

AGENDA

STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING



Overview and Scrutiny

Date: Tuesday 7 April 2015
Time: 6.30 pm
Venue: Town Hall, High Street, Maidstone

Membership:

Councillors: Ash, Black, Butler, Mrs Gooch (Chairman), Mrs Grigg,
Long, Pickett and Mrs Stockell (Vice-Chairman)

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Continued Over/:

Issued on 30 March 2015

Alison Broom

**Alison Broom, Chief Executive, Maidstone Borough Council,
Maidstone House, King Street, Maidstone Kent ME15 6JQ**

alternative formats. For further information about this service, or to arrange for special facilities to be provided at the meeting, please contact Poppy Brewer on 01622 602242. To find out more about the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, please visit www.maidstone.gov.uk/osc

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2015

Present: Councillor Mrs Gooch (Chairman), and
Councillors Ash, Black, Butler, Edwards-Daem,
Mrs Grigg, Pickett and Mrs Stockell

Also Present: Councillors Mrs Blackmore,
McLoughlin and Sargeant

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

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be webcast.

113. APOLOGIES

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Thomas Long.

114. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no Substitute Members.

115. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

It was noted that Councillor Mrs Blackmore was in attendance as a witness to item 9 – MKIP Planning Support.

Councillors McLoughlin and Sargeant were in attendance as observers.

116. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

117. 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.

118. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 JANUARY 2015

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 6 January be agreed as a correct record and signed.

119. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 JANUARY 2015

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 12 January 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed.

120. MKIP PLANNING SUPPORT

The Chairman, Councillor Mrs Gooch, welcomed the Swale Borough Council Scrutiny Committee and the Tunbridge Wells Overview and Scrutiny Committee to Maidstone for a co-located meeting of the three Committees.

The Chairman informed the Committees that nationally a great many councils were involved in sharing services, and that central Government had strongly encouraged local Councils to share services and staff. The MKIP constituent authorities were early adopters of the shared service agenda. The function of scrutiny was to objectively challenge policy development and decision making, in order to provide constructive reflection in the name of public accountability. As such the purpose of the meeting was to provide reassurance to residents and the public that lessons had been learned and improvements made.

(a) Project Implementation Review

The Committee welcomed the Head of Mid Kent Audit Partnership, Rich Clarke, who presented a report into the Planning Support Project Implementation Review. Mr Clarke outlined the three major issues identified in the report:

1. Not employing a recognised project methodology

The project did not fully employ the project methodologies that had been well developed in-house by the MKIP authorities, nor did it fully employ formally recognised techniques such as PRINCE II. This resulted in the lack of a clear detailed project plan until late on in the process, inconsistent assignment of roles and responsibilities, and non-creation or monitoring of a project risk register. This lack of resilience made the project vulnerable to issues as they arose, and prevented the anticipation and mitigation of future problems.

2. Not fully establishing the project's scope and complexity

The implementation of the Planning Support Shared Service required the physical relocation of staff, the procurement and use of a new software package, combining the services under a single manager without extensive experience in planning support management, and the simultaneous delivery of another shared service which put pressure on the availability of resources.

The approach to the shared service was novel. It split an existing service into two separate components, without a consistent understanding across

the three authorities as to where the divide began and ended. This also required a complete reorganisation of business processes.

The software element of the project was understood to be separate, even though it became clear from the outset that ICT related matters were of importance to the implementation of the total project.

3. Attempting delivery within existing resources

This increased pressure on key individuals, and led to projects being delivered without the required level of expertise or time needed.

Mr Clarke noted that the three authorities had enthusiastically taken on board the findings of the report and had each committed to making improvements accordingly.

The Chairman of the meeting, Councillor Gooch, invited Members to comment upon the report.

- Councillor Henderson (SBC) asked for clarification as to how the IT issues arose across the three authorities. Mr Clarke explained that only one of the three, Tunbridge Wells BC, had used the IDOX software before but in an earlier version. Swale and Maidstone BC had not used IDOX before. Furthermore the software included GIS (geographic information system) elements which were brand new to IDOX, and this introduced further complexity.
- Councillor Ash (MBC) asked if Mr Clarke had been surprised to find that minutes had not been taken during the project board's meetings. Mr Clarke confirmed that this was the case, and that no minutes had been taken at any of the meetings. This meant that Mr Clarke's research for the report had focussed on recollections after the event.
- Councillor Rankin (TWBC) raised the fact that IT systems had been central to the implementation of the Planning Support Shared Service, and asked whether there had been IT representation on the project board. Mr Clarke responded that the Head of ICT was invited to sit on the project board but did not attend. No IT representatives attended until the February 2014, and up until this point IT information had been fed back to the board through a third party.
- Councillor Bowen (SBC) asked whether there was defined responsibility at project board level. Mr Clarke confirmed that there was clear methodology defining who should be on the board, and that the focus of his work with Officers was on refreshing project management methods. It was noted that project methodology in respect of who should sit on the board was generally dependent on the scope or ambition of any project, and each project would be assessed on that basis.

- Councillor Gooch (MBC) requested clarification as to why the scope of the Audit report excluded the business case stage. Mr Clarke stated that the business case had not been considered germane to the brief, which was to review the implementation of the Planning Support Shared Service, and therefore took its starting point at the decision of Cabinet.
- Councillor Booth (SBC) requested confirmation as to whether an appropriate risk assessment had been carried out in the initial stages, to which Mr Clarke replied that no effective assessment or register of risk was undertaken.

(b) Planning Support Implementation

The Committee considered the response provided by the MKIP Board which outlined how they had commissioned the review of the implementation of Planning Support Shared Service, and welcomed unequivocally the findings of the review. The Board apologised to everyone who had been affected by the delays and provided assurance that they were working hard to address the situation. Attention was drawn to the fact that the vast majority of services delivered in partnership were working well, delivering savings and improved resilience during a period in which grant funding from central Government had been cut by more than 40%. However lessons would be learnt from this exercise.

Discussion was opened up to Members by the Chairman Councillor Gooch.

- In response to a question from Councillor Truelove (SBC) Councillor Jukes, Leader of the Council (TWBC) and MKIP Board Member stressed that the Board took ultimate responsibility and ownership for strategic oversight. Councillor Bowles, Leader of the Council (SBC) and MKIP Board Member, endorsed Councillor Jukes' statement and elaborated to describe how the MKIP Board was a corporate entity and as such all Members shared responsibility.
- Councillor Henderson (SBC) enquired as to whether it was the Board's understanding that comprehensive improvements were being implemented. Abdool Kara, Chief Executive (SBC) and MKIP Board Member acknowledged that each authority adhered individually to good project management methodologies but had not employed a single approach across all three. He therefore stated that the suggestions made by Mr Clarke in his report clarified the basic requirements of project management and would provide a shared base for the three authorities going forward. Mr Kara described how the experience of the Planning Support Shared Service had instilled a deep awareness of risk within the Board, and that future projects would not be progressed without fundamental project management requirements being met.
- Councillor Hills (TWBC) queried whether early involvement of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees could have helped to mitigate issues. Councillor Blackmore, Leader of the Council (MBC) and MKIP

Board member confirmed that each authority held Member Briefings on the Planning Support Shared Service prior to launch, and that the schedule of decisions was available to Members and the public in the forward plan. Councillor Bowles (SBC) advised the Committees that all planning related decisions had been received by each authority's Cabinet which was open to all Members to attend and speak at, and that Members could call-in decisions where they deemed it necessary. Councillor Hills (TWBC) asked whether consideration of the strategic decision making stages and member briefings at that level would have revealed the operational issues that were occurring within the service. Councillor Bowen (SBC) stressed the importance of communication between the Cabinet, MKIP Board and the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. Councillor Blackmore (MBC) put forward that the tripartite meetings between the scrutiny committees of the three authorities, as was undertaken that evening, was a beneficial process which addressed the need for greater communication.

