

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 7
AUGUST 2012**

PRESENT: Councillors Black, English, Mrs Grigg, Gooch (Chairman), Hogg, Pickett, Moss, Mrs Stockell and Yates.

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

It was resolved that all items be webcast.

23. Apologies.

Apologies were received from Councillor Mrs Gibson.

24. Notification of Substitute Members.

Councillor Black substituted for Councillor Mrs Gibson.

25. Notification of Visiting Members.

Councillors Mrs Ring, Wilson, Greer and Paine were noted as a Visiting Members. The Cabinet were present as witnesses for item 9 on the agenda, Cabinet Priorities for the 2012-13 Municipal Year.

26. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

There were no disclosures.

27. 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.

28. Minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2012.

It was resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2012 be agreed as a correct record of the meeting and duly signed.

29. Annual Performance Plan

Following an overview of the report from the Scrutiny and Policy Officer the Assistant Director of Environment & Regulatory Services responded to questions on the Annual Performance Plan and the poor performance of the Park and Ride Service. He explained that a detailed audit was to be

undertaken on the service which would provide a better understanding of the business and enable a more robust approach. He informed the Committee that a report to the Cabinet Member would detail proposals to realign the buses services offered to the customer need. It would also address the necessity to create a more attractive customer experience.

The issue of the Park and Ride being a subsidised service was discussed and the Sittingbourne Road site was highlighted by Members as an area where costs could be reduced. The officer agreed that this was an issue but explained that there is two and a half years left to run on the present agreement.

In relation to the performance indicator INT00, 'Percentage of the borough covered by broadband,' the Committee requested a map of the borough showing broadband coverage in both urban and rural areas.

It was felt that the description of the indicator CDP003 'Percentage of residents participating in neighbourhood planning as a percentage of the ward population,' required review in order to make a distinct difference between Neighbourhood Action Planning and Neighbourhood Planning. It was clarified that this had already been addressed and two distinct terms would now be used; Neighbourhood Action Planning and Neighbourhood Spatial Planning.

It was resolved that:

- a) The report be noted; and
- b) The following information be provided to the Committee:
 - a map of the borough showing broadband coverage in both urban and rural areas.

30. Amendment to Order of Business

It was agreed that items 10 & 11, Review of Complaints and Review of Complaints January-March 2012 should be taken together, before item 9, Cabinet Priorities for the 2012-13 Municipal Year.

31. Review of Complaints 2011-12 & Review of Complaints January - March 2012

Following an overview of the reports from the Senior Corporate Policy Officer, Members were informed that the new complaints system was ready and training would be rolled out across the authority. In response to questions it was explained that further work would be undertaken on the correct categorisation of complaints and enquiries. The new system would enable two names to be recorded against each complaint which would give visibility to those reported by Councillors on behalf of a resident with both the Councillor's and resident's names recorded against the complaint.

The Committee considered ways in which complaints were handled. The Officer confirmed that verbal responses were followed up with a written response and that email responses contained the same written content as

a response sent by letter. The Committee emphasised the importance of good grammar in all complaints correspondence.

It was resolved that:

- a) The reports be noted; and
- b) The Head of IT be invited to the next meeting to answer the Committee's questions on the new Complaints System.

32. Cabinet Priorities for the 2012-13 Municipal Year

The Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services, Councillor John A Wilson, the Cabinet Member for the Environment, Councillor Marion Ring, the Cabinet Member for Economic and Commercial Development, Councillor Malcolm Greer and the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development, Councillor Stephen Paine, outlined their priorities for the 2012-13 Municipal Year.

Housing was an area highlighted to the Committee by the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services. Members were informed that the new Empty Homes Strategy would seek to mitigate the risks brought about by the current economic situation. Parks and Open Spaces and in particular, Mote Park, was discussed. It was explained that the Mote Park Maintenance Plan was an opportunity to continue to develop the park over the next 10 years with a focus on events and volunteering.

