

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL**

**10 DECEMBER 2014**

**REPORT OF THE CABINET HELD ON 8 OCTOBER 2014**

**UPDATE ON MOTIONS REFERRED TO THE CABINET BY THE COUNCIL**

The Cabinet, at its meeting held on 8 October 2014, considered three motions referred to it by the Council. The motions related to the Bedroom Tax (Spare Room Subsidy), Cycling Safety and the Gyrotory System and Over-Development of Inner Maidstone. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the action taken by the Cabinet in respect of these motions.

**Recommendation Made**

That the action taken by the Cabinet in respect of the motions referred to it by the Council relating to the Bedroom Tax (Spare Room Subsidy), Cycling Safety and the Gyrotory System and Over-Development of Inner Maidstone be noted.

**MOTION 1 – BEDROOM TAX (SPARE ROOM SUBSIDY)**

At the meeting of the Council held on 17 September 2014, the following motion was moved by Councillor Harper, seconded by Councillor English:

*The impact of Welfare Reforms around social housing tenants with the so called additional living space over a quota (the Bedroom Tax) is socially and morally divisive and unfair. It seeks to punish the poor and families with members with disabilities through withdrawing housing benefit. The impact is being felt throughout the UK and in Maidstone. Increasing numbers of families are as a result of these changes either being forced to move to smaller accommodation, often outside the community they live in, and where their social networks and support are, or are threatened with facing eviction.*

*In Maidstone at the same time there are tenants who independently want to downsize their social housing needs who are effectively being blocked by the requirement to go into a competitive bidding process for available accommodation.*

*This Council resolves to:*

- 1. Review the Housing Allocation Policy to give social housing tenants who voluntarily want to downsize accommodation priority to move to smaller accommodation, thus freeing up larger properties for families.*
- 2. Do all it can within the Council's legal powers to minimise the impact of the Bedroom Tax on families where there may be short term absences and also people with disabilities where additional bedrooms may be required due to a person's disabilities.*

3. *Actively campaign to seek a change in national legislation to repeal the Bedroom Tax.*
4. *Report back to the next Council meeting on the implementation of measures 1 - 3 above.*

The Council resolved to recommend to the Cabinet, as the decision making body, that the motion be agreed subject to the amendment of paragraph 3 as follows:

*Campaign for change to the legislation via the Local Government Association.*

### **Decision Made by the Cabinet**

That:

- (a) As a review of the Housing Allocation Policy was undertaken less than six months ago, there is no need to carry out another review. The actions taken to assist residents in downsizing to smaller accommodation are noted;
- (b) The Council will continue to do all it can within the Council's legal powers to minimise the impact of spare room subsidy on families where there may be short term absences and also people with disabilities where additional bedrooms may be required due to a person's disabilities;
- (c) The Leader of the Council will write to the Ministers of Housing and Work and Pensions setting out the facts and experiences in Maidstone arising from the spare room subsidy policy and send a copy to the LGA; and
- (d) The Leader will also provide feedback at the next full Council meeting in December under the 'Current Issues' agenda item.

### **MOTION 2 - CYCLING SAFETY AND THE GYRATORY SYSTEM**

At the meeting of the Council held on 17 September 2014, the following motion was moved by Councillor Harper, seconded by Councillor Mrs Gooch:

*The Council notes the proposal by Kent County Council to redevelop the gyratory system around the two Medway bridges; it also notes that it is proposed to remove the current cycle track over St Peters Bridge. The gyratory system in its current format is a major deterrent to the development of cycling in Maidstone. This Council requests Kent County Council to ensure that any redevelopment of the gyratory system incorporates measures to improve the safety of cycling in the town centre. A report on progress should be made to the next Council Meeting.*

The Council resolved that the motion be referred to the Cabinet, as the decision making body, for consideration.

### **Decision Made by the Cabinet**

That there is appropriate and sufficient dialogue with the Kent County Council's Highways Authority to address the issues raised in the motion relating to Cycling Safety and the Gyrotory System and it is not therefore considered that a further report is needed at this time.

### **MOTION 3 - OVER-DEVELOPMENT OF INNER MAIDSTONE**

At the meeting of the Council held on 17 September 2014, the following motion was moved by Councillor Harper, seconded by Councillor Naghi:

*Pressures for development exist all over the town and Borough of Maidstone. There are considerable concerns by residents of Fant Ward about the conversion of houses to multiple occupancy properties. The concerns relate to issues such as over density, overcrowding, lack of amenity space, problems of parking where small terraced houses are sub divided and general environmental impact.*

*At the July 2014 Council meeting Mr Elliot Dean asked a question on the over-development of Inner Maidstone and all the Council Groups agreed that this was a matter of concern.*

*The Council notes these concerns and requests that this issue be addressed in the Local Plan. For these purposes "Inner Maidstone" can be defined as East, Fant, Heath, High Street, Bridge and North Wards. Policies should be prepared to prevent or discourage conversion of housing to multiple occupancies in areas of already high population density. The Council requests that the Officers report back progress to the next meeting.*

The Council resolved that the motion be referred to the Cabinet, as the decision making body, for consideration.

### **Decision Made by the Cabinet**

That due to the existence of policies and work in progress which address the issues raised in the motion relating to Over-Development of "Inner Maidstone", there is no requirement for a further report at this time.