(c) Update on the latest position

Sandra Fryer, the Interim Head of Planning Support Services, advised Members that on arrival in post work was undertaken to reaffirm the shared service board and operations team, and to foster a new staff culture. It was found that there was more training to be rolled out with staff, and that IT systems required more technical support. Operational targets, accuracy and local team performance were all reviewed.

Members heard that:

- There had been an increase in positive customer feedback, and a mystery shopper process undertaken at Swale had recorded an improvement.
- Consultee agencies had welcomed the movement of services online in electronic format due to the improvement in accessibility.
- The service was working broadly within budget although the scale of savings had been reduced.
- There had been a significant upward trend in planning performance, with IT systems working well and relocated teams settling into their new environments, but additionally there had been a steep increase in volume of planning applications received which had impacted on timescales. This aside, the service was running at a steady pace.
- Of the 12 strategic indicators 9 were able to be reproduced, and full performance statistics would be circulated to Members.

The Chairman, Councillor Gooch, invited comments from Members:

- Councillor Booth (SBC) sought confirmation as to whether there had been a 'plan B' in place should the Planning Support Shared Service suffer difficulties.

Mr Benson (TWBC) described how the previous successes in the implementation of MKIP services may have meant that issues had not been fully conceived of or foreseen, and as a result, no fallback position had been provided for.

Alison Broom, Chief Executive (MBC) and MKIP Board Member, expressed on behalf of the Planning Support Shared Service host authority that Maidstone took responsibility and accountability as lead on the splitting of the Planning services. It was noted that the recipients of the planning service had felt positively about the long term goal of the Planning Support Shared Service, and the accessibility it would afford. Mrs Broom stated that financial information could be circulated to Members. Councillor Bowles (SBC) reiterated the corporate identity of the MKIP Board and that accountability was shared among all Members of the Board.

The Chairman gave thanks to Mr Clarke, Mrs Fryer, Councillor Blackmore, Alison Broom, Councillor Bowles, Abdool Kara, Councillor Jukes and William Benson, who left the meeting at 8.57 p.m.

112. NEXT STEPS

After the members of the MKIP Board had departed, members of the three Committees considered what further action was necessary at this stage, based upon the responses they had just received and the evidence before them.

- Councillor Butler (MBC) felt that committee members required more detailed information about the financial consequences of the numerous difficulties which the joint Planning Support service had suffered since its launch. The Chairman acknowledged that this was important further evidence, which she asked be circulated to all committee members as soon as this was available;
- Councillor Booth (SBC) voiced his dissatisfaction with the responses the committees had heard at the meeting. He proposed that a further more detailed examination of the situation was required, which considered was best undertaken by a Joint Task and Finish Group;
- Councillor Booth (SBC) acknowledged that Swale Borough Council's all out elections on 7 May meant that the Task and Finish Group was faced with a dilemma; either it was required to complete its work before the election or delay the start of its work until mid-May; when the newly appointed Overview and Scrutiny Committee was in place. This was seconded by Councillor Henderson (SBC);

- Councillor Gooch (MBC) sought clarification over exactly what the Task and Finish Group was being tasked to undertake. Councillor Woodward endorsed this view, adding that it was vital that the scope of the Task and Finish Group was determined first, before any work could begin;
- Councillor Henderson (SBC) felt that there were two distinct functions for the Task and Finish Group: an element of 'looking back' and identifying why and how the project had been so poorly managed. This, he felt would help to identify and frame a set of recommendations for the MKIP Board to apply to any subsequent MKIP project. The second function was to look at the future of the Planning Support service and determine what remaining operational activities were required to be implemented (e.g. land charges, GIS mapping, a paperless system, problems of accuracy etc). Councillor Henderson also felt that the financial performance of the service should be a factor that the Task and Finish Group should consider.
- Committee members discussed whether these elements would be beneficial, with Councillor Hills (TWBC) preferring an approach which focused on frequent, detailed and reliable reports being presented back from the Planning Support Project Board which could demonstrate whether the actions now being followed were delivering the service. Councillor Gooch (MBC) also felt it would be helpful to determine what 'normality' looked like. The evidence the Interim Head of Planning Support Services had offered to provide would be vital in helping the three committees in their next stages;
- Councillor Rankin (TWBC) endorsed the view that there was little benefit in looking back. At this stage, Councillor Rankin felt there were three Overview and Scrutiny tasks (i) the need to be satisfied that the MKIP Board's response was the right one, (ii) the need to have a detailed performance update; and (iii) the opportunity to examine what operational efficiencies are being led by the interim Head of Planning Support Services. On this basis, the work of the Task and Finish Group could be delayed until June.
- Councillor Booth (SBC) reiterated his concerns and urged that further Overview and Scrutiny action be taken. Councillor Rankin (TWBC) stressed that it had to be the 'parent committees' that established the terms of reference for the Task and Finish Group, not for the group itself to undertake this.
- Councillor Booth (SBC), based on the clarification of member discussions, proposed that (i) a task and finish group be formed in early May; (ii) that in the intervening period, each separate Overview and Scrutiny Committee decide what outstanding concerns they have; (iii) post-election the three Committees delegate responsibility to their Chair and Vice Chairs to nominate representatives and agree the terms of reference.

Members agreed that a Joint Task and Finish Group could look to the future and establish confidence in the Planning Support Shared Service through the monitoring of its progress.

RESOLVED:

1. That the consideration of the reports and appendices by the joint Overview and Scrutiny Committees of Maidstone, Swale and Tunbridge Wells be noted, including:
 - a. The Audit Report on MKIP Planning Support Implementation;
 - b. The response of the MKIP Board to the Audit report; and
 - c. The issues raised by each.
2. That in the next Municipal Year, the three newly formed Scrutiny or Policy and Resources Committees of Maidstone, Swale and Tunbridge Wells should delegate responsibility to their Chairman and Vice-Chairman to nominate two representatives to join a Joint Task and Finish Group and agree the terms of reference of this Group for further examination of the performance and financial information of the MKIP Planning Support Shared Service and project methodology for future MKIP Shared Services.

113. DURATION OF MEETING

7.03 p.m. to 9.47 p.m.

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 3 MARCH 2015

Present: Councillor Mrs Gooch (Chairman), and
Councillors Ash, Black, Butler, Mrs Grigg, Pickett and
Mrs Stockell

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

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be webcast.

123. APOLOGIES

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from
Councillors Edwards-Daem and Long.

124. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute Members.

125. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

There were no visiting Members.

126. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

127. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

128. QUARTER 3 CUSTOMER FEEDBACK (COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS AND
SOCIAL MEDIA) REPORT

The Research and Performance Officer, Sam Bailey, introduced the report
detailing the complaints and compliments received by the Council, and
also depicting the social media trends over Quarter 3, and asked the
Committee to note the feedback briefing included at appendix A.

