

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE REGENERATION & ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 22 NOVEMBER 2011**

PRESENT: Councillor Burton (Chairman)
Councillors Cuming, Beerling, Black, Mrs Joy, Ross,
Springett and Newton

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

Resolved: That all items on the agenda be web-cast.

84. Apologies.

Apologies were received from Councillor English.

85. Notification of Substitute Members.

There were no substitute Members.

86. Notification of Visiting Members.

There were no visiting Members.

87. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

There were no disclosures.

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

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

89. Minutes of the meeting held on 25 October 2011

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 October 2011 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman.

90. Traffic Congestion Review

The Chairman welcomed Kent County Council's Sustainable Transport Team Leader, Graham Tanner, to the meeting to discuss sustainable options as part of the Committee's in-depth review of traffic congestion. Mr Tanner gave a presentation, attached at Appendix A, on his role at KCC (Kent County Council) and the work he was undertaking. This highlighted the following:

- Given the Government's current financial economic situation it was unlikely that many new road infrastructure schemes to combat congestion would be financed in the short term and that more effort should therefore be placed in shifting attitudes to choose sustainable transport options;
- The importance of credible leadership, including in the public sector, with regard to encouraging their own workforces to choose sustainable options;
- The importance of partnership working with businesses in achieving behavioural shifts;
- Travel plans were historically considered as 'red tape'. Therefore, there was a need to work with developers to change their understanding of the role they played in enabling more sustainable development to come forward. Also, to ensure that they became more than a 'paper exercise'. Guidance on securing Travel Plans would be improved to ensure the requirement for a Travel Plan was based on a more qualitative assessment of need rather than arbitrary thresholds;
- All but one school in Maidstone had produced travel plans compared to a 95% take up across the whole county. However, KCC's school engagement staffing had reduced from 5.5 to 1 full time equivalent and this was likely to reduce the momentum of the application of the existing plans; and
- There was a lot of scope in Maidstone Borough Council's involvement in the 'New Ways 2 Work' partnership - this was a voluntary partnership program to incentivise businesses in collaboration with service providers to get employees to review their travel options and was anticipated to be a county wide 'umbrella' initiative with scope for local interpretation and implementation

In response to a question, Mr Tanner confirmed that KCC requested travel plans as a Condition or as part of a development's Section 106 (S106) when they felt it was needed. Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) was responsible, as the planning authority, for securing and enforcing such Conditions and S106s. KCC collaborated with districts to identify and prioritise S106 travel plans and gave assistance in achieving their fruition as appropriate. He noted that travel plans were resource intensive and enforcing them as part of a Condition or S106 was often difficult. For this reason a more voluntary and collaborative approach to Travel Plans, backed by the planning system as appropriate, was viewed as a better way forward.

A Member felt that Maidstone's topography did not encourage people to cycle, highlighting that places with successful cycle routes often commanded flat landscapes. Mr Tanner acknowledged this, but highlighted that east to west movement in the borough was generally a relatively flat and easy cycle route and noted that it was well used. However, he emphasised that Maidstone's challenge to build cycle routes was different to that of places like Ashford, with a lot of new developments, as it had to retrofit these into the borough with already limited road and pedestrian space. He advised that this placed a greater

importance on engaging with businesses to achieve commuter behavioural shifts towards sustainable options. Mr Tanner also highlighted that rising fuel costs was actually resulting in more people considering sustainable transport methods because it was becoming more economic than single car occupancy.

In response to a question Mr Tanner informed the Committee that School Travel Plans would ideally be monitored annually. However, KCC's relationship with some schools was changing with the emergence of Academies and therefore they had less influence than before to enforce the monitoring of school travel plans. He explained that KCC were working to encourage schools to keep plans up to date by making them available on the KCC website for prospective parents of new pupils. He also noted that the Department for Education had removed the mandatory questions, regarding how pupils had commuted to and from school, from the Annual School Census and therefore this had made it more difficult to quantifiably measure and monitor.

A Member of the Committee queried the role of KCC in securing school bus service contracts and their timetables. She noted that both of her school children narrowly missed a bus at school end and that this, in addition to lengthy journey times, understandably resulted in many other parents electing to use cars to collect their children from school. She also highlighted that a bus route through Bally Park routinely drove past school children at the bus stop as it was already a full single decked bus. Mr Tanner explained that bus contracts were procured as part of a tender process with a variety of criteria including the most cost effective methods of transporting children to schools, and that contracts generally lasted three years. He noted that KCC were seeking to make some savings on supported bus routes in the Borough where the level of per passenger subsidy was unsustainably high, but that approximately £7 million per annum was invested by KCC to subsidise socially necessary bus services across the county. Mr Tanner informed the Committee that school travel plans identified issues with timetables and that routine dialogue took place between KCC and the bus operators concerning any capacity issues at peak school times, noting it was in the operators' best interests. He also advised Members that additional buses were provided where ongoing problems were identified but that often there were difficulties at the start of the school year while travel patterns of pupils 'bedded in'.

