

Maidstone Borough Council

Leisure & Prosperity Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 26 April 2011

Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture Progress Over the Year

Report of: Overview & Scrutiny Officer

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Committee heard the mid-year update on 23 November 2010. The purpose of this item is for the Cabinet Member to update the Committee on the progress made over the year, and highlight future activities within their portfolio.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Committee interview the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture with regard to progress that has been made on during 2010/11 the priorities within the Leisure and Culture portfolio.

3. Progress Over the Year

- 3.1 The Leisure and Prosperity Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for holding to account Cabinet Members whose portfolios fall within the remit of the Committee. The Committee interviewed the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture in November 2010, an extract of the minutes is set out below:

"The Chairman welcomed Councillor Richard Ash to the meeting, and invited him to present the update to the Committee.

Councillor Ash gave a brief overview of the leisure and culture topics that had been under review in the past six months, making Members aware that the public view this as the best place to make cuts. He suggested that sport and recreation should not be actively promoted to young residents, as in his view, they either wished to participate in such activity and therefore already knew of activities in the borough, or they did not. The Committee expressed concern at this view and stated that they did not feel this was the case, as many young people either new to the borough or wanting to try new things would not necessarily know where to go without local advertisement and therefore strongly advised that this was to continue.

The Committee was informed that whilst £100m of income was from tourists, the council was looking to review leisure and cultural services to identify savings and new more cost effective ways of working. Councillor Ash informed the Members that he was having ongoing discussions with Brian Morgan, Simon Lace, Mandy Hare, John Foster to identify savings for the next four years.

Councillor Ash stated that the East Wing project of the Museum was on schedule and within budget. The Museum was still able to provide an array of events and artefacts throughout the building works. It was noted that the £2m that had been pledged including lottery funding was not enough to cover the improvements, regardless of cut backs from the original plans.

The new track at Sutton Valence was completed in June 2008, in answer to questions it was noted that the Cabinet Member was not aware of whether there had been any record of usage maintained by the school. The Committee requested that the Council should be made aware of how many people use that facility on a regular basis.

The refurbishment of the Leisure Centre was completed in May 2010, and there had been a 40% increase in gym membership to date. The Committee asked about the facilities available for performers at the Leisure Centre it was noted that a new 'green room' had been created for performers. The acoustics of Mote Hall were good for concerts although it was in fact a sports hall. Members raised concerns that at this time there was no facility in Maidstone solely for concerts with seating for 1000 people This was supported by members of the public present from MAAC and Maidstone Orchestra Society (MOS). The members from MAAC and MOS also highlighted that they had not been consulted with regarding the changes to the Leisure Centre and cited issues including the payment of invoices on time. Councillor Ash noted that more consultation with the users of the Leisure Centre should have taken place, and that he would investigate the contract with Serco. Several Members remarked that the contract manager should be interviewed at the next Committee in order to answer some questions regarding the facilities at the Leisure Centre. It was also noted that the arts voluntary groups had an expansive use of expertise which could be utilised more.

Resolved: That the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture be thanked for the information and it be recommended that:

- a) The usage of the new track facilities at Sutton Valence be monitored;
- b) An update be provided every 6 months of the Museums funding;
- c) Information on any improvements for performers scheduled at Mote Hall be provided;
- d) The voluntary groups be consulted as part of the Leisure and Culture Strategy and for any other Culture related issues within the Borough;
- e) That the Chairman liaises with the Chairman of Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in connection with the contract of Serco being discussed at the next Leisure and Prosperity Committee; and

f) The Serco Contract Manager be invited to the next meeting on Monday 13 December 2010 to discuss the contract.”

3.2 The Committee could choose not to interview or receive written statements from the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture, however in doing so they would not be fulfilling the crucial role of holding the executive to account.

4. Impact on Corporate Objectives

4.1 The Committee should seek to review whether the Cabinet Member’s achievements are aligned to the Council’s corporate objectives as set out in the strategic plan.