

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 7 APRIL
2009**

PRESENT: Councillors Mrs Stockell (Chairman), Bradshaw, Hotson, Marshall, Mrs Marshall, Mortimer, Parr and F Wilson.

APOLOGIES: Councillor Ash.

116. Web-Casting

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

117. Notification of Substitute Members

There were no substitute Members.

118. Notification of Visiting Members

There were no visiting Members.

119. Disclosures by Members and Officers

There were no disclosures.

120. Exempt Items

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

121. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2009 be agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

122. Cabinet Member for Corporate Services: Progress During 2008/09

The Chairman informed the Committee that Councillor Ash had sent his apologies and therefore was unable to present item 7 of the agenda. The Committee was informed that the Head of Business Improvement, Alasdair Robertson, would present the information with regard to the Asset Management Update.

Mr Robertson informed the Committee that the update provided some information requested at the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 February 2009. An account of the cost of each asset individually was not possible as the system employed by the Council recorded asset cost on a service basis. The provision of costs on an asset basis would require reconfiguration of all budgets which would be

particularly time consuming. The Committee was informed that a targeted approach would be more effective, whereby a small number of assets that had the potential to be used more efficiently would be investigated. Mr Robertson informed the Committee that Parish Councils had been written to asking whether they knew of any unused plots of land. Known plots of land would be plotted on the Geographic Information System (GIS) in batches. The Committee requested that an update on this process be received in three months time.

Mr Robertson stated that a comprehensive list of individual land holdings was available, however due to its large size a hard copy had not been produced. The Committee was informed that an electronic copy of the information was available at Members' request.

In response to a question Mr Robertson informed the Committee that the decision to sell assets required approval by the appropriate Cabinet Member and the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee could be involved in the decision making process if appropriate. A Councillor requested the Committee be involved in the process of identifying assets for which serious consideration should be given as to whether disposal of the asset may be more profitable. Plots of land were considered for disposal on the basis of area, proximity to adjacent plots and current usage. The Committee recommended that a specific meeting be held at which the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider potential assets for disposal.

Resolved: That:

- a) The Committee hold a special meeting in order to discuss potential assets for disposal.
- b) The Committee be updated in 3 months time as to the progress of data having been plotted using the GIS.

123. Leader of the Council: Progress During 2008/09

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Chris Garland identified that economic prosperity had been his administration's main priority during the municipal year 2008/09. Most recently 5 architects had been selected from the Royal Institute of British Architects, one of which was to be selected to deliver the planned regeneration of the High Street.

Councillor Garland informed the Committee of a number of achievements that had been made during 2008/09:

- Agreement with Kent County Council (KCC) to build at least one skills studio (at Senacre Community Hall) which would provide 14 – 19 year olds with the opportunity of developing vocational skills. Negotiations were taking place for the agreement to develop a second skills studio at Park Wood;
- The development of the Sustainable Community Strategy, which was now undergoing the final stage of public consultation, had been facilitated by the use of workshops held for the Local Strategic

Partnership (LSP). The Chair of the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce and a representative of the Federation of Small Businesses agreed to attend the LSP board regularly;

- 600 new affordable household had been developed and the number of people living in bed and breakfast accommodation had reduced. Funding had been undertaken on a unit by unit basis and in partnership with a range of registered social landlords;
- The Council had been selected as one of twelve Local Councils to receive support from the Energy Saving Trust which would help to facilitate carbon reduction within the Council and the borough;
- Despite the recession the Council had continued to provide front line services. Although the delivery of recycling bins to all residents within the borough had been delayed in light of the recession, the services would continue to be provided;
- Although changes to the Park and Ride services within the borough have been controversial, they ensured that the services remained viable at all three locations; and
- £2 million of Heritage Lottery funding had been secured each for Mote Park and the Maidstone Museum. Although this would also require significant funding by the Council, this was a substantial opportunity. The Leader informed the Committee that no further applications would be made for Heritage Lottery Funding, until further notice was given.

The Committee congratulated Councillor Garland on the work of his administration.

In response to a question with regard to the development of Upper Stone Street, Councillor Garland accepted that development of the area had been a concern for a number of years, however funding from KCC had been secured and so some progress should have been made. It was requested that the group which had previously met in order to discuss development of the area should reform.

The Committee was informed by the Leader that Councillors Malcolm Robertson and Mark Wooding, despite attempts to lobby rail service providers, had had little progress in encouraging improvements in the provision of rail services between Maidstone and London. However lobbying was the only power that the Council had with regard to this matter.

A Member raised concern that the success of the lottery bid for Mote Park could result in the neglect of other parks within the Borough.

The Committee raised concerns with regard to the perceived fear of rejecting planning applications made for gypsy sites. Councillor Garland clarified that only 35 pitches must be allocated for gypsy use every ten years, as opposed to every five years as originally believed. A Councillor suggested that the onus to find appropriate land for gypsy sites should fall onto all of the Councillors as opposed to simply officers.

The Committee requested further information with regard to the provision of skills that had been considered to be necessary within the Borough. Additionally, the Committee wished to have details of the number of jobs that had been provided within the Borough during 2008/09, the type of employment that the administration wished to provide in the future, and how it would be provided.

Resolved: That:

The Committee be provided with further information regarding:

- a) Any progress in the development of Upper Stone Street since the allocation of funding by KCC;
- b) The possibility of reactivating the group that used to meet half yearly with regard to Upper Stone Street;
- c) The number of jobs that had been created within the borough during the financial year of 2008/09;
- d) The details of the skills that local people had wanted to be developed;
- e) The type of employment opportunities that would accompany growth point developments; and
- f) How these employment opportunities would be provided.

