

## **Maidstone Borough Council**

### **Regeneration and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Tuesday 30 June 2009**

#### **Cabinet Member for Environment: Progress for 2008-09 and Plans and Priorities for 2009-10**

**Report of:** Overview and Scrutiny Officer

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Regeneration and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for holding to account those Cabinet Members whose portfolios fall within the remit of the Committee.
- 1.2 The Cabinet Members whose portfolios relate to the Committee are the Cabinet Members for Regeneration and for Environment.
- 1.3 At its meeting on 14 April 2009, the Regeneration and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to defer progress report will therefore be considered alongside the Cabinet Member's plans and priorities for 2009-10.

#### **2. Cabinet Member for Environment**

- 2.1 The areas of the Cabinet Member for Environment's portfolio that are relevant to the Committee are as follows:
  - **Parking** – to be responsible for the development, operation and enforcement of the pay and display car parks, and on-street waiting and parking restrictions in the Borough.
  - **Public transport** – to be responsible for transportation policy including the operation of the Park and Ride service and the development of public transport initiatives; to be responsible for the Council's Concessionary Fares Scheme.
  - **Highways** – to be responsible for seeking strategic highways improvements; to oversee the delivery of the local (District) Highways functions; to be responsible for the Council's Environmental Improvement Schemes.

#### **3. Progress**

- 3.1 At the meeting of the Regeneration and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 June 2008, Members interviewed the Cabinet Member for Environment with regard to his priorities for the Municipal Year 2008/09. Members also considered

a written statement by the Cabinet Member at this meeting, which is attached at Appendix A to this report.

3.2 The relevant extract from the minutes of the 10 June meeting is below:

"The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor Mark Wooding to the meeting. Councillor Wooding informed the Committee that he advocated pre-decision scrutiny and that he intended to work closely with officers to ensure draft policy initiatives and supporting documents were supplied to the Committee as early as possible. He advised the Committee that if Members felt documents were not being received early enough to notify him of this.

#### Parking

The Committee was advised that Councillor Wooding had asked for a report on the competitiveness of pay and display car park and on street parking tariffs in comparison to other Local Authorities in Kent and other providers in the town centre, to ensure they remained financially and economically sustainable. A review of the effectiveness of parking restrictions, their control times and associated costs had also been requested although he considered that it was unlikely that changes to parking restrictions could be made within the municipal year. A Member related that the High Street Councillors had surveyed residents regarding the hours of residents' parking and considered that it was possible to implement changes within the municipal year. Councillor Wooding agreed that a separate meeting would be arranged with Councillors Beerling and English to discuss residents' parking.

#### Public Transport

Councillor Wooding introduced the Director of Change and Support Services, Mr David Edwards and the Public Transport Officer, Mr Clive Cheeseman to the Committee and advised that they would answer any queries regarding the re-tendering of park and ride and the service in general. Councillor Wooding advised the Committee that all three park and ride sites ran at a loss. A strategic assessment would be carried out to produce a strategic vision for Park and Ride, which would include both short and long term strategies. He informed the Committee that no plans existed to cut the service and that he supported the growth of park and ride and was working to identify future sites. The Committee noted that the re-tendering process for the three park and ride sites was imminent as the current contracts run out in January 2009. Mr Edwards advised the Committee that potential tenderers had been invited to a meeting and that there had been significant interest with 12 local and national companies had attended. A decision to commence the tender process would shortly be made by Councillor Wooding with the decision to appoint. Work had been conducted to investigate the current market, resident views and consider what else was being offered across the country. The Committee was assured that

the tender process would be competitive and that the quality of the service and cost would be key considerations.

Councillor Wooding advised the Committee that he would continue to work with KCC (Kent County Council) to improve Maidstone's transport links to the capital and that the findings of the Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee "Image of Maidstone" report had identified this as an issue of concern. A Member noted that they were pleased to hear that Councillor Wooding intended to utilise Councillor Robertson's experience and would discuss methods for taking this issue forward.

