



Annual Report

April 2014 – March 2015



PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST



Introduction from the Leader of the Council

This report sets out what we have achieved from April 2014 to March 2015 to deliver our Strategic Plan priorities to 2015. We also want to highlight some of the key activities for the coming year as we embark on a new five year strategic plan until 2020. We have refreshed our vision for the borough and focused our priorities concentrating on eight action areas to make Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all with a successful economy.



There is no doubt that the local plan remains an important area for the council's attention during 2015-16. We will reflect on what people have told us so far as we set out parameters for development, and the good growth necessary to meet the borough's housing and employment needs up to 2031. It will provide for sustainable development that respects the character and heritage of Maidstone Borough and we will work to provide another 1,000 affordable homes for local people over the next five years.

Infrastructure, and transport in particular, will be the key to a successful local plan. The borough council is working with infrastructure providers, including Kent County Council, and has already carried out traffic modelling to plan for necessary development. Next year work will start on improvements to traffic flows over the bridges in Maidstone. The disruption during the works will be worthwhile when waiting times are reduced by 20% in peak hours. Other improvements are planned including alternatives to the car such as new cycle ways.

The character and heritage of the borough will be preserved and protected by our new green and blue infrastructure strategy. Continuing work to improve our parks and spaces will include an adventure zone at Mote Park and the new visitor centre at Cobtree Park.

The environment and cleanliness of the borough will be improved with work on a low emission strategy to improve air quality and more renewable energy installations on our buildings. We will campaign against litter and improve street cleaning, with satisfaction measured by residents and we will improve recycling with a target to recycle 60% of waste by 2019.

Maidstone town centre improvements will continue as we invite contributions to a new town centre vision and action plan.

Your views are important if we are to ensure that Maidstone Borough remains vibrant and prosperous with an excellent environment where people can realise their

aspirations. Towards the end of 2015 we will carry out another residents' survey to find out what people think about the borough and the council's services. See page 15 of this report for an idea of what people said the last time we asked them about these issues.

As government funding continues to reduce we will continue to strive to make our services more efficient and customer focused. We will work with partners to make the best use of public money and to provide services jointly with others. We will look to make the council more commercial, providing new services and investing in commercial opportunities.

We will achieve all of this through a new committee system, with most strategic decisions taken by four service committees, of nine or 15 councillors, and with Chairmen and Vice Chairmen of different political groups.

With buy-in from all the political groups on the council I believe the new system will retain the benefit of timely decision making under the former cabinet system but with the added advantage that all councillors will now have the opportunity to be fully involved in policy formulation and decision making. Because the new system will involve all councillors in decision making, it will be more democratic, inclusive and transparent, and that has got to be better for everyone.

Fran Wilson
Leader of the Council

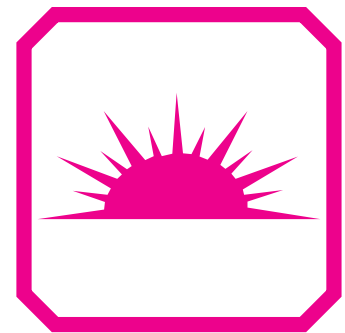
'Continuing work to improve our parks and spaces will include an adventure zone at Mote Park'



What we achieved - Great Opportunity

Outcomes by 2015

- A transport network that supports the local economy, with a focus on the delivery of an integrated transport strategy in conjunction with Kent County Council.
- A growing economy with rising employment, catering for a range of skill sets to meet the demands of the local economy, with a focus on the following areas;
 - Creating the right planning environment
 - Developing key infrastructure
 - Business expansion
 - Inward investment
 - Developing stronger business relationships
 - Tackling worklessness




Key Achievements in 2014 - 15

- Supported 300 'troubled' families with help and advice to enter or re- enter employment through the Maidstone Families Matter partnership.

