

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 5 AUGUST 2014

Present: Councillor Mrs Gooch (Chairman), and
Councillors Butler, Mrs Grigg, Long, Pickett, Powell,
Mrs Stockell and J.A. Wilson

Also Present: Councillor Mrs Blackmore and
Councillor McLoughlin

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

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be webcast.

34. APOLOGIES

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Ash, Councillor Edwards-Daem and Councillor Mrs Parvin.

35. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following substitute members were noted:

Councillor Powell for Councillor Edwards-Daem

Councillor JA Wilson for Councillor Mrs Parvin

36. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS/WITNESSES

Councillor Mrs Blackmore, the Leader of the Council, and Councillor McLoughlin, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, were in attendance.

37. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED: That Councillor Mrs Stockell be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year 2014-15

38. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

39. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

40. MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING HELD ON 7 JULY 2014

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the special meeting held at Tunbridge Wells BC on 7 July 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed.

It was noted that Ashford BC were no longer part of MKIP although they continued to be in a strong partnership with Maidstone BC for the Audit Shared Service. In response to a question the Head of Finance and Resources explained that the Audit Shared Service had been established prior to MKIP.

41. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 JULY 2014

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed.

42. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNT SCHEME

The Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service, Stephen McGinnes, introduced a report on the findings of the Committee's sub group regarding the options for the local council tax discount scheme to be introduced from April 2015. He explained that:

- Six scenarios had been discussed at the sub group, of which two had been recommended for consideration at Committee, namely:
 - a. Option One: to maintain the current 13% reduction for working age households;
 - b. Option Five: to reduce the level of reduction for working age household to 9.5% with the additional cost met through the removal of the discount available for 2nd adult rebate, provision for backdated awards and reduction of the capital limit to £6000.
- The Committee were to take a majority view on the sub group's recommendations

During the discussion reference was made to the Debt Recovery Policy, and the Committee requested that this come to the Committee on completion.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Cabinet be recommended to consider the following options when making the recommendation to Full Council as to the Local Council Tax Discount Scheme to be implemented in 2015/16:
 - a) Maintaining the current 13% reduction for working age households

- b) Reducing the level of reduction for working age households to 9.5% with the additional cost met through the removal of the discount available for 2nd adult rebate, provision for backdated awards and reduction in the capital limit to £6000
2. That an update on how best to approach the wider review of the Local Council Tax Discount Scheme at the end of the current three year agreement be considered at Committee during November;
3. That the Debt Recovery Policy be included within the Committee's future work programme.

43. CABINET MEMBER PRIORITIES FOR 2014/15

Councillor Blackmore, the Leader of the Council, and Councillor McLoughlin, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, informed the Committee of their priority areas for the 2014/15 Municipal Year. Councillor McLoughlin stated that his priorities include improving efficiency, extending current activities and investing in new activities, and made reference to the following issues:

- Asset Management and the identification of opportunities, however it was stressed that this was separate from the Commercialisation Strategy.
- The MKIP Shared Services and the establishment of procedures for reporting and monitoring performance levels, to which end meetings had been scheduled to include members at Swale BC, Tunbridge Wells BC and the Mid Kent Services Director, Paul Taylor, and for which dialogue would be on-going.
- Staff motivation and excellence, with it noted that the staff of the Planning Shared Service had shown exemplary enthusiasm in working hard to overcome recent problems and improve services.
- The procurement of a public Gypsy and Traveller site which, although not included on the written report, was considered as a priority for strengthening the Council's position in relation to the planning enforcement of illegal encampments.

In response to questions the Committee heard that;

- The Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport and Development, Councillor Burton, would be the Member to whom queries regarding the performance of the Planning Shared Service should be addressed, and that the terms of

reference of the Committee included scrutinising the financial and customer complaint elements of the service.

- The Kent County Council Pension Fund Committee had two district council memberships but no vacancies, and that this would be the only direct method of influencing decisions with regard to pensions. There had been discussion within Central Government regarding larger regional pension funds but these were considered to provide less value for money.
- With regard to the long term plan to vacate Maidstone House, vacating the first floor would be estimated to incur a cost of £300,000 but make a saving of £80,000 per annum. The move would be used as an opportunity to make more efficient use of space across the other floors through implementation of desk and room booking systems. It was explained that there would be no benefit to vacating Maidstone House before 2023 due to contractual obligations.
- There were no specific timescales built into the separate objectives as some, such as motivation of staff, were not time bound, but an overarching deadline was given as the end of the financial year.

Previous Committee recommendations on asset management were noted, and the Committee suggested that these be circulated to Councillor McLoughlin.

Councillor Blackmore highlighted the following priorities:

- Representing Maidstone BC at Parish and County level;
- Forging strong links between the three levels of Local Government and outside organisations with a focus on collaboration.

