

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 4 MARCH 2014

Present: Councillor Mrs Gooch (Chairman), and
Councillors Black, Butler, Mrs Grigg, Hotson,
D Mortimer, Nelson-Gracie, Mrs Parvin and Pickett

Also Present: Councillors Garland, Greer and Moss

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

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be web-cast.

109. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence.

110. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS/WITNESSES

It was noted that Councillor Greer was in attendance as a witness in relation to Agenda Item 10 – The Council as a Business Review (follow up), Councillor Garland was in attendance as a witness in relation to Agenda Item 11 – The Capital Programme Review (follow up) and Councillor Moss was in attendance as a witness in relation to all Items on the Agenda.

111. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

112. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

113. EXEMPT ITEMS

RESOLVED: That the Items on the Agenda be taken in public as proposed.

114. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 FEBRUARY 2014

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 4 February 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed.

115. REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS OCTOBER - DECEMBER 2013 (QUARTER 3)

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Policy and Communications regarding the Council's performance in dealing with complaints during October-December 2013 (Quarter 3).

The Research and Performance Officer, the Head of Planning and Development, the Mid Kent Planning Support Manager, the Parks and Leisure Services Manager and the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services were in attendance to introduce the report and respond to comments raised by the Committee.

The Research and Performance Officer introduced the report asking the Committee to note the performance, particularly in relation to the compliments received by teams and individual officers within the Council and:-

- i. The high number of complaints received by Development Management this quarter
- ii. The high number of complaints that were responded to out of time for Development Management this quarter
- iii. The high number of complaints received by Parks and Leisure this quarter
- iv. The high number of stage 2 complaints received this quarter
- v. Improvements made as a result of complaints this quarter

In response to questions raised by Members of the Committee, the Head of Planning and Development explained that the number of submitted applications is increasing and a high proportion of those submitted are major applications. Also, there are currently vacancies for a Principal Planning Officer and a Development Manager, both of which were advertised in December. There were no suitable candidates for the Development Manager role (following 2 interviews) and although they did offer the position of Principal Planning Officer it was unfortunately not accepted due to the extra travel. In the meantime, two consultants have been brought in. It was noted that the number of Freedom of Information ("FOI") requests has increased dramatically.

The Head of Planning and Development informed the Committee that, as a Department, they need to re-prioritise the importance of complaints and general customer care.

The MKIP Planning Support Manager explained that they are in the process of setting up the Planning Support Shared Service which is due to be in place from 1 June 2014. Planning Support will take the first calls across all 3 Authorities. There is a programme of work leading up to 1 June 2014 and thereafter an improvement exercise. There is a programme of extensive training with the Contact Centre and setting customer care as a priority. A number of areas will be looked at and improvements made where required and as much of the process standardised where possible.

The Committee felt very strongly that they wanted to do all they can to help the Department and that it was important to attract the right calibre of candidate and get the vacant positions filled as a matter of urgency. They felt that in order to do this the Council should offer a market supplement (as has been done in the past) to ensure the package is attractive to the best candidates. They felt this would be of great benefit to the whole Department as they will have the experience and expertise required. It was therefore felt appropriate to send a recommendation to the Chief Executive to this effect.

A Member of the Committee mentioned that another Council in Kent charges for FOI requests and the Committee felt it was prudent for this option to be investigated at Maidstone.

The Parks and Leisure Services Manager addressed the Committee explaining the detail behind the complaints received with regard to the Social Festival held in Mote Park in September 2013.

In response to questions, the Parks and Leisure Services Manager confirmed:-

- that a de-brief with the organisers was held after the meeting;
- when measuring sound, it does not take into account the base level and therefore a restriction to the base level will be put in place for future events and that sound curtains around the event would help stop the noise travelling;

RESOLVED:

- a) That the performance in relation to complaints be noted, in particular:-
 - i. The high number of complaints received by Development Management this quarter
 - ii. The high number of complaints that were responded to out of time for Development Management this quarter
 - iii. The high number of complaints received by Parks and Leisure this quarter
 - iv. The high number of stage 2 complaints received this quarter
 - v. Improvements made as a result of complaints this quarter
- b) That the compliments received by teams and individual officers within the Council be noted.
- c) That the Chief Executive be recommended to advertise for the positions of Development Manager and Principal Planning Officer offering a market supplement as a matter of urgency.
- d) That the Committee fully supports the various work programmes being undertaken for the MKIP Planning Support Shared Service and that the Customer Improvement Programme be prioritised and be

considered by this Committee at the earliest opportunity.

- e) That the Head of Policy and Communications give consideration to charging a fee for FOI requests.
- f) That the Parks and Leisure Services Manager be congratulated on the outstanding "The Social" event held in September 2013 and the Committee are pleased that action will be taken to control the base noise level for future events.

116. QUARTER 3 KPI PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Policy and Communications setting out the progress made in the third quarter of 2013/14 for the Council's key performance indicators ("KPIs").

