

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Economic and Commercial Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 24 MARCH 2015

Present: Councillor Paterson (Chairman), and
Councillors Butler, Cuming, Fissenden, Harper,
Mrs Hinder, Hogg, Paterson, Powell and Mrs Wilson

Also Present: Councillor John Perry

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

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be webcast.

125. APOLOGIES

There were no apologies.

126. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

127. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

The Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services, Councillor John Perry was presented as a Visiting Member for item 8 and as a witness for item 9 on the agenda.

128. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures.

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

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

130. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24 MARCH 2015

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2015 be agreed and duly signed by the Chairman.

131. REVIEW OF CAREERS GUIDANCE IN MAIDSTONE

The Chairman welcomed the following witnesses to the meeting. They had been invited to assist the Committee in its evidence gathering for its review of Careers Guidance in Maidstone:

- Simon Harris, Team Leader, CXK
- John Taylor, Invicta Chamber of Commerce
- Abigail Lewis, Economic Development Officer, Maidstone Borough Council (MBC).

John Taylor was invited to inform the Committee on Invicta Chamber of Commerce and its link to careers advice. Mr Taylor made the following points:

- Careers guidance was delivered through 'Young Chamber'
- There were two schools in Maidstone involved in Young Chamber and all schools in Ashford.
- Its offer included public speaking and mentoring
- It offered real business links
- Young Chamber worked with young people in schools to prepare them for the business environments
- The cost of the youth chamber was £950 per annum, per school.
- Part of the Young Chamber involved the development of a business proposal. Each school currently raised between £3,000 and £5,000 per annum for charity.

With regards to fund raising aspect of Young Chamber it was suggested by a member of the Committee that this successful enterprise could become self-funding, providing a route into all Maidstone schools. Mr Taylor put forward a counter option of the Council seed funding the programme and schools paying back the Council back through their fund raising.

It was clarified for the Committee that young people involved in public speaking through the young chamber came from all schools and were of varying abilities.

Simon Harris from CXK informed the Committee on his organisation, CXK:

- CXK were a charity that emerged from the organisation Connections.
- A percentage of its revenue funding came from Kent County Council (KCC).
- It received various other project/funding streams, including the National Lottery
- The organisation worked with young people and adults
- From 1 April 2015 CXK would be the primary contact for Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) for careers.
- CEX worked with adults via the job centre
- Vulnerable people would have up to 3 interventions per year
- Schools careers advice in the locality was very often someone trained by or previously employed by CXK.
- It was delivering a project called Stepping for KCC, a development strategy to help young people cope better post 16, providing

greater resilience. This was funded by a Member's grant from County Councillor Gary Cook

- It was the primary contract for the National Citizen Service for Kent, Sussex, including Brighton and Hove.
- It ran community projects in Tunbridge Wells
- It worked with young people with disabilities, 'statemented' students i.e. those with emotional and behavioural issues.
- The organisation used and advocated Lego therapy and Art therapies were being looked at.

Abigail Lewis from MBC updated the Committee on the Council's role and involvement with Careers Guidance. She explained that:

- The Council worked with the job centre plus running work experience 'coffee mornings'.
- As a result of the coffee mornings, 23 placements had been offered and 11 of those had gone on to secure, paid employment.
- The Council's role was described as a broker role.
- Barriers that had been identified included local business' engaging with Grammar Schools only for work experience placements
- The Council had a role to play with apprenticeships and was developing a new website to signpost.
- There was a misconception with regards to apprenticeships that they were not widely available or with attractive or high profile employers.
- MBC were hosting an event the following week for employees of large business in Maidstone that had gone into administration. Its role was to coordinate support. The event was for adults.
- MBC would be working with KCC to provide 24 work placements at the beginning of the next financial year. They would specifically working with individuals identified by the Troubled Family programme. The work placements would be fully funded for businesses.

Members of the Committee asked the witnesses whether or not they thought young people were prepared for the workplace. It was felt that there were significant gaps overall. The following reasons put forward:

- Careers guidance delivered in school did not have the independent impartiality it should have.
- Careers guidance should begin in the primary school setting. CXK were engaging with Year 6 pupils. However, even at that age they were already closed off to possibilities.
- From the point of view of an employer there was a lack of awareness from young people on how to present themselves in the work place.
- Unlike schools, the Young Chamber was designed to prepare young people for the business world, it offered a broad spectrum of options. It was focused on skills and conduct and not designed to channel young people towards a particular route.
- The Future Schools Foundation's Studio school and Medway Technical College were highlighted. Both establishments took an

intake of students from Maidstone from Year 10 onwards. It was felt that there should be more vocational options like these available to young people.