Members heard that the Policy and Information Team had employed an
Information Officer, responsible for handling complaints and Freedom of
Information (FOI) Requests received by the Council, who provided a more
consistent approach to complaint handling.

Special mention was made of Planning Support, as although they had closed four of six complaints late, it was clear that complainants had been engaged with. Three of the six complaints were about the time taken to validate applications. All complaints were justified and the responses apologised to customers, explained the reasons for delays and outlined the actions being taken to improve performance. One complaint was about how the website operated for planning applications, and suggested some changes to improve the site. These changes have now been implemented.

During discussion the following matters were raised:

- There was a desire to be able to see the wording of complaints in the same manner in which the wording of compliments was displayed in the report.
- The Policy and Performance Officer, Clare Wood, advised that she was working with the Interim Head of Planning Support to create and manage performance indicators which would be monitored from April 2015 onwards. The backlog in Planning Support had been reduced as additional staff had been brought in to assist, and the data depicted improvement.
- The complaints system RFI had been in place for two years. A recent update had provided further functionality which would allow it to become a holistic correspondence programme, and had introduced a facility for reminders to be sent to Managers regarding complaints within the system that required a response.
- Issues had arisen regarding complaints received directly by email to Officers when they were on leave. It was suggested that this matter would need to be forwarded to IT to see if there were options for retrieval.

It was stated that all complaints regarding the long-term empty premium had been received from those who had to pay the premium due to their properties being left unoccupied and unfurnished for two years or more, and who had not been eligible for statutory exemptions. It was noted that whilst the long-term empty premium may have affected the renovation of long term derelict homes, the Empty Homes Programme was in place to offer assistance to get properties back into use. Members were interested in how the Private Sector Housing team that managed the Empty Homes Programme worked together with the Revenues team who implemented the Long-Term Empty Premium, and whether the homes that are brought back into use effect the Planning departments housing need figures.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Quarter 3 feedback briefing be noted.
2. That the successful implementation of the other MKIP shared services be noted, but due to concerns regarding complaints received

by the Planning Support Shared service, that the Interim Head of Planning Support be invited to circulate a briefing note detailing:

- a. A timeline for the implementation of performance improvement measures depicting when these measures are expected to take effect and improve service;
 - b. The performance indicators that have returned results to date; and
 - c. The financial information detailing budget, spend and the projected savings to be made going forward.
3. That information be circulated to Members to explain how the Private Sector Housing and Council Tax departments work together to administrate the Council tax assistance regarding the return to use of long term empty properties, and whether the return to use of these properties affects the calculation of the housing need target used by the Spatial Policy team.

129. 2014/15 QUARTER 3 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REPORT

The Policy and Information Officer, Clare Wood, introduced the Quarter 3 Key Performance Indicator Report and advised the Committee that:

- Income from pay and display car parks had increased by 10% compared to the same period during the previous year, equating to an additional £28.66 income per parking space.
- The number of park and ride on-board transactions had marginally missed the quarterly target, but that the decline in performance had lessened from the previous year.
- During quarter 2 a triage system had been introduced into the housing department to handle homelessness cases meaning that the figures have increased during quarter 3. However based upon the previous year's data and performance the annual target was not expected to be met.
- There was a wide review of street cleansing underway to address areas of land where there was an unacceptable amount of litter.

The following points were made during discussion:

- Members requested data explaining why there had been an increase in income derived from pay and display parking spaces, and the users of the park and ride service. Miss Wood explained that service profiling was used and that details could be circulated to Members.
- The Committee enquired as to how the triage system employed with regard homelessness cases worked in practice, and in particular

requested clarification as to how this helped contribute towards the prevention of homelessness.

- As part of the process of area based street cleaning, the cleansed area is monitored after a lapse of time and pictorial measurements are used to judge the efficacy and this given a numerical value. The Council were unable to remove fly-tipped waste from private land, and Members expressed concern that if not taken it could encourage further tipping or other unwanted behaviours.

RESOLVED:

1. That the following be noted:
 - a. The out-turns of the KPIs;
 - b. The indicators that were unlikely to achieve the annual performance target; and
 - c. That the new monitoring KPI for development Enforcement: DCE 004 Percentage of enforcement cases investigated within 21 days be agreed.
2. That the Policy and Information Officer be requested to circulate the performance profiling information for pay and display car parks and the park and ride bus service.
3. That the Programme Manager (Financial Inclusion and Maidstone Families Matter) be requested to provide details as to how the triage system implemented in the Gateway for homelessness enquiries works in practice.
4. That Members concern regarding the leaf detritus in the Bearsted ward area be reported to the Environmental depot, and that details as to the route of the area based cleaning service, and the rationale behind non-removal of flytipping from private land, be circulated by the Operations Manager to Members outside of the Meeting.

130. **FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chairman requested that the Committee consider its future work programme, the list of forthcoming decisions, and the SCRAIP update report.

RESOLVED: That the Committee's Future Work Programme, the Council's List of Forthcoming Decisions and the SCRAIP update be noted.

131. **DURATION OF MEETING**

6.32 p.m. to 8.34 p.m.

Maidstone Borough Council

Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

7 April 2015

Communications and Engagement Strategy

While reading the following report you may want to think about:

- What you want to know from the report;
- What questions you would like answered.

Make a note of your questions in the box below.

As you read the report you may think of other questions.

Questions I would like to ask regarding this report:

-
-
-
-
-

Guidance note - Making Quality Overview and Scrutiny Recommendations

Scrutiny recommendations should seek to make a real difference to local people and the services provided. Recommendations that note a change or request further information fail to resolve problems or make changes. The scrutiny team have identified the following criteria for quality recommendations, they:

- affect and make a difference to local people;
- result in a change in policy that improves services;
- identify savings and maintain/improve service quality; or
- objectively identify a solution.

One way of checking the usefulness of recommendations is to evaluate them against the 'six Ws' set out below:

Good recommendations should answer these questions:

Why does it need to be done?	This will help ensure the outcome is relevant and in the right context – if a meeting is being requested it will ensure the correct people are invited to attend
Who is being asked to do it?	Without this nothing will get done (no one will take ownership)
What needs to be done?	Needs to be clear and specific
HoW will it be done?	Again, needs to be clear and specific, what is the expected output- for example a report to be written or a meeting to be arranged
Where does it need to be done/go?	If it's a meeting – where is it needed If it's a report – where is it to go, who needs to see it
When does it need to be done?	Crucial to have a timescale – without a deadline it will never get done

Thinking about these points will help ensure the outcomes of scrutiny are effective and will aid monitoring.

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND CORPORATE SERVICES
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

7 APRIL 2015

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS

Report prepared by Roger Adley

1. COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

1.1 Issue for decision

- 1.1.1 To consider the Communication and Engagement Strategy for 2015-20.

