

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Scrutiny Coordinating Committee

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 28 NOVEMBER
2013**

Present: Councillor Barned (Chairman), and
Councillors Mrs Blackmore, Collins, Mrs Gooch,
Mrs Grigg, Mrs Joy, Paterson and Mrs Wilson

Also Present: Councillors Butler and Nelson-Gracie

1. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

2. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no notifications.

3. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures.

4. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Councillor John Barned be appointed as Chairman for the municipal year 2013-14.

5. ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Councillor Fay Gooch be appointed as Vice Chairman for the municipal year 2013-14.

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

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

7. AUDIT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

The Chairman welcomed Cllr Nelson-Gracie, Chairman of the Audit Committee, and Cllr Butler, Vice-Chairman of the Audit Committee, to the meeting.

Officers explained that the terms of reference for the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee included developing mechanisms for addressing cross cutting issues and preventing duplication. This included consideration of the Audit Committee's Work Programme.

The Committee noted the role of the Audit Committee differed from that of Overview and Scrutiny Committees in that the role of scrutiny was to review policy and challenge whether the Executive had made the right decisions to deliver policy goals. The role of the Audit Committee was to provide independent assurance of the adequacy of the risk management framework and the associated control environment, independent scrutiny of the Council's financial and non-financial performance to the extent that it affects the Council's exposure to risk and affects the control environment, and oversight of the financial reporting process.

The following issues were discussed:

- The protocol that had been adopted to manage the referral of issues either way between the Audit and Overview and Scrutiny Committees;
- The potential overlap between the work of the Audit Committee and the Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- The Museum East Wing Project Review;
- The Mid Kent Improvement Partnership (MKIP);
- The Council's Commissioning and Procurement Strategy;
- The financial reporting cycle.

RESOLVED:

It was agreed that in the event of the Audit Committee being minded to refer an issue to an Overview and Scrutiny Committee (or vice-versa), the issue, the reasons for referral and the desired outcome must be clearly understood, and specified in the minutes and the reference.

8. VISITING MEMBERS - DISCUSSION ITEM

The Committee considered the role of Visiting Members at Overview and Scrutiny Committees and reviewed the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, set out in Part 4 of the Constitution.

The Committee agreed that as well as having the right to speak on any item, Visiting Members should also be allowed to be involved in discussions at Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings at the discretion of the Chairman. The Committee identified that it needed to be clear at scrutiny meetings that Visiting Members could not vote or take part in decision making for example formulating recommendations.

RESOLVED:

It was recommended that an amendment to the Constitution be agreed by Council so that:-

The second bullet point, paragraph 3, of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules be deleted and replaced with the following:

- *"that Visiting Members may be involved in the general discussion of the Committee at the discretion of the Chairman but are not allowed to vote and it should be clearly indicated prior to any decision that they are not taking part in the vote".*

9. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2013-14

Officers explained that the terms of reference for the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee included developing mechanisms for addressing cross cutting issues and preventing duplication.

The following cross cutting issues were discussed:

- The Mid Kent Improvement Partnership (MKIP) and the MKIP review, set up by the Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services OSC;
- Gypsy and Traveller Sites (Private Site Allocation)

The Committee agreed all Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairmen, and Vice Chairman should receive reports and information in relation to the MKIP Review so that they could provide input as required. This information should also be sent to the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Audit Committee.

Before making a decision on how/whether to scrutinise Gypsy and Traveller Sites, the Committee agreed further information was required. The Committee asked for an update in relation to private sites and agreed that the Chairman of Planning, Transport and Development OSC should meet with the Chairman of Community, Leisure Services and Environment OSC outside of the meeting to consider the best way to proceed.

Other issues considered by the Committee included the scrutiny of: the Local Plan; the Budget Strategy; Performance Data; the Town Hall Lease; Employment Issues; Tourism; Economic and Commercial Services; Homelessness and Mental Health.

RESOLVED:

The Committee agreed:

- a) That all Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairmen, and Vice Chairman should receive reports and information in relation to the MKIP Review so that they could provide input as required. This information should also be sent to the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Audit Committee.

- b) That before making a decision on how/whether to scrutinise Private Gypsy and Traveller Sites – Site Allocation, further information should be circulated to the Committee via email.
- c) That, following receipt of this information, the Chairman of Planning, Transport and Development OSC should meet with the Chairman of Community, Leisure Services and Environment OSC to consider the best way to scrutinise Private Gypsy and Traveller Sites – Site Allocation.

10. SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee noted that the issue of making, and monitoring, recommendations was an important part of the scrutiny process.

Officers explained resolutions requiring further action should be as clear as possible to ensure correct information is provided and agreed outputs met. The Committee agreed vague conclusions and unspecific recommendations were unlikely to add value and that their role was to monitor recommendations to ensure both quality and follow up.

The Committee agreed the Chairman and Vice Chairman from each Overview and Scrutiny Committee should review the Scrutiny Committee Action Implementation Plans (SCRAIPs) for reviews carried out by their Committee since 2008. Following their investigations an update would be provided at the next Scrutiny Coordinating Committee meeting.

RESOLVED:

The Committee agreed that:

- a) The Chairman and Vice Chairman from each Overview and Scrutiny Committee should review the Scrutiny Committee Action Implementation Plans (SCRAIPs) for reviews carried out by their Committee since 2008.
- b) Following their investigations an update should be provided, by each Committee Chairman, at the next Scrutiny Coordinating Committee meeting.

11. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered topics for inclusion in the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee's work programme for the 2013/14 Municipal Year.

The following issues were discussed:

- The Governance Review and recommendations from the Cabinet and Enhanced Scrutiny Model Report (April 2013);
- Developing the awareness of the potential of scrutiny;

- Recommendation implementation, follow up and monitoring.

RESOLVED:

The Committee agreed:

- a) That the next Scrutiny Coordinating Committee meeting should take place in mid/late February 2014 with the time and date to be confirmed outside of the meeting.
- b) That an update on the Governance Review and recommendations from the Cabinet and Enhanced Scrutiny Model Report (April 2013) be considered by the Committee at their next meeting.
- c) That an update on how Scrutiny Committee Recommendation Action Plans are being monitored be considered by the Committee at their next meeting.

12. **MEMBER DEVELOPMENT NEEDS**

The Committee agreed that Members required a complex set of skills and competencies to realise the potential of Overview and Scrutiny.

Officers explained, following the publication of the revised Member Development Policy, published in July 2013, and recommendations made in relation to the Cabinet and Enhanced Scrutiny Model, that two scrutiny development activities had been planned for 2014.

The following issues were discussed:

- The "Questioning / Challenging Skills" session which would be facilitated by the Parliamentary Outreach Service on 29 January 2014;
- The "Making the most of Scrutiny" session which had been prepared, in draft, by the Centre for Public Scrutiny;
- Dealing with questioning from Councillors who identify grammatical and typographical errors in reports;
- Ways to improve questioning skills;
- The requirement for good preparation and listening skills to ensure agenda items are understood;
- Assessing evidence and drafting effective recommendations.

RESOLVED:

- a) That a memo be sent to all Members to inform them that where Councillors identify grammatical and typographical errors it would

be more appropriate for these to be raised with the report author or scrutiny officer prior to the meeting rather than focusing on these at the Committee meeting.

- b) That the date of the "Questioning / Challenging Skills" activity be confirmed as 29 January 2014 and feedback from the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee be used to structure the format of the session.
- c) That feedback from the Scrutiny Coordinating Committee be used to develop the "Making the most of Scrutiny" session and a date be confirmed in due course.

13. DURATION OF MEETING

9.30am to 11.00am