In response to a question, Mr Tanner informed the Committee that he did not know why the Transport User Group had been disbanded but that he felt that any collaborative group discussions on transport issues could only be a good thing.

Mr Tanner informed the Committee that approximately 3500 people had signed up to use the Kentjourneyshare.com Car Share scheme. The Committee requested that data for car shares within and to Maidstone be provided.

The Committee thanked Mr Tanner for an informative presentation and in closing asked what one thing he felt was most important to be undertaken

in Maidstone. Mr Tanner advised that MBC and KCC should lead by example and consider their own businesses first and foremost, highlighting opportunities for incentivising public transport, walking, cycling and managing car parking availability.

Resolved: That

- a) The information provided by Mr Tanner inform its review; and
- b) Data regarding the number of Kent Journey Car Share Scheme relating to trips within and to Maidstone be circulated to the Committee to inform its review.

91. Employment and Skills Training

The Chairman welcomed Community Partnership Manger, Sarah Robson, and the Economic Development Officer, Keith Grimley, to the meeting. Councillor Black provided an update to the Committee, attached at Appendix A, on the independent work he had been doing for his ward. The Committee thanked Councillor Black for this and agreed that the same visits as a Committee should be undertaken to inform a review of skills and employment. The Committee also requested that Ms Robson assist them in identifying additional possible venues for visits.

Ms Robson informed the Committee that the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) Delivery Group had focussed its work on worklessness in terms of skills and training. She explained that the Delivery Group had recently resolved to hold a NEETS (Not in Education, Employment or Training) worklessness event in February 2012 to identify current provisions and the most disadvantaged groups of residents with all relevant stake holders. However, she clarified that this was in its very early stages and its agenda was yet to be finalised. She highlighted the need for co-ordinated provision in order to work effectively and to respond to identified needs, noting there was a significant amount of duplication of provision in some wards in the borough. Ms Robson also informed the Committee that she was seeking to identify gaps in provision and best practice and welcomed any Committee involvement in this, and the Committee welcomed the opportunity. Members discussed the requirement for a regularly updated amalgamated list of skills and employment training providers. This would both identify duplication and could be used as a resource to people looking for support/offering support to others. Ms Robson agreed this would be useful but highlighted the importance of local knowledge in identifying barriers to work, and that any duplication should be considered in light of this. Members felt that this could be developed so that training programmes in relevant professions were identified and circulated to local employers who had undoubtedly been approached by unskilled applicants, for their referral.

Mr Grimley emphasised the possible assistance the Committee could provide by publicising those local groups that were identified as best practice in the local area as part of its review. The Committee felt that the Council should find ways to support outstanding providers in the

Borough, and point them in the direction of possible sources of help should they have any difficulties, particularly with funding.

Members considered the importance of identifying whether the amount of unemployment across the borough represented long term unemployed or not. In response to a question, Mr Grimley informed Members that the figure of 2.6% of residents related to those on work related benefits, and that the proportion was higher including those on out of work benefits. He noted that the South East rate was higher than the rest of the country and that Maidstone's rate was around the middle of the South East. The Committee requested that this data be provided in order to inform its review.

In response to a question, Ms Robson advised the Committee that the number of NEETs was high in comparison to other age brackets in the Borough. Furthermore, Members noted an increase in the number of young people leaving school without basic literacy and numeracy, and felt that this also needed to be addressed in the Borough. It was also highlighted that the number of NEETs may be higher than recorded as they may not have signed on and were possibly being support by their parents.

The Committee considered different methods to obtaining information regarding NEETs and agreed that the Committee should informally chat to local unemployed young people to identify their barriers to employment. Members requested that Ms Robson provide a list of possible organisations that could facilitate these conversations. Ms Robson advised the Committee that an important piece of work was required on how to intervene with those that were long term unemployed and were likely to remain that way. She highlighted these were the hard to reach groups as they typically did not take part in those organised activities of training. She considered that it may be possible to identify these groups from as early on as birth.

The Committee thanked the witnesses for an informative presentation.

Resolved: That

- a) Ms Robson provide a list of possible organisations for the Committee to visit as part of its review;
- b) The Committee be involved in the identification of both best practice and gaps in training and skills provision;
- c) The data including people on out of work benefit be circulated to the Committee to inform its review; and
- d) Ms Robson provide a list of possible organisations that could facilitate informal chats with young people seeking employment.

92. Future Work Programme

The Committee felt that they could make an important contribution in reviewing Skills and Employment Training. The Overview and Scrutiny

Officer circulated a draft scope for the review, attached at Appendix A, and the Committee agreed to respond with its comments by email in order that the review may commence at its meeting on 31 January 2012. Furthermore, the Committee was informed that a draft interim traffic congestion report would be provided at its meeting in January, and Members requested that Sail and Ride be considered as part of this. A Member highlighted a recent article in the Downs Mail had mentioned this opportunity.