1.2 Recommendation of the Head of Policy and Communications

That the Committee recommends that Cabinet approve the Communication and Engagement Strategy for 2015-20.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

- 1.3.1 The purpose of the strategy is to ensure the council communicates and engages effectively with residents, councilors, partners and staff to achieve its priorities. The communication and engagement strategy supports the council's new Strategic Plan for 2015 onwards.
- 1.3.2 Communication is central to the delivery of all council services. It is important to understand what residents need and expect and to engage them in decision making and service delivery. The council wants to ensure that its vision, priorities and outcomes are clearly understood by local people, the workforce, partners, local businesses and other stakeholders.
- 1.3.3 As well as supporting the delivery of the strategic plan the strategy should support other council strategies and plans, including the Community Development Strategy, Community Safety Partnership Plan Economic Development Strategy, Housing Strategy and the Maidstone Borough Local Plan.
- 1.3.4 Communication methods continue to change rapidly with social media increasing in importance for many residents who are looking to

communicate through Facebook and Twitter in particular. The action plan includes proposals to review existing channels for external communication to develop a new social media strategy building on our existing policy. This will support the council's work on moving more services on-line as identified in the customer services improvement programme.

1.3.5 The strategy takes account of best practice from other councils. The Head of Policy and Communications consulted the Local Government Association, which recommended Aylesbury Vale and Stevenage district councils as examples of best practice. This strategy follows a similar format to Stevenage's, which is the subject of a case study in the Chartered Institute of Public Relations' text book 'PR and Communication in Local Government'.

1.3.6 The council's editorial policy has served it well for many years under the cabinet and leader political management system. The council will revert to a committee system in May 2015 and the opportunity has been taken to review and recommend changes to the editorial policy.

1.4 Alternative Action and why not Recommended

1.4.1 The council could choose not to have a communications and engagement strategy; however this will impact on the ability to take a coordinated approach to communication and engagement.

1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.5.1 The communications and engagement strategy underpins the Council's Strategic Plan and Priorities.

1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1 A key part of effective communication and engagement is to manage and mitigate the risk to the Council's reputation. An effective strategy will assist with the delivery of the Strategic Plan and the corporate priorities.

1.7 Other Implications

1.7.1

1. Financial
2. Staffing
3. Legal
4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment

X
X
X

5. Environmental/Sustainable Development
6. Community Safety
7. Human Rights Act
8. Procurement
9. Asset Management

1.8 Financial

The strategy includes a proposal to review spending on our external newsletter to ensure that the newsletter remains effective and that the council continues to receive value for money.

There is another proposal to review our social media monitoring to consider if our customer contact team and others should be trained to monitor and reply to posts. The costs of the extra licences would be included in a future report.

1.9 Staffing

Communications is the responsibility of every officer and member of the council so whilst the communications team will be responsible for coordinating the delivery of the action plans for the strategy it will need the support of everyone.

The communications team now consists of three full time equivalent employees reporting to the Head of Policy and Communications. The Head of Service is reviewing the structure of teams within the portfolio.

1.10 Legal

The strategy places great importance on the need for the council to continue to observe the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity.

The chance has been taken to update the council's own editorial policy.

1.11 Relevant Documents

1.11.1 Appendices

Appendix A – Draft Communication and Engagement Strategy

Appendix B – Draft Communication and Engagement Strategy Action Plan

Appendix C – Stage 1 Equality Impact Assessment

1.11.2 Background Documents

None

<u>IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?</u>		<u>THIS BOX MUST BE COMPLETED</u>	
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, this is a Key Decision because:			
.....			
Wards/Parishes affected:			
.....			



Putting people first

Corporate Communications and Engagement Strategy, 2015-20



Contents

1. Introduction
2. Our communications and engagement aim
3. Maidstone's Borough Council's Strategic Plan 2015-20
4. The strategy in context
5. Corporate Communications and Engagement Strategy 2015 - 2020
6. Our stakeholders
7. How do we communicate and engage?
8. What do we communicate and engage?
9. Who communicates and engages?
10. Evaluation

Appendix 1 - Summary communication and engagement channels

Appendix 2 – Our performance and targets

Appendix 3 - Communication and Engagement Plan template

Appendix 4 – Principles of consultation

Appendix 5 - Editorial policy

Appendix 6 – 2015-16 action plan



1. Introduction

We are committed to delivering great value services for Maidstone Borough residents. The effectiveness of how we deliver our vision is determined to a significant extent by the quality of our communications and engagement. This strategy outlines the approach we will take to ensure our communications and engagement activity is the best possible and helps to achieve our vision.

Effective communications and engagement will ensure that our vision, priorities and outcomes are clearly understood by local people, our workforce, our partners, local businesses and other stakeholders.

2. Our communications and engagement aim

We will communicate clearly, openly, accurately and regularly with residents, business and our partners, and throughout the council, to promote mutual understanding, and give a better service to the people of Maidstone Borough. We will achieve this by:

- Articulating and communicating activities and services that support and deliver the strategic priorities in the council's strategic plan.
- Providing consistency in the delivery of key messages.
- Ensuring that all our communications are open, honest, clear, concise, simple and accessible.
- Ensuring that there are clear opportunities for residents and partners to have an influence on our policies and services.



3. Maidstone Borough Council's Strategic Plan 2015-20

The Corporate Communications and Engagement Strategy supports Maidstone Borough Council's Strategic Plan and sets out how we will communicate the council's vision, mission, priorities and values set out below to all our stakeholders:

OUR VISION

That our residents live in decent homes, enjoy good health and a pleasant environment, with a successful economy that is supported by reliable transport networks.

OUR MISSION

Putting People First.

PRIORITY 1

Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all

Providing a clean and safe environment

Encouraging good health and wellbeing.

Respecting the character of our Borough

Ensuring there are good leisure and cultural attractions

Enhancing the appeal of the town centre for everyone

PRIORITY 2

Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough

Securing improvements to the transport infrastructure of our Borough

Promoting a range of employment opportunities and skills required across our Borough

Planning for sufficient homes to meet our Borough's needs

OUR VALUES

Service

Everything we do impacts on our customers, both internal and external. We will listen to and understand their needs, then take action to provide the right service in a positive and professional manner.

Teamwork

Working together to achieve our objectives and goals in a way that utilises the talents and creativity of everyone in our organisation.

Responsibility

We work in an environment that encourages us to take ownership for our actions. Making the right choices and decisions that lead to a satisfactory outcome for all.

Integrity

We have the courage to act on our convictions to build trust and honesty. We work with our partners and customers to create a feeling of openness and transparency in everything we do.

Value

Taking care and weighing up our options, aiming to get the maximum effect for every penny of public money we spend.

Equality

Valuing our differences and understanding how they can contribute to a better working environment and services that are fair and easy to access.



4. The strategy in context

Research shows that the better informed people are about their council services, the more satisfied they feel. The Place Survey confirmed long-held beliefs that well informed residents are more likely to be satisfied with their council and feel it offers value for money (The New Reputation Guide - 2010, www.lga.gov.uk/reputation)

Good communications therefore can lead to more effective services, a better reputation and stronger relationships.

In our most recent residents' survey (conducted by Lake Market Research in autumn 2013) around two thirds of residents (67%) believed they were kept well informed about the services and benefits Maidstone Borough Council provides. This represents a small improvement compared to 2011 (63%) and clearly there is still room for improvement.

Maidstone Borough Council does not believe in spin.

Paragraph 4 of the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity 2011 (available for download from the gov.uk website) says "Publicity by local authorities should:

- Be lawful
- Be cost-effective
- Be objective
- Be even-handed
- Be appropriate
- Have regard to equality and diversity
- Be issued with care during periods of 'heightened sensitivity'"

In addition the council's editorial policy sets specific standards for Maidstone Borough Council publicity. The policy at Appendix 5 has been amended to take account of the Council's committee system that will operate from 2015-16.



