

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 8
JANUARY 2013**

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

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

It was resolved that all items be webcast.

60. Apologies.

Councillors Mrs Gibson and Pickett sent apologies.

61. Notification of Substitute Members.

Councillors Butler and Mrs Wilson were Substitute Members for Councillors Mrs Gibson and Pickett respectively.

62. Notification of Visiting Members.

There were no Visiting Members.

63. Disclosures by Members and Officers.

There were no disclosures of pecuniary or other significant interests.

64. 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.

65. Minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2012.

It was resolved that the minutes of the meeting on 4 November 2012 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed.

66. Complaints Report Q2 2012-2013

Ellie Kershaw, Policy and Programmes Manager and Sam Bailey, Research and Performance Officer introduced the complaints report for quarter two.

The following points were highlighted to the Committee:

- 151 stage 1 complaints had been closed during the second quarter

- 98% of these had been responded to in time which was down 1% on the previous quarter;
- No service stood out as poor performing ;
- In terms of trends waste services had 14 complaints relating to the quality and cost of waste sacks but as these were no longer being used this would not continue;
- Economic Development had 28 complaints relating to trips and falls in the newly designed high street;
- Staff conduct complaints related to the litter enforcement service. Members were advised that the litter enforcement team wore cameras enabling all instances to be fully investigated. Conduct was found to be satisfactory;
- 33% of customer complaints surveys had been returned and 39% were satisfied or very satisfied;
- The Council had received seven compliments which were now reported alongside complaints and services were being encouraged to highlight these; and
- The new complaints system was fully operational and the next quarter's report would be produced via this new system.

The Committee considered the new correspondence system for complaints. It felt that all Members would benefit from training in the logging of complaints and the capabilities of the new system.

In response to Members questions on complaints to the Economic Development team regarding the safety of the high street scheme, it was explained that the complaints were sent to the service manager and any legalities arising as a result of these would be consulted on with Legal. The Committee were informed that independent safety assessments had been carried out, all of which had found the scheme to be safe for pedestrians. Due to the number of complaints relating to King Street the Council had replaced the granite blocks in the carriageway with black tarmac to provide maximum distinction between the different heights of the carriageway and pavement.

The Committee resolved to keep a watching brief on the complaints issues relating to the high street scheme. In relation to this issue Members made the following requests for information:

- Maidstone Borough Council's Health and Safety Procedure; and
- Maidstone Borough Council's Risk Management Strategy.

It was resolved that:

- a) Member training be offered in the new correspondence system so that the system of logging Member/resident complaints can be understood from first point of contact. Training should also include the functionality of the complaints system including the facility to record both the residents and Councillors name against a single complaint and how this can be monitored;
- b) A watching brief be kept on the complaints relating to the high street scheme, adding the item to the Committee's future work

programme with the option to invite appropriate officers from Economic Development to the Committee's next meeting on complaints monitoring;

- c) The following information be provided to the Committee:
- Maidstone Borough Council's Health and Safety Procedure; and
 - Maidstone Borough Council's Risk Management Strategy.

67. Strategic Plan 2011-15, 2013-14 Refresh

Angela Woodhouse, Head of Change and Scrutiny, introduced the Strategic Plan Refresh, focused on developing and aligning the council's priorities to what mattered most for Maidstone.

The Committee were asked to consider the refreshed document which had increased its outcomes from 6 to 7 and the updated action plans for the outcomes, identifying any amendments and making recommendations as appropriate.

In response to Members questions the Chief Executive explained that the document defined the identity wanted for Maidstone. The refresh of the Strategic Plan reflected what had been achieved so far but was not proposing a fundamental change.

