs established within the 16 rural wards of Maidstone as opposed to only 1 within each of the borough's urban wards. Within the rural areas of Maidstone PACT surgeries had been held, within each ward, monthly and letter drops were carried out regularly. Urban areas tended to rely more heavily on the support of local PCSOs to encourage community engagement.

The PACTs identify three priorities for the local area. Kent Police assisted in a number of campaigns which had involved the local media as a result of priorities identified through PACT meetings. Recently, "Operation Reconsider" was publicised with the aim of discouraging heavy goods vehicles from using roads which they may easily damage. Kent Police had also recently assisted the local PACT at Grove Green to carry out a litter pick. In answer to a question concerning the decline in attendance at PACT meetings, Mr Hewetson suggested that this may reflect residents' increased satisfaction with their local area.

The Committee were informed by Mr Knowles, that PACTs had been less successful in urban areas. PCSOs however encouraged community engagement, within urban areas, without the requirement of attending monthly PACT meetings.

The Committee were in agreement that within rural areas, fear of crime had decreased and satisfaction of policing had improved. The Committee requested that they be provided with figures which enabled a comparison of crime figures between the urban and rural areas. In response to a question Mr Knowles confirmed that PCSOs were able to monitor more than one ward, ensuring regular PCSO presence. The Committee was informed that Kent Police had liaised with Parish Councils and attended community events such as tea and coffee mornings.

Mr Hewetson recognised that young people may be more difficult to engage with, however the Safer Maidstone Partnership had worked with the Multi-Agency Youth Development Action Group (MAYDAG) in order to ensure the involvement of younger people. The Committee was also informed that MAYDAG provided funding for a number of outreach workers. A Member questioned whether enough work had been carried out with regard to the area surrounding Shepway South shops, which had a bad reputation with regard to anti social behaviour. The Cabinet Member for Community Services requested that these concerns be raised at the next Safer Maidstone Partnership, partnership and tasking group, and a response be given directly to the relevant Councillor.

David Hewetson presented the Committee with statistical data relating to PACT and crime issues. It was identified that speeding featured most frequently as a priority for the PACTs, during 2008/09. The CDRP performance report was presented and it was indicated that perception of crime within the borough had fallen suggesting that the work of PACTs was beneficial. It was requested that the Committee be informed as to why crime associated with the night time economy had increased.

Members congratulated Kent Police on the success of the PACT scheme.

Resolved:

That the Community Safety Co-ordinator David Hewetson:

provide the Committee with data enabling a comparison of the crime figures within the rural and urban areas of the Borough.

provide the Committee with greater information with regard to the increase in night time crime and how Maidstone's night time crime rate compares to the Kent average.

provide figures with regard to primary and secondary fires, which enable a comparison of winter and summer months.

David Hewetson and Kent Police report back to the External OSC in six months time to provide the Committee with an update of crime rates within the Borough.

The concerns of Councillor Mrs Williams and Councillor Ring with regard to the perceived lack of police presence in particular areas of Shepway South, be raised at the next meeting of the Partnership and Tasking group and a response be given to Councillor Mrs Williams.

86. Youth Services

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Community Services, Councillor Ring; the Community Development and Social Inclusion Manager, Ian Park and the Sports Play and Youth Development Team Manager, Jacqueline Bobb to the meeting.

The Committee was informed of the latest developments of the Youth Café which had been undergoing decoration. The cafe would not be opened until the outcome of a lottery bid for funding was known.

Mr Park identified the importance of taking a positive approach towards young people. The Officers identified that they worked closely with Kent County Council (KCC), particularly with regard to the relevant national indicators included within the Kent Area Agreement Two and Maidstone's Local Area Agreement.

The Committee recognised significant progress had been made since the review of Services for Young People which was undertaken in 2003. In response to a question Mr Park notified the Committee that there was not one overall manager for youth services within the Council. The provision of an overarching manager could result in the removal of key youth functions of the relevant departments, such as the museum or theatre. Mrs Bobb indicated that coordinating youth developments within the various departments fell within her remit.

Mrs Bobb informed the Committee that she had chaired MAYDAG which co-ordinated youth development (diversionary activities) within the borough. Councillor Mrs Ring also highlighted her role in ensuring that key partners produced adequate provision for young people.

