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Maidstone Borough Council **Strategic Plan 2011-15**

From the Leader

Over the next four years the council will have to work harder than ever before to meet the needs of Maidstone residents, as we confront the financial challenges arising from the coalition government's determination to reduce Britain's annual deficit. The Strategic Plan and the Medium Term Financial Strategy set out Maidstone's approach to meeting the needs of our community in this new financial and political era.

To deliver our savings targets we will need to change the way in which services are delivered. We will continue to prioritise activities which will deliver our priorities.

The financial position of the council is strong, we have balances of around £3.6m, which is substantially more than our requirement to maintain balances of 10% of the annual budget. During the course of this plan the Council has delivered three flagship projects for the Borough; High Street Improvement, Museum and Mote Park as part of the Council's sustainable Capital Programme. For the next two years of the plan we will continue improvements to the public realm, the High Street and commence work to secure infrastructure for future growth.

In order to provide focus to our efforts we have identified three priorities for the Council:

1. For Maidstone to have a growing economy.
2. For Maidstone to be a decent place to live.
3. Corporate & Customer Excellence.

By focusing on three priorities we can establish clear objectives for this Council. This is especially important in the current financial climate.

Maidstone is a vibrant county town with many strategic public agencies present in the Borough. It is an attractive environment for both businesses and residents the Strategic Plan is focussed on ensuring our economy grows along with maintaining and improving the Borough as a place to live.

Having now established a joint partnership with KCC through the new Maidstone Locality Board, there will be greater opportunities to work collaboratively using public money, together with the resources of the private and third sectors, to achieve even greater improvements for Maidstone residents.

Introduction from the Chief Executive

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Maidstone Borough has many attractive urban and rural places, a relatively robust economy and diverse communities. With both a rich heritage and an ambition for growth we want to make the best of our past and the future to support people, strengthen the economy and develop the public realm to build vibrancy and prosperity.

Our Strategic Plan for 2011-15 focuses on three strategic priorities and seven key outcomes. We are striving to achieve these in circumstances of economic recession and significant change. These have an impact on the Council and the daily lives of every resident and business in the borough. We have consulted widely on this plan, to focus on what matters most to Maidstone.

We cannot make our vision a reality without working with our partners. The past few years have seen many successes from working closely with public, private, voluntary and community sector partners from the borough and across Kent.

As a community leader, we must strive even harder to harness the energy, support and commitment of our partners to overcome the challenges ahead. We must support our partners where we can and challenge them where necessary. Our Community Strategy sets a bold and challenging vision for the borough and we must play a leading role in the Maidstone Locality Board to turn that vision into reality.

To bring this plan to fruition we must be open about the design of services and who delivers them. In this plan we have described seven principles for how we do things at Maidstone. We will equip our staff with the skills, knowledge and technology to make these a reality.

Among the challenges ahead is to interpret localism in a way that enables local people and their Councillors to take charge of how their neighbourhoods develop. This will focus our resources and efforts on those issues that matter most to the community.

We must also strive for continuous improvement in the services used by Maidstone people and businesses. The improvements for Maidstone set out in this plan will ensure that our Council does what our communities need in the most efficient and effective way. Delivery against our strategy is reviewed bi-annually and the strategy itself is reviewed annually to make sure we adapt to changes in our environment.

Maidstone is an ambitious place and we are an ambitious Council. There will always be new challenges and competing priorities. This is what makes our Council and what we do so exciting and fulfilling. We will need to make difficult decisions about how we prioritise and deploy our resources. In doing so we must remember to put our customers and our communities first, improving efficiency, promoting innovation and striving for continuous improvement.

Your community is our priority.

National Context

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New Political Leadership

Britain has been going through a state of change having just come out of a recession and entering a new political environment. The general election in May 2010 resulted in a hung parliament and a subsequent coalition government forming between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Parties. The coalition government has stated their top priority is cutting Britain's budget deficit, "with the main burden of deficit reduction borne by reduced spending rather than increased taxes".

In May 2010, the Government published 'The Coalition: our programme for government' which outlined the key policy areas, with an emphasis on 'freedom, fairness and responsibility' creating the Big Society and giving citizens, communities and local government a central role in enabling a new approach to sustainable, low carbon economic growth.

Localism Act

The Localism Act is designed to enable many of these changes. It received Royal Assent in November 2011 and came into effect in April 2012. The Act introduced new freedoms and flexibilities for local government, and new rights and powers for communities and individuals.

The Act gives councils a general power of competence, whereby as long as an activity is not unlawful, they are empowered to carry it out if they wish. It increases the flexibility of councils to structure themselves in the way they think best. The Act also increases local control over housing decisions and business tax rates.

As a result of the Act the Council has introduced policies on community right to challenge and community right to buy. In the spirit of Localism the Council has introduced the U project; a fun way for people to learn new skills and meet more people in their community. We are also working with Voluntary Action Maidstone to develop a website to connect businesses and voluntary organisations.

Community groups and social enterprise organisations are encouraged to take an active role, and are given the right to bid to deliver public services themselves. Local people are also given greater influence over council taxes, community assets and planning decisions. Councils will need to be transparent about their policies on pay.

Comprehensive spending review

In October 2010, the Government presented its Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) which determined the spending budgets until 2014-15. For local government this means a reduction in funding by an average of 28% over the four year life of this plan, with larger savings having to be achieved in the first year. The Council has developed a corporate improvement plan with an identified programme of reviews and improvements. Maidstone Borough Council has started a programme of reviews, to consider how services are delivered and the potential impact of these changes in policy on other services and cost. The Autumn statement 2012 sets out further cuts for local authorities, these cuts combined with changes to council tax benefit discounts in 2013 will increase risk and uncertainty for the Council.

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Local Enterprise Partnerships

Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are local partnerships between local authorities and businesses. The Government's aim is that LEPs will play a central role in determining local economic priorities and undertaking activities to drive economic growth and the creation of local jobs. Maidstone is committed to playing a full role in the Kent, Essex and East Sussex Partnership to ensure the Borough and its businesses benefit from regeneration opportunities.

