

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET**

Decision Made: 14 April 2015

**USE OF POTENTIAL REVENUE UNDER SPEND 2014-15**

**Issue for Decision**

To consider proposals for the use of the projected under spend for the financial year 2014/15 following Cabinet agreement to set aside funding for projects to deliver on key priorities from the under spend in 2014/15.

**Decision Made**

That the schemes set out in Appendix A to the Report of the Head of Finance and Resources be approved and the priority applied to them in order to allocate up to £400,000 of revenue resources from the year end under spend 2014/15.

**Reasons for Decision**

- (1) As part of the third quarter's budget monitoring report, considered by the Cabinet at the meeting on 11 February 2015, the predicted year end under spend was reported and the following decision was made:

"That the Cabinet agree to set aside £400,000 of the projected under spend for 2014/15 to fund specific projects which support the delivery of the council's strategic priorities."

Following that meeting the Council approved the 2015/16 budget on 27 February 2015 with an amendment that included the following item:

"...b) That recognition of the service growth required to provide new housing is set out in the medium term financial strategy through the provision of a budget of £40,000 to support the new service. For the budget year 2015/16 funding will be provided from the set aside of the projected under spend for 2014/15 that Cabinet has already approved for such use. For future budget years 2016/17 onwards this would be resourced from the income generated by the service."

- (2) At this time the provisional figures for the outturn for 2014/15 suggest that the under spend relating to salary vacancy levels will be in the region of £400,000 out of the £17m salary budget. This means that an initial assessment would suggest that the Cabinet agreed action set out in paragraph (1) above is achievable.

- (3) It is however possible that the final outturn after all year end work is completed will be a different figure and an adjustment will be required to the value of the available under spend. This is further complicated by the commencement of new governance arrangements and a new constitution.
- (4) Under the new governance arrangements that commence from the date of the annual general meeting of the Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2015, issues in relation to the budget will be considered by the Policy and Resources Committee. Given the committee's prominence in the new rules regarding referral of decisions the meetings of this committee will end each committee cycle. This means the first meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee will occur late in June or early in July.
- (5) The final outturn position for 2014/15 will be reported to that meeting of the committee and in normal circumstances use of any under spend would be a consideration in that report. Due to the timing delays that this option would introduce into the commencement of the schemes, it was proposed that the issue was considered by Cabinet.
- (6) Members noted that the matter was only an issue in this first year of the new arrangements and future years will include a more continuous calendar of meetings between municipal years.
- (7) At this time final outturn is not available and, while the current projection would enable the use of the £400,000 reported in the third quarter's monitoring report to the Cabinet, it is possible that final outturn will be a lesser sum. For this reason the proposals required prioritisation.
- (8) In considering the most appropriate prioritisation method to propose to Cabinet the work on consultation in relation to the strategic plan was used. Given the measurement of public opinion on the priorities, as set out in the consultation report on the Cabinet agenda for 11 February 2015, the following order of priority was proposed:
1. Prior approval by Council;
  2. Unavoidable or Health & Safety schemes
  3. A Clean & Safe Environment
  4. Transport Improvements
  5. Putting People First
  6. Encouraging good health
  7. Promoting Employment & Skills
  8. Good Leisure & Cultural Attractions
  9. Respecting Maidstone Borough
  10. Planning for sufficient homes
  11. Enhancing Maidstone Town Centre
- (9) Subject to Cabinet's satisfaction with the prioritisation method it had been applied to the schemes that are set out in **Appendix A**

to the report of the Head of Finance and Resources for approval.

- (10) The schemes brought forward have been proposed by officers and relate to issues that do not currently have funding or sufficient funding to progress as required. In cases where a financial benefit would accrue from the proposal this value is given and in all cases the link to the strategic plan priority is also provided.
- (11) Should the resources available to progress the schemes be different to the value of the schemes set out in Appendix A to the report then it was proposed that additional schemes or alternatives would be reported to the first Policy & Resources Committee of the new municipal year along with the final outturn.

### **Alternatives considered and why rejected**

- (1) The resources could have remained in general balance or be carried forward to support the service in which the under spend occurred. This would not proactively support the delivery of the Council's strategic priorities or achieve the more strategic actions that would otherwise not be considered.
- (2) The final outturn could be awaited and a proposal put forward that identified these schemes at that time but this would delay the actions that can be taken by officers in the forthcoming months.