124. Draft Strategic Plan 2009-12.

The Leader introduced the Draft Strategic Plan 2009-12 to the Committee stating that it concentrated on economic prosperity and addressing the credit crunch. The Policy and Performance Manager, Miss Georgia Hawkes informed the Committee that the final draft of the Strategic Plan would go to Cabinet then Council for decision, in April.

Miss Hawkes informed the Committee that following the all Member Overview and Scrutiny workshop in September 2008 it had been decided that a full colour version of the Strategic Plan would be available electronically. A summary document, in the form of a leaflet, would be produced for distribution to members of the public. Finally, a technical document would be available to Members and Officers which outlined the key objectives of the Council, the next steps and the key performance indicators (KPIs). The KPIs had been selected to enable the measurement of objectives as opposed to actions, as had been the case previously. The Strategic Plan had been subject to extensive consultation online and with parishes and partners. 200 responses from the general public had also been received during a week of consultation in the Gateway.

Miss Hawkes informed the Committee that a number of amendments had been made to the plan. The printers had been informed of these changes which would be made prior to the plan being presented to Council.

Members congratulated Miss Hawkes on the development of the Strategic Plan and expressed their approval of the design used. The Committee

was particularly pleased with the relevance of the KPIs which had been selected to measure performance of the Key Objectives.

The Committee discussed the example leaflets that had been provided, indicating that a simple design was preferred. It was agreed that the summary document should follow the design of the summary of the Broxbourne Borough Council Corporate Plan 2008 – 11.

Resolved: That:

- a) the Strategic Plan 2009-12 be recommended to Cabinet.
- b) the Policy and Performance Manager be thanked for her work in bringing the plan together and producing an improved document; and
- c) that a summary leaflet be produced similar to the style of the Broxbourne Borough Council Corporate Plan 2008 – 11 summary (attached at appendix A).

124. Draft Whole Council Elections Report

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer introduced the draft Whole Council Elections Report to the Committee, outlining the research involved and highlighting that the report included the advantages and disadvantages of both whole and partial council elections, as requested by the Committee. It was recommended that Council review the report and make a decision as to whether or not to go out to consultation on implementing whole council elections.

A Councillor commented on the importance of recommendation two, in light of evidence which suggested that an amendment to the frequency of elections may not be the most appropriate method of encouraging sustainable increase in voter turnout. The Committee requested that the first sentence of paragraph 10.8 be reworded as its current mention of 'storage costs' was misleading.

The Committee agreed the recommendations and recommended that the report be taken to full Council.

Resolved: That, subject the above amendment of paragraph 10.8, the report and recommendations be agreed and be taken to the next full council meeting.

125. Consultation Process

The Overview and Scrutiny and Policy Manager, Angela Woodhouse, identified that the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee had, in December, requested a review of the ways in which the Council dealt with and responded to consultation. This should enable the Scrutiny

Committees to be involved in consultation which they deemed to be of relevance. The devised process included three different types of consultation:

1. A document that sought comments on proposals that would have implications for the Council's Budget and Policy Framework or was of major strategic importance.
2. A document that sought comments on proposals that would have implications for specified Council services, or have resource implications for specified services.
3. A document that sought factual information on Council Services or was a Freedom of Information Request.

The Committee stated its general approval of the consultation process. A Councillor questioned whether consultation by Parliamentary Select Committees fell within this process. Mrs Woodhouse informed the Committee that the Best Value Review Officer was aware of a website which detailed many different types of national consultation and that this site was to be checked frequently. Finally a Councillor stated that the new process should not discourage backbenchers from actively being involved in the consultation process.

Resolved: That the proposed consultation process be approved and recommended to Cabinet.

126. Constitutional Changes

The Overview and Scrutiny and Policy Manager, Angela Woodhouse, informed the Committee that the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health (LGPIH) Act 2007 made provision for any Member to put an item forward for the Overview and Scrutiny agenda, in addition to making representation that would detail why the matter should be considered. The Committee was notified that recommendations were subject to section 21A of the Local Government Act which outlined issues which may not be put forward as an agenda item. A request to add an item to the agenda was conditional however, on the basis that the Member first sought to address the issue by consulting with external organisations within the local area, such as the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP). Appendix A of the report detailed the constitutional changes which would be necessary to ensure the constitution reflected this legislation.

Mrs Woodhouse stated that the LGPIH Act gave provision for Ward Councillors to be given delegated powers to perform executive functions in their wards. As a result an amendment to the details of the call-in procedure was required to include a Councillor with delegated executive authority.

Thirdly, the Committee was referred to Appendices C and D of the report, which detailed amendments required as a result of the Police and Justice Act 2006. This legislation provided the Council with increased powers to scrutinise the CDRP. The Committee was notified that the External

Overview and Scrutiny Committee would take on the function of the Crime and Disorder Committee. Finally the Committee was informed of the Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) protocol which was proposed as an addition to reflect the new legislation. Mrs Woodhouse proposed several amendments to the report to reflect the request of the Head of Legal Services that when sifting a CCfA the Overview and Scrutiny Chairman in consultation with the proper officer must have regard to whether the item is a local government matter. Paragraphs 4.2 of the CCfA protocol required an amendment to reflect this as did the first paragraph of the addition to the agenda items procedure rule.

Resolved: That the constitutional changes as amended be submitted to the Standards Committee and Full Council for approval.

127. Annual Report

The Overview and Scrutiny and Policy Manager explained that the Annual Report detailed the successes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees over the municipal year of 2008/09. The Committee requested that the section on the role of scrutiny in policy development be updated with more recent review examples. It was suggested that the Committee review the report and email any changes they considered to be necessary to the Overview and Scrutiny and Policy Manager.

Resolved:

That the Committee review the Annual Report and inform the Overview and Scrutiny and Policy Manager of any desired amendments.

125. Duration of the Meeting.

6:30 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.