Transport and Infrastructure

The Department for Transport grant to local authorities has been reduced by 28%. However, the Government sees transport as a key driver of growth nationally and in the regions, stating that for every pound spent on Highways Agency schemes, on average £6 of benefits are achieved in return and in many cases, there are higher returns for local authority schemes. Following the Comprehensive Spending Review the Government committed to a £1.5 billion programme of major local authority transport schemes. 41 transport schemes have been approved and evidence is being gathered for a decision on a further four, with a total investment so far of £1.4 billion, partly from Department for Transport contributions and partly from local funding. The Chancellor's Autumn Statement 2012 revealed that a major emphasis in the budget will be switching spending in the public sector from departmental resource budgets to investment in capital projects. Projects include funding for schemes to alleviate bottle necks and funding for cycling infrastructure. This could have an impact on our emerging core strategy and infrastructure delivery plan.

Transparency and Inspection

The Government sees Local Authorities as having a crucial role to play in ensuring that services are efficient and effective, offer good value for money and deliver what people want. The Government announced the abolition of the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) with immediate effect from 25 June 2010, with the intention of clearing the burden of assessment from local authorities. Alongside the reduction in inspection, councils will be moving to increased transparency in the data held by publicising more information such as spending, contracts and tenders above £ 500.

Planning and Housing

The Localism Act will allow for the opportunity for local people to plan for new development within the strategic framework provided by the Council's Core Strategy. The Community Right to Build will allow a development to go ahead where there is overwhelming community support. Regional Planning Strategies will soon be abolished and decision making on matters such as housing and general planning policy are now made by local Councils in the Core Strategy and related documents.

The Government has implemented – 'The National Planning Policy Framework.' This replaces all existing central government planning guidance (i.e. Planning Policy Statements (PPS), Planning Policy Guidance (PPGs). Circulars etc) but, more fundamentally, introduces a presumption in favour of sustainable development.

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Local Context

Maidstone the place

Maidstone is an exceptionally green Borough with a number of parks, the largest of which is Mote Park, which is Grade II on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and home to thriving rugby and cricket clubs. There are numerous smaller parks and squares within the town and villages which have benefited from a major playground and sports facility investment programme in recent years. We recognise the importance of maintaining a quality environment for residents including our heritage and conservation areas. The attractive countryside offers high quality landscape and biodiversity and a wide range of informal recreation opportunities.

Economically Maidstone Borough is considered a good place to live and work with high rates of employment, relatively low levels of adults claiming incapacity benefits and a higher proportion of residents who have a degree than the South East average. Larger numbers of people commute into than out of the Borough. The Borough has a very mixed business sector with large numbers of small and medium size businesses with particular strengths in professional services (law and accountancy) and construction. There is a growing media industry led by Maidstone Studios and the Kent Messenger Group. Maidstone has an extensive further education campus (Mid Kent College) and a higher education offer with both the University for the Creative Arts and Mid Kent College seeking to increase their range of courses and facilities. Oakwood Campus is being taken over by Mid Kent College and over the next three years the University for Creative Arts will be expanding the broadcast media courses being delivered at Maidstone Studios.

Residents living in the Borough have relatively high wages (although many higher earners commute out of the Borough to achieve these). Maidstone came out as the top destination for business in the 2010 study of locations for business in Kent. The 2011 census revealed that Maidstone not only has the largest population of all Kent districts it is also the area which grew most in terms of population between 2001 and 2011 increasing by 16,300 people (11.7%). It is thought that migration alongside the fact that people are living longer is the reason behind this increase.

Transport links are generally good although rail travel could still be improved. 2011 saw the introduction of High Speed services from the Maidstone west to St. Pancras. Rail journey times to London from some of the smaller rural towns (Staplehurst and Marden) are as low as 40 minutes. The Borough is well served by the motorway network with the M20 and M2 both providing links to the M25 and the Channel Ports. The international high speed railway stations at Ebbsfleet (15 mins) and Ashford (25 mins) are also extremely accessible. The Council is pleased that an extension to the Thameslink network is being proposed to provide a direct link to London from Maidstone. With regard to travelling in and around the Borough by car, congestion is an issue particularly at peak time in the town centre. The bus transport network serving Maidstone town is relatively strong whilst rural transport presents distinct challenges. Road safety is a concern for Maidstone, with the poorest record in Kent. Following a scrutiny review of road safety, the Council will be supporting the Safer Maidstone Partnership in taking initiatives forward to address this issue.

Maidstone's Local Strategic Partnership carried out work in 2010 looking at how public money is spent locally. It identified that £602 million was spent in Maidstone in 2010

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by various bodies including Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council, Kent Police and the local Primary Care Trust. Just over 35% of the money is spent on health and social wellbeing, nearly 17% was spent on education and 15% on housing.

In November 2011, the Maidstone Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) was replaced by the Maidstone Locality Board, which draws together local public services for greater effectiveness and efficiency to oversee and shape the local delivery of services. The change to Locality Boards will result in a greater input from county and district councillors, but with representation from the wider public sector, including Kent Police, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, NHS, the voluntary and community sector and the business community. The first formal meeting of the Maidstone Locality Board was held on 20 January 2012. The Board has agreed three priorities for Maidstone:

- Community Budgets
- Tackling Worklessness and Poverty
- Local Environment Improvements

The Locality Board has set and agreed performance indicators to measure the outcomes against these priorities. These indicators are set for Maidstone and are cross-partner. The priorities align with the Strategic Plan.

What matters to Maidstone residents

The Council carried out extensive consultation when developing the Sustainable Community Strategy for Maidstone 2009-2020. Residents were asked to identify what was good and bad about living in the Borough as well as their dream for Maidstone. The top three positive comments related to Maidstone included shopping, parks and the river. Other positive comments related to cleanliness, the countryside and nightlife. The top three negative comments related to traffic congestion, public transport and the quality of roads. The top three dreams for Maidstone residents related to resolving transport issues, improving the river and an improved theatre/concert facility.

A residents' survey was undertaken in 2011. This was the first survey the Council had undertaken since the Place Survey in 2008 and showed improved satisfaction in a number of areas including providing value for money, keeping residents informed and the way the council runs its services. It also showed some areas that need improvement, such as people from different background getting on well together and satisfaction with the local area. The council will work with residents to find ways to increase satisfaction across the borough.

During the 2012-13 refresh of the Strategic Plan, residents were consulted on the budget to identify what matters to them in respect of council services. This exercise was factored into the Cabinet's prioritisation of spending and services. More detail is provided in the prioritisation section of the plan. The importance of the rural transport network, cleanliness of our town centre and supporting and encouraging a range of business development were identified during a resident focus group reviewing our priorities.

