

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE REGENERATION & ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 25 SEPTEMBER 2012**

PRESENT: Councillor Burton (Chairman)
Councillors Cuming, Vizzard, Beerling, Black, Ross,
Springett, Newton and D Mortimer

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

Resolved: That all items on the agenda be webcast.

35. Apologies.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cox and Paterson.

36. Notification of Substitute Members.

It was noted that Councillor Mortimer and Councillor Vizzard were substituting for Councillor Cox and Paterson respectively.

37. Notification of Visiting Members.

There were none.

38. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

There were no disclosures.

39. 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.

40. Minutes of the meeting held on 31 July 2012

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 31 July 2012 be approved as a correct record of the meeting subject to the amendment of minute no 31 paragraph 4 replacing site with sight.

41. Empty Homes Scoping Report

The Chairman welcomed the Head of Housing and Community Services, John Littlemore to the meeting. Mr Littlemore introduced the report to the

Committee, it was highlighted that the number of empty homes in Maidstone was below the national and South East average. Maidstone did not have a specific issue with regard to empty homes and the number of long-term empty properties have been reducing year on year. The Committee's attention was drawn to the property pictured on the original 2007 Empty Homes Strategy, the Council had taken direct action to bring the property back into use, carrying out renovation works and recouping the money spent once the property had been sold.

The Council had recently been successful in its bid for £160,000 of funding from the Homes and Community Agency to bring 10 homes back into use over the next three years. A Member queried whether the resource could be used to renovate empty homes, sell them and then recoup the money so more than 10 homes could be improved. Mr Littlemore confirmed that the money could be used in this way. It was clarified that the funding was for the capital programme and the staffing post to deliver the scheme would come from the Housing and Planning Delivery Grant.

Members questioned whether the scheme could involve partner agencies in the renovation of properties working with apprentices to ensure that young people looking for work experience and qualifications would benefit. Mr Littlemore agreed to take this forward. Members were informed that there was an empty homes hotline and the call centre took calls regarding empty properties. Members requested that the empty homes hotline be re-launched for empty property owners to encourage them to come forward for assistance from the council. This was agreed. The Committee was informed that there was now 3,500 people on the council's housing waiting list a reduction from previous years, the number of homeless had however increased in the last 12 months.

Resolved: That the principles outlined in the report are endorsed and the Cabinet Member agrees with the Committees suggestions to improve the plan including, re-launching the empty homes hotline for property owners, ensuring apprenticeships are used for property renovation within the scheme, and where possible the funding is invested in properties and recouped when they are sold.

42. Future Work Programme & Review Update from the Chairman

The Head of Change and Scrutiny informed the Committee that a meeting on Gypsy and Traveller site selection had been organised with Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 17 October. The Core Strategy and related planning documents would be presented at a special meeting on 13 November. The Committee discussed the review of the visitor economy and the recent visit to the Museum. A Member asked the review group to consider the installation of kiosks and the current review of the Town Hall during as part of the review. The recent jobs fair event held by the Council was discussed and a request was put forward to ensure that employment remained as an item on the Committee's future work programme.

Resolved: That the update on the Visitor Economy review and the future work programme be noted.

43. Duration of the Meeting

18.30 to 19.05