

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 5
APRIL 2011**

PRESENT: Councillor Harwood (Chairman)
Councillors Hinder, Lusty, Parr, Mrs Wilson and Burton

114. The Committee to consider whether all items on the agenda should be web-cast.

Resolved: That all items on the agenda be web-cast.

115. Apologies.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ross and Bradshaw.

116. Notification of Substitute Members.

It was noted that Councillor Burton was substituting for Councillor Ross.

117. Notification of Visiting Members.

There were no visiting Members.

118. Disclosures by Members and Officers:

There were no disclosures.

119. To consider whether any items should be taken in private because of the possible disclosure of exempt information.

Resolved: That all items on the agenda be taken in public.

120. Minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2011

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2011 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed by the Chairman.

121. Interview with Leader of the Council - Progress Over the Year

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Chris Garland, Leader of the Council to the meeting.

Councillor Garland informed the Committee that the main concern during the year was the budget. However savings had been made and identified for the next four years.

Councillor Garland stated that a grant from central government had allowed the Council to freeze the council tax for 2011-12, once the grant had finished the Council will have to fund the shortfall in council tax revenue.

Councillor Garland highlighted to the Committee that the Mid-Kent Improvement Partnership (MKIP) comprised three partners, as Ashford had left the partnership. As the future of MKIP was not certain, Councillor Garland informed the Committee that any potential savings found through MKIP had not been included in the budget.

In answer to a question, Councillor Garland stated that the loss of Ashford had allowed processes to move quicker, as proven by changes that had begun within Revenues and Benefits service.

Councillor Garland stated that the achievements of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) had yet to be quantified, and that if no convincing evidence was provided to support its function, then the proposed Kent Locality Boards may subsume the role of the LSP. He explained that the LSP needed to be invigorated and made more robust if it was to continue. Councillor Garland informed the Committee that there were proposals for Locality Boards across Kent by 2014 these would comprise of County Councils, District Councillors and other key public service providers. There would be officer and financial support to deliver outcomes. The Leader raised the recent resource mapping exercise that had been undertaken highlighting that Kent County Council, Health Services and the Borough Council were the highest spenders closely followed by the Police this reveals who should be involved in a future partnership to have impact. As the Council needed to focus on which partners they worked with and on which projects, a deliverable outcome was paramount. The Locality Boards had been developed within the context of the replacement of the Kent Partnership and Kent Leaders with the Kent Forum. It was envisaged that these boards would deliver the ambitions for Kent at a local level and eventually have decision making powers delivering services for Kent and Maidstone Councils.

A Member raised the withdrawal of the Heart of Kent tourism brochure because of one partner leaving as an example of the vulnerabilities of partnership working.

Councillor Garland informed the Committee that KCC had introduced neighbourhood forums as a way of communicating with the public, there was a view from Kent that these were a good way of engaging the public. The Committee agreed with Councillor Garland that they had not proved the best method of communication for Maidstone.

Resolved: That Councillor Garland be thanked for the information and the progress over the year be noted.

122. Interview with Cabinet Member for Corporate Services - Progress Over the Year

The Chairman welcomed Councillor Marion Ring, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services to the meeting. Councillor Ring invited the Committee to comment on the written report that was provided in the agenda.

The Committee enquired about the future of Planning for Real. Councillor Ring informed the Committee that this would continue, and lessons had been learnt which would aid future projects. Partners had been requested to provide information regarding funding within the Park Wood area which to date had not been forthcoming and they would recruit the help of the LSP if necessary to obtain this. The Committee enquired if Planning for Real would be brought to other areas including more prosperous locations in the Borough. Councillor Ring stated that it would be rolled out in other areas it was highlighted that Park Wood was a broad area, with areas of deprivation and areas that were more prosperous.

A Member highlighted concerns that public transport had reduced its services in all areas, including Park Wood, as it was perceived by Arriva that services were not being utilised.

A member raised the issue that tourism was identified as low priority in the budget consultation with the public. Councillor Ring stated that the budget had been reduced and they were looking at working more effectively if more detailed information was required this would be available from the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture, Councillor Ash.

The Committee asked if there were any plans to improve the way the post room functions as mail was being received outside the designated courier run, especially in rural areas where post took up to two days with royal mail. Councillor Ring stated that ways to save time and money were being identified and noted the Committees' comments.

Resolved: That Councillor Ring be thanked for the information and the progress over the year be noted.

123. Future Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2011-12

It was noted that this was the last meeting for this municipal year. The Head of Change and Scrutiny requested that the Committee consider what items it would like to suggest for the work programme for 2011-12. The Committee agreed that the post room and printer contract should be put forward as suggestions for the 2011-12 work programme. The Committee thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Officer for her help and asked to convey thanks to her colleagues within the team.

Resolved: That the post room and printer contract be suggested for the 2011-12 work programme.

124. Duration of Meeting

6.30pm to 7.10pm.