In response to questions, the Committee were informed that:-

- the level of short term sickness was 2.5 days (as opposed to 9 days which included long term sickness);
- the new website has a lot less pages than the previous one and therefore the process is much simpler. Also there are more active pages where customers can request services and information and this has seen an increase;
- £9,000 has just been approved to pay for the website to be flexible so that it can re-configure itself to the size of screen being used;
- The number of indicators (too many or not enough?) will be considered at the workshop being held on 5 March 2014;

RESOLVED:

- a) That the out-turns of the KPIs be noted;
- b) That the following additional indicators that are unlikely to achieve the annual target (by more than 10%) be noted:
 - E&S 001 – Work experience placements delivered across the council;
 - E&S 002 – Number of employers that have engaged with NEETs;
 - HSG 005 – Number of households prevented from becoming homeless through intervention of housing advice;
 - CTC 001 – Average wait time for calls to the contact centre
 - PIT 002 – Satisfaction with complaint handling;
 - CTC 004 – Proportion of avoidable contact;
 - BIM 003abc – Percentage of customer contacts made a) in person, b) online, c) by phone;
 - BIM 004- Reduction in the number of out-going post items;
 - WCN 006 – Missed bins (per 100,000 collections); and
- c) That the review of performance indicators that will be undertaken by the Head of Policy & Communications and the Performance and

Scrutiny Officer with Overview and Scrutiny Members as part of the refreshed Strategic Plan be noted.

117. THE COUNCIL AS A BUSINESS REVIEW (FOLLOW UP)

The Committee considered the responses received to the SCRAIP regarding The Council as a Business review undertaken by the Committee previously.

The Head of Finance and Resources, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services and the Cabinet Member for Economic and Commercial Development were in attendance to respond to questions raised by the Committee.

In response to questions by Members, the Head of Finance and Resources and the Cabinet Members informed the Committee that:-

- The new Commercial and Economic Development Department is now fully staffed;
- A Festival and Events Policy is being prepared with a vision to develop a festival and event programme to make Maidstone a lively and vibrant place to live, work and visit ;
- The new Head of Commercial and Economic Development does have a large remit but the timescale of October 2014 is felt to be realistic;
- There will be an update in October, in financial terms, following the work of the Budget Working Group;
- The Town Hall is included in the draft policy to make it financially viable;
- A report is due to be published shortly regarding the re-organisation of Legal Services following it becoming part of MKIP; and
- The proposed business hub at the old Post Office premises is being re-assessed as KCC have now informed us that grants are no longer available;

The Committee raised concerns regarding the following:-

- The lack of explanation as to why Willington Street Park & Ride was not felt suitable to hold Boot Fairs on a Sunday;
- The remit of this review now falls outside of the Committee and how is it going to be monitored on overall progression

RESOLVED: That the current position be noted and:-

- a) That the Committee receive an update in financial terms in October 2014.
- b) That the Parking Services Manager provides explanatory information on why the Willington Street Park & Ride site is not to be used for boot fairs; and
- c) That the Scrutiny Co-Ordinating Committee be requested to consider which Overview & Scrutiny Committee should follow up the Council as a Business? Review SCRAIP responses.

118. THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME REVIEW (FOLLOW UP)

The Committee considered the responses to the SCRAIP with regard to the Capital Programme Review previously undertaken by the Committee.

The Head of Finance and Resources, the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services were in attendance to respond to questions raised by the Committee.

The Head of Finance and Resources thanked the Committee for their immensely helpful support over the last year on the budget strategy and that he hoped a similar level of engagement would be possible for the coming year.

The Leader of the Council stated that the capital programme is there to deliver the objectives of the Council, which is robust and the Infrastructure Delivery Plan has to be put in place.

The Chairman stated that the Committee recognised how helpful it was to be involved through the Budget Working Party this year. However, as the membership of the Committee for 2014/15 will not be agreed until the Annual Council Meeting in June, it was difficult for this Committee to make a commitment before then.

It was suggested that at the first meeting of the Committee in the new Municipal Year a proposal is put forward for them to take part in the Budget Scrutiny with options on a programme of work in consultation with the Head of Finance and Resources.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the current position with regard to the recommendations of the Capital Programme Review be noted; and
- b) That a proposal regarding Budget Scrutiny, with options of a work programme, be brought to the June 2014 meeting for consideration.

119. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the future work programme.

The Chairman was grateful to the MKIP Programme Manager for the explanatory email sent to all Members of the Committee regarding the current position in relation to the MKIP Governance Review and proposed that Maidstone hold their own meeting to consider this before meeting with the Scrutiny Committees of Tunbridge Wells and Swale.

A Member raised the issue of the future of Maidstone House and concern was expressed at the lack of progress. It was proposed that the Director of Environment and Shared Services be invited to attend the meeting of the Committee in May to update them on the current situation.

RESOLVED:

- a) That a separate Meeting of the Committee be arranged for w/c 7 or 14 April 2014 at 10am to consider the MKIP Governance Review and that the MKIP Programme Manager be invited to attend.
- b) That the Director of Environment and Shared Services be invited to attend the Meeting on 6 May 2014 to update the Committee on the progress of the future of Maidstone House.

120. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.52 p.m.