'Secured £15million of Single Local Growth Funding for transport improvements in the Borough'



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- Secured £15million of Single Local Growth Funding for transport improvements in the Borough such as the Bridge Gyratory system in Maidstone.
 - Established the Maidstone Economic Business Partnership as an independent industry led voice of business.
 - Helped people find work and work experience, organising jobs fairs and work experience coffee mornings in partnership with Job Centre Plus.
 - Established the Engage programme supporting 30 disadvantaged young people (aged 18-24 years) into training and sustained employment in partnership with JobCentre Plus and Tomorrow's People.
 - Access to Finance: Worked with KCC and the West Kent Partnership to ensure that the borough was included in this 0% Loan Fund and was represented on the decision making body. The fund is now closed and Maidstone based businesses won 46% of the budget.
 - The new Leader Rural Development Programme was approved. Around £250,000 of grants will be available to rural communities each year. All of Maidstone's rural areas and Mote Park were eligible for the first time.
 - Launched a new fully responsive Visitmaidstone.com tourism website, getting 20-30,000 visits a month.
 - Prepared and consulted on initial designs for the next phase of Maidstone's town centre public realm improvement project.
 - Consulted on the draft Maidstone Borough Local Plan, meeting parish councils, residents' groups and other local groups, to get comments to shape the next draft.
 - Established four multi-agency task and finish groups to address problems with transport, health, education, and waste water, sewerage and flooding.
 - Helped parish councils prepare neighbourhood plans, designating 12 neighbourhood plan areas and progressing others.



What we achieved - Great Place



Outcomes by 2015

- Decent, affordable housing in the right places across a range of tenures, with a focus on:
 - Developing sustainable communities
 - Increasing choice and improving the quality of life for vulnerable people
 - Improving existing homes
 - Improving access to housing and working to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping in Maidstone.
- Continues to be a clean and attractive environment for people who live in and visit the borough by;
 - Implementing new waste management arrangements
 - Implementing a new cleansing model
 - Reducing the Council's energy consumption
 - Implementing an Air Quality Action Plan.
- Residents are not disadvantaged because of where they live or who they are, vulnerable people are assisted and the level of deprivation is reduced, focusing on key areas; early intervention work with young children and their families to tackle disadvantage and undertaking work to help families who have multiple needs.

Key achievements in 2014-15

- Provided money advice training to 180 community wardens and others and prevented a scam, saving one local resident £20,000.
- Encouraged 43 residents to switch their energy providers, saving them on average £217.50 per household through the Maidstone Big Switch.
- Worked with housing providers and the Homes & Communities Agency to deliver 1,100 new affordable homes over the past five years - 163 last year.
- Purchased Aylesbury House and Magnolia House, Maidstone to provide 20 better quality homes for homeless people.
- Approved 134 grants for adaptations to support people with disabilities to live independently within their own home.
- Looked after 256 families in temporary accommodation for a total of 12,688 nights.
- Helped 620 families find affordable homes.

- Appointed a Housing Outreach Officer in partnership with Porchlight charity, to help Maidstone's street homeless find the right support and housing.
- Grant aided improvements to 129 homes which will now be available for social housing.
- Funded programmes on Healthy Weight, Mental Health and Wellbeing, and Workplace Health initiatives.
- Fitted photovoltaic panels to Maidstone Depot to reduce the council's energy consumption.
- With YOUR help we recycled more than 50% of the borough's waste.
- Introduced weekly food waste collections to people living in flats.
- Improved street sweeping and standards of cleansing.
- Exhibited Britain's third largest Bronze Age hoard and five temporary exhibitions, including Ralph Steadman: A Retrospective, which attracted 4,000 paying visitors, at Maidstone Museum.
- Provided a new Mote Park Fellowship building staffed by volunteers in Mote Park.
- Created a new public open space at Oakwood Cemetery, Barming.
- Completed a £30,000 improvement programme at Trinity Park, Maidstone.
- Created Remembrance Square in the Lower High Street Maidstone to mark the end of the High Street improvement works.
- Completed the Sir Garrard Tyrwhitt-Drake café and visitor centre at Cobtree Park, ready to open in July 2015.

'Created Remembrance Square in the Lower High Street'





‘Customer focused services that residents are satisfied with’

What we achieved - Great People

Outcomes by 2015

- Customer focused services that residents are satisfied with.
- Effective, cost efficient services are delivered across the borough.