The Committee considered the detail of the document, suggesting the following additions and amendments to it:

- That an emphasis be placed in the description of the borough in the Leader's foreword and the body of the document that promotes Maidstone as a vibrant County Town, home to many strategic authorities including the Police and Fire Services;
- That the term direction of travel, where used in the borough, be replaced with the word objectives;
- That on page 25 of the document in addition to the following reference to *Tourism* 'As a consequence, the Council has reviewed our cultural services and tourism offer creating a new visitor economy business unit within economic development,' the following sentence be added: *The low financial priority given to Tourism would not prevent the authority from pursuing opportunities that would benefit the local economy and tourism, should they arise;*
- That further clarity was needed with the references within the document and glossary to the terms neighbourhood planning and planning for real process;
- That under local context in the document that information be included on the size of the inward economy and inward investment to compliment the information already included on public money. This should be introduced in the Leader's foreword;
- That the reference to the Marmot review should include a footnote or brief definition;
- That the reference to the Troubled Families Programme on page 18 of the document be reworded from 'we have also started to identify

families who will be worked with through the government's troubled families programme' to worked 'alongside' or 'supported'; and

- That clarification be given on the progress of issues relating to Maidstone's economy that have been addressed by the Council's priorities and strategic plan; what has been achieved so far and remaining aims and objectives. A headline section should be added to the Strategic Plan that cross references with the refreshed Economic Development Strategy. This addition to the strategic plan should include and show alignment to the relevant Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) adopted by the Locality Board since the last version of this document.

It was recommended that:

- a) An emphasis be placed in the description of the borough in the Leader's foreword and the body of the document that promotes Maidstone as a vibrant County Town, home to many strategic authorities including the Police and Fire Services;
- b) The term 'direction of travel' be replaced with the word objectives in the document;
- c) On page 25 of the document' in addition to the following reference to *Tourism* 'As a consequence, the Council has reviewed our cultural services and tourism offer creating a new visitor economy business unit within economic development,' the following sentence be added: *The low financial priority given to Tourism should not prevent the authority from pursuing opportunities that would benefit the local economy and tourism, should they arise;*
- d) Further clarity should be given to the terms neighbourhood planning and planning for real process within the document and glossary;
- e) Within the section local context in the document information be included on the size of the inward economy and inward investment to compliment the information already included on public money. This should be introduced in the Leader's foreword;
- f) The reference to the Marmot review includes a footnote or brief definition;
- g) The reference to the Troubled Families Programme on page 18 of the document be reworded from 'we have also started to identify families who will be worked with through the government's troubled families programme' to worked 'alongside' or 'supported'; and
- h) Clarification be given on the progress of issues relating to Maidstone's economy that have been addressed by the Council's priorities and strategic plan; what has been achieved so far and remaining aims and objectives. A headline section should be added to the Strategic Plan that cross references with the refreshed Economic Development Strategy. This addition to the strategic plan should include and show alignment to the relevant Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) adopted by the Locality Board since the last version of this document

68. Refresh of the Improvement Plan for 2013-16

Georgia Hawkes, Head of Business Improvement introduced the refresh of the Improvement Plan explaining that it brought together improvement work streams, ensuring work was aligned with the Council's strategic priorities and medium term financial strategy; looking ahead to work required until 2016.

The Committee considered the draft document and appendixes, making the following suggested additions or changes to the information presented within it:

- That the reference to Covalent includes a definition to explain that it is the Council's Performance Management System;
- References to 'customer centricity' be changed to 'customer centred';
- In appendix B, Priority workstreams, under Customer services delivery – Progress April-October 2012 that the first bullet point entry be changed to read 'taken action to improve customer service delivery;'
- In appendix 1, Future plans for priority services areas in Transformation and External challenge workstreams, under Integrated Transport Strategy, that a reference be included in the column entitled 'Longer Term' to the review and implementation of a Parking Strategy; and
- In appendix 1, Future plans for priority services areas in Transformation and External challenge workstreams, under Revenues and Benefits in 2013/14 column – the statement relating to empty properties be changed to Plain English.

It was recommended that:

- a) The reference to Covalent includes a definition to explain that it is the Council's Performance Management System;
- b) References to 'customer centricity' be changed to 'customer centred';
- c) In appendix B, Priority workstreams, under Customer services delivery – Progress April-October 2012 that the first bullet point entry be changed to read 'taken action to improve customer service delivery;'
- d) In appendix 1, Future plans for priority services areas in Transformation and External challenge workstreams, under Integrated Transport Strategy, that a reference be included in the column entitled 'Longer Term' to the review and implementation of a Parking Strategy; and
- e) In appendix 1, Future plans for priority services areas in Transformation and External challenge workstreams, under Revenues and Benefits in 2013/14 column – the statement relating to empty properties be changed to Plain English.

