

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 12
JUNE 2012**

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Gooch (Chairman)
Councillors Burton, Yates, English, Mrs Gibson,
Mrs Grigg, Hogg and Pickett

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

It was resolved that all items be webcast.

12. Apologies.

Apologies were received from Councillor Mrs Stockell.

13. Notification of Substitute Members.

Councillor Burton substituted for Councillor Mrs Stockell.

14. Notification of Visiting Members.

Councillor Vizzard attended as a Visiting Member with an interest in item 8 on the agenda, Asset Management Plan – 2012-15.

15. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

Councillors Moss and Yates declared an interest in item 8, Asset Management Plan – 2012-15 by virtue of their roles as trustee of Maidstone Leisure Centre and involvement with the Friends of Mote Park respectively.

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

It was agreed that all items be taken in public as proposed.

17. Minutes of the Meeting held on 22 May 2012.

It was resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2012 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting and duly signed.

18. Asset Management Plan 2012-15.

The Chairman welcomed David Tibbit, Property and Procurement Manager and Councillor Eric Hotson, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services to the

meeting. Mr Tibbit introduced the Asset Management Plan 2012-15, an update on the Plan published in 2010. He explained that it set out how the Council would manage its property for the next three years. Its focus was to build on recent investment. The key actions of the Asset Management Plan were:

- Maidstone House – Letting the vacant 1st floor area, improving energy consumption and implementing closer control of environmental conditions;
- Town Hall – Letting the vacant entrance foyer, increasing the usage of the remaining areas and carrying out external redecoration and repairs;
- King Street multi-storey car park – Securing a short term tenant and establishing a plan for the longer term future of the site;
- Chillington House – Relocating residual functions to the Museum and progressing a subsequent freehold or leasehold disposal of the building;
- Park Wood Industrial Estate – Implementation of a proactive management plan; and
- Community Assets – Transfer of Beechwood Hall, Fant Hall and Heather House to local community groups and exploration of the opportunity of further asset transfers.

The Officer highlighted two recent amendments to the document. The first was the date of the lease break clause for Maidstone House. This had been amended from 2015 to October 2016 (page 18, 6.3.7) and the second was a change to the wording which referenced 'the integrated parking strategy.' This now read 'an integrated parking strategy (page 21, 6.8.1). Members felt that the ambiguity of the reference to the implementation of an integrated parking strategy which was still under development was conflicting with the detail given later in the document (page 26, 8.3) on regeneration which referenced car parks.

The Committee considered the Council's empty properties: the future use of the Town Hall and the decision to relocate the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) to the Museum and King Street Car Park. The Cabinet Member explained that the Town Hall would be utilised as part of Jubilee Square and Officers were tasked with increasing its usage. The decision to move the TIC was a staffing issue. With regards to King Street Car Park, Members were informed that this matter was being considered. It would cost a significant amount to ensure safety standards were met to keep the car park in use but it did provide the Council with an income. Agents were engaged to let the empty shop premises and it was advertised nationally. Associated issues highlighted to the Committee was the cost of business rates to the Council when a property remained empty and the depressed property market which could prevent the Council disposing of properties that no longer had a revenue use to the authority.

Members were happy that possibilities were being explored with regards to King Street car park but felt that a definite process should be defined within the plan for dealing with empty properties and this should include

larger sites of amenity land and that a specific reference is made with regard to the current outlook and options for King Street Car Park.

The Committee considered the Council's role as a developer and opportunities for site assembly to increase land ownership and create opportunities for redevelopment. Members were informed that the Council had land to utilise but lacked capital injection at present. Members felt that the Council had an important role to play in shaping Maidstone and cited its involvement in Fremlin Walk as evidence of this. It was felt that the Council's role in development activities should be clearly defined in the Asset Management Plan.

Members recommended a few minor changes to the document for accuracy and ease of reading:

- That the reference to the Housing Trust was amended to read 'Golding Homes';
- That the table on page 31 of the plan (10.7) was amended to include a key to explain the ratings used; and
- That the document's appendices include a diagram that illustrates the Asset Management Plan's links to other Council strategies.

It was also felt that it would be beneficial to have a map available of the Council's assets. The Cabinet Member agreed to investigate the plausibility of this task with the Geographical Information Systems team (GIS).

It was resolved that:

- a) The Cabinet Member consider and define the process for dealing with empty properties and larger sites of amenity land;
- b) The following amendments are made to the Asset Management Plan as agreed:
 - The reference to the Housing Trust is amended to read 'Golding Homes';
 - The table on page 31 of the plan (10.7) is amended to include a key to explain the ratings used; and
 - The document's appendices include a diagram that illustrates the Asset Management Plan's links to other Council strategies.
- c) The Asset Management Plan clarifies and confirms that Maidstone Borough Council is willing and able to act as a developer where this furthers its strategic objectives and the aims of the Asset Management Plan; and
- d) There is clarification within the plan on the apparent conflict between what is written at 6.8.1, bullet point two, (The implementation of an integrated parking strategy, in conjunction with the Local Development Framework, that considers Town Centre Car parks and on-street parking, the Park and Ride service, the associated revenue costs, car park income and congestion relief and carbon dioxide reduction) and 8.3 which details key areas for regeneration including car parks.

19. Capital Programme Review

The Committee considered the scope for its review topic 'The Capital Programme'. It was agreed that the methodology for deciding the Capital Programme should be the starting point of the review as a means of evaluating the process.

The Committee considered the Council's assets and the acquisition of land and property and it was felt that the Capital Programme should include ambitious schemes. It was therefore decided that the second area to consider was the way in which this could be funded in the future. Members discussed types of borrowing and other innovative ways of working with the Council's finance and assets.

It was agreed that initial research should be undertaken on best practice at other local authorities. The Chief Executive, the Leader and the Head of Finance and Customer Services were identified as key witnesses for a first meeting.

The Committee appointed Councillors Moss, English, Grigg, Yates, Gibson and Gooch as members of the Working Group.

It was resolved that:

- a) The Scrutiny Officer prepare the draft scoping document and circulate it to members of the Working Group; and
- b) A meeting be arranged by the Scrutiny Officer with the Chief Executive, the Leader and the Head of Finance and Customer Services.

20. Future Work Programme and Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The Committee considered its future work programme and the provisional agenda items for its next meeting on 7 August 2012. It was agreed that all items should remain on the agenda for the next meeting. The Chairman brought to the Committee's attention a recommendation made by the Standards Committee regarding a review into Codes of Conduct. It was noted that this would be the responsibility of the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to undertake.

It was resolved that the following items should be the focus of the August meeting:

- Interview with the Leader and Cabinet (individual updates on the strategic direction for the Council for each portfolio holder);
- Annual Performance Plan;
- Quarter 4 Complaints Report ; and
- Annual Complaints Report.

21. Duration of Meeting

6.30 p.m. to 8.40 p.m.