

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 4
DECEMBER 2012**

PRESENT: Councillors Mrs Wilson, Mrs Gooch (Chairman), Yates, English, Mrs Gibson, Mrs Grigg, Moss and Mrs Stockell

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

It was resolved that all items be webcast.

49. Apologies.

There were no apologies.

50. Notification of Substitute Members.

Councillor Mrs Wilson and Councillor Butler were substituting for Councillors Pickett and Hogg respectively.

51. Notification of Visiting Members.

Councillors Vizzard and Black were in attendance as witnesses for Item 9 on the agenda, Corporate Governance Review.

52. Disclosures by Members and Officers.

Councillor Butler made a disclosure of interest by virtue of his appointment as Chairman of the Audit Committee.

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

It was agreed that all items be taken in public as proposed.

54. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2012

It was resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2012 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed.

55. Quarter 2 Key Performance Indicator Report 2012/13

Clare Wood, Performance and Scrutiny Officer, presented the Quarter 2 Key Performance Indicator report to the Committee, summarising the main points in the report.

The Officer highlighted areas of performance from indicators reported as having a green, amber or red status in the 2nd Quarter.

The footfall for Mote Park was reported as having a green status, up by 9% compared with the same period the previous year. The Collection of Council Tax was reported as being behind target with an amber status; this was said to be the same across Kent. Members were informed that the Performance Indicators (PIs) with red (alert) statuses were the same as those reported in the first quarter and related to Housing and Customer Services. Cabinet had requested Action Plans for these areas.

Members considered Housing and whether recent reports of Maidstone being a desirable place to live combined with the Council's Strategy for growth had impacted on the department's performance.

The Committee discussed paragraph 1.5.20 in the report which highlighted the recent policy change at Tovil Household Recycling Centre which could have an impact on the Council's impressive enforcement and low fly tipping performance figures. Members were concerned that if fly tipping was to become an issue for the Council there would be a financial penalty. It was felt important that evidence should be provided at quarter 3 in order for the relevant scrutiny Committee to address the issue.

Members felt that there was an inconsistency in the 'latest notes' included in Appendix A to the report, 'Mid-Year strategic Plan Updates and KPI Performance Report.' It was felt that the notes should all reference the same time period with all entries kept up to date.

Sandra Marchant, Customer Services Manager, was invited to update the Committee on the Action Plans produced for the Contact Centre and Gateway Customer Services teams.

She provided an update on the Contact Centre highlighting the following points that had impacted on its performance:

- A decrease in phone calls and an increase in emails;
- The loss of a Senior Customer Service Advisor;
- Staff secondments ; and
- The length of time it took to build up knowledge of the services provided.

The Committee was informed of the following measures that were being taken to improve the performance targets in the Contact Centre:

- The switchboard was to become an automated service which would release half a full time post;
- Flexi workers were used to cover sickness and leave; and
- Cross-training with other departments to improve the team's knowledge of services provided.

With regards to the Gateway Members were informed that they had taken on selling bus tickets for Arriva and the money from this would be used to recruit; a recruitment campaign due to take place in January.

The channel shift project and the improvements being undertaken with the website would mean that more could be done online but there were still unknown factors to consider such as the changes to Welfare Reform and universal credit.

The Committee praised the work of the Customer Services team and the opportunity it gave to staff joining the Council. Members felt that it provided an excellent grounding to move forward in the Council. The impact of this on the Customer Services team was acknowledged but it was felt that it was extremely beneficial to the Council as a whole. The Committee acknowledged the changes to come for the Customer Services team as a result of changing customer needs identified by the channel shift project but felt it important that the face to face element of the Council's customer services was safeguarded.