Key achievements in 2014-15

- Introduced online application forms, text messaging and emails to speed up support for people on the housing waiting list.
- Introduced payment by phone and Wi-Fi on our Park and Ride buses and phone payments for our car parks.
- Added mobile technology to speed up our response to fly-tipping and other cleansing service requests, freeing up four people to do other work. Over the next two years it will save £50,000.
- Invested in specialised temporary accommodation and improved the way we manage housing services, spending £126,000 less than it would have cost otherwise.
- Our website received more than 1million hits and we received 19,536 requests through online forms, an increase of 150% on 2013-14.
- More than 60% of payments not made by direct debit were made online or using our automated payments telephone line.
- Face to face visits to the Gateway reduced by 12% to 65,941.

Performance highlights 2014-15

Great opportunity

- Visited 178 licensed premises and 500 food premises to make sure they were safe.
- High Street Improvement Project Highly Commended in the Kent Design and Development Awards 2014.
- Supported 1,200 small businesses through the award of small business rate relief.

Great Place

- Made more than 7.5 million waste and recycling collections from households across the borough at a cost £34.17 per household, compared to £43.48 the year before.
- Collected 55,915 tonnes of household waste and recycled or composted 27,501 tonnes.
- Our commercial waste service ended the year with 255 customers and collected 92 tonnes paper and cardboard from businesses to recycle locally.
- Latest figures value Maidstone's visitor economy at £251,608,000.
- New Visit Maidstone website gets 20-30,000 hits a month.
- Maidstone Museum awarded Visit England's Quality Rose Marque for the quality of visitor welcome and Trip Advisor's Certificate of Excellence for consistently good reviews.
- 50% of all Kent Schools have visited Maidstone Museum.
- Four Maidstone parks have Green Flag status and Mote Park has a Trip Advisor 'Certificate of Excellence'.
- More than 1 million people visited Mote Park in 2014 and it was voted the nation's second favourite park.
- A record 750,000+ people visited Maidstone Leisure Centre in 2014 and it received an 'Excellent' rating in Quest benchmark for second consecutive year.
- Kent Life Farm attraction at Cobtree won the customer service category in the Museum & Heritage Awards for Excellence 2015.

Great People





- Collected 98.4% of the council tax due within the financial year.
- Reduced deprivation through the award of discretionary housing payments to 500 vulnerable households.
- Processed benefit claims for low income households in an average of 8 days, with 85% of customers satisfied or very dissatisfied with the service.

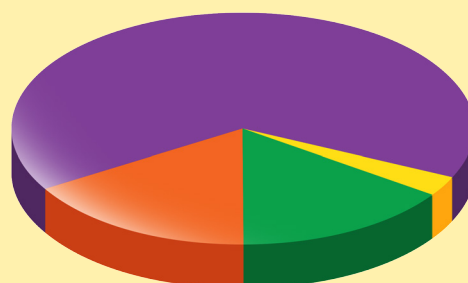
Financial Summary

The council is committed to providing value for money services and has a responsive approach to the level of council tax needed to deliver the priorities set out in the strategic plan. In recent years it has set small increases in council tax, below Consumer Price Index inflation levels. The council will remain flexible on the level of increase in future years in order to set a balanced budget.

A full statement of our accounts is available on our website www.maidstone.gov.uk/council/finance-and-performance/annual-accounts. For more information about the council's accounts contact Paul Holland – paulholland@maidstone.gov.uk.





Our Income

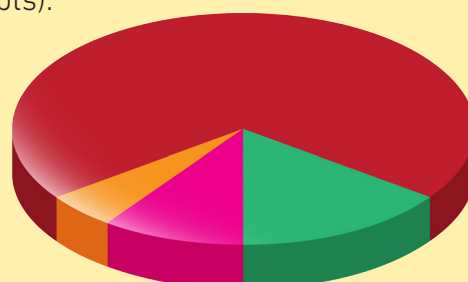
	Government funding – £56,098,162
	Business Rates – £2,559,708
	Council Tax – £12,867,600
	Fees and charges – £13,989,891



Your Council Tax

Out of every council tax pound that we collect 70p goes to Kent County Council, 15p goes to Maidstone Borough Council, 10p to Kent Police and Crime Commissioner, and 5p to Kent Fire and Rescue (excluding parish council precepts).