Members noted that a short review of the visitor economy was also scheduled for its meeting on 31 January. An update on museum artefacts was considered by the Committee and Members noted that the Museum Manager had suggested that the requested independent visits of the Museum and the Visitor Information Centre, to inform its review of the visitor economy, take place from December 2012, as 90% of the new wing would be available to visit.

Resolved: That

- a) Members respond with comments on the draft Skills and Employment Training Review scope; and
- b) Sail and Ride be investigated with regard to the traffic congestion review.

93. Duration of the Meeting

6.30pm to 8.33pm.

**Maidstone Borough Council
Regeneration and Economic Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Traffic Congestion Review**

22 November 2011

Graham Tanner - BA Hons, MSc

Sustainable Transport Team Leader, KCC Highways and Transportation

My role...

- Facilitating, empowering and championing sustainable travel choices by individuals and communities across Kent
- Developing and supporting projects and initiatives that contribute to Cutting carbon and Supporting economic growth – twin emphasis of the Government's Local Sustainable Transport Fund
- Not mutually exclusive objectives
- Working with politicians, businesses and local communities to develop an understanding that together 'we' are all part of the problem but also part of the solution

Sustainable Travel Choices and Congestion...

- There is always more that we could and should be doing to expedite the flow of existing traffic; however we cannot simply build our way out of trouble.

Four million more cars will be on the roads in the next 25 years, according to a recent report by the RAC Foundation.

- Need to address attitudes and behaviour too.....very complex area because it involves dealing with people not 'traffic' and people can't always be relied upon to make rational and objective decisions
- Small shifts in behaviour can have a big impact collectively
- People will generally follow a credible lead – there is more that the public sector could and should be doing to provide this

Emphasis on partnership...

- KCC cannot effectively cover the whole county from County Hall
- Therefore we are very dependant on building partnerships at the local level i.e. District Councils, NHS, local employers, schools etc
- We need to look beyond 'congestion' in respect of sustainable travel choices and recognise it as a 'golden thread' through policies on local economic development, health and physical activity, air quality etc
- Maidstone is a good example where all the key building blocks are in place e.g. Town Centre Management, Borough Council, KCC, Hospital, police, schools and local employers

Sustainable Travel Toolkit...

- Public transport
- Zipcar
- Kentjourneyshare.com
- Skeletal cycle network
- School Travel Plans
- Workplace Travel Plans

Workplace Travel Plans...

- Travel Plans routinely secured through the planning process as part of Planning Condition or S106
- Circa. 38 planning related Travel Plans (list available)
- 8 organisations engaged (to varying degrees) on a voluntary basis
- Historically seen as very much a KCC 'highways' issue and 'planning red tape' – link not made to always made to other MBC priority areas
- Disconnect between development planning process and end user
- Follow up and enforcement creates quite an adversarial situation when mutual support and co-operation is key
- Ultimate sanction is not really there, too much of a grey area
- KCC looking to revise guidance on Travel Plans to provide clearer guidelines and expectations and potentially to rationalise the approach based on a more qualitative assessment of need

School Travel Plans...

- Excellent progress as part of Government funded Travel to School Initiative (2004/5-2010/11)
- Virtually all Maidstone schools have a school Travel Plan which is available on the KCC website
- Compares to circa. 95% of schools across the county
- Previously 5.5 FTEs engaged with schools across the county
- String of supporting initiatives e.g. walking bus, WOW, Walking Bug and Freedom Pass
- Now 1 FTE – therefore less 1-2-1 time and more targeted initiatives
- Realistically - some momentum may be lost unless schools can be re-engaged as part of a locally led partnership

New Ways 2 Work

- Building a collaborative, voluntary partnership (backed up by the planning system)
- Inspired by Cambridgeshire Travel for Work Partnership www.tfw.org.uk
- Involving the public transport operators and service providers
- Incentivising membership
- MBC are an inaugural member

- Umbrella brand for local interpretation and implementation
- Important to have a county wide consistent approach because of the amount of inter-urban movement

Examples of good practice

- Sustainable Travel Towns – Peterborough, Darlington
- Cycle Towns

Tranche 1 (2005)

- Aylesbury, Brighton and Hove, Darlington, Derby, Exeter and Lancaster with Morecambe

Tranche 2 (2009)

- Blackpool, Bristol (cycling city), Cambridge, Chester, Colchester, Leighton Buzzard with Linslade, Shrewsbury, Southend, Southport, Stoke-on-Trent, Woking and York

Recommendations...

- Start with our own organisations – lead from the front – Pied Piper effect
- Embed sustainable travel within our own business operations
- Identify one or two high profile interventions and work with the media
- Build a core public / private sector partnership with clear and deliverable goals and objectives
- Provide a clearer set of expectations for Developers and town centre employers – help them to see how they are contributing to the big picture