5. Corporate Communications and Engagement Strategy 2015 - 2020

A successful Communications and Engagement Strategy to establish and maintain clear and relevant two-way channels of communication will:

- Raise awareness of the council's vision
- Maintain a culture of two-way communication with all our stakeholders to ensure that feedback is consistently fed into service planning and delivery
- Keep Maidstone Borough residents well informed
- Address negative or potentially damaging information about council services
- Support council staff in their roles as ambassadors for the organisation
- Support elected members in their role as community leaders
- Reach all sections of the community
- Keep abreast of technological developments and embrace them where feasible
- Promote respect and trust between the council and its stakeholders
- Raise the profile of Maidstone Borough
- Maintain a strong and consistent identity for the council
- Raise awareness of council services to maximise access to them
- Keep staff informed and promote understanding
- Develop and promote opportunities for residents, community groups and other stakeholders to engage with the council
- Maintain and improve customer satisfaction levels with the council
- Involve stakeholders in policy development and decision-making

We are committed to making all our communications and engagement activities:

- Two-way – both informing and listening
- Relevant and appropriate for target audiences
- Easily accessible
- Easily understood by everyone in our community
- Consistent
- Honest and accountable
- Timely

Continued over



We will achieve this by:

- Providing opportunities for residents and communities to be more involved and offer views and opinions on services and issues. These will be tailored to the needs of different groups – residents, parishes, councillors and officers, businesses, community groups and other partners.
- Exploring common approaches to engage groups of people, particularly those who are harder to reach.
- Carrying out communications and engagement to support and promote the priorities outlined in the Strategic Plan.

6. Our stakeholders?

A stakeholder is a person, group, or organisation that can affect or be affected by an organisation's actions, objectives, and policies. Stakeholders have varying needs and different stakeholders are entitled to different considerations.

Our communication and engagement plans (appendix 3) will seek to identify stakeholders and how to engage with them.

7. How do we communicate and engage?

We have many methods to communicate with stakeholders, and for them to communicate with us, including face to face, our Customer Contact Centre, our residents' newsletter, our website, traditional and social media, consultations and road shows. However, we will be innovative by:

Improving our digital communications

- Making our website more interactive so it is quick and easy to engage with us.
- Using new ways to engage people through digital and social media.
- Developing digital channels as alternatives to print when appropriate.

Tailoring communications and engagement to maximise impact

- Using data to tailor activity to reach groups of people more effectively.
- Evaluating of our approach to continue to increase effectiveness.
- Joining up activity to reach key groups of people in the most effective way and provide value for money.

Continued over



Maintaining a strategic approach

- Focusing on the priorities in the Strategic Plan.

Ensuring Maidstone has an influential voice locally and regionally

- Presenting the borough's views locally and regionally on our priorities.

Providing opportunities for people to engage on issues and services

- Increasing opportunities for people to engage on issues and services by developing existing and new channels.

Providing the best communications and engagement by working as one team

- Building on effective, coordinated communications and engagement that is consistently high quality and provides value for money.
- Working with partners and others to co-ordinate communications and engagement for the benefit of Maidstone residents and businesses.

8. What do we communicate and engage in?

We communicate and engage with stakeholders about the council's services, policies, values and decisions, and the issues which impact on stakeholders. This includes information on how the council works and how to get involved in decisions, councillors, public service information during emergencies, and consultation and engagement opportunities. Stakeholder feedback is passed on to departments to inform service planning and delivery

Where people expect to be able to play a role in how services are designed and delivered, we will recognise and appreciate their involvement.

We will tailor our communications and engagement to the needs of different groups – residents, officers, members, businesses, communities and other partners - to enable deeper engagement.



9. Who communicates?

Communication is the responsibility of every officer and member of the council. We have a corporate communications team of three full time equivalent people that manage the council's communications function by providing procedures, guidance and advice, which ensures that information is exchanged in an accurate and consistent manner.

The reporting structure of the team is:



The council has an agreement for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to supply design services.

The communications team is responsible for delivering the action plan for this strategy. It deals with all requests/enquiries from journalists on behalf of staff and assists all councillors with requests/enquiries from journalists. Journalists can expect us to:

- Foster a cooperative, mutually beneficial relationship
- Treat them with courtesy and respect
- Regard them as partners in providing people with timely, accurate information
- Make every effort to assist them with their requests/enquiries.

The council expects to be reported fairly and accurately and given a reasonable opportunity to reply to media enquiries.



10. Standards and Evaluation

We have in place formal measurement mechanisms for our communications and engagement activities (appendix 3). These are in line with communications best practice, and indicate progress towards the achievement of our targets.

We will regularly review our progress in implementing this strategy and will share updates.

The council's approach to communications, branding and the corporate identity is detailed in the council's clear communications guide and branding guidelines. The council has adopted principles of consultation (appendix 4) and maintains a consultation handbook. We will continue to brief and inform our staff to ensure consistency.

We will continue to use the results of both formal and informal research to measure residents' satisfaction with the quality and quantity of information we provide. Our next survey of residents' attitudes to the council and awareness of its services is scheduled for the autumn 2015. We will review the results before preparing our 2016-17 communications and engagement action plan.



Appendix 1 – Summary communication and engagement channels

Our detailed plans to deliver this strategy are set out in the 2015-16 action plan at appendix 6. We will measure our success against the results of the residents' survey in autumn 2015 and then every two years.

The following is a summary of the channels we use and why.

Community and business engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote coproduction of solutions with residents, businesses, staff, partners and other stakeholders where possible and be clear on when we are seeking to engage, inform or consult to manage expectations. • Provide community and business forums, e.g. Maidstone Older Person's Forum, Disability Focus Group, BME Forum, Maidstone Economic Business Partnership, Marden Business Forum etc. - to provide balanced and objective information to assist people in understanding and actively engaging in local issues and opportunities. • Provide individuals and communities with training, information, advice and support needed to develop their confidence, skills, knowledge and ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - participate in community life - engage with services - engage in local decision-making - understand and engage with democratic processes - come together to take action for themselves • To partner with the community in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification and delivery of the preferred solution. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For example, neighbourhood action planning which involves community groups, residents and public organisations working together to tackle neighbourhood issues. • To place decision-making in the hands of the community. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For example, Maidstone Community First neighbourhood funding to increase community engagement, improve health and wellbeing and reduce crime and ASB.
Corporate identity and branding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop understanding of the needs of different audiences and plan marketing communications accordingly. • Promote services and information in a clearly branded way through the most appropriate channels. • Ensure guidance and support is available for internal use so that the corporate identity guidelines can be adhered to by all.

Continued over



Council publications e.g. Borough Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To inform and educate target audiences about changes to service delivery and issues directly related to the council's key communications messages.
Internal communications e.g. One Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop communications channels to provide honest, accurate, understandable and timely information to staff and councillors that is relevant to them undertaking their roles effectively and increasing their understanding of council business. Listen as well as inform, ensuring that sufficient channels of communication, including feedback mechanisms, are in place so information moves up, down and across the organisation. Ensure that members of staff are aware of, and involved in, decision making and activities. To gain organisational buy-in and support for our strategic plan.
Leaflets and posters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To inform and educate target audiences about changes to service delivery and issues directly related to the council's key communications messages.
Media relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop proactive and open relations with the media, responding quickly and effectively to media enquiries. Use news releases to inform and educate target audiences about changes to service delivery and issues directly related to the council's key communications messages. Ensure procedures are in place so that all officers and councillors dealing with the media have appropriate support.
Publicity and awareness campaigns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To inform and educate target audiences about changes to service delivery and issues directly related to the council's key communications messages.
Social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus social media activity on developing Twitter as an information provider, with Facebook used for time limited campaigns, issues and engagement, rather than for general news updates.
Website	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the use of the council's website to access council information and services, and to facilitate e-channels of communication that the public can use to speak to us and access services.