### **Background Papers**

None

Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call in form signed by any two Non-Executive Members to the Head of Finance & Resources by: **23 April 2015**

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET**

Decision Made: 14 April 2015

**OFFICE ACCOMMODATION PROJECT**

**Issue for Decision**

- (1) To note progress on the project and to consider funding for the next phase; and
- (2) To consider funding for the next stage of the projects.

**Decision Made**

- (1) That the progress on the office accommodation projects be noted;
- (2) That approval is given to the funding of £65,000 for the first phase of the optimization of Maidstone House in connection with the Council's short/medium term accommodation;
- (3) That approval is given to the funding of £10,000 to complete investigations into the alternative use of the Gateway; and
- (4) That the potential requirement of £165,000 for the second phase of the optimization of Maidstone House be noted.

**Reasons for Decision**

**Background**

- (1) In August 2014, Cabinet agreed the strategy and the scope of the work planned for the short/medium term and the long term provision of the Council's office accommodation. The short/medium term strategy was being driven by the objective of implementing the break clause in the lease for the first floor of Maidstone House in October 2016; with the long term strategy being driven by the lease end date for the rest of Maidstone House and the Gateway in October 2023.
- (2) Cabinet agreed initial funding of £90,000 for the appointment of a specialist advisor in connection with formulating the long term strategy, the purchase of desk/meeting room booking software and the appointments of a space planner and a project manager to develop the workstreams for the short/medium term strategy.

- (3) In December 2014, Cabinet also agreed funding of £250,000 to proceed with the establishment of an Enterprise Hub on the first floor of the Gateway building. This, and the decision to amalgamate the contact centre with the Gateway team into the Gateway building, and the proposal to provide accommodation for the West Kent Commissioning Group have had an impact on the short/medium term strategy.
- (4) The initial funding of £90,000 has been supplemented by further funding of £106,500, agreed by Cabinet in February 2015, to enable advancement of the project through to the end of 2014/15.

Progress to date

- (5) Montagu Evans has been appointed to provide specialist advice in connection with the long term accommodation strategy. A three stage approach has been developed. The first stage, ascertaining accommodation requirements, has been completed, and has involved officers and a cross party group of Members. The next stage, site identification and evaluation, is nearing completion and the final stage, proposed delivery strategy and financial implications, will be completed in April.
- (6) Intus Ltd has been appointed as the space planner, and following rigorous occupancy surveys of the existing accommodation and consultation with staff, presented initial ideas for the new layouts of each floor in February. Final layouts are currently being worked on. The space planning brief assumed the release back to the Mall of the first floor of Maidstone House and was extended to include the creation of the Enterprise Hub on the terrace, the relocation of the contact centre to the Gateway and office space for the West Kent Clinical Commissioning Group. This exercise will also provide a blueprint for the Council's future spatial requirements.
- (7) Part of the first floor is currently licensed to Mid Kent College as a training facility. This arrangement ends on 30 September 2015.
- (8) Investigations into suitable desk/meeting room software are continuing. This will enable a more effective and efficient use of desk space and meeting rooms in Maidstone House and meeting rooms in other Council accommodation.
- (9) AW Business Solutions has been appointed as project manager and, in agreement with Corporate Leadership Team, is managing these and associated accommodation projects, such as the Enterprise Hub, as part of an overall programme of inter-related accommodation projects, reporting to a programme board. The projects are distinct and the requirements for each project are the responsibility of the relevant client.
- (10) GDM Architects has been appointed to develop agreed space plans for the optimisation of Maidstone House, the Enterprise Hub and the relocation of the contact centre to the Gateway into detailed

designs and to manage the associated construction contracts.

