

# **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **CABINET**

**14 OCTOBER 2009**

### **REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICES & PARTNERSHIPS**

**Report prepared by Ian Park**

#### **1. REVIEW OF COMMUNITY HALLS IN THE BOROUGH**

##### **1.1 Issue for Decision**

Cabinet is asked to consider the attached report on community halls in the borough, commissioned by the council as an initial step towards an audit of all such halls in the borough.

##### **1.2 Recommendation of the Assistant Director of Customer Services & Partnerships**

###### **1.2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:**

1.2.2 Agree that a review of community halls in the borough be undertaken, in order to establish a strategy and framework for delivering community hall provision, that achieves the objectives of a balanced budget in respect of the council's funding of community halls and an appropriate and sustainable network of good quality community facilities across the borough based on equity of provision.

1.2.3 Agree that the decision on how to close the funding gap in respect of the council's community halls be deferred until the full audit.

##### **1.3 Reasons for Recommendation**

1.3.1 The council's community halls are currently incurring a funding gap of approximately £30,000. This is likely to be brought down to £13,000 in 2010/11 once the proposed lease of Senacre Hall to Kent County Council as a skills studio is successfully concluded. Following an options report to Cabinet in February 2009 and a call-in by the External Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it was agreed that a review of community halls in the borough be carried out in order to establish the current position of community halls, their locations, lease arrangements, a snapshot of their operating financial position and examples of best practice which might be shared. The council's draft community asset transfer (CAT) process refers to the need to audit

existing community buildings and the commissioned report was also intended to provide the first step in this process and more broadly to establish a strategy and framework for delivering community hall provision. The council commissioned Action for Communities in Rural Kent (ACRK) to produce this report. The report is attached as **Appendix A**.

- 1.3.2 As recommended in the ACRK report, a full audit and review of all community halls in the borough will be carried out, with the aim of developing a set of consistent standards in respect of them, reporting to Cabinet by spring 2010. This will provide a mechanism to remodel and consolidate provision in order to achieve greater economies of scale, create potential for sustainability and establish a closer link between provision and community need. Data relating to community halls will be mapped against local populations and settlements using the council's GIS system. Information will include internal facilities and condition, geographical reach, range and breadth of activities and community support, and communities and community subsections served. This process will enable the council to make strategic decisions in respect of the management and development of its community assets and to ensure it is providing value for money.
- 1.3.3 Officers were invited to attend a meeting of the Environment and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 22 September to discuss the ACRK report. The Committee reviewed and discussed the proposals regarding the review and did not take up the offer to participate in or contribute to the proposed review.

#### 1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

It would be possible to make a decision on how to close the funding gap in respect of the council's community halls independently of a full audit and review and the development of a set of standards. However, it is considered that a more effective strategic decision can be made following an audit and review which will establish a strategy and framework for delivering community hall provision. The community asset transfer (CAT) process refers to the need to audit existing community buildings as a prerequisite of any transfer. CAT is one option to help reduce the funding gap.

#### 1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

The council has, as key priorities, creating "a place that has strong communities" and "a place with effective public services". Reviewing the services the council provides to ensure they meet the needs of local people and provide value for money is a key objective.

1.6 Risk Management

There are reputational and financial risks associated with responsibilities for the management of community halls. These include matters relating to equity of treatment, consistency of approach and financial sustainability. These will be mitigated by the report's recommendation.

1.7 Other Implications

1.7.1

1.	Financial	X
2.	Staffing	
3.	Legal	
4.	Equality Impact Needs Assessment	X
5.	Environmental/Sustainable Development	
6.	Community Safety	
7.	Human Rights Act	
8.	Procurement	
9.	Asset Management	X

1.7.2 Development of a strategy and framework within which decisions can be made regarding how to close the funding gap is proposed in this report.

1.7.3 The proposed audit and review will take into account equality issues such as accessibility.

1.7.4 The outcome of the proposed review will be incorporated into the council's asset management strategy.

**NO REPORT WILL BE ACCEPTED WITHOUT THIS BOX BEING COMPLETED**

Is this a Key Decision?      Yes                          No   

If yes, when did it appear in the Forward Plan? \_\_\_\_\_

Is this an Urgent Key Decision?      Yes                          No   

Reason for Urgency