

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 6 DECEMBER
2011**

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Blackmore (Chairman)
Councillors Black, FitzGerald, D Mortimer, Mrs Parvin,
Paterson and Yates

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

The Committee resolved that all items on the agenda be web-cast.

101. Apologies.

Apologies were received from Councillors Ash, Field and Mrs Stockell.

102. Notification of Substitute Members.

Councillor Black substituted for Councillor Mrs Stockell.

103. Notification of Visiting Members.

There were no Visiting Members.

104. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

There were no disclosures.

105. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.

It was resolved that all items should be taken in public as proposed.

106. Minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2011

It was resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2011 should be agreed as a correct record of the meeting and duly signed by the Chairman.

107. 'Making Waste Work for Maidstone' Review

The Chairman welcomed Jim O'Connor Chief Executive and Steve Gill Director from Noah Enterprise. The meeting began with a short presentation which explained the background of the organisation. The Committee were informed that NOAH enterprise would be celebrating its

25 year anniversary having begun in 1987 with little means, providing soup and sandwiches to the homeless in Luton, Bedfordshire.

The organisation had evolved out of a need for furniture for the homeless they housed. Initially this came from donations but the surplus of furniture received provided a starting point from which the organisation had grown. Members were informed that NOAH now found accommodation for over 300 people each year. It was explained that housing was provided by private landlords (Luton had a shortage of Council housing, although the Local authority always tried to meet the need). Their successful relationship with Private Landlords was attributed to the reputation and behaviour of those they housed.

NOAH took a holistic approach to homelessness and exclusion and their welfare, advice and outreach services included:

- Day centre
- Resettlement and benefits advice
- Drug and alcohol support
- Counselling
- Hot meals
- Healthcare
- Hygiene
- Outreach support to help vulnerable people struggling to cope in their own homes

Mr O'Connor helped convey the organisations ethos and success with examples of those they had helped rehabilitate, predominantly white English men with addictions to alcoholism (70% of those who they dealt with). He described the esteem that working as part of the NOAH enterprise gave and the structure to a life that would have previously been lived in chaos. He explained that a clients two main aspirations were employment and accommodation but the barriers to this included a lack of identification and language difficulties.

It was explained that training was the key tool in breaking the cycle of no money leading to no home and helping people achieve independent living. In 2003 with a £400,000 lottery grant they established a training centre, providing accredited training courses in the following:

- Woodwork and furniture restoration
- White goods refurbishment
- Warehousing
- IT skills
- Life skills

Mr O'Connor explained that becoming a social enterprise was NOAH's way of contributing to its own sustainability as a charity. The Social Enterprise included:

- Three Luton-based retail outlets selling a variety of new and used furniture, kitchen appliances, clothing and household goods;

- Furniture and appliance restoration and repair at their two warehouse sites; and
- A second hand furniture and kitchen appliance collection and reuse service.

The Committee highlighted the possible pitfalls of a successful organisation like NOAH with the likelihood of attracting people from surrounding areas. Mr O'Connor understood their apprehension but explained that this was not a problem at present. What would alter this would be the legislative changes to Housing Benefit which would change the single room allowance age group from 25 to 35 which could impact on Luton with London as a close neighbour.

Members referenced similar organisations in Maidstone such as the Beacon Centre, explaining that they had struggled to achieve the balance between human need and sustainability and had closed after three years.

Mr O'Connor told the Committee that it was essential to be market minded in terms of price and quality and there had to be clarity in the objective set. He explained that NOAH sold everything they received but would offer support to vulnerable people. It was explained that NOAH operated a dual pricing system in their retail outlets, one price for the general public and one to those receiving benefits. NOAH paid 35 full time employees and 100 volunteers a year through the Social Enterprise. The organisation advertised their services, the Social Enterprise welfare team organised leaflet drops, and they were well known locally. People simply contacted them by telephone and a vehicle would be sent out. They used computer based logistics and took marketing information from callers.