About the Council

Maidstone Borough Council has a strong record of improvement based on previous inspection results as an excellent rated Council. We are now looking at how we improve

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residents' satisfaction with the Council, as we turn our attention outwards to residents rather than up to central government.

When the Council conducted the Place Survey in 2008, 44% of respondents said they were very or fairly satisfied with the way the Council runs things. This was just below the national average of 45%. 32% strongly or tended to agree that the Council provides value for money. The resident survey conducted from December 2011 to January 2012 showed a significant improvement in resident satisfaction with 63% of respondents indicating that they were satisfied with the way the Council runs things. The Council is looking to continue to improve resident satisfaction and increase value for money as a priority going forward.

The services we deliver

- Housing
- Benefits including housing and Council Tax
- Spatial Planning and Development Management
- Council tax and non-domestic rates collection
- Waste collection
- Electoral registration
- Local land charges
- Food and safety
- Environmental enforcement
- Building control
- Museum
- Theatre
- Crematorium and cemetery
- Leisure centre
- Parks and open spaces
- Street cleaning
- Abandoned vehicles
- Community safety
- Arts and sports
- Parking Services
- Licensing
- Economic development

How the Council works

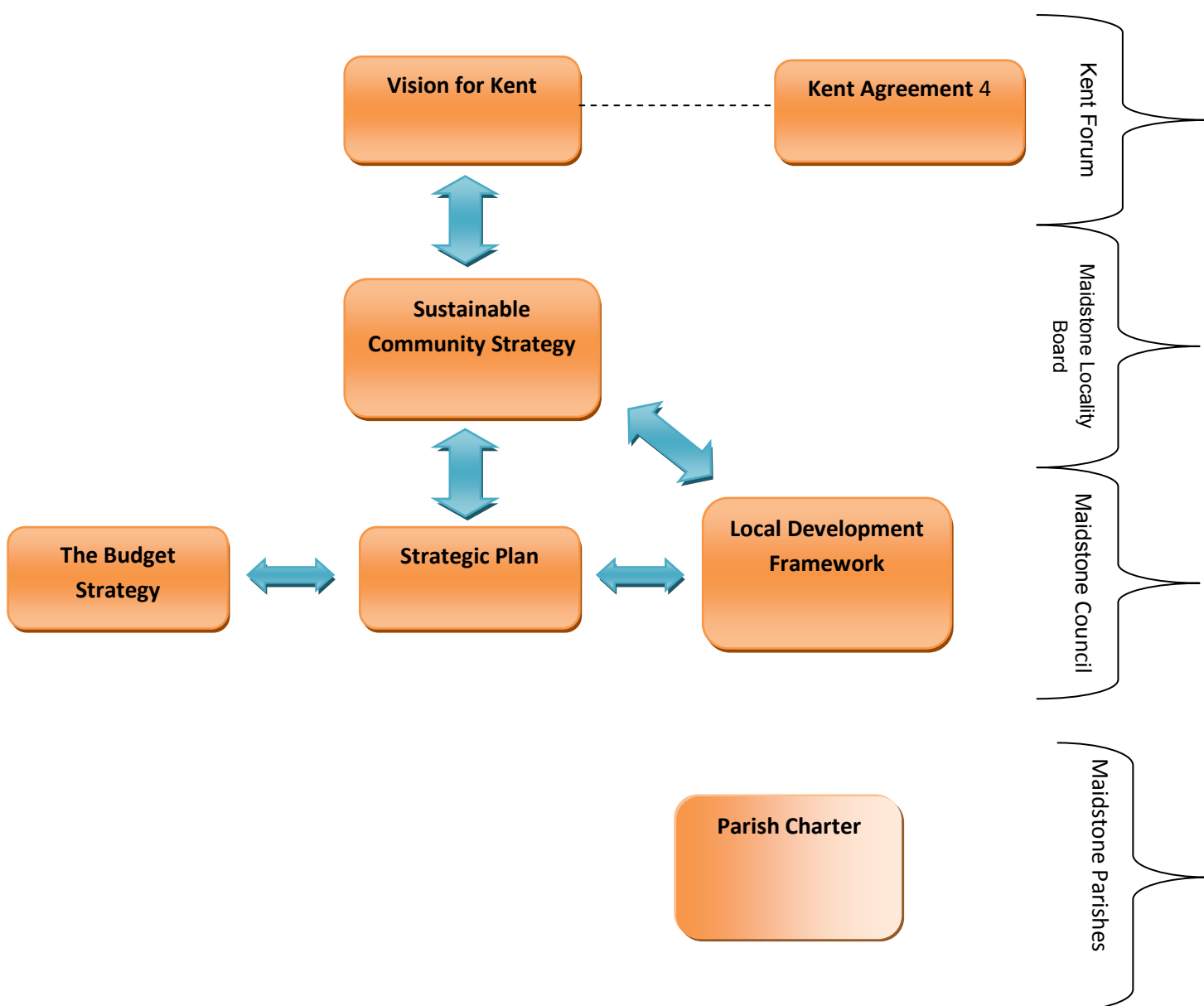
The Council has 55 Councillors who are elected by thirds. Since May 2008, the Conservative party has held the majority of seats on the Council. The Council appoints a Leader who appoints the Cabinet; the Cabinet makes key decisions on Council services, which must be in line with the overall policy and budget framework set by the Council. Each Cabinet Member has their own portfolio area which they make decisions on. Matters that concern two or more portfolios are generally dealt with by the whole Cabinet, which meets monthly.

The Cabinet is held to account by Overview and Scrutiny committees. These committees ensure the decisions of the Cabinet are properly monitored and examine the Council's policies, services and expenditure. They also carry out investigations and research into relevant topics and make recommendations to Cabinet based on their findings to inform and shape the policy of the Council.

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The Council also operates several Committees who take regulatory decisions including Licensing and Planning. These are an integral part of the Council's operation. The Council also has an Audit Committee and a Standards Committee in place which act as checks and balances on the Council and its services to ensure we adhere to our high standards of corporate governance.