- (11) It was noted in the report in August 2014, that there is a break clause in the licence with Kent County Council that allows termination of the Gateway arrangements in October 2016. Officers have been investigating alternative uses of the space and will identify the most suitable options for consideration.
- (12) The initial funding of £90,000, agreed by Cabinet in August 2014, has been allocated as follows:

Strategic advice	£40,000
Project management	£10,000
Space planning	£20,000
Desk/room booking software	£20,000
Total	£90,000

- (13) Additional funding of £106,500, agreed by Cabinet in February 2015, to enable advancement of the project through to the end of 2014/15, has been allocated as follows:

Design team	£25,000
Project management	£17,000
Space planning	£5,000
Relocation of contact centre to the Gateway	£50,000
Investigations of options for future use of the Gateway	£9,500
Total	£106,500

#### Next steps

- (14) Whilst these funds have initially been allocated as set out above they have not yet been spent and any commitments will be based on a rigorous assessment of need and value for money.
- (15) It is proposed to proceed with the optimisation of Maidstone House in two phases.
- (16) The first phase will be to adapt the accommodation to deal with the loss of meeting rooms, kitchen facilities and break out space following the establishment of an Enterprise Hub on the first floor of the Gateway building, and to provide office space for staff from the West Kent Clinical Commissioning Group. This phase will also take into account the strongest concerns raised by staff during consultations about the lack of suitable meeting rooms. Work will begin slightly ahead of the Enterprise Hub project to ensure continuity of kitchen facilities for staff.
- (17) The approximate cost of this phase and the additional funding needed is set out below. It has been reduced by an element of funding agreed by Cabinet in February 2015, which is now not needed for the first phase.

Design team	£8,000
Project management and space planning	£7,000
Alterations to 4 <sup>th</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> floors of Maidstone House	£60,000
Total	£75,000
Less – previously allocated funding agreed in February 2015	£10,000
Total required	£65,000

- (18) The proposed second phase will be to adapt the accommodation on the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> floors of Maidstone House to deal with the loss of Member's accommodation, staff showers and other office space if the Council exercises the break clause in the lease for the first floor.
- (19) The need for and the extent of the alterations will be influenced by the recommendations for long term accommodation strategy being prepared by Montagu Evans. As the aim is to bring a report to the Policy and Resources Committee in July 2015, and the latest date for the notice to terminate the first floor lease is April 2016, there will be sufficient time to plan and carry out the alterations without impacting either decision.
- (20) Cabinet was requested to note the approximate cost of the second phase as set out below.

Design team	£18,000
Project management and space planning	£12,000
Alterations to 4 <sup>th</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> floors of Maidstone House	£135,000
Total	£165,000

- (21) All of the above figures are approximate estimates and are subject to completion of detailed designs and tendering of the work.
- (22) In connection with the investigation of alternative uses of the Gateway, Cabinet was also requested to consider further funding of £10,000 to complete the discussions with the public sector partner.

### **Alternatives considered and why rejected**

- (1) The Council could decide not to serve notice in April 2016 of its intention to implement the break clause for the first floor of Maidstone House. In which case, it will be tied to the lease until October 2023 and will require the Council to find a sub-tenant or sub-tenants to mitigate the continuing rent, rate and running costs of £156,000 per annum. The configuration of the accommodation and the cost suggest that this is unlikely and is therefore not recommended; and

- (2) The Council could decide to relocate the facilities currently provided on the first floor of Maidstone House and on the first floor of the Gateway building to the ground floor of the Gateway building. However, this will deny the Council the opportunity of finding an alternative option and contribution to the running costs of £160,000 per annum, and is therefore not recommended.

### **Background Papers**

None

Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call in form signed by any two Non-Executive Members to the Head of Finance & Resources by: <b>23 April 2015.</b>
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## **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET**

Decision Made: 14 April 2015

#### **COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

##### **Issue for Decision**

To consider the Communications and Engagement Strategy for 2015-20.

##### **Decision Made**

- (1) That delegated authority be given to the Head of Policy and Communications, in consultation with the Leader, to make changes to the Communications and Engagement Strategy reflecting the feedback from the Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee together with the recommended changes made by Cabinet;
- (2) That consistency of language be given to the content in Sections 2, 4 and 5 of the Strategy; and
- (3) That subject to the above, the Communications and Engagement Strategy for 2015-20, together with the action plan, be reviewed annually and approved.

##### **Reasons for Decision**

- (1) The purpose of the strategy is to ensure the council communicates and engages effectively with residents, councillors, partners and staff to achieve its priorities. The communications and engagement strategy supports the council's new Strategic Plan for 2015 onwards.
- (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.
- (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.