Councillor Wooding advised the Committee that he was committed to investing in and establishing a travel assistance scheme for the disabled and their carers within the Borough. Maidstone Borough Council would remain entitled to the grant of £444,000 towards the new National Bus Concession providing that the Council itself did not provide an additional scheme. A third party would therefore be used to provide the proposed travel assistance scheme on behalf of the Council. Mr Cheeseman advised the Committee that discussions had been held with Age Concern and Maidstone Volunteer Bureau to ensure that the new scheme would only target those in most need. It was hoped that the new scheme would be in place by August or September. A Member noted that careful consideration of the terminology used regarding the new scheme was required in order to ensure that Maidstone Borough Council did not lose out on the Government grant. Councillor Wooding advised the Committee that he was aware of this and that the terminology used would be carefully considered.

The Committee was informed that officers had been asked to look at the feasibility of the new scheme. 238 disabled residents and 111 carers had used the concessionary scheme. A number of Members were disappointed that the new scheme had not been implemented immediately. Councillor Wooding advised the Committee that they had been unable to implement the new scheme immediately as the exact number of those who were previously eligible and were now eligible for the new national bus concession was unknown but that the numbers requiring a new travel assistance scheme would be determined in the coming weeks. In response to a question, Councillor Wooding advised that it would be prudent to circulate the costing of the new scheme following receipt of this information rather than provide copies of the original fully costed scheme mentioned in their campaign literature as the costs of the scheme had changed. Councillor Wooding advised that the implementation of the new scheme required a secure system, noting that it would be managed by a third party and therefore required proper administrative and operational assessment prior to the allocated money being distributed. A Member commented that the number of disabled people in the Borough did not fluctuate as it was a criteria set by Central Government, and therefore queried why the existing

numbers could not be used to predict the cost of implementing the scheme. Councillor Wooding acknowledged that the numbers in reality should not be that different.

The announcement from KCC regarding the Kent wide extension to the National Bus Pass starting time from 9.30 to 9.00 a.m. was raised as an issue of great concern. Mr Cheeseman advised the Committee that KCC had not consulted with Maidstone Borough Council prior to their announcement and that he was apprehensive with the figures KCC had based their funding on. The Leader of the Council, Councillor Chris Garland advised the Committee that he had received an email from the Leader of KCC, Councillor Paul Carter confirming that KCC would indemnify Maidstone Borough Council of extra costs. However, in response to a question, Mr Cheeseman noted that technology did not exist to indicate how many additional journeys took place as a result of the earlier start time of 9.00 a.m.

#### Highways

Councillor Wooding informed the Committee that he was concerned with the issue of safety on the roads as the amount of time and resources dedicated to addressing this was falling and that he was committed to establishing a safety plan for the Borough.

A number of Members felt that the priorities set by Councillor Wooding were not ambitious and that they would like to see the vision revisited at a later date."

#### **4. Plans and Priorities**

- 4.1 The Cabinet Member for Environment will present his plans and priorities for the 2009/10 municipal year to the Committee. This will enable the Committee to monitor the progress of the Cabinet Member through the year.

#### **5. Recommendation**

- 5.1 Members are recommended to consider the statement made by the Cabinet Member for Environment in June 2008 and ask questions with regard to the progress that has been made on those issues highlighted as priorities.
- 5.2 The areas of the Cabinet Member for Environment's portfolio that are relevant to the Committee are outlined at section 2.1. Members are also recommended to consider these, and ask questions of the Cabinet Member for Environment with regard to his plans and priorities for the year for these areas.
- 5.3 Furthermore, Members are recommended to make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Environment with regard to his plans and priorities for the year.

5.4 Members are reminded that "Quality Recommendations" are those that adhere to the following categories:

- Recommendations that affect and make a difference to local people;
- Recommendations that result in a change in policy that improves services;
- Recommendations that identify savings and maintain/improve service quality; or
- Recommendations that objectively identify a solution.