

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Economic and Commercial Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 26 NOVEMBER 2013

Present: Councillors Ash, Cox, Cuming, Hogg, McLoughlin,
Naghi, Newton and Paterson (Vice Chair, in the Chair)

Also Present: Councillors Burton and Moss

48. THE COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER WHETHER ALL ITEMS ON THE AGENDA SHOULD BE WEBCAST

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be webcast.

49. APOLOGIES

It was noted that:

- Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Barned and Councillor Mrs Stockell; and
- Councillor Hogg had indicated he would be late in arriving at the meeting.

50. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor McLoughlin was substituting for Councillor Mrs Stockell.

51. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS/WITNESSES

Councillor Moss, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, attended as a witness in relation to agenda item 9.

Councillor Burton indicated his wish to speak on agenda items 8, 9 and 10.

52. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures.

53. TO CONSIDER WHETHER ANY ITEMS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

54. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 22 OCTOBER 2013

RESOLVED: That, subject to adding Cllr Moss's name to the list of apologies, the Minutes of the meeting held on 22 October 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed.

55. EVENTS REVIEW - MAIDSTONE TOURISM ASSOCIATION

The Chairman welcomed Alan Reading, Chairman of Maidstone Tourism Association (MTA), to the meeting.

The Chairman explained that the Committee had decided to look at events as a review topic as part of their work programme for 2013/14. The primary objective for the Committee was to evaluate the value of Council supported events to residents, visitors and the local economy.

Mr Reading informed the Committee that Maidstone Tourism Association was an organisation working to encourage visitors to the towns, villages and hamlets around Maidstone.

The association was formed to:

- Promote and develop the interests of tourism in Maidstone and its surrounding areas and to provide joint marketing and publicity initiatives;
- To bring together members with the aims and objectives of promoting the association;
- To encourage the development of services, facilities and amenities for visitors within the area in co-operation with other interests;
- To extend the visitor season and to spread the economic benefits of tourism;
- To increase public understanding of the social, economic and cultural impact of tourism, particularly of the contribution which it can make towards full employment, and to regional and local development;
- To encourage growth in the membership of the Maidstone Tourism Association;
- To raise the profile of the visitor economy and publicise the importance of tourism locally and regionally.

It was acknowledged that Maidstone offered a wide variety of events throughout the year. These ranged from outdoor concerts to touring theatre to food and harvest festivals.

A number of events were discussed by the Committee, including:

- The River Festival;
- The Festival of Europe;
- Maidstone Mela;
- The Maidstone Carnival;
- Civic Events such as the Civic Parade and Remembrance Sunday;
- The World Custard Pie Championships;
- Various Beer Festivals;

- Village Fetes and Fairs;
- Farmers' Markets;
- Lenham's Diamond Jubilee Celebration;
- Maidstone Arts Festival;
- Maidstone Music Festival.

The importance of events taking place at Mote Park, the town centre including those on Jubilee Square, at venues such as Leeds Castle, and those taking place in rural parts of the borough were acknowledged, and the following issues discussed by the Committee:

- The importance of marketing;
- The costs, and value, of the resources currently used to promote events, including: social media; the Visit Maidstone website; the MTA Guide and website; the Council's website and "What's On" publication;
- The possibility of using the "Maidstone Shopping Experience" as a way to promote events in the borough;
- Ensuring both rural and urban events are promoted;
- The importance of volunteers;
- Looking at ways to involve the public in event organisation;
- The positive economic effects of tourism activity in Maidstone;
- The importance of capturing all events in one place to help with the coordination, planning, promotion, marketing and diarising of events across the borough;
- The role of the local media in increasing awareness of events;
- The importance of learning lessons from other local authorities, both in the UK and further a field;
- The possibility of introducing stalls along the river, similar to those used by local artists along the Seine in Paris, as a way to increase the variety of events offered in the town centre;
- Improving communication between the council and parish councils to ensure promotion of all local events;
- Police costs, health and safety issues, and the need to hire expensive equipment were highlighted as potential barriers to future events;
- The possibility of the Council buying, rather than hiring, equipment, so that this could be hired out for future events hosted in the borough;
- Ensuring events make a positive contribution to the Council's Corporate Objectives: For Maidstone to have a growing economy; For Maidstone to be a decent place to live; and for Corporate and Customer Excellence.

To help take a number of these suggestions forward, Mr Reading suggested that the Council would benefit from having an Events Manager.

