

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**REGENERATION AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

27 APRIL 2010

REPORT OF HEAD OF CHANGE AND SCRUTINY

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1. **Cabinet Member for Environment – Update on Progress 2009 - 10**
- 1.1 Issue for Consideration
 - 1.1.1 To consider the report of the Cabinet Member for Environment on the progress made with the priorities set for 2009-10.
- 1.2 Recommendation of the Head of Change and Scrutiny
 - 1.2.1 The Committee are recommended to consider the statement made by the Cabinet Member at the beginning of the year and ask questions with regard to progress that has been made on those issues highlighted as priorities.
- 1.3 Reasons for Recommendation
 - 1.3.1 The Regeneration and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for holding to account those Cabinet Members whose portfolios fall within the remit of the Committee.
 - 1.3.2 The Cabinet Members whose portfolios relate to the Committee are the Cabinet Members for Environment and Regeneration.
 - 1.3.3 The areas of the Cabinet Member for Environment portfolio that are relevant to the Committee are as follows:
 - **Parking** – to be responsible for the development, operation and enforcement of the pay and display car parks, and on-street waiting and parking restrictions in the Borough.
 - **Public transport** – to be responsible for transportation policy including the operation of the Park and Ride service and the development of public transport initiatives; to be responsible for the Council's Concessionary Fares Scheme.
 - **Highways** – to be responsible for seeking strategic highways improvements; to oversee the delivery of the local

(District) Highways functions; to be responsible for the Council's Environmental Improvement Schemes.

1.3.4 The Committee interviewed the Cabinet Member for Environment on 30 June 2009, the relevant extract from the minutes is set out below:

" The Chairman welcomed the Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor Mark Wooding. The Committee was reminded that many of the changes made by the Cabinet Member for Environment during the previous year were well known due to publicity within the press and his attendance at this Committee. During 2009-10 the Cabinet Member would be seeking short term benefits for the Council and setting some medium and long term direction.

Parking

Councillor Wooding highlighted a number of changes that had been made with regard to parking services within the previous year:

- 1. Resident parking zones had seen the introduction of permit charges. Residents were able to obtain first and second permits at a cost of £25 and a third permit for £50. This decision had been made to manage increasing street parking demand, and prevent the parking budget from falling into deficit, as well as to cover the cost of producing the permits.*

It was noted that the number of calls the council had received regarding these charges had been minimal.

- 2. Changes had also been made to off street parking, most notably the introduction of Sunday charges. This had been operating for five weeks, and had so far provided revenue of £1800 - £2700 each Sunday.*

Officers were undertaking a review of the volumes of traffic within the town centre now that these charges had been implemented and this was to be reported back to the Cabinet Member by August. The Committee was also informed that local businesses in the area were to be consulted in order to establish whether the charges had had any significant impact upon the number of people coming into the town on Sundays.

The Committee was informed that no major changes should be required within the forthcoming year although small amendments could be necessary in light of the economic climate.

Several aspects of the decisions on monitoring on and off street parking demand had been deferred last year following consultation and reports were due in August on these. Councillor Wooding noted that these would fully consider concerns that had been raised by residents during the consultation process. There could also be further opportunity to develop car parks in order to generate further income, however this would also depend upon the economic climate and the availability of monies.

In response to a question, the Cabinet Member stated that the introduction of Sunday charges had been well publicised, and any car owners who failed to display tickets on the first Sunday the scheme was introduced were not penalised.

Highways

Councillor Wooding informed the Committee that he had been working hard to establish good links with Kent County Council (KCC). A joint seminar with KCC had been held in December which the KCC Cabinet Member with responsibility for highways. KCC had agreed to work towards decreasing the number of people who were killed or seriously injured on the roads within Maidstone. The Cabinet Member had requested a review of progress now that six months had passed. It was the aim of the Cabinet Member to maintain a good relationship with KCC.

It was requested that the Committee receive an update on road safety issues from KCC.

Public Transport

The Committee was informed that safeguarding the park and ride service was of paramount importance. However it was important that the subsidy which was required from the tax payer in order to facilitate the service was reduced. Changes last year had reduced this subsidy from £450,000 to £225,000. As a result no major changes would be required this year, however small adjustments could be necessary to reflect the economic situation.

Last year's tendering exercise had resulted in the renewal of the park and ride contract with Arriva. Some amendments had also been made to the schedule of services. It was recognised that this had caused some problems, as new routes had conflicted with road maintenance subsequently delaying some services. Customer surveys, however, particularly those of customers using the London Road park and ride site, had demonstrated

that the majority of customers were satisfied with the services which they had received.

The Committee was also reminded that there had been a 25% increase in the park and ride fares which may have had some impact upon the level of usage. It was noted however, that a decrease in the number of people using the service had been seen before the implementation of the fare increase and bus usage nationally was decreasing. This was being monitored.

All three sites were now manned by two mobile attendants and initial indications suggested that this was working well. Holiday and sickness were covered by members of the parking services team where necessary. A mobile phone number was available for customers at each site; however calls so far had been minimal. Maintenance work continued to be carried out by the attendants.

Long term targets with regard to park and ride included the consideration of additional park and ride sites. However, this was to be considered alongside the development of the Core Strategy and the Local Development Framework.

A member enquired as to whether Bluebell Hill was to be considered as a possible location for a new park and ride site. The Committee was informed that this location was still under consideration, and was being reviewed by consultants. It was requested that the Committee receive a copy of this report.

Concessionary Travel

The Committee was reminded of the assisted travel scheme which had been introduced during the previous year. Over 400 people had so far benefited from the scheme, in addition to 100 people who had companion passes. The Cabinet Member also noted that changes had been made to the availability of concessionary fares, from 9:30 a.m. to 9. a.m. Central Government was currently consulting on potential changes to the administration of the concessionary fares scheme, including a proposal to move this to county-level.

The Council continued to support the Stockbury and Lenham Community transport schemes which had been re-established following the removal of the post-bus service.

Rail Services

Pressure would continue to be exerted on Southeastern Rail with regard to the proposals to remove the fast service to Cannon Street service in December. Improvement of the rail service

was particularly important as Maidstone would have 11,080 new homes by 2026 as a result of its Growth Point Status.

Network Rail had released its Kent Rail Utilisation Strategy report, and the Cabinet Member would respond outlining a strong argument for Thameslink services to serve Maidstone and the benefits of the high speed shuttle running to Maidstone West.

In response to a question, the Committee was informed that Councillor Wooding had written to the Chief Executive of Southeastern three weeks previously, but had not yet received a response. This had, however been heavily publicised.

Resolved: That

a) an update be received from Kent Highways Services on road safety issues; and

b) the committee receive a copy of the updated consultant's report on the potential Bluebell Hill park and ride site when this was received by the Cabinet Member."

1.4 Alternative Action and Why Not Recommended

1.4.1 The Committee could choose not to interview the Cabinet Member, however in doing so they would not be fulfilling the crucial role of holding the executive to account.

1.5 Impact on Corporate Objectives

1.5.1 The Committee should seek to review whether the Cabinet Members achievements are aligned to the Council's corporate objectives as set out in the forward plan.

1.6 Risk Management

1.6.1 There are no risks involved in interviewing the Cabinet Member for Environment.

1.7 Other Implications

1.7.1

1. Financial

2. Staffing

3. Legal

- 4. Equality Impact Needs Assessment
- 5. Environmental/Sustainable Development
- 6. Community Safety
- 7. Human Rights Act
- 8. Procurement
- 9. Asset Management