Strategy map - how we work with others



Our Vision, Priorities and Outcomes for Maidstone

The Council is committed to and shares the vision for Maidstone, identified in the Sustainable Community Strategy 2009-2020:

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“We want Maidstone Borough to be a vibrant, prosperous 21st century urban and rural community at the heart of Kent, where its distinctive character is enhanced to create a safe, healthy, excellent environment with high quality education and employment where all people can realise their aspirations.”

The essence of this can be described in six words- Great opportunity, great place, great people.

The Council has three priorities and seven outcomes for Maidstone over the next four years. Over 2011 these outcomes were defined to show which areas the Council will concentrate on, taking into account the needs of the Borough and the budget reductions the Council has to find. The Council will continue to use its influence wherever possible to encourage partners to invest in Maidstone in both the priority and non priority areas.

Priorities

1. For Maidstone to have a growing economy

In essence, Maidstone will be a good place to work and do business. The economy will continue to grow with a wide range of employment and business opportunities.

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

2. For Maidstone to be a decent place to live

Maidstone already has a clean, attractive and well designed and built environment. We wish to maintain this and ensure that proper respect is paid to its diverse and valuable assets so that Maidstone is a place where people want to live. We will continue to support our most vulnerable residents and seek to reduce the different forms of deprivation across the Borough in both urban and rural areas.

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

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- 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 two key areas; early intervention work with young children and their families to tackle disadvantage and undertaking work to help families who have multiple needs.

3. Corporate and Customer Excellence

The Council will have a productive workforce with people in the right place at the right time, delivering cost effective services. Services will be affordable, delivered on time and to agreed standards in an accessible way.

Outcomes by 2015

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

Delivering Priorities and Outcomes

Outcome: By 2015 Maidstone has a transport network that supports the local economy

Why it matters for Maidstone

Transport plays an important role in supporting economic development and creating opportunities for growth. Businesses need an effective and well connected transport system to access the town and to connect with London, other centres in Kent, the southeast and internationally in order to thrive. Residents need to be able to get to places directly and quickly. We recognise that to do this we need to work closely with transport authorities and operators including business leaders and Kent County Council. We also seek to have an improved rail network for residents and business and will continue to lobby and work with partners to achieve this ambition. We recognise that the transport network has to be effective across the Borough and will be a key component in supporting our rural areas and ensuring our rural economies prosper.

Public consultation consistently reveals transport as a major concern. For example, consultation carried out for the Sustainable Community Strategy showed that a large proportion of Maidstone's local people view the transport system and particularly the accessibility of public transport, as inadequate. Links are generally good although rail travel could still be improved with journeys to London mostly taking over an hour and none of the main stations having full disabled access. There are proposals to put in place a new train line direct to the City and to other London destinations, which we will support. In 2011 a fast link from Maidstone West to London was introduced and the Council will seek to encourage use and see the service continued. The Borough is well

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served by the motorway network with multiple accesses to the M20 and M2 both providing links to the M25 and the Channel Ports. In terms of town centre congestion, during the morning peak time it takes three minutes and 28 seconds to drive one mile. Peak congestion is a problem and projected to get worse. The town is also vulnerable to 'operation stack' which alleviates traffic problems at the Port of Dover and Channel Tunnel by using the M20 to park traffic. There is a park and ride scheme which serves the town centre.

What we plan to do	Milestones	Ownership
Deliver an integrated transport strategy (alongside the Core Strategy) in partnership with the transport authorities and operators which will result in joint working to improve and develop an effective and integrated transport network to meet future needs	<p>– 2012-Mid 2013 Develop Integrated Transport Strategy alongside the Core Strategy</p> <p>2013-15 - Milestones as set out in the Integrated Transport Strategy</p>	Maidstone council and partners
Implement an infrastructure delivery plan with partners utilising available funding including S106/CIL, new homes bonus, Local Transport Plan 3, other grant funding and potentially tax incremental financing	<p>2013-2014 - Develop Infrastructure Delivery Plan</p> <p>2014-2015 - Milestones as set out in the Infrastructure Delivery Plan</p>	Maidstone council. Kent county council and partners
Create and deliver a Local Development Framework including a Core Strategy and related documents that create good conditions for prosperity whilst still providing balance with environmental protection.	Mid 2015 – Core Strategy adopted	Maidstone council

Indicator	Frequency	Out-turn 2011/12	Target 2012/13	Target 2013/14	Target 2014/15
Percentage change in bus usage on services from Maidstone depot (NEW)	Annual	+2.24%	Contextual – partner data		
Average journey time per mile for key routes	Annual	Contextual – partner data			

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(Congestion)					
Number of Park and Ride transactions	Quarterly	428,902	420,000	420,000	420,000
Income from pay and display car parks per parking space (NEW)	Quarterly	£1,121.17	£1,153.19	Will be set as part of the budget process each year	

Outcome: By 2015 Maidstone has a growing economy with rising employment, catering for a range of skill sets to meet the demands of the local economy.

Why it matters for Maidstone

As a Borough we want Maidstone to be a place where the conditions are in place for businesses to flourish. The Council is committed to growth that is sustainable and will create the conditions which enable local businesses to start up, expand and attract new business to the borough. We will also support business growth and development across the Borough through our planning policies and land allocation including the management of the green and blue infrastructure network. Our Development Management service will ensure the relevant Council services provide an effective pre-application service and will process planning applications in a cost effective and timely manner. Maidstone also has significant rural business economies our Local Development Framework will include the rural areas.

Maidstone has the largest economy of all Kent Districts and Boroughs. More people commute into the Borough each day than commute out. The Borough is an economic hub providing employment for a large part of Kent. However, despite its natural location advantages, Maidstone's growth rate was the 4th lowest in Kent between 1998 and 2008 and behind the South East and Great Britain averages. It is a diverse economy with reliance on town services and 30% of businesses located in the rural area. Moreover much of this employment growth has been public sector employment. Whilst around 10,000 jobs were created in the service sector during this period, the Borough lost over 3,000 jobs in manufacturing. Neighbouring areas have been able to provide a greater choice and range of employment sites in both quality and quantum and in some cases at more competitive prices. If the planned cuts in public sector expenditure of 30% result in jobs losses in the sector in the same proportion, nearly 6,000 people who work in Maidstone could lose their jobs. We also have a low wage local economy and the national changes to education and skills development will impact on our residents and employment. We are determined to address these local issues through our land allocations, planning policy and work with the education and skills sector. A new Economic Development Strategy will be agreed in 2013 this strategy sets out the progress the Council has made in relation to our priority for a growing economy and the future actions we will be taking.