The Committee thanked Mr Reading for his input and agreed that a small task and finish group, consisting of Councillors Cox, Cumming, Newton and Paterson, should meet, prior to the Committee meeting in January 2014, to discuss the work programme for the rest of the review. It was agreed that the new Head of Commercial and Economic Development should be invited to the meeting.

In addition, and following the scoping session, a call for evidence / press release should be issued to help raise the profile of the review and to seek evidence from people who have organised events in the borough.

RESOLVED:

- a) That a small task and finish group, consisting of Councillors Cox, Cumming, Newton and Paterson, meet prior to the Committee meeting in January 2014, to discuss the work programme for the rest of the review. The new Head of Commercial and Economic Development should be invited to the meeting.
- b) That, following the scoping meeting, a call for evidence / press release should be issued to help raise the profile of the review and to seek evidence from people who have organised events in the borough.

56. LEASE FOR TOWN HALL FOYER

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Moss, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, to the meeting.

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Paul Fisher, Head of Legal Services, who was represented at the meeting by Zena Cooke, Director of Regeneration and Communities.

The Cabinet Member explained that the primary objective of the lease, relating to the Ground Floor Entrance Foyer forming part of the Town Hall, was to support the Volunteer Bureau to increase the number of volunteers registered in the borough. Between April and September 2013, 249 people had registered to volunteer at the Volunteer Bureau.

The following points, arising from the Visitor Information Centre Review 2012/13 and relating to the use of the Town Hall Foyer, had been incorporated into the lease between the Council and Voluntary Action Maidstone (VAM):

- a methodology for logging visitor numbers and enquiries would be used at the Town Hall that is consistent with that used by the Visitor Information team;
- VAM staff and volunteers based at the Town Hall would provide visitor information;
- VAM staff and volunteers based at the Town Hall would be supported by the Council's customer service advisors to provide visitor information.

A number of issues, in relation to sections of the lease, were discussed by the Committee including:

- Permitted Use
- Service Media

- Opening Hours
- Security and Keyholders
- Refurbishment
- Foyer Use
- Access Way
- Use and Nuisance
- Property Obligations

The Committee were keen to express their support for VAM in the Foyer and of the work they do, but expressed concerns in relation to the opening hours not including the weekends. Zena Cooke, Director of Regeneration and Communities, explained that consideration had been given to opening the Town Hall at weekends but regrettably, due to the costs involved, it was not possible.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the success of the volunteer bureau in increasing the number of volunteers registered by Volunteer Action Maidstone (VAM) be noted;
- b) That the draft lease for the Town Hall be noted;
- c) It was recommended that Section 6.2, of the draft lease for the Town Hall Foyer, be re-worded, and checked by Legal Services, to ensure clarity in terms of refurbishment responsibilities;
- d) It was recommended that Schedule 2 (Rights Retained), of the draft lease for the Town Hall Foyer, be reviewed, in relation to Foyer Use (2-3), to establish whether it is necessary to include a fixed number of days in terms of the landlord's right to use the property upon giving the tenant two weeks' notice;
- e) It was recommended, in view of the Town Hall being closed at weekends, that information be clearly displayed to ensure visitors are signposted to the Visitor Information Centre, at the Museum, and to further information, such as the Visit Maidstone website;
- f) That further information, concerning visitor information numbers and types of enquiry, be provided to the Committee at their next meeting (28 January 2014). In addition to details from the Visitor Information Centre (at the Museum) and the Town Hall, a breakdown of enquiries received via email, internet and telephone should be provided.

57. **FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee considered the list of forthcoming decisions and their future work programme.

It was noted that a decision in relation to the Regeneration and Economic Development Plan Consultation was unlikely to be made by Cabinet until early 2014 and that as a result the Committee's work programme would need to be updated.

The Maidstone Museums' Collections Development Policy 2013 – 2018 was discussed by the Committee and it was agreed, subject to the Chairman speaking to officers outside of the meeting, that this should be added to the future work programme, with consideration given to holding a future meeting at Maidstone Museum.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the future work programme be noted;
- b) That the Regeneration and Economic Development Plan Consultation be considered by the Committee as soon as possible in 2014;
- c) That, subject to the Chairman speaking to officers outside of the meeting, the Maidstone Museums' Collections Development Policy 2013 – 2018 be added to the future work programme, with consideration given to holding a Committee meeting at Maidstone Museum.

58. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.50 p.m.