- (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.
- (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'.
- (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.
- (7) The draft strategy was considered by the Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 7 April. Officers gave Cabinet an update at its meeting.

### **Alternatives considered and why rejected**

Cabinet could have chosen not to have a communications and engagement strategy; however this would impact on the ability to take a coordinated approach to communication and engagement.

### **Background Papers**

None.

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## **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET**

Decision Made: 14 April 2015

#### **TOWN CENTRE VISIONING**

##### **Issue for Decision**

To consider whether to provide the funding to further develop the Town Centre Visioning work.

##### **Decision Made**

- (1) That the Maidstone Town Centre masterplanning and delivery programme is commenced; and
- (2) That approval is given to the expenditure set out in Table 1 in paragraph 1.3.8 of the report of the Director of Regeneration and Communities to enable the development and delivery of the Town Centre Visioning work.

##### **Reasons for Decision**

- (1) Maidstone town centre is currently facing a number of challenges including:
  - a) A decline in Maidstone's retail hierarchy position relative to other areas from 33<sup>rd</sup> in 2007 to 52<sup>nd</sup> in 2013, due to a lack of investment.
  - b) Vacancy rates are higher than some competing centres.
  - c) A lack of large units and sites to attract anchor retailers.
  - d) An under-representation in the mid/upper restaurant offer.
  - e) A lack of integration across the Town Centre with other retail sites across the river.
  - f) Limited prospects for office stock in the town centre due to more attractive out-of-town business parks.
  - g) Congestion in the Town Centre and questions over sustainable access.
- (2) Since Summer 2014 officers have been working with consultants, ward councillors, group leaders and members of the Cabinet to discuss the future of the town centre, the challenges it faces and how to address them. These meetings have sought to obtain a broad consensus on the key issues, and form a basis on which to engage with stakeholders outside the Council.

- (3) Five broad themes have been agreed for consultation purposes:
- i) Town Centre Living.
  - ii) Employment and Retail.
  - iii) Culture and Leisure.
  - iv) Public Realm and Connectivity.
  - v) Transport.
- (4) A draft action plan (Appendix A to the report of the Director of Regeneration and Communities) has been produced which is broken down by these themes, and will be used as a starting point for the next phase of wider stakeholder engagement work.
- (5) Items in the draft action plan have been scored for consultation purposes based on their delivery timescale (short, medium, long-term), as well as their impact and the resource required to deliver each action. These scores have then been used to prioritise actions.
- (6) When scoring each action for its 'resource requirement' it is clear that a dedicated staffing resource is essential to carry out the work, and there will need to be a budget allocation to undertake specific work to progress the actions. The next stage is to engage with a wide range of stakeholders, from key landowners and stakeholders such as Kent County Council (KCC), retailers, other businesses, voluntary groups and the public. It is proposed that a programme manager is appointed to lead on all aspects of the Town Centre work. The Council's draft action plan will be used as a starting point for these discussions.
- (7) The proposed estimated expenditure will be based on the engagement with stakeholders and the agreed action plan and is set out in Table 1 below:

Table 1

Description	2015/16	2016/17	Total
Programme Manager (2 year fixed term incl. on costs)	£50,000	£50,000	£100,000
Stakeholder engagement and production of master plan.	£30,000	0	£30,000
Site survey and feasibility work for potential key site redevelopment	£25,000	£25,000	£50,000
Total	£105,000	£75,000	£180,000

- (8) Consultation on the draft Economic Development Strategy (EDS) finished on 23<sup>rd</sup> January 2015. A key priority within the draft EDS was Maidstone Town Centre. It was intended to report the findings of the consultation, together with any changes proposed to the draft strategy to Cabinet on 11 February 2015. This reporting timetable aligned with the next expected consultation on the draft Local Plan, in particular the work setting out the proposed changes to the allocation policies for employment and mixed use sites in response to representations made during the previous public consultation on the draft Local Plan. However, the combined factors of the extended Committee and Cabinet decision making process on the proposed Local Plan housing sites and the number and detail of the comments received on the draft EDS has meant that the timetable for consideration has been revised. A new meeting date is being identified which will need to take account of the local election period as well as the Council's changing governance arrangements and the move to the committee system.
- (9) Whilst the consultation attracted a large number of submissions there was universal support for the priority to enhance the Town Centre and therefore progressing this priority in advance of considering the other representations on the draft EDS is recommended.