It was established that NOAH did not 'cherry pick' when doing house clearances or collections. Members were informed that they had a constructive relationship with the local authority providing a win-win solution for both parties. The local authority took their rubbish away free of charge and NOAH prevented goods going to landfill. The team used hand held scanners and all furniture was scanned and bar-coded. The operation provided a wide range of volunteering opportunities. An individual training plan was created for each person on the programme.

Mr O'Connor told the Committee that there were great opportunities for partnership with the local authority and the key to this was the understanding and perception of the win-win. NOAH's relationship with their local authority was best demonstrated at the time their lottery grant was running out. The Leader of the Council became involved the organisation and they secured an empty council building for their use which they restored with the facilities they required and with Officers help, overcome complex planning issues. The organisation had identified the building as part of a contingency plan.

Members were informed that NOAH's ACE (Adults Facing Chronic Exclusion) programme was hugely expensive to maintain. They had won a bid to help tackle this issue. Their proposal was 1 of 12 in England considered and they would be running a pilot for the East of England.

From the outset they formed a steering group which brought partners together. All partners involved began by each naming the twenty most excluded people in Luton and found they were all dealing with the same people on a constant basis. They considered the unit cost of one individual to the local authority and all the various organisations within the public sector such as the NHS and the Police. The cost was estimated at £100,000 annually. NOAH agreed to work with the individual highlighted and the result of the joined up thinking and interconnection of the organisations was a win-win solution. Members questioned the loss rate with the welfare programme and were told people recovering would make numerous attempts before being successful and in some cases it could never happen but with the interventions provided by their outreach workers individuals who could seem beyond help would make a recovery.

Mr O'Connor spoke of the deputy Leader, Nick Clegg's Welfare to Work programme, and told Members that there were still issues to resolve as he felt the hard to reach were not being reached. He explained that NOAH had raised this with the previous government advising that it would take three years rather than 26 weeks to help a homeless person to return to sustainable employment. NOAH employed a Mentor to make progress the needed to take someone all the way to employment.

Members were interested to find out what NOAH intended to do next and were informed that the next stage would be to recycle furniture, an area they were actively exploring. Wood was currently difficult to recycle and held little commercial value. Once the way forward had been identified they would invest in this and buy the machinery required. They would also present a business case to the local authority demonstrating the win-win value.

Members questioned whether Luton had a bulky collection. They were informed that they did but what was collected was waste. Mr O'Connor's suggestion to Maidstone was to temper the service provided. NOAH expressed an interest in becoming involved as a means of capturing more product. They explained that they collected from people's homes to prevent the goods from being left outside and diminishing any future use. They explained that legal and TUPE legislation had prevented the organisation going forward with Luton Council and providing the collection service.

The Chairman introduced Jennifer Gosling, Waste Collections Manager. The Committee were interested in the monitoring exercise which had been carried out 18 months ago on the Weekend Freighter Service. Ms Gosling explained that the waste team were looking for new opportunities and ways to deliver the Bulky Collection and would be monitoring the service in the near future. She estimated that 33% of the waste was reusable furniture. She told Members that they had begun monitoring the usage of the Freighter Service again over the past two weeks. The Committee were informed that the Freighter had visited two sites in Parkwood and no visitors were recorded and the site in Tovil had only one visitor but were in close proximity to the Household Recycling Centre The sites in Marden and Staplehurst were reported to have had less than 10 visitors each and

the only site that had up to 20 visitors was Loose. With reference to the sites in Parkwood, Members made the Officer aware of a collection service offered by Golding Homes that could have affected this. The Committee resolved that the possibility of a tandem service being provided should be investigated and reported back to the Committee.

Ms Gosling informed Members that the usage had clearly dropped since the last monitoring exercise, 18 months ago, after which the collection of garden waste had ceased and usage had fallen. General waste was still collected and there were areas in the south of the borough that were not served well by Recycling Centres. The Committee were told that there would be a Kent County Council Consultation on Household Recycling Centres and the part played by the Freighter Service would be considered. The Committee reported problems with access to the Household Recycling Tip at Tovil and suggested that a roundabout would improve the congestion problem. Ms Gosling encouraged Members to have their say via the consultation.