It was recommended that:

- a) That the appendixes to the quarterly performance report be produced in colour for Committee agendas;
- b) That the Head of Housing be invited to the next meeting focusing on performance to discuss the possible impact of the Council's Strategy for Growth on Housing's performance targets and the approach to replacing the decent homes standard;
- c) In relation to 1.5.20 in the Quarter 2 Performance report, highlighting the recent policy change at Tovil Household Recycling Centre, the Committee request evidence of any negative impact at Q3 to ensure the relevant Committee can then address any possible issues, particularly the negative financial impact on the Council;
- d) That the 'latest note' included in Appendix A 'Mid-Year strategic Plan Updates and KPI Performance Report' for each KPI be up to date and reflective of a standard time period for each entry; and
- e) The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services should ensure the face to face customer service offered by Maidstone Borough Council is safeguarded and enhanced.

56. The Corporate Governance Review

Councillors English, Vizzard and Black gave the Committee a presentation on behalf of the Corporate Governance Review Working Group (**Appendix A**) which outlined the agreed scope of the review as follows:

- Identify different models and quote advantages/disadvantages of them;
- Increase Member involvement; and
- Evaluate the Scrutiny functions.

The Committee was informed that the origins of the Corporate Governance review were the result of a motion passed by Council on 15 December 2010 stating that "a report be submitted at the appropriate time outlining the advantages and disadvantages of returning to the Committee system and the procedure necessary to achieve this." It was explained that this was taken forward by the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee and considered in relation to the Localism Act 2011.

The presentation provided the Committee with a background to the Local Government Act 2001 which had changed the way in which Councils were governed. Maidstone Borough Council adopted the Leader and Cabinet system May 2001.

Members of the Working Group explained that they had gathered evidence in the following ways:

- An all Member workshop,
- Interviews with a wide variety of councillors, past and present,
- An all Member survey; and
- Desktop research focused on different scrutiny structures at other authorities.

The group revealed its key findings as:

- Lack of member involvement;
- Scrutiny not seen as effective; and
- Cabinet seen as autocratic.

It then put forward four options:

- No Change – stay as we are;
- Develop a Hybrid system;
- Retain Cabinet system with an enhanced Scrutiny system; or
- Retain Cabinet System and engage and develop Cabinet advisory boards/Committees.

The advantages and disadvantages of each were included in the presentation. It was explained that the intention was to present the four options to full council.

Members of the Committee considered, in turn, the current system and the options put forward. It was felt that mechanisms available through the current structure such as call-in and councillor call for action were underutilised at present. It was felt that a short written paper should be presented to Council to evidence the information given in the presentation to allow Councillors time to consider the evidence supporting the options put forward before the Council meeting. The Committee agreed that the report should reference the mechanisms available to Members from each of the options put forward and it should make a reference to the cost implication, if any, to the Council. It should also consider the effect on different political make-ups of the Council.

Members were in agreement that continued professional development was needed for all Members and that Members themselves should be involved in developing this.

It was recommended that:

- a) A written report be prepared for Council that defines the four options set out in the Corporate Governance Working Group's presentation. The report should be succinct, written in plain English and include a supporting evidence base:
 - i. The report should highlight the mechanisms currently available to members through the scrutiny process including CCFA and Call-in and those that would be available through the other governance options put forward;
 - ii. The report should indicate any possible cost implications for the options proposed;
 - iii. All possible future political make-ups of the Council should be considered in the report to ensure the proposed governance options are robust and fit for purpose; and
 - iv. The report should highlight the need for continued professional development as an integral part of any new system of governance and the importance of member involvement in shaping their own training needs.

57. Future Work Programme

The Committee considered its future work programme and the list of forthcoming decisions.

The Committee agreed that its next meeting would consider the following:

- Budget Strategy;
- Complaints Quarterly Monitoring Report;
- Strategic Plan Refresh; and
- Improvement Plan Refresh.

The Procurement Strategy 2013-16 should be included in its future work programme.

It was resolved that:

- a) The Committee would consider the Budget Strategy, Complaints Quarterly Monitoring Report, Strategic Plan Refresh and the Improvement Plan Refresh at its next meeting; and
- b) The Procurement Strategy 2013-16 should be included in the Committee's future work programme.

58. Duration of meeting

6.32 p.m. to 9.00 p.m.