69. Amendment to Order of Business.

The Committee agreed that items 11 and 12 on the agenda, Budget Strategy 2013-14 Onwards and Budget Strategy 2013-14 Onwards – Corporate Fees & Charges Review should be taken as one item.

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70. Budget Strategy 2013-14 Onwards & Budget Strategy 2013-14 Onwards - Corporate Fees & Charges Review.

Following a presentation from the Head of Finance and Customer Services on the Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) to brief the Committee on recent changes to the strategy since August 2012 and in response to Members questions the following points were highlighted:

- Business rates would be retained locally from 2013/14, with the County Council keeping a large share and redistributing funds to local authorities' most in need;
- The retention of business rates presented a risk to the authority in terms of collection;
- The Local Council Tax Scheme (LTCS) and the overall reduction of 12.5% in funding would affect the Council and parishes;
- There would be a one year transitional grant from Government for the LTCS which would reduce the financial impact to 8.5%;
- The effect on parishes was discussed and the method for apportioning the risk across the borough and parishes was presented in Appendix A of the Budget Strategy;
- Government had announced a further Council tax freeze grant of 1% or and a referendum requirement for increases by Local Authorities of 2% and over;
- The Budget Strategy set a working assumption of 1.99% rise in Council Tax which would equate to £4.43 per annum for a Band D Council Tax payer or 37 pence per month.
- The freeze grant of £123,000 was equal to a £123,000 in Council Tax;
- Forgoing a rise in Council Tax resulted further savings having to be made;
- The Council faced increased pressures and no let up on savings in the foreseeable future; and
- With regards to the Capital programme, the prudential borrowing limit had been put up to £6 million for projects that would repay the debt borrowed and bring in a revenue stream.

It was explained Appendix A, Budget Strategy 2013/14 onwards, showed the apportionment of Local Council Tax Scheme funding for parishes. The General Purposes Group had considered the effect of proposed local Council Tax scheme on parish precepts when it set the tax base for 2013/14 (the number of taxable properties in an area expressed as a proportion of the Band D value). Work was undertaken to calculate the

Tax Base for each parish. Appendix A showed funding apportioned based on the benefit currently claimed in each area, as any loss through reductions in Council Tax income would be proportionate to that value. Members were supportive of this methodology.

The Committee expressed its appreciation for the hard work attributed to the Budget Strategy and its ongoing development.

It was recommended that the method of apportionment for Local Council Tax Scheme funding shown in Appendix A of the Budget Strategy 2013/14 be endorsed by this Committee going forward.

71. Future Work Programme

The Committee considered its future work programme; the list of forthcoming decisions and the reference and recommendation from the Audit Committee.

Members felt that the reference from the Audit Committee was unclear and it was difficult to determine the desired outcome of the recommendation made. The Committee sought the advice of the Head of Change and Scrutiny on the role of the Audit Committee. The Head of Change and Scrutiny confirmed, in response to Members questions, that whilst there was overlap between the roles of the Audit Committee and the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Audit Committee had the ability to hold Council Officers to account. The Committee felt that the recommendation required further clarification as its desired outcome was unclear and in its undertaking of this the Audit Committee should reconsider whether it should be the body responsible for acting on the recommendation made.

The Committee voted in favour of referring the recommendation back to the Audit Committee as an urgent item with one abstention to the vote.

The Committee agreed that the Procurement Strategy, the complaints monitoring report and the performance monitoring report should be the focus of its next meeting.

It was resolved that:

- a) The reference and recommendation at Appendix A be referred back to the Audit Committee as an urgent item for clarification and in order to reconsider whether the Audit Committee should be responsible for delivering the desired outcome; and
- b) The Procurement Strategy, the complaints monitoring report and the performance monitoring report should be the focus of the next meeting.

72. Duration of Meeting.

6.30 p.m. to 9.05 p.m.