

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Economic and Commercial Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 25 FEBRUARY 2014

Present: Councillor Paterson (Vice-Chairman in the Chair),
and Councillors Ash, Butler, Cuming, Hogg, Mrs Joy,
Naghi, Newton and Paterson.

Also Present: Councillor Vizzard

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

RESOLVED: That all items should be webcast.

70. APOLOGIES

It was noted that apologies were received from Councillors Cox and Stockell.

Apologies were also received from Luke Bendall of The Social Festival and Karen Franek, Principal Economic Development Officer.

71. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Butler was substituting for Councillor Stockell.
Councillor Joy was substituting for Councillor Cox.

72. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS/WITNESSES

Councillor Vizzard was in attendance as a visiting member.

73. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures.

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

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

75. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28TH JANUARY 2014

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the meeting of 28th January 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to the

following changes:

- The removal of the bullet point discussing 'sweating the assets'; and
- Further clarification of roles and responsibilities within the Commercial and Economic Development Department, particularly around the posts that had been recruited to.

76. EVENTS REVIEW - THE SOCIAL

RESOLVED: That this item be deferred to the next meeting as Luke Bendall, of The Social Festival, was unable to attend.

77. EVENTS REVIEW - MAIDSTONE AREA ARTS PARTNERSHIP

Ken Scott, Chair of the Maidstone Area Arts Partnership, was invited to speak on item 9:- Events Review- Maidstone Area Arts Partnership.

Ken Scott explained that Maidstone Area Arts Partnership was an organisation that represented 30 different arts communities. Over 1000 artists were represented through the organisation.

Ken Scott informed the committee he felt that arts activities were important to Maidstone for the following reasons:

- They brought visitors to Maidstone;
- They contributed to quality of life, making Maidstone an attractive place for employers to locate their businesses; and
- They had positive wellbeing effects for participants, visitors and volunteers.

Ken Scott reported to the committee that his experience of working with the council regarding events in the past was that:

- There was no overall plan or strategy for events;
- Communication between departments within the council around events was not good enough; and
- Many activities and events were not thought through quick enough, and funds were not being allocated and made available in a timely manner for events to go ahead.

Ken Scott conveyed that most events in the borough were not run or supported by Maidstone Borough Council. Therefore it was important to look beyond the Council when considering events.

Ken Scott believed that there were three roles for Maidstone Borough Council in terms of events:

- Passive support;
- Providing facilities; and
- Active support.

Passive support offered by the council included:

- Visit-maidstone.com website which was a free resource available to publicise any event; and

- A leaflet produced 3 times a year, with a leaflet run of 4000, which was left in prominent locations around the town.

Ken Scott emphasised the increasing importance of this free publicity for small groups putting on events. Often their budgets were low and promotion could be a significant strain on these budgets.

Ken Scott highlighted that support provided by Maidstone Borough Council in terms of facilities included:

- The Leisure Centre- Ken Scott believed this was a high quality, well run facility and the booking process was straightforward. However it was expensive and not well suited for arts events as it was primarily a sporting venue.
- Hazlitt Theatre- Ken Scott felt that the venue was used extensively in the past, and when run by Maidstone Borough Council there was a good relationship between the theatre and groups using the theatre. However there were concerns emerging since Parkwood Theatres have taken over, particularly around ticket sales and increasing charges to small groups.
- Jubilee Square- Ken Scott gave his opinion that this was an excellent venue for outdoor events. Support from Maidstone Borough Council staff had been excellent. The Council had allowed use of the square free of charge and provided free electricity. However the event planning process, and the final legal agreement that has to be signed can be daunting, especially for small organisations.

Ken Scott emphasised that the legal agreement that had to be signed before using Jubilee Square was particularly daunting, as many of the organisations that used the square for events were unincorporated. This meant that if anything were to go wrong at an event, the organisers of the event could be held liable, potentially putting their personal assets at risk.

Ken Scott moved on to speak about events in which Maidstone Borough Council had played an active part. Examples of such events included the Mela, Proms in the Park and events around the Olympics in 2012. Ken Scott informed the committee that often decisions to back these events had taken a long time. However once decisions had been taken the Council had been very professional in their approach and very easy to work with.

Ken Scott made the following observations around the value of events to the borough:

- There were lots of small events that do not have a large impact individually, but when considered altogether they have had a significant impact;
- Including children in events had brought more people to the town centre;

- Events in Jubilee Square seemed to have brought more people into the town centre; and
- There had been lots of positive feedback from events that Maidstone Area Arts Partnership have put on in the town centre, including from those who come from outside the borough.

Ken Scott highlighted that the Impact Assessment tool for events that the Commercial and Economic Development department had proposed to use was not suitable for small events. This was due to the large amount of people that needed to be surveyed for such a tool to be accurate. Maidstone Area Arts Partnership had been working on developing a similar tool that could be used for smaller events.

