

## **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

#### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 15 SEPTEMBER 2014**

**Present:** Councillor Mrs Gooch (Chairman), and  
Councillors Ash, Butler, Long, Mrs Parvin, Pickett and  
Mrs Stockell

**Also Present:** Councillors Mrs Blackmore and  
Mrs Wilson

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

**RESOLVED:** that all items on the agenda be webcast.

59. APOLOGIES

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

60. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following substitute member was noted:

Councillor English for Councillor Mrs Grigg.

61. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS/WITNESSES

Councillor Mrs Wilson was in attendance as a witness for item 7 of the agenda – Call-In: Equality Objective Update 2013/14.

62. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

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

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

64. CALL-IN: EQUALITY OBJECTIVE UPDATE 2013/14

The Equality Objectives Update 2013/14 decision had been called in by Councillors English and Mrs Wilson, who were invited to address the Committee to outline their concerns with the decision and reasons for

calling it in. Councillor Mrs Blackmore, Leader of the Council, Angela Woodhouse, Head of Policy and Communications, and Clare Wood, Policy and Performance Officer, attended to answer questions and provide further information on the decision.

The Committee heard the concerns of the members that had called the decision in, which focused on the question of whether the current equality objectives were effective in eliminating discrimination, eliminating inequality of opportunity or fostering good relations between groups or people. The members raised the concern that the current equality objectives appeared to have a narrow scope of focus, and expressed a wish that the equality objectives focus on serious local issues such as domestic violence, disability and prejudice. The members clarified that their desire was for a fundamental review of the equality objectives to ensure their focus on urgent or significant issues. It was recognised that the equality objectives were evidence based. Members suggested that the demographic of Maidstone had changed in recent times and as a result more recent, localised data would be required.

The Committee raised the following points of clarification:

- Could the issue have been dealt with at Overview and Scrutiny Committee rather than by call in?
- How did the Equality Objectives tie in with the Equality Policy?

The Head of Policy and Communications advised the Committee that the subject of the call in was the review of the progress of the Equality Objectives and not the Objectives themselves. It was explained that the Equality Objectives were one part of the Council's activities with regard to the Equalities Act 2010, including the Equality Policy and the Respecting Difference training which staff and Members had attended. The Committee also heard that a recent Internal Audit review of the Council's Public Sector Equalities Duty had concluded the controls in place provided a substantial level of assurance.

The Leader of the Council explained to the Committee that a new Strategic Plan would be implemented in 2015 with a review of the Equality Objectives starting in September/October 2014. The Policy and Performance Officer described how data was gathered to inform the formulation of the Equality Objectives, and advised the Committee that ward and borough profiles would be brought before Members in November 2014.

Members discussed the possibility of a workshop to discuss the development of future Equality Objectives with particular reference to how these could complement the new Strategic Plan. Members suggested that evidence should be sought from a variety of appropriate stakeholders, including those with protected characteristics.

**RESOLVED:**

1. That no action be taken, and that the decision be implemented as taken by the Leader of the Council on 29 August 2014.
2. That a cross-party workshop, open to all Members, be set up to help with the planned review of the Council's Equality Objectives to ensure Objectives for 2015-18 meet the needs of the local community and complement the new Strategic Plan.
3. That findings from the cross-party workshop be reported back to the Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to ensure formal recommendations can be made.

65. DURATION OF MEETING

4.00pm to 4.45pm