What we plan to do	Milestones	Ownership
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Create and deliver local development framework documents including a core strategy with the policies and land allocations that will create the right conditions for economic development*	Mid 2015 - Core Strategy adopted	Maidstone council
Update the Council's Economic Development Strategy and Regeneration Statement and deliver actions to support the Council's priorities.	2013- 2015 Milestones in accordance with the updated Economic Development Strategy and regeneration statement	Maidstone council
Assist businesses who want to develop or locate to the Borough through our pre-application planning advice service, a new role of business champion to encourage new business and supporting existing businesses and ensuring that the planning committee continues to be effective in supporting the Council's priorities	April 2011- August 2011 – Peer Review of planning completed 2011-12 Introduction of a training schedule for Members and officers completed	Maidstone council
Review Park Wood Industrial Estate and implement a strategy for its regeneration	November 2010 - Strategy review completed 2011-2015 Implement strategy actions	Maidstone council and relevant partners
Work with partners through the worklessness forum to assist people into training and employment	Milestones to be set and agreed by the Maidstone Locality Board	The Council and relevant partners

* The local development framework and core strategy set out the Council's planning policies for the Borough, as well as where it wishes to see housing and commercial development

Indicator	Frequency	2011/12 Out-turn	2012/13 Target	2013/14 Target	2014/15 Target
Overall employment rate	Annual	81.0%	82.5%	84.0%	85.0%
Percentage of commercial planning applications completed within statutory timescales	Quarterly	88.89%	90%	90%	90%
Percentage of people claiming Job Seekers Allowance	Quarterly	2.7%	2.4%<	2.3%<	2.3%<
Percentage of vacant units within the town centre	Annual	9.24%	11.50%	10.75%	10.00%
Value of business rateable floor space	Annual	£139,904,131	1% increase year on year		
Percentage of major business planning applications take-up of pre-applications advice	Bi-annual	90.0%	92.0%	93.0%	94.0%

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Percentage of those taking pre-application advice where the applications were approved		100.0%	90.0%	90.0%	90.0%
Number of 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEETS) (NEW)	Annual	5.7 (2010/11)	Contextual- Partner data Data is released 1 year in arrears.		
Working age people educated to NVQ level 4 or higher	Annual	34.3%	Contextual partner data		

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Outcome: By 2015 Maidstone has decent, affordable housing in the right places across a range of tenures

Why it matters for Maidstone

We want Maidstone to be a place where people enjoy living and a key part of this will be having access to affordable and decent housing. We understand that good housing promotes educational attainment, better health outcomes and employment opportunities. The provision of choice and affordability in housing for the citizens of Maidstone, including rural communities, which meets their needs and aspirations are addressed within this outcome. Decent means housing that meets residents' needs in terms of availability and size as well as meeting the national decent homes standard.

In terms of affordable housing, we are referring to a range of tenure that includes socially rented, intermediate or affordable rent and a variety of shared ownership products. Maidstone Borough Council works to ensure that all new developments of 15 homes or over contain at least 40% affordable housing, which in 2011/12 led to 284 affordable homes becoming available. Due to Council intervention, 30 empty private sector homes were brought back into use or demolished - the majority being let to households from our housing list. We also have a role to play in improving the quality of private housing through grants for improvements to insulation and heating. The Council has completed a Strategic Housing Market Assessment to help us build the right kind of homes in the right places.

Housing in Maidstone town has traditionally been considered relatively affordable compared to the south east average, but this is not the case in rural Maidstone and for those on average or low incomes. The recent recession has resulted in an increase in home repossession and homelessness generally has risen across the UK. Whilst Maidstone has seen a rise in the numbers of households requiring temporary accommodation provided under the homelessness legislation this remains comparably low compared to the other Boroughs in Kent and a significantly lower level than the worst affected areas in England. Maidstone continues to perform above targets for homelessness prevention and is seeking to find new ways of encouraging people to seek housing advice at an earlier stage than when the crisis point of homelessness is reached.

What we plan to do	Milestones	Ownership
New Housing: Enable the delivery of a range of high quality homes that are desirable and affordable to all sections of the community	2011-2015 Implement Housing Strategy	Maidstone council
Existing Housing: Ensure our existing housing is suitable and able to meet future challenges; providing sought after homes now and into the future	2011-2015 Implement Housing Strategy	Maidstone council

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Homelessness & vulnerable groups: Commission and provide services with partners that meet identified needs, reduce inequalities, are responsive and timely, promote stable, strong communities, self-reliance and encourage positive aspirations	<p>2011-2015 Implement Housing Strategy</p> <p>2013 – Implement the new Allocation Scheme</p>	Maidstone council
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Indicator	Frequency	2011/12 Out-turn	2012/13 Target	2013/14 Target	2014/15 Target
Percentage of residential planning applications processed within statutory timescales	Quarterly	75.0%	78.0%	83.0%	86.0%
Number of affordable homes delivered	Quarterly	284	200	Targets for future years will be agreed as part of the budget process	
Number of homes occupied by vulnerable people made decent	Quarterly	205	180	180	180
Percentage of new homes built on previously developed land	Annual	92.33%	80%	70%	60%
Average grant per MCB funded affordable home unit	Annual	£8210.00	>£10,000	>£10,000	>£10,000
DCV 007 Average cost of planning service per application	Annual	£209	TBC	Targets for future years will be agreed as part of the budget process.	

Outcome: By 2015 Maidstone continues to be a clean and attractive environment for people who live in and visit the Borough

Why it matters for Maidstone

Maidstone is an exceptionally green Borough with a number of well maintained parks and open spaces. As Maidstone will continue to be a place for development the challenge will be to continue to maintain and enhance our 41 conservation areas. Work has been undertaken to make the Borough more attractive, such as the Mote Park improvement project, High Street improvements and the Museum East wing project. An attractive environment means a well built and designed environment: under the outcome related to the economy we have committed to an effective planning process to ensure we have a well designed environment.