Appendix 2 - Our performance and targets

Indicator	Residents Survey 2011	Residents Survey 2013 *the definition of some indicators was amended in 2013	Residents Survey 2015 target
Overall satisfaction with local area as a place to live	84%	84%	85%
Percentage of residents who trust the council (new indicator in 2013)	n/a	61%	64%
Agreement that residents can influence decisions affecting their local area	35%	29%*	32%
Agreement that the local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together	77%	56%*	60%
Satisfaction with the way Maidstone Borough council runs its services	63%	66%	68%
Percentage of residents that feel that the council keeps them well informed about the services and benefits it provides	63%	67%*	69%
Agreement that Maidstone Borough Council provides value for money	46%	43%	45%
Indicator	Best Companies Survey 2007	Best Companies Survey 2010	Best Companies Survey 2015
Employee engagement measured by the Best Companies accreditation scheme	586.2	602.9	576.4



Appendix 3 – Communications and Engagement plans template

Background

- A brief summary, including situation and/or environmental analysis tools as appropriate, of the context in which the communications/engagement will take place and the events or actions that have led to the activity.

Overall Aim

- The aim should clearly follow from the background.

Objectives

- These should be clear, concise and achievable outcomes that can be measured.

Key messages

- What are the key facts, thoughts or ideas that this activity seeks to get across?

Measurement:

- How will this activity be measured against its objectives?
- What are the criteria for success?

Review:

- How and when will progress be reviewed?

Resources:

- What is the total cost of this activity and what is the breakdown of costs by activity?

Timetable

- When is this activity likely to begin?
- Over what period will it continue? What other relevant council activities or events will coincide with this activity?

Stakeholders

- The communications/engagement activity should identify a clearly defined audience or set of audiences and demonstrate how the objectives relate to each. Audience needs should be considered.

Actions

- What elements comprise the communications/engagement activity? What media/tools will be used?



Appendix 4 - Principles of Consultation and Engagement

- **Inclusive** - Involving all sections of the community. When possible information should be available in a choice of formats.
- **Open** - With real choices. What can people realistically change?
- **Impartial** - It should not lead local people to a response.
- **Informative** - People must be informed to make reasoned decisions.
- **Involving** - It must enable people to really become involved in the development of proposals rather than the final decision.
- **Understandable** - Plain English must be used.
- **Appropriate** - To reach all groups there should be a mix of quantitative and qualitative research.
- **Strategic** - To avoid 'tick box tiredness' consultation should take account of the council's partner's consultation exercises.
- **Joined Up** - Is it appropriate to combine consultation exercises?
- **Resourced** - Sufficient human and financial resources are committed to ensure consultation is rigorous and reaches all participants.
- **Professional** - There must be confidence that the results are real and not massaged to produce the outcome favoured by the council.
- **Timely** - It should be at times and in places where people are likely to participate.
- **Listened to** - It must be owned by the council and the results must provide them with real information on which to base decisions.
- **Reported & Communicated** - Feedback on the results and how they have informed the decision will build confidence that views are listened to and acted on.



Appendix 5 - Public Relations and Editorial Policy

This appendix sets out the Public Relations and Editorial Policy for council newsletters, news releases, media events and enquiries, and council road shows.

- All the council's communications will comply with s.2 of the Local Government Act 1986 and s.27 of the Local Government Act 1988, and have regard to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity. This means that it will be:
 - Non-partisan
 - Lawful
 - Cost-effective
 - Objective
 - Even-handed
 - Appropriate
 - Have regard to equality and diversity
- The council will only publicise and promote the decisions, policies and services of the council and its partners.
- Committee Chairs and the Leader of the Council can be quoted in news releases, council newsletters and media statements to explain decisions and policies and to promote council services.
- News releases and responses to media and other enquiries will include contact details for all group spokespersons.
- The council will hold photo calls and events to promote and explain decisions, policies and services. The council will be represented at photo calls and events by The Mayor, the Leader of the Council, Committee Chairs, and council officers, as appropriate. All members of the council will be informed of, and welcome to attend, these events.
- News releases will be sent to all councillors at the same time that they are issued to the media.
- Ward members and group leaders will be informed of council road shows as soon as the dates are fixed and invited to attend or send representatives.



Appendix B - 2015-16 Action Plan

We measure progress towards a number of communication and engagement objectives as set in appendix 2.

The actions we will take to achieve these objectives are listed below, along with actions to improve communication with councillors following the transfer to the council's new committee system in 2015-16.

Objective - Satisfaction with local area as a place to live					
What we plan to do	Anticipated Outcomes	By whom	When	Inform/ Consult/ Engage	Strategic Priority
Engage with residents to identify residents' needs and aspirations for the new homes bonus and community infrastructure levy.	A targeted approach to the distribution of these resources.	Head of Planning and Development Communications Manager	2015	Engage	Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all
Help people understand and actively engage in local issues and opportunities through community forums such as - Maidstone Older Person's Forum, Disability Focus Group and BME Forum.	People involved in local policy and decision making. Improved networking, collaboration and partnership between the voluntary and community sector and agencies building their organisational capacities. Better community cohesion and equality of opportunity for all throughout the Maidstone borough.	Head of Housing and Community Services	Annually	Engage	Putting People First
Objective – Trust the council					
What we plan to do	Anticipated Outcomes	By whom	When	Inform/ Consult/ Engage	Strategic Priority
Develop a plan to communicate funding issues and their implications to residents.	Increased awareness and understanding of new commercial activities.	Head of Policy and Communications	September 2015	Inform	Putting People First
Communicate changes to governance arrangements to ensure residents understand how they can get involved in decision-making.	Increased awareness and participation by residents in council decision making.	Head of Policy and Communications	June 2015	Engage	Putting People First

Regular feedback on the results of consultations on our website and through other channels as appropriate.	Increased trust among residents that consultation results are taken into account and do influence decision making.	Head of Policy and Communications	On-going	Inform	Putting People First
Objective - Residents can influence decisions affecting their local area					
What we plan to do	Anticipated Outcomes	By whom	When	Inform/ Consult/ Engage	Strategic Priority
Rollout an online Events Toolkit to support local community events and activities. Provide training events and workshops such as Community Participatory Appraisal and Planning for Real neighbourhood engagement.	Individuals and communities empowered and more resilient through training, information, advice and support. Increased confidence, skills, knowledge and ability to participate in community life, engage with services, local decision-making and democratic processes and take action for themselves.	Head of Housing and Community Services	Annually	Engage	Putting People First
Develop ways in which residents can have their say and influence the Council's new decision making process including the opportunity for regular dialogue and engagement.	Greater participation by residents in council decision making.	Head of Policy and Communications Head of Finance and Resources	June – July 2015	Engage	Putting People First
Participation in Democracy Week 2015	Raised awareness of the opportunities residents have to take part in council decision making.	Head of Finance and Resources	October 2015	Engage	Putting People First
Seminars and training in community engagement for staff and councillors.	More councillors and staff running community engagement events for their communities and service areas.	Head of HR Shared Services Head of Housing and Community Services Head of Finance and Resources	Annually	Engage	Putting People First