	Kent County Council – 70p
	Kent Police and Crime Commissioner – 10p
	Maidstone Borough Council – 15p
	Kent Fire and Rescue – 5p



Capital Investment

Last year we spent £4,741,596 on capital projects such as property, vehicles and equipment, and on grants to build new subsidised housing and to renovate existing properties.

Property Purchases	£2,659,700
Housing Grants	£739,151
Commercial Projects	£363,163
Corporate Property	£121,072
IT Software & Hardware	£181,199
Vehicle Purchases	£283,665
Other Capital Schemes	£393,646

Our Spending

£2,615,853 Car Parking & Public Transport		£537,652 Licensing	
£1,064,135 Cemetery & Crematorium Total		£9,858,385 Other Corporate Services	
£1,825,530 Community Safety & Development		£2,340,042 Parks & Open Spaces	
£1,999,754 Culture & Tourism		£3,837,351 Planning & Building Control	
£1,215,880 Democracy		£49,243,390 Revenues & Benefits	
£940,960 Economic Regeneration & Employment		£533,326 Sport & Recreation	
£1,474,538 Environmental Services		£1,757,166 Street Cleansing	
£2,529,077 Housing		£3,519,322 Waste Collection & Disposal	

Our Vision, Mission and Priorities to 2020

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.

OUR PRIORITIES

Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all

Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough

ACTION AREAS

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

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

More information about our priorities can be found in our Strategic Plan which can be downloaded from www.maidstone.gov.uk/council/strategies,-plans-and-policies.



Achieving our priorities 2015-20

- **Keeping Maidstone Borough an attractive place for all**
- **Securing a successful economy for Maidstone Borough**

Action areas: Outcomes for 2015-16

Providing a clean and safe environment

- Consult on a Low Emission Strategy to reduce emissions in the borough.
- Recycle 60% of waste by 2019 with new incentives for householders to recycle, recycling street cleansing waste, and reuse and waste reduction initiatives.
- Improve street cleaning standards, measured by customer satisfaction and local environmental quality surveys.
- Run litter awareness campaigns with school age children and young adults utilising 50% of the surplus generated from the litter enforcement activity.
- Roll out a programme of renewable energy installations across the Council's buildings.

Encouraging good health and wellbeing

- Work will start on a new cycle path linking Aylesford to Barming.
- We will consult on a Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy.

Respecting the character of our borough

- We will progress the Maidstone Borough Local Plan towards "Publication" consultation and submission for public examination in 2016.

Ensuring there are good leisure and cultural attractions

- A new visitor centre at Cobtree Manor Park.
- Work will start on the introduction of an Adventure Zone at Mote Park.
- A new fully responsive website will be delivered for Maidstone Museum and Bently Art Gallery.
- Work will commence on delivering the action plan for the new Destination Management Plan for the Borough.
- We will develop a Cultural Strategy for the Borough linking our cultural and heritage assets to our Economic Development Strategy, Destination Management Plan and Town Centre Vision.



Enhancing the appeal of the town centre for everyone

- We will develop a new Town Centre Vision and Action Plan.
- Work will be finished on improvements to the High Level Bridge at Maidstone East.
- We will introduce a Farmers Market at Jubilee Square.
- We will replace the Historic Interpretation Panels.

Securing improvements to the transport infrastructure of our borough

- We will consult on an Integrated Transport Strategy.
- We will commence work to deliver the Bridge Gyratory Widening project in partnership with Kent County Council.
- We will commence work to design, consult and if approved, implement the Cycle Path project along the river Medway between Aylesford and Barming Bridge.