Cleanliness has improved across the Borough and CO² emissions have been decreasing. We are committed to increasing social responsibility to ensure the new development is of high quality and the Borough's varied and valued landscape and heritage assets are respected and the environment remains clean and attractive. We want Maidstone to continue to be a place where people enjoy living and would choose to live. As stated in the earlier section on the economy, we will also be encouraging green business in Maidstone. As a Council we will lead with our carbon management programme: over the next four years we will be seeking to reduce carbon emissions from Council buildings and vehicles.

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What we plan to do	Milestones	Ownership
Deliver focused enforcement activity to ensure high impact on the cleanliness of the Borough	April 2012 - Area Based Enforcement implemented	The Council
Work with partners to ensure that all areas of the Borough are clean and well-maintained	Ongoing - Deep Cleaning Programme in place	The Council and Partners
Continually develop street cleaning operations to ensure Maidstone is a clean and tidy Borough	August 2013 – Introduce mechanical cleaning operation as part of joint waste and street cleaning contract Ongoing – work with partners to ensure that all areas of the Borough are clean and well maintained	The Council The Council with others
Ensure provision of timely specialist advice and services on heritage and landscape design to protect and enhance Maidstone's environment	Ongoing - Provide quality pre-application advice services for heritage and landscape design	The Council
Deliver the Carbon Management Plan to ensure that the Council reduces its carbon footprint by 3% per annum	Ongoing - Reduce carbon emissions across the Borough and improve air quality Ongoing - Reduce the Council's carbon footprint and improve the use of other natural resources whilst ensuring the Council is planning to adapt to Climate Change	Maidstone council and partners
Maximise our leisure and cultural offer to enhance the quality of life for our residents whilst attracting visitors, new residents and businesses	March 2012 - Completed the redevelopment of the Museum's East Wing June 2013 – Complete a review of play areas and produce a strategy for future provision June 2012 - Completed Mote Park regeneration project capital works	Maidstone council
New waste contract	Summer 2013 – New Waste Contract in place	Maidstone council

Indicator	Frequency	2011/12 Out-turn	2012/13 Target	2013/14 Target	2014/15 Target
Satisfaction with local area as a place to live (residents survey)	Biennial	84%		87%	

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Satisfaction with street cleaning (residents survey)	Biennial	56%		59%	
Satisfaction with Parks & Open Spaces (residents survey)	Biennial	76%		78%	
Percentage waste recycled	Quarterly	45.13%	46%	48%	50%
Percentage of relevant land assessed with unacceptable levels of litter	Annual	1.70%	1.705%	1.70%	1.70%
Percentage of relevant land assessed with unacceptable levels of detritus		5.28%	5.8%	5.75%	5.70%
Percentage of fly tipping reports responded to within one working day	Quarterly	99.24%	99.00%	99.00%	99.00%
Cost of maintaining the borough's parks and open spaces per hectare	Annual	£12.89*	£13.00	Targets for future years will be agreed as part of the budget process.	
Percentage of planning enforcement cases signed off within 21 days	Quarterly	90.42%	92%	92%	92%
Cost of waste collection per household	Annual	£55.96	<£59.00	<£57.00	<£57.00
Cost of street cleansing per head of population	Annual	£10.00*	<£10.50	Targets for future years will be agreed as part of the budget process.	
Residual Waste per household (kg)	Quarterly	446.29kg	440kg	430kg	420kg
Percentage reductions in CO2 emissions from local authority operations (tonnes)	Annual	-7.63%	-3%	-3%	-3%

Outcome: By 2015 residents in Maidstone are not disadvantaged because of where they live or who they are, vulnerable people are assisted and the level of deprivation is reduced

Why it matters for Maidstone

This outcome refers not only to our deprived areas but those individuals who are most vulnerable wherever they are in the Borough including our rural communities. National policies on welfare reform and public sector budget cuts will have an impact for our deprived areas and our most vulnerable residents. Our economic and housing strategies that feature under other outcomes will be crucial to achieving this outcome. This will not be an easy area to address as 11% of Maidstone's population live in areas considered to be in the 20% most deprived in the country. Our rural areas also contain households suffering deprivation. These areas have lower standards of health and lower life expectancy than average. The disadvantaged wards have the highest numbers of young people not in education, employment or training and significantly higher numbers of youth offenders.

Following an internal review on the issue of disadvantage and having regard to the findings of the Marmot Review, *Fair Society Healthy Lives*, the Cabinet has determined to tackle disadvantage in the long-term through improving early years' development. This will be achieved through giving every child the best possible start in life; maximising their capabilities; and creating fair employment and good work for all, the result of which will be to break the cycle of deprivation and disadvantage. This cannot be achieved overnight but the positive gains will have generational benefits. The

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Marmot Review concluded that effective local delivery requires residents to be involved in the decisions that affect them. Local authorities are best placed to enable and co-ordinate this approach by empowering individuals and local communities.

We will continue the work on Planning for Real in our deprived areas to engage communities in identifying and resolving local issues and problems and helping others to help themselves.

As community leaders, we will convene resources to reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training and reduce the number of adults out of work. We will seek to do this through working with local businesses and supporting social enterprise start ups. We will be working to prevent disadvantage and will seek to participate in a pilot with KCC to address the needs of complex families in our Borough. We have also started to identify families who we will be working alongside as part of the government's troubled families programme. This programme seeks to understand the problems facing families with complex needs and to help them by giving them one key worker to talk to rather than dealing with multiple agencies.

What we plan to do	Milestones	Ownership
Reduce inequalities within communities through preventative action	April 2012 – March 2016 Pilot completed with KCC on complex families April 2012-16 - Deliver Community Development Strategy milestones	In Partnership
Promote active citizenship – to facilitate and support increased involvement by local people in decision making and involvement in their neighbourhoods	April 2012 - Locality Boards in place Ongoing Neighbourhood forums in place	Maidstone Council, Kent County Council and partners
Review the Park Wood Planning for Real activity to inform further work and activities supporting communities in identifying and meeting their needs, opportunities, rights and responsibilities	2011-2016 - Neighbourhood Action Plans in place for Park Wood, Shepway North, Shepway South, Tovil and Mangravet	Maidstone Council, Kent County Council and partners
Increase targeted support for families with children aged 0-3, particularly the most vulnerable and deprived	December 2015- robust partnerships in place to support and improve early years development and services	Maidstone Council, Kent County Council and partners