Councillor Blackmore explained that Cabinet coffee meetings were to be established from September onwards in order to provide an informal meeting place for discussion. Further details would be communicated in due course.

In responses to questions Councillor Blackmore explained that:

- Achieving a balance of making savings versus providing excellent service was a clear priority, and would be monitored using Key Performance Indicators and cost benefit analysis.

- A key element of the new Strategic Plan would be to put Maidstone at the forefront of the Kent agenda as its County Town.
- With regard to the discussion on Kent County Council Pension Fund, Councillor Blackmore would enquire as to when the next vacancy would be advertised for the Superannuation Committee, and the substitution procedure for this, and report back to the Committee.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Priorities set by the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Corporate Services for the Municipal year 2014/15 be noted;
2. That the details of the next vacancy for district members on the Kent County Council Superannuation Committee and the procedures for substitution be circulated to the Committee by Councillor Blackmore;
3. That the previous SCRAIPS regarding Asset Management be circulated to Councillor McLoughlin.

44. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT

Policy and Performance Officer, Clare Wood, introduced the Annual Performance report and asked the Committee to consider the end of year Strategic Plan action updates and Key Performance Indicator turn outs for 2013/14.

The following highlights were noted:

- The number of Job Seekers Allowance claimants had reduced and comprised only 1.8% of the Maidstone population.
- Private Sector Housing had exceeded their annual target for the improvement of private residential accommodation.
- Customer satisfaction with the Borough's parks had increased

The following low lights were noted:

- Customer satisfaction with street cleansing had declined, although this constituted a perceptual dissatisfaction as the actual figures for litter and detritus clearing had improved. Officer and Member walks were scheduled to take place within the least satisfied areas in order to meet and speak with residents.

- Although missed bin reports increased at the time of the waste contract change, these numbers were steadily declining and on track to reach a standard rate by the end of the financial year.

In response to questions the Committee were advised that:

- With regard to the turn-around time for planning applications, staffing issues were in the process of being resolved as three management positions and two spatial planning policy positions had been accepted by candidates. It was noted that, due to notice period obligations, the start dates for each employee could not be provided but that all were expected to be in post by January.
- The decrease in the number of customers using the Park and Ride service was easing year on year, and that changes to the bus timetable would be reported to the Committee.
- In order to improve the rate of recycling a programme of public information would start later in the year. The Waste Department was asked to provide details of whether any symbols or language changes would be placed on the bins.

It was explained that the Corporate Improvement Plan had been reported to the Committee every 6 months as an appendix to the Annual Performance report. During discussion it was agreed that moving forward the Corporate Improvement Plan should be considered as a stand-alone report, due to the clarity and value of the information contained in the document.

RESOLVED:

1. That:
 - a) The Performance Out-Turns and end of year Strategic Plan action updates be noted;
 - b) The targets for the Strategic Plan 2014/15 refresh for the Key Performance Indicators for 2014-17 be noted;
 - c) The amendments to the Key Performance Indicators be noted;
 - d) The progress made on the Corporate Improvement Plan work streams and projects be noted.
2. That any changes made to the bus timetables of the Park and Ride service be reported back to the Committee;

3. That the Corporate Improvement Plan be considered in 6 months as a stand-alone report;
4. That the Waste Section's programme of public information, including the implementation of symbols or languages on bins, be reported back to the Committee.

45. CAPITAL PROGRAMME UPDATE 2014-15

The Capital Programme Update was introduced by the Head of Finance and Resources, Paul Riley. The report noted the programme considered by Council in March 2014 and provided further detail on infrastructure expenditure and the predicted level of funding for 2019/20.

It was noted that a previous SCRAIP on Asset Management had recommended that the cross party Budget Working Group consider the Capital Programme within its terms of reference.

In response to questions the Head of Finance and Resources explained that:

- The minus figure for Asset Management / Corporate Property was due to projects that were allowed to progress where the budget will accommodate them at a later date.
- The River Medway cycle path plan was designed by Kent County Council and was to be implemented by Maidstone BC, and was expected to benefit residents by providing an alternative method of travelling to employment areas other than by car.

RESOLVED:

1. That the changes to the Capital Programme be noted;
2. That the Capital projects review be included within the terms of reference of the Budget Working Group.

46. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its future work programme and heard that the Budget would go before Cabinet and come to Committee in January.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Future Work Programme be agreed subject to the inclusion of the following items: Local Council Tax Discount Scheme Update (Nov 2014); Debt Recovery Policy (Date TBC); Corporate Improvement Plan (Feb 2015);

2. That the List of Forthcoming Decisions be noted;
3. That it be agreed that the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman meet to discuss an update to the terms of reference for the Budget Working Party and return recommendations to the Committee for approval;
4. That the Mid Kent Planning Support update be noted;
5. That the continuous professional development of the Committee be considered and noted.

47. DURATION OF MEETING

6.35 p.m. to 8.41 p.m.