To partner with the community in decision making with neighbourhood action planning in Maidstone's areas of deprivation to involve community groups, residents and public organisations working together to tackle neighbourhood issues.	Communities have an input into addressing health, housing and wellbeing issues in their localities. Consultation and decision-making placed in the hands of the community.	Head of Housing and Community Services	Annually	Engage	Putting People First
Identify hard to reach groups and develop effective means of engaging with them, working with our partners when appropriate to ensure our communications and engagements are inclusive.	More representative samples from council consultations and greater participation in council engagement activities.	Head of Policy and Communications Head of Housing and Community Services	Review April – June annually	Inform/ Consult/ Engage	Putting People First
Objective - People from different backgrounds get on well together					
What we plan to do	Anticipated Outcomes	By whom	When	Inform/ Consult/ Engage	Strategic Priority
Develop a guide to communities across the borough containing data about communication preferences and other information available through sources such as Mosaic and Acorn to better target communications.	Improved targeting of information and engagement activities so that people receive the information most relevant to them, improving their engagement with and trust in the council.	Head of Policy and Communications	April 2015 – March 2016	Engage	Putting People First
Objective - Satisfaction with the way Maidstone Borough Council runs its services					
What we plan to do	Anticipated Outcomes	By whom	When	Inform/ Consult/ Engage	Strategic Priority
You Said... We Did quarterly campaigns/information.	Increased trust in the council. Staff and residents more informed about services and changes made as a result of customer/staff feedback.	Head of Policy and Communications	2015-2016	Inform	Putting People First
Produce Annual Report on the council's progress towards achieving its strategic plan priorities.	Increased trust in the council. Greater understanding of the council's strategic priorities	Head of Policy and Communications			

A consistent and memorable corporate identity on all front facing services.	Increased trust in the council. Greater understanding of how council tax is spent, demonstrating value for money.	Head of Policy and Communications		Inform	Putting People First
Objective – Information about the council services and benefits					
What we plan to do	Anticipated Outcomes	By whom	When	Inform/ Consult/ Engage	Strategic Priority
A review of our external communications channels including our newsletter and social networking accounts.	More effective communication and better value for money.	Head of Policy and Communications	July – September 2015	Inform	Putting People First
A new Social media Strategy, building on our policy for social networking accounts.	Clear direction for the council's use of social media to make sure that it effectively contributes to the council's priorities	Head of Policy and Communications	April – June 2015	Engage	Putting People First
'Our day' social media campaigns highlighting council services.	Increased awareness of council services, improving trust and understanding of how council tax is spent.	Head of Policy and Communications	Quarterly	Inform	Putting People First
Working for you features in our newsletter and social media.	Increased awareness of council services, improving trust and understanding of how council tax is spent.	Head of Policy and Communications	Each issue	Inform	Putting People First
Objective - Value for money					
What we plan to do	Anticipated Outcomes	By whom	When	Inform/ Consult/ Engage	Strategic Priority
Annual budget consultation for residents and staff including value for money information and report.	Increased understanding of how council tax is spent, improving trust in the council and belief that it provides value for money.	Head of Policy and Communications Head of Finance and Resources	October – January Annually	Consult/ Inform	Putting People First

Annual Council tax publicity – value of services provided.	Increased understanding of how council tax is spent, improving trust in the council and belief that it provides value for money.	Head of Policy and Communications Head of Finance and Resources	April annually	Inform	Putting People First
Objective - Employee engagement					
What we plan to do	Anticipated Outcomes	By whom	When	Inform/ Consult/ Engage	Strategic Priority
An annual One Council rhythm of the year programme of co-ordinated staff communication and engagement activities including - One Council briefings, Core Brief, team talks, Staff Forum, health and wellbeing week, and STRIVE awards etc.	Increased employee engagement leading to better understanding of the council's strategic plan and priorities.	Head of Policy and Communications Head of HR Shared Service	Annually	Engage	Putting People First
Objective – Improve communication with councillors					
What we plan to do	Anticipated Outcomes	By whom	When	Inform/ Consult/ Engage	Strategic Priority
Support councillors to raise their profiles in their local areas to lead their communities and bring forward ideas to the council.	Improved resident engagement with the council.	Councillors Head of Policy and Communications	Annually	Engage	Putting People First

Stage 1: Equality Impact Assessment

1. What are the main aims purpose and outcomes of the Policy and how do these fit with the wider aims of the organization?

The purpose of the communications and engagement strategy is to ensure we communicate clearly, openly, accurately and regularly with our residents, with our partners, and throughout the council, to promote mutual understanding, and give a better service to the people of Maidstone Borough.

Our aims are:

- To articulate and communicate activities and services that support and deliver the strategic priorities in the council's strategic plan.
- To provide consistency in the delivery of key messages.
- To ensure that all our communications are open, honest, clear, concise, simple and accessible.
- To ensure that there are clear opportunities for residents and partners to have an influence on our services.

The strategy will support the council's core values such as Service for example understanding customer needs and expectations, Integrity, being honest and fair, Value, delivering cost effectiveness and Equality, valuing differences.

2. How do these aims affect our duty to:

- **Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization and other conduct prohibited by the act.**
- **Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.**
- **Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.**

The strategy will help advance equality of opportunity for all our residents and businesses by co-ordinating the council's approach to communications and engagement, and ensuring there are clear and accessible opportunities to have an influence on our services.

Our communications/engagement activity should identify a clearly defined audience or set of audiences and demonstrate how the objectives relate to each. Audience needs should be considered.

Each individual consultation and engagement activity has the potential to impact on people with protected characteristics, dependant on the questions being asked or the changes proposed, and therefore specific EQIAs will be undertaken for each consultation exercise.

There are no direct impacts on protected characteristics as a result of this strategy.

3. What aspects of the policy including how it is delivered or accessed could contribute to inequality?

There are no direct impacts on equalities. The strategy includes proposals to review our external communications channels including our resident's newsletter and social networking accounts. Protected characteristics will need to be considered as part of the review and any changes to our communication channels. This will be accessed for Equality Impacts as part of the review process.

The potential for inequality will also need to be considered as part of each consultation activity and such activities will require separate EQIAs.

4. Will the policy have an impact (positive or negative) upon the lives of people, including particular communities and groups who have protected characteristics? What evidence do you have for this?

It is expected that a successful strategy will establish and maintain clear and relevant two-way channels of communication for all stakeholders including those with protected characteristics. Including an inclusive and accessible approach to consultation that should have a positive impact for all of the communities we serve.

If the answer to the second question has identified potential impacts and you have answered yes to any of the remaining questions then you should carry out a full EQIA set out as stage 2 below.

Agenda Item 10

Maidstone Borough Council

Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

7 April 2015

End of Year Scrutiny Committee Recommendation Action and Implementation Plan (SCRAIP) Update Report

While reading the following report you may want to think about:

- What you want to know from the report;
- What questions you would like answered.

Make a note of your questions in the box below.

As you read the report you may think of other questions.