### **Alternatives considered and why rejected**

- (1) The 'do nothing' option:

The alternative action is to *not* agree to fund the work to progress the town centre visioning work. This is not recommended, as the work already identified to take forward the action plan would have to be carried out by existing members of staff, whose work-time is already allocated to other projects. Without a committed resource, the programme of work would not be effectively carried out. The work undertaken to date has already identified the need for Maidstone town centre to improve its performance as the County Town and progressing the work identified is essential.

- (2) Reduce the size of the project:

A second alternative is to reduce the amount of investment in the project. However as set out above, the agreed aims and objectives for Maidstone Town Centre are ambitious. It is considered essential that Maidstone continues to be a town with a growing economy.

### **Background Papers**

Town Centre Study (Produced by Urban Practitioners) 2010  
Maidstone Town Centre Assessment (produced by DTZ) 2013

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## **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET**

Decision Made: 14 April 2015

#### **REVIEW OF TRANSPORT IN MAIDSTONE - ALTERNATIVES TO USING A CAR REPORT**

##### **Issue for Decision**

To consider the recommendations within the 'Review of Transport in Maidstone – alternatives to using a car' report attached at Appendix A to the report of the Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

##### **Decision Made**

- (1) That the SCRAIP relating to the review of 'Transport in Maidstone – alternatives to using a Car' be referred to the Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transport Committee from May 2015 to consider in line with the emerging Integrated Transport Strategy; and
- (2) That the outside body appointments are referred to the Democracy Committee from May 2015.

##### **Reasons for Decision**

- (1) Congestion has been considered to be a serious problem in the centre of Maidstone for some time. With an objectively assessed housing need figure of 18,600 new homes, there is a risk this problem will only get worse unless strategic steps are taken to mitigate the effects of this increase in homes on traffic.
- (2) The emerging draft Local Plan will include policies to mitigate the effect of increased development on the borough roads. This is an opportunity to look at alternative methods of transport infrastructure to support this.
- (3) The Committee has made recommendations regarding the promotion of walking and cycling as an alternative to using a car which will need considerable investment.
- (4) The Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee found there were issues with the services provided by public transport providers. There also appears to be a lack of opportunity for service users to discuss their issues with providers or a lack of awareness of the opportunities that are available. The

Committee believe this needs to be addressed if public transport is to be an attractive alternative to using a car and have made recommendations accordingly.

### **Alternatives considered and why rejected**

The Cabinet could have decided not to consider the recommendations within the 'Transport in Maidstone – alternatives to using a car' report. However, the recommendations are based on evidence from a wide range of sources and support the Council's objectives with regard to Maidstone being a decent place to live and Maidstone having a growing economy outlined in the report of the Planning, Transport and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

### **Background Papers**

None

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## **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **RECORD OF DECISION OF THE CABINET**

Decision Made: 14 April 2015

#### **TWILIGHT ECONOMY REVIEW**

##### **Issue for Decision**

To consider the findings of the Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny's Twilight Economy review and make a decision on whether to accept the recommendations from the review.

##### **Decision Made**

That the recommendations made by the Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the subsequent responses be noted and agreed.

##### **Reasons for Decision**

- (1) The reasons for recommendation were outlined in the Twilight Economy Review Report attached to the report of the Head of Policy and Communications; and
- (2) This report was previously considered and discussed at the meeting of 11 March 2015. At this meeting it was resolved that:  
  
'Cabinet noted the recommendations of the Economic and Commercial Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee and asked that the responses from Officers and the relevant Cabinet Members come back to the next meeting in the form of a SCRAIP.'

The draft responses from Officers and relevant Cabinet Members were attached as Appendix B to the report of the Head of Policy and Communications.

##### **Alternatives considered and why rejected**

The Council could choose not to take action to improve the Twilight Economy. However, this might mean an opportunity to improve the vibrancy of the Town Centre is missed.

##### **Background Papers**

None

Should you be concerned about this decision and wish to call it in, please submit a call in form signed by any two Non-Executive Members to the Head of Finance & Resources by: **23 April 2015.**