Indicator	Frequency	2011/12 Out-turn	2012/13 Target	2013/14 Target	2014/15 Target
Percentage of the Borough covered by Broadband	Annual	64.94%	66%	68%	70%
Average time taken to process and notify	Quarterly	3.5	5 days	5 days	5 days

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applicants on housing register (days)					
Number of residents participating in neighbourhood planning as a percentage of the ward population	Annual	14.89%	17%	20%	23%
Average time taken to process new benefit claims and changes of circumstances	Quarterly	9.16	15 days	15 days	10 days
In setting the above target at 15 days we have worked on the basis that the focus going forward will on reducing cost of delivery, whilst maintaining the level of service expected by customers and allowing for some short term impact on performance during the shared service implementation. This is supported by the BTP review of the service which looked specifically at processing times to establish whether it was a driver for satisfaction and concluded that within certain boundaries, it was quality of service rather than speed of assessment that was key.					
Number of households prevented from becoming homeless through intervention	Quarterly	608	500	500	500
The council provides help for all households presenting as homeless and will use the appropriate means to resolve the situation. It should be noted that intervention is not an appropriate option in all cases. It is expected that the performance of this indicator will improve as the economy recovers from the recession.					
Gap between median wage of employee (residents) and the median wage of employees (workplace) (salary differences)	Annual	£73.40	>£75.00	>£70.00	>£70.00

Outcome: By 2015 the Council will ensure that cost effective, efficient services are delivered across the borough

Why it matters for Maidstone

This outcome is related to ensuring that services received by residents are delivered in the best way to ensure that the most value is received for every pound spent. We will commission services to improve outcomes in the most efficient, effective, equitable and sustainable way that will involve a more diverse set of providers and include social enterprise, voluntary, public and employee run services

The Council provides many different services which are used by different types of people. It is essential to ensure that people can access services they need in a way that suits them and provides value for money. We recognise that the internet provides the only way people can access our services and get information at any time of day and on any day of the year. Therefore, we are improving the Maidstone Borough Council website to make sure information is clear and have as many services as possible online. Using the Council website also provides good value for money: it costs least for people to get information, apply for things and make payments online (about £0.32 per visit to the website), a little more if people telephone the Council (about 1.86 per phone call) and most for people to visit the Gateway (about £9.66 per visit). As we know that not everyone can or wants to get information or services online, we will continue to provide high quality telephone and face to face services.

In 2012 the Council carried out a review to identify the optimum customer service model looking at how people prefer to access our services and find out information. The research work has been significant identifying what is in place now and how we perform; consulting with residents, businesses and staff as well as visiting and talking with other authorities. From this work and research a range of improvements have

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been identified. Once the recommendations for improvement have been agreed, a programme of improvement will be implemented.

What we plan to do	Milestones	Ownership
Seek out and implement new ways of delivering services that are not our core business, such as the Theatre and the Museum	March 2013 – Plans in place for cost neutral Museum and Theatre service	Maidstone council
Progress the shared services programme for those services that it is practical to do so and savings can be achieved	April 2011 – March 2015 - progress shared services	Maidstone council and partners
Undertake a programme of business improvement service reviews to ensure services are customer focused and delivered efficiently and effectively	April 2011- March 2015 - Undertake programme of reviews as per the Corporate Improvement Plan.	Maidstone council
Ensure that the authority has a productive, proactive and flexible workforce	April 2013 - Produce and implement a Workforce Plan incorporating a skills audit for current resources and a plan to develop the workforce for future needs March 2015 - Gain Investors in People Gold 2011-2015 - Manage the change initiatives through a strategic approach to organisation development in line with Strategic Plan milestones	Maidstone council

Indicator	Frequency	2011/12 Out-turn	2012/13 Target	2013/14 Target	2014/15 Target
Percentage of business rates collected	Quarterly	97.39%	97.4%	97.4%	97.4%
Percentage of Council tax collected	Quarterly	98.30%	98.30%	98.30%	98.30%
Savings delivered through reviews (value for money)	Quarterly	£491,750			
Number of missed bins per 100,000 collections	Quarterly	30.4	25	30	25
Percentage of planning decisions taken under delegation	Quarterly	94.18%	94.5%	95%	95%
Value of fraud identified (Housing benefits) (Efficiency)	Quarterly	£1,165,746.51	£500,000	£500,000	£500,000

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Indicator	Frequency	2011/12 Out- turn	2012/13 Target	2013/14 Target	2014/15 Target
Percentage of financial transactions not carried out on-line or by direct debit/standing order	Quarterly	14.01%	13.5%	13.0%	12.5%
Percentage of customer contact that is avoidable	Quarterly	4.7%	12.5%	12%	11.5%
Average cost of planning per application	Annual	£209	£209	Targets for future years will be agreed as part of the budget process	
Working Days Lost Due to Sickness Absence (rolling year) (BV 12) (SPI)	Quarterly	7.84	8.0	8.0	8.0

Outcome: **By 2015 the Council will ensure that services are customer focused and residents are satisfied with them**

This outcome is related to ensuring that residents are satisfied with the services they receive and the way the Council spends money. We will conduct regular satisfaction surveys and carry out regular consultation with residents, using the information gathered to inform service design.

We will be changing the role of the Council to ensure that our services have a positive impact on the lives of people who live and work in the Borough. As a Council, we will seek to enable residents, encourage responsibility and grow our communities.