Questions I would like to ask regarding this report:

-
-
-
-
-

Guidance note - Making Quality Overview and Scrutiny Recommendations

Scrutiny recommendations should seek to make a real difference to local people and the services provided. Recommendations that note a change or request further information fail to resolve problems or make changes. The scrutiny team have identified the following criteria for quality recommendations, they:

- affect and make a difference to local people;
- result in a change in policy that improves services;
- identify savings and maintain/improve service quality; or
- objectively identify a solution.

One way of checking the usefulness of recommendations is to evaluate them against the 'six Ws' set out below:

Good recommendations should answer these questions:

Why does it need to be done?	This will help ensure the outcome is relevant and in the right context – if a meeting is being requested it will ensure the correct people are invited to attend
Who is being asked to do it?	Without this nothing will get done (no one will take ownership)
What needs to be done?	Needs to be clear and specific
HoW will it be done?	Again, needs to be clear and specific, what is the expected output- for example a report to be written or a meeting to be arranged
Where does it need to be done/go?	If it's a meeting – where is it needed If it's a report – where is it to go, who needs to see it
When does it need to be done?	Crucial to have a timescale – without a deadline it will never get done

Thinking about these points will help ensure the outcomes of scrutiny are effective and will aid monitoring.

Maidstone Borough Council

Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 7 April 2015

End of Year Scrutiny Committee Recommendation Action and Implementation Plan (SCRAIP) Update Report

Report of: Poppy Brewer, Democratic Services Officer

1. Introduction

- 1.1 To consider the Committee's End of Year SCRAIP Update report.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. That the Committee notes the End of Year SCRAIP Update report at **Appendix A**.
- 2.3 That the Committee decides whether any items should be recommended for consideration by the appropriate Service Committee in the next Municipal year.

3. Scrutiny Committee Recommendation Action and Implementation Plan (SCRAIP) Responses

- 3.1 The issue of making, and monitoring, recommendations is an important part of the scrutiny process. SCRAIPs set out recommendations following scrutiny meetings/reviews and information is sought on the plan as to whether recommendations are accepted, the action to be taken and by who.

4. Impact on Corporate Objectives

- 4.1 The Strategic Plan sets the Council's key objectives for the medium term and has a range of objectives which support the delivery of the Council's priorities.
- 4.2 The Committee will consider reports that deliver against the following Council priority:
- 'Corporate and Customer Excellence'

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1 To assist O&S committees in their inquiries, a small budget is available for the purchase of necessary equipment and to cover the costs of training, site visits, meetings in locations other than the Town Hall, witness expenses, specialist advice, books and any other

cost that might be legitimately incurred by the committees in the course of their activities.

6. Relevant Documents

6.1 Appendix A – SCRAIP report

7. Background Documents

10.1 None

Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Meeting, Minute & Date	Recommendation	Due Date	Executive Decision Maker	Response	Lead Officer
SLCS.1501 06.96.1 46	<p>That the Draft Strategic Plan be noted, and the following amendments referenced in discussion between Members, the Leader of the Council and Head of Policy and Communications be requested:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A reference to be made to the river within the 'Ensuring there are good leisure and cultural attractions' priority. 2. Under the heading 'Respecting the Character of the Borough', delete 'which aside from Tovil are rural' at the end of the second sentence, and for the third point under 'We Mean' to be amended to read 'Respecting our Heritage and Natural Environment'. 3. Under 'Ensuring there are good Leisure and Cultural Attractions' to include reference to the river and for the sentence to read '...a well-used leisure centre, a castle, various markets and a variety of 	02-Mar-2015	Cabinet Member for Corporate Services	Subsequent to the January meeting of the Committee the draft Strategic Plan 2015-2020 went to Cabinet and then full Council, who resolved that the be approved and gave delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, to make minor amendments to the document as required.	Angela Woodhouse; Poppy Brewer

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47	festivals and events held through the year and across the Borough'. 4. Under 'Enhancing the Appeal of the Town Centre for Everyone', to include the phrase 'for leisure' after 'popular place' and before 'to live' in the last sentence. 5. In the background data provided, the results of academic year 2011/2012 to be replaced and updated with the most recently available data, and for the graphs to be made larger with the colour labelling made clearer. 6. For Maidstone's rating within the 'Halifax Best Places to Live' survey to be referenced in the introduction to the Strategic Plan 2015/2020.				
SLCS.1501 06.98.2	That it be noted that Members were in active support of Officers in finding options that mitigate the financial risk to the Council while achieving strategic objectives, and request an update from the Head of Housing and Community Services on this issue.	02-Mar-2015			John Littlemore
SLCS.1501 06.98.3	That Officers be requested to produce Member Development sessions on strategic risk with a view to these being incorporated into new Member inductions	02-Mar-2015		In November 2014 the Audit Committee agreed to a calendar of member development sessions which included Risk Management. In addition to Audit Committee Members it was agreed that the sessions would be made available to all Members to attend.	Russell Heppleston

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	commencing from elections in May 2015, and rolled out to all Members.			<p>The member development session on Risk Management was held in January 2015, and received good attendance.</p> <p>We will therefore explore the opportunity to integrate these sessions into the Members Induction Programme for 2015/16 onwards.</p>	
SLCS.1501 06.99.2 48	That the Head of Finance and Resources be requested to ascertain whether income was generated through photography of artefacts in the Museum, and for this information to be circulated to Members outside of the Committee.	02-Mar-2015			Paul Riley
SLCS.1503 03.1281	<p>That the successful implementation of the other MKIP shared services be noted, but due to concerns regarding complaints received by the Planning Support Shared service, that the Interim Head of Planning Support be invited to circulate a briefing note detailing:</p> <p>a. A timeline for the implementation of performance improvement measures depicting when these measures are expected to take effect and</p>	31-Mar-2015	Cabinet Member for Corporate Services		Ryan O'Connell

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	<p>improve service;</p> <p>b. The performance indicators that have returned results to date; and</p> <p>c. The financial information detailing the budget, expenditure and the projected savings to be made going forward.</p>				
SLCS.1503 03.1282 49	That information be circulated to Members to explain how the Private Sector Housing and Council Tax departments work together to administrate the Council tax assistance regarding the return to use of long term empty properties, and whether the return to use of these properties affects the calculation of the housing need target used by the Spatial Policy team.	31-Mar-2015	Cabinet Member for Corporate Services	A statement from Spatial Planning has been circulated to Members by email.	Nigel Bucklow; Steve McGinnes; Sue Whiteside
SLCS.1503 03.1292	That the Policy and Information Officer be requested to circulate the performance profiling information for pay and display car parks and the park and ride bus service.	31-Mar-2015	Cabinet Member for Corporate Services		Clare Wood
SLCS.1503 03.1293	That the Programme Manager (Financial Inclusion and Maidstone Families Matter) be requested to provide details as to how the	31-Mar-2015	Cabinet Member for Corporate Services	Flowchart sent to Poppy and circulated to Members.	Ellie Kershaw

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	triage system implemented in the Gateway for homelessness enquiries works in practice.				
SLCS.1503 03.1294	That Members concern regarding the leaf detritus in the Bearsted ward area be reported to the Environmental depot, and that details as to the route of the area based cleaning service, and the rationale behind non-removal of fly tipping from private land, be circulated by the Operations Manager to Members outside of the Meeting.	31-Mar-2015	Cabinet Member for Corporate Services		Martyn Jeynes; Jennifer Shepherd