Ken Scott summarised what he felt made a successful event:

- The event must be relevant to the intended audience;
- Enthusiastic promoters are critical to the success of events;
- Volunteers are important to keep costs down;
- A professional project manager- the larger the event the more important this is; and
- Good communication between Maidstone Borough Council and the event organiser.

Ken Scott highlighted the work of the Town Team, which was a good example of where Maidstone Borough Council staff had worked well with outside organisations. Ken Scott also highlighted that the Town Team was in possession of some funding to put on events which was received from Section 106 agreements.

The Committee asked Ken Scott whether he was involved in drafting the new culture and leisure strategy. Ken Scott replied that Maidstone Area Arts Partnership had agreed with Dawn Hudd, Head of Commercial and Economic Development, and Laura Case, Cultural Services Manager, to be involved in writing the strategy.

The Committee asked Ken Scott whether the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services had been involved with Maidstone Area Arts Partnership. Ken Scott responded that there had been some involvement by the Cabinet Member, but that most of the partnership work had taken place with senior officers. As a result of this partnership work, Maidstone Area Arts Partnership had been involved in organising three projects in collaboration with Maidstone Borough Council:

- A singing group for those with Mental Health Problems;
- A type of karaoke machine for older people with dementia, which can be used in a care home. There is also a singing group in a day centre for older people; and
- A singing group for people who have minor health problems which GPs can refer patients to.

The Committee asked Ken Scott what Maidstone Area Arts Partnership classified as a cultural event. Ken Scott informed the committee that Maidstone Area Arts Partnership used the same definition as the

Department for Culture, Media and Sport. This definition included arts and heritage events and excluded events associated with the night time economy.

The Committee asked Ken Scott what the role of the Town Team had been in putting on events. The Committee were particularly interested in whether the funding that the Town Team possessed had been available for small organisations. Ken Scott replied that the funding for the Town Team hadn't gone directly to small local organisations. However the Town Team has sought to involve local organisations in the events that have been arranged so that they can share the benefits.

The Committee asked Ken Scott whether the Council could take a greater lead in publicity for events. Ken Scott confirmed that this would be a great help for events, especially as budgets for publicity were coming under increasing pressure for event organisers.

The Committee asked Ken Scott whether there was one thing in particular that the council could do that would help event organisers. Ken Scott replied that there used to be a database of culture and leisure based organisations in the borough. This was found to be very useful in the past and would be worth recreating.

RESOLVED: That

- a) The Committee note the presentation given by Ken Scott;
- b) The Committee invites a representative from the Town Team to the next meeting to explain the structure of the Town Team, as well as its role in organising events in the town;
- c) The Committee invites the appropriate officer to the next meeting to discuss the legal agreement and processes around events being held on Jubilee Square;
- d) The Committee invites a representative from Parkwood Theatres to the next meeting to discuss concerns raised around ticketing policy and provision of facilities to community groups;
- e) A letter of thanks be sent to Ken Scott from the Committee;
- f) The issue of up to date communications around events be raised as a recommendation in the final review; and
- g) A database be compiled of cultural and arts organisation in Maidstone. Members should be given a lead role in this. This should be considered as a recommendation in the final review.

78. ENTERPRISE HUB UPDATE

RESOLVED: That this item be deferred to a future meeting as Karen Franek, Principal Economic Development Officer, was unable to attend.

79. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the future work programme.

The Committee considered which witnesses would be helpful to invite to assist with their ongoing review of events in the borough. The Committee requested that the following witnesses be invited to the next meeting on the 25th March 2014:

- Verne Sanderson from Medway Council
- Luke Bendall from The Social Festival
- A representative from the Museum of Kent Life
- A representative from Maidstone Town Team
- A representative from Parkwood Theatres
- The officer responsible for renting Jubilee Square to event organisers

The Committee were informed that there had so far been no responses to the call for evidence on events in the borough that had been publicised in the press.

The Committee considered the forthcoming Cabinet Member Decision on the Museum's collections policy. At the meeting held on the 28th January the Committee asked to arrange a viewing of the museum's current collection. The Committee confirmed that they wished to see a general overview of the collection during the visit; and requested that Laura Case, Culture and Leisure Manager, be present during the visit. The following four dates were proposed:

- Monday 3rd March 5.30-6.30
- Tuesday 4th March 5.30-6.30
- Tuesday 11th March 2.00-3.00
- Friday 14th March 2.00-3.00

The committee were asked to inform the Research and Performance Officer of their availability on these dates by Friday 28th February 2014.

RESOLVED: That

- a) The following witnesses be invited to the meeting of 25th March 2014 in order to assist with the ongoing review of events in the borough:
 - Verne Sanderson of Medway Council
 - Luke Bendall of The Social Festival
 - A representative from the Museum of Kent Life
 - A representative from Maidstone Town Team
 - A representative from Parkwood Theatres
 - The officer responsible for renting Jubilee Square to event organisers
- b) The visit to the museum should cover a general overview of the collection and that Laura Case, Culture and Leisure Manager, should be present during the visit.
- c) The work programme should be updated by officers in consultation with the Chairman of the committee