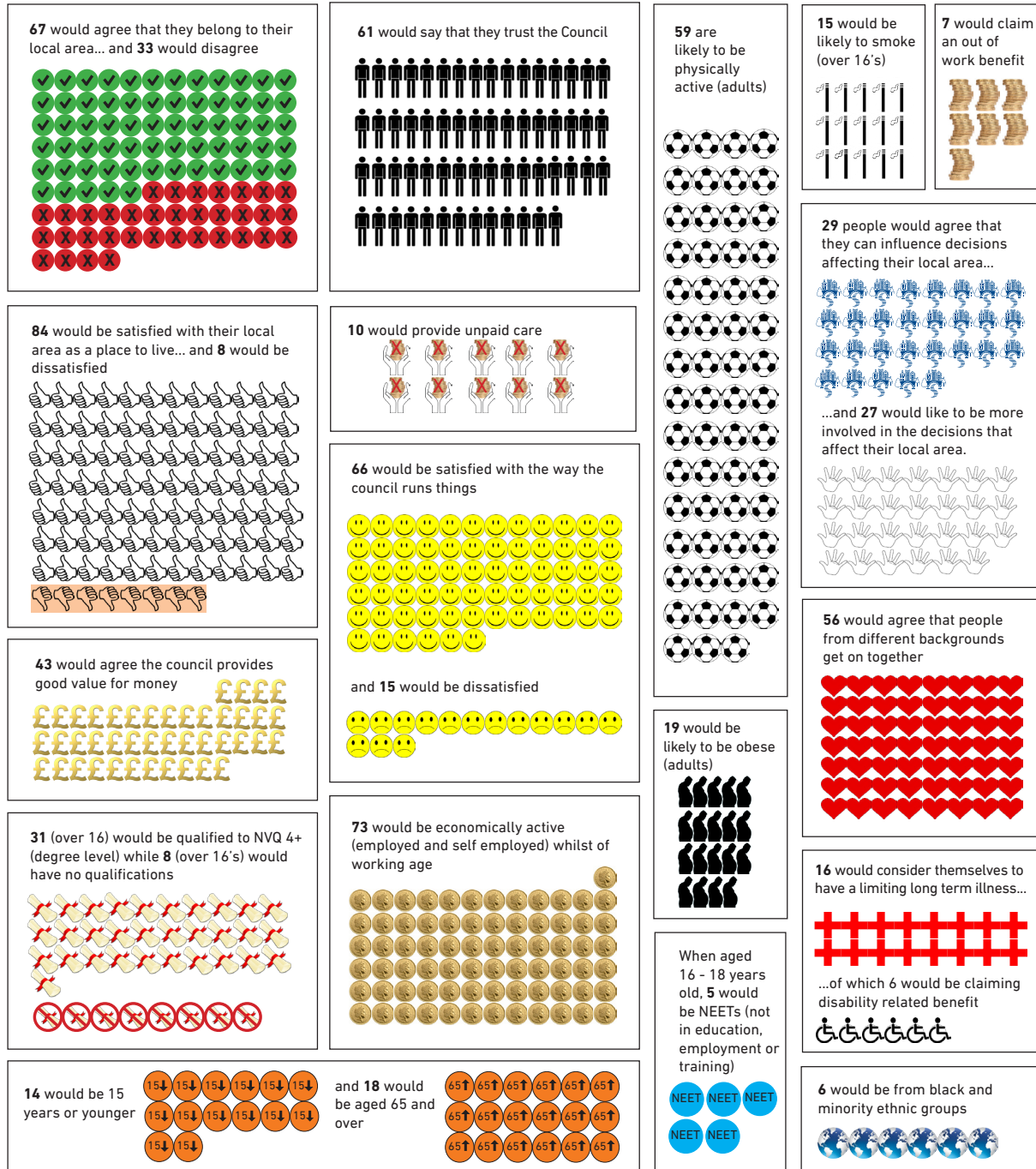
Promoting a range of employment opportunities and skills across our borough

- Open a new Enterprise Hub in the Gateway Terrace at Maidstone House.
- Deliver a new business website incorporating a skills exchange hub and information on starting, growing and locating your business in the Borough.
- Work will start on delivering the action plan behind the Council's new Economic Development Strategy.

Planning for sufficient homes to meet the Borough's needs

- Provide 1,000 new affordable homes over the next five years.

If there were only 100 people in the borough of Maidstone...



Contact Details

Visit us at Maidstone Gateway, King Street, Maidstone
ME15 6AW – Mondays, 9am – 5.30pm and Tuesdays –
Fridays: 9am – 4.30pm

Visit our information centre at Maidstone Museum, St
Faith's Street, Maidstone ME14 1LH – Mondays – Saturdays
10am – 5pm.

Visit our website at www.maidstone.gov.uk

Main Switchboard 01622 602200

Emergency after hours calls are routed to Kent County
Council via our main switchboard number 01622 602000

Use our 24hr Automated Payments Line 01622 602544 for
paying council tax and parking fines.

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