It was highlighted to the Committee that volunteers who work along side children need to undergo a CRB check which, in the case of the Council, should be renewed annually. In response to a question Mr Park informed the Committee that the Council did not have a comprehensive database containing the contact details of all volunteers within the Borough and it was not necessary as Voluntary Action Maidstone collects information on volunteers as part of its remit

A Member raised concern with regard to the Hotfoot play schemes for 5 – 11 year olds. It was suggested that Family Liaison Officers were not sufficiently qualified to refer children for the scheme, and secondly that Councillors should not be asked to complete the relevant form for these referrals, as it requested the completion of questions that Councillors were not sufficiently equipped to answer. It was requested that the Cabinet Member for Community Services review this referral process to ensure that it was adequate.

A Member questioned to what extent the involvement of young people was encouraged on a political level. It was emphasised that the work of the Youth Scrutiny Committee was a move in the desired direction and that depending on the relevance of the topic, it may be beneficial to co-opt a member of the Youth Forum onto the Committee. The Committee were also informed that KCC provided some financial support for voluntary organisations such as

the Guides or Scouts, but this did not fall within the remit of MBC. Finally, in response to a question, Mrs Bobb informed the Committee that she would be an advisor to the new board that has been established for Maidstone Leisure Centre, as a result of the contract having recently been won by Maidstone Trust.

A Member suggested that there should be in place an agreed timeline to ensure that reports and recommendations have been fulfilled and reports can be closed.

The Committee were informed that the Council were in the process of producing, with KCC, the Joint Youth Strategy. This document would form the action plan of the Kent Area Agreement Two.

Resolved: That

The Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture, Councillor Brian Moss update the Committee of progress with regard to the Leisure Centre.

The Cabinet Member for Community Services provided the Committee with regular updates on the services for young people.

The Cabinet Member for Community Services review the method of referral for the Hot Foot play scheme, the appropriateness of the process.

87. Draft Diverse Communities Review

The Committee suggested the following amendments:

- Paragraph 6.1.5: rationalise the wording to clarify the difference between 'Asian', 'Asian & any other ethnic group' and 'other Asian'.
- Pages 22 and 23: remove 'recommendation 5' and reconfigure the recommendation numbering accordingly.
- Paragraph 9.4: the word 'anticipated' be replaced with 'hope'.

Resolved:

That, subject to the above changes, the report and recommendations be agreed and distributed to the relevant local authorities.

88. Review of Past Reports:

Councillors Marchant and Vizzard informed the Committee they had reviewed eight reports. In addition to a review of Services for Young People, the Committee was informed that the Access to NHS GPs should be reviewed in light of amendments by the Government to contracts.

Resolved:

That Access to NHS GPs be reviewed as part of External Overview and Scrutiny Committee's work programme for 2009-10.

That a time period be set, after which all reviews should be re-assessed to establish whether recommendations had been met.

89. Mental Health Working Group Written Update

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer informed the Committee that the mental health working group had visited a number of organisations which provided mental health treatment. The group last met on 11 February, they had decided that the focus of the group should be narrowed to scrutinising the provision of mental health treatment by the PCT for adults. The Committee was informed that the group would be undertaking research in to GP referral waiting times.

A number of Members raised concern that a true reflection of the provisions available could not be gained by solely consulting with the providers of the services. In relation to carrying out the review jointly with Tunbridge Wells, a number of Members considered the distance of travelling to Tunbridge Wells to be too costly. It was suggested that meeting venues should be sought between the two boroughs to cut the cost and time of travel.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer informed the Committee that joint working was advantageous as guest speakers were more likely to attend working group meetings.

A Councillor recommended that a separate review be undertaken considering the provision of mental health services for children.

Resolved:

At the first External OSC meeting of the next municipal year the joint review of mental health services be considered to ensure that the concerns regarding meetings were addressed.

A review of the developments of the Pembury Hospital be added to the future work programme.

90. Future Work Programme and Actions Taken Since Last Meeting.

A Member requested that the Committee be updated with regard to the developments of the new Pembroke Hospital.

Resolved:

At its meeting on 7 April 2009 the Committee will interview the Leader and Cabinet Member for Community Services on their achievements for the year.

A review of the developments of the Pembury Hospital be added to the future work programme.

91. Duration of the Meeting

6:30 p.m. to 8:45 p.m.