Members of the Committee questioned whether Parks and Open Spaces would be impacted as a result of the implementation of the Parish Services Scheme. The Cabinet Member stated that details of the Scheme had not yet been finalised. He was asked if the customer satisfaction from recent surveys could be maintained, and he explained that currently customer satisfaction in Mote Park and Cobtree Park was high.

The final area of the Cabinet Member's portfolio discussed was Community priorities. Members were informed that Domestic Abuse and Road Safety were the two main areas being addressed.

The Cabinet Member for the Environment responded to Members questions on litter and street cleansing. The Committee discussed the responsive approach taken by the Council to reports of littering or requests for grass cutting. Councillor Ring explained that the first step with all reports would be to establish if it was an area Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) was responsible for. The Committee were informed that at the end of August officers from MBC would be meeting with officers at Kent County Council (KCC) to address recouping money spent by MBC responding to areas of KCC responsibility in the borough.

The Committee offered their congratulations to George Gray and his team for the excellent service offered.

The Cabinet Member for Economic and Commercial Development informed the Committee of the successful opening of Jubilee Square which had

been put forward for a Kent Design Award. He explained that the focus was on maximising all the Councils assets, including Jubilee Square. An Events Management provider was being sought to facilitate this.

Councillor Greer spoke of the encouraging rise in visitor numbers following the extension to the museum. The Committee were informed that the new wing had received an award from Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA). The Cabinet Member discussed options for driving the Visitor Economy forward including 'borrowing to invest'.

The success of the Olympic Torch events were noted by the Committee and Members offered their congratulation to officers.

Finally the Committee heard from the Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development. He explained enormity of the decisions currently being made in relation to the Core Strategy and the importance of Member involvement.

With regards to transport issues the Cabinet Member told members that you could not discourage car use but it was important to have good bus and cycle routes in place.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was discussed and arrangements that had been made between neighbouring parishes who were coming together to improve their understanding. A Planning officer was to work with the parishes in an advisory capacity.

It was recommended that:

- a) All updates be noted; and
- b) An update on the progress of Events Management be sought from the Cabinet Member for Economic and Commercial Development.

33. Amendment to Order of Business

It was agreed that Items 12 and 13, Budget Strategy 2013-14 onwards and Capital Programme 2012-2016 should be taken together as one item.

34. Budget Strategy 2013-14 Onwards & Capital Programme 2012-2016

Following an overview of the reports from the Head of Finance and Customer Services, Members described the decisions taken by Cabinet on the Capital Programme as sensible. In response to Members questions it was explained that Cabinet would be making a decision on the schemes going forward in December. The Committee were informed that officers had been asked to come forward with proposals for the £1.3 million under spend and were separately being asked to put forward funding suggestions for the Capital Programme.

A member of the Committee raised the recommendation made in the Council as a Business Review for the appointment of a cross party Budget

Working Group. This was to enable the Committee to consider the Budget Strategy and proposals for the Capital Programme in more detail and providing a 'risk sounding board' as part of the budget making process. The recommendation was approved by Cabinet in June. The Chairman asked the Committee for nominations and Councillors Moss, Yates and English were appointed to the working group.

It was resolved that:

- a) The cross-party Budget Working Group be established; and
- b) The first meeting be arranged by the Scrutiny Officer.

35. Future Work Programme and Forward Plan of Key Decisions

The Committee considered its Future Work Programme and the Forward Plan of Key Decisions. Members were also asked to consider the recommendations made to the Committee from the (old) Standards Committee and the Corporate Governance Working Group.

The Committee resolved that the recommendation from the (old) Standards Committee to include the monitoring and evaluation of the introduction and implementation of the new ethical standards regime should be included as a topic in its future work programme.

The Committee discussed the recommendation from the Corporate Governance Review Group for a nomination from the Conservative Group for a member to be part of the Corporate Governance Review group. It was felt that a member should be selected by the Group's Leader on the basis of their expertise.

It was resolved that:

- a) The monitoring and evaluation of the introduction and implementation of the new ethical standards regime should be noted as a topic on the Committee's future work programme; and
- b) The Leader of the Conservative Group be requested to put forward a member for the Corporate Governance Review group.

36. Duration of Meeting

6.30 p.m. to 9.35 p.m.