What we plan to do	Milestones	Ownership
Ensure we use performance management data, customer satisfaction and customer feedback to improve services	December 2012 - new correspondence system introduced and use complaints and compliments to inform service delivery and improvements Ongoing - Cabinet & Scrutiny to monitor performance quarterly Ongoing - Ensure there are robust audit and overview and scrutiny arrangements in place	Maidstone council
Review the way we interact with our customers through the Customer Centricity Review	April 2012-September 2012 Conduct review	Maidstone council
Implement improvements in customer service delivery as recommended in the Customer Centricity Review	April 2013- March 2015 Undertake programme of customer service delivery improvements	Maidstone council

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Indicator	Frequency	2011/12 Out-turn	2012/13 Target	2013/14 Target	2014/15 Target
Satisfaction with the way the council runs things	Biennial	63%		65%	
Satisfaction with the council's recycling service	Biennial	78%		80%	
Satisfaction with the council's refuse collection service		82%		85%	
Satisfaction with the leisure centre		53%		55%	
Satisfaction with the council's parks and open spaces		76%		78%	
Satisfaction with street cleansing		56%		58%	
Percentage of customers satisfied with benefits processing service	Quarterly	84.69%	85%	85%	85%
Percentage of residents that feel that the Council keeps them well informed about the services and benefits it provides	Biennial	63%		65%	
Average wait time for calls (seconds)	Quarterly	80.67	50	50	50
Percentage of customers to the Gateway seen within 20 minutes	Quarterly	83.64%	80%	80%	80%
Percentage of residents agreeing that the Council provides value for money (Residents Survey)	Biennial	46%		48%	
Percentage of those making complaints satisfied with how their complaint was handled	Quarterly	34.19%	36%	38%	40%

Service Principles – How we will design our services

1. Residents and businesses are the starting point for services; every service must be considered from the perspective of the citizen and delivered at the lowest possible level – a bottom-up approach.
2. We will commission services to meet agreed outcomes and deliver them in the most appropriate way.
3. We will work with partners where there are economies of scale and to identify common solutions and shared services.
4. Services must achieve our priorities.
5. We will manage our services so no-one is disadvantaged because of where they live.
6. We will concentrate on delivering our core services, whilst recognising that there are areas we need to influence and work with others on to bring about change.
7. We will work together as one Council and with our partners to deliver change and manage expectation.

Values - How we will deliver our services

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The Council has developed and agreed six core values which will define how we deliver our services:

- Superb customer service – It is important to understand that everything we do impacts on our customers, both internal and external. We will listen to and understand their needs, then take action to provide the right service in a professional manner.
- Teamwork - working together to achieve our objectives and goals in away that utilises the talents and creativity of everyone within our organisation.
- Responsibility for delivering on our promises
 - being focussed on the Council’s vision and priorities. Leadership and management that respond and take the organisation through change.
- Integrity and high standards of corporate governance – being transparent and accountable. Having the courage to act on our convictions to build trust and honesty within the organisation. Working with our partners and customers to create a feeling of openness and transparency in all that we do.
- Value for money – taking care and weighing up our options, aiming to get maximum effect for every penny of public money we spend. Promoting ownership to ensure that all of us feel responsible for providing value for money in all that we do and making suggestions for improvements.
- Equality within a diverse organisation - valuing our differences for the enrichment and betterment of our working environment. Having the courage to question our own reactions and mindset in order to be open to new ideas and concepts.

How we have prioritised and funded services

The Council has to make £ 5.9m of savings between 2011 and 2015, £1.2m more than originally projected in 2011. In order to identify savings, the Council has focused on the delivery of core services which meet our priorities and asked the public to determine what matters to them in relation to the Council’s discretionary services.

The Cabinet, as a first stage in determining budgets, prioritised the Council’s front line services into low, medium and high, by identifying which services would best achieve their priorities through a paired analysis. A paired analysis is where each service is compared in a pair with every other service and one is chosen above the other as being more important in achieving the Council’s priorities. Services were ranked from 1 to 12 and then as high, medium or low.

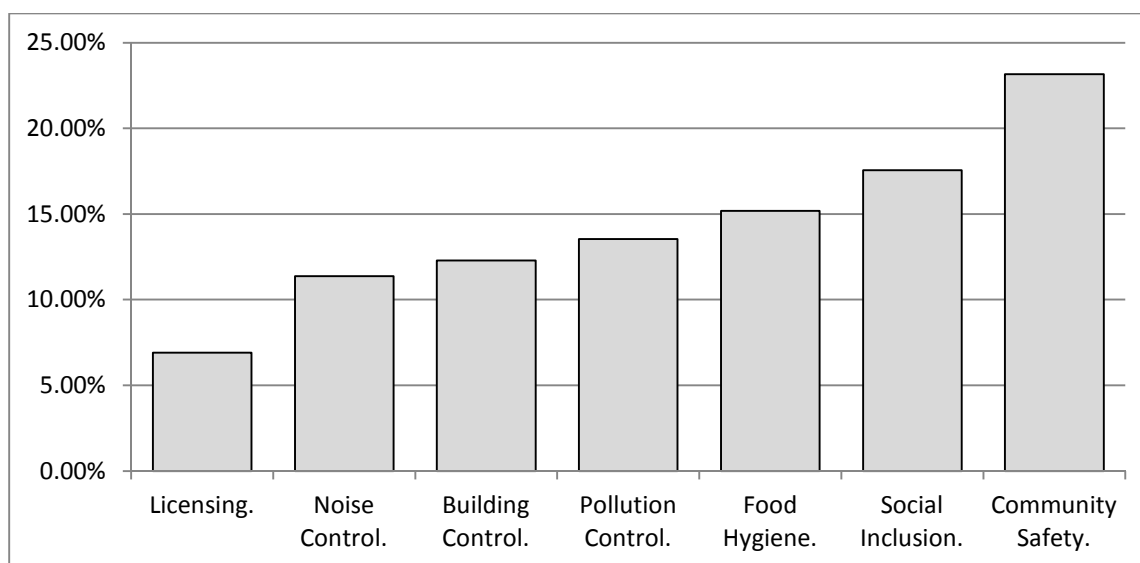
Revenue	High	Medium	Low
Invest	Economic Development		
Maintain	Parking and Transport Housing		Environmental Health

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Reduce	Planning and Building Control	Community Safety Waste Collection and Recycling Community Development Recreation, Sport and Open Spaces	Culture and Heritage Tourism Street Cleansing
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Once Cabinet had carried out this exercise, they reviewed the services to determine which should receive investment, which should be maintained and where investment should be reduced. It should be noted that maintaining services will not necessarily mean maintaining the cost of the service. Also, where the service has been identified for reduction, this refers to the cost of the service. For example, it was identified that for the planning service the service level should be maintained but the service should be more efficient and costs reduced. The prioritising of services was followed up with meetings between senior managers and the Cabinet and, where appropriate, the shadow Cabinet to identify how savings could be made in accordance with the prioritisation. As a consequence, the Council has reviewed our cultural services and tourism offer creating a new visitor economy business unit within in economic development. The low financial priority given to Tourism should not prevent the authority from pursuing opportunities that would benefit the local economy and tourism, should they arise.

The