- The valuable contribution made by voluntary agencies within Careers guidance was highlighted to the Committee.
- The Careers networking meeting was highlighted to members. A regular information sharing meeting between school's career guidance officers

Finally, the Committee asked the witnesses what their aspirations were for Maidstone Borough Council's role. The following points were made:

- To get Young Chamber into as many schools as possible.
- To help bring young people into contact with businesses.
- To provide support for businesses and organisation. The Council should have a visible profile within this area.
- To help ensure career guidance works across all ages – i.e. the family unit was very important. Parents could be struggling as much as young people to sustain employment. Groups should not be looked at in isolation.
- To understand that the barriers to employment were intergenerational.
- Encouraging Careers guidance at Primary School age

RESOLVED: that the Committee notes the information given by the witnesses on careers guidance in Maidstone.

132. CAR PARK CHARGES IN MOTE PARK

The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services, Councillor Perry and Marcus Lawler Commercial Projects Manager to the meeting.

The Cabinet Member introduced the Car Park charges in Mote Park report explaining that it was an emotive issue but it was about the future of the park and ensuring its sustainability and funding.

The following points were made:

- The Committee was informed that visitor numbers had doubled in the past three years.
- The increased use of the park had a knock on effect on the maintenance of costs of the park.
- There was a risk that Mote Park would absorb a disproportionate amount of the parks and leisure budget.
- There were 26 Parks and Open Spaces managed by the Parks and Open Spaces team. The total budget was 1.8 million with £400,000 spent on Mote Park.
- The park was heavily reliant on volunteers, volunteer labour accounted for £40,000, over 10% of the budget.

- Money would be ringfenced to maintaining the park and its green flag status.

Some members raised concerns about the ambition of the plans for Mote Park. Mr Lawler informed the committee that the report presented to them originated from a report that it had considered in 2013, Sustainable Future for Mote Park. It was clarified that there were originally three proposed revenue streams including a pay to use adventure zone and bringing the park café 'in house', along with capital investment for improvements (i.e. the toilets and café). Car Parking charges was the final one of the three proposals being brought back to the Committee for its input.

The Committee was informed that Lake Market research had been commissioned to undertake market research, stakeholders involved with the park had been spoken to and the parking charges in place at other parks in Maidstone had been evaluated.

It following points were made:

- 1,133 park users were interviewed. This represented about 1% of all park users.
- 1,508 residents responded of the 5,000 houses which were written to. This was 7.8% of the houses in the borough and 1.3% of the voting demographic.
- These were huge samples when considered against national polls such as those conducted by MORI.
- Of those 1,508 residents who responded, 76% were happy to pay a nominal charge.
- Of park respondents those from the 1,133 who did not live in the borough 73% were willing to pay a charge.

The impact of parking charges on residential streets and residents parking in surrounding areas was considered. It was emphasised to the Committee that the enforcement arrangements would be determined once an option going forward had been recommended. The options put forward in the report included a period of free parking. Determining the gaps in traffic regulations, enforcement measures and addressing residents' fears would be dependent on what was recommended. This would be a separate piece of work that would be brought back to the Committee for its consideration.

In response to member's questions it was clarified that there were no plans to introduce car parking charges to any other parks or open spaces.

The Committee considered the options. After some deliberation it was felt that the proposal for a £1 parking charge with the first hour free was preferable. Members agreed that season tickets should be part of the option going forward and a concessionary pass was a good idea, particularly for volunteer workers.

The issue of commuter parking was considered and the need to prevent this. It was explained this was currently being achieved by opening the park later. It was considered that parking charges should be punitive after a 6 hour period to prevent this.

The Committee voted on the recommendation as set out in the report at paragraph 1.2.1 with the following additional options as proposed and seconded by members of the Committee:

The Committee supports an option for a £1 car parking charge at Mote Park with the first hour free. It stipulates that the income from car parking charges at Mote Park be ringfenced to Mote Park. The option should include:

- i. Provisions for a season ticket and concessionary pass for volunteer workers.
- ii. A charging period that begins at 10am.

The Committee voted in favour of the recommendation. Councillor Mrs Wilson asked that her dissent be noted, stating that she could not vote in favour until the views of her residents were known.

RESOLVED that:

The Committee supports an option for a £1 car parking charge at Mote Park with the first hour free. It stipulates that the income from car parking charges at Mote Park be ringfenced to Mote Park. The option should include:

- i. Provisions for a season ticket and a concessionary pass for volunteer workers.
- ii. A charging period that begins at 10am.

133. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its Future Work Programme. It was agreed that date needed to be scheduled for the Careers Guidance in Maidstone Working Group to bring together its final report and recommendations. It was agreed that this would be week commencing 30 March subject to room availability.

Members were informed that all outstanding responses to recommendations had been chased with the responsible officer.

RESOLVED: that a meeting be arranged, week commencing 30 March for the Careers Guidance in Maidstone Working Group to bring together its final report and recommendations.