Members questioned how the public were informed on the service provided. They were told that the dates were published in the Downs Mail on a quarterly basis and Parish Councils also published the Freighter's Collection dates. Council were not asked about the service which suggested a lack of public interest.

Members considered whether the Freighter Service had a positive effect on fly tipping and were informed that there did use to be more reported incidents of fly tipping before the Freighter Service was offered.

Councillor Paterson, who had monitored the Freighter service on behalf of the Committee in recent weeks, reported that she saw very little reusable rubbish and much of the waste was seasonal. Members of the public she spoke to were aware of where furniture could be reused or recycled. She felt that there was a need for rubbish collection in certain circumstances where people could not dispose of it themselves. She reported to the Committee that she had observed a private vehicle that went with the Freighter collecting metal waste.

Members questioned NOAH's catchment area and the legalities involved in the operation. Mr Gill explained that various certificates were needed to collect all the various types of waste, all of which they had. He told Members that they had no hesitation in travelling further afield. Members felt that NOAH were using a good model and suggested Maidstone consider storing furniture with a view to NOAH collecting it.

Members questioned the inclusion of an arrangement for collecting Bulky Items by an organisation like NOAH in the new Waste partnership Contract. Ms Gosling confirmed that furniture reuse was something that was likely to be included and what was not reused would be recycled.

It was recommended that:

- a) Further advertising of the Freighter Service should be investigated and the usage of the service should be continued to be monitored;
- b) There should be improved communication with other organisations who may collect waste across the Borough such as Golding Homes to ensure the best use of Maidstone Borough Council's resources;
- c) A service provided by Noah Enterprise for the collection of furniture and white goods from Maidstone Borough Council's bulky collection should be investigated; and
- d) A letter should be sent by the Committee to the relevant Select Committee or Department at Kent County Council highlighting the model used by Noah Enterprise.

108. The Bigger Society in Maidstone

The Chairman introduced Ellie Kershaw, Policy and Performance Manager and Ryan O'Connell, Corporate Projects and Overview and Scrutiny Manager. The purpose of the report was to establish the Council's approach to the bigger society and outlined a pot of £100k that the communities could bid for to deliver the bigger society.

Members questioned whether the funding allocated would be match funded and questioned why this had not been made clearer in the report. Mr O'Connell explained that the report was primarily about establishing Maidstone's role as an enabler or facilitator and setting up the pot of money. As a result the report was very open and restrictions would not be put in place until people begun coming forward and informed decisions could be made. In addition to the budget allocation of £100,000, Members were informed that Officer time and expertise would be allocated to this as well as a matching website which would put different entities in touch with each other which would help signpost organisations at no extra cost to the Council. Miss Kershaw informed Members that the Bigger Society already existed where certain issues such as a local post office or library closure had resonated with a local community. A community group may begin in this way but Maidstone Borough Council would enable them to carry on past the initial project or starting point as part of the Big Society. In terms of making the public aware of the Bigger Society there would be work with business on corporate and social responsibility funds and a roadshow to engage with the community.

Members emphasised the need to balance cuts from other services when considering proposals and not just to focus on innovation. Members were informed that a business case would be asked for and an assessment would be made in relations to service gaps in the early stages of all proposals considered.

It was recommended that the Bigger Society programme should progress to Cabinet for Maidstone Borough Council to mover forward with the Bigger Society.

109. Future Work Programme and Scrutiny Officer Update

The Committee consider the Forward Plan and their Future Work Programme. Members felt that a written update from the Local Strategic Partnership on Locality Boards would be sufficient for them to consider.

The Waste Review was discussed and the draft report which the Committee would consider at their January meeting. Members resolved that they should see sight of this as early as possible.

It was resolved that:

- a) A written update should be requested on Locality Boards; and
- b) The draft Waste review report should be circulated to Members at the earliest venture.

110. Duration of Meeting

6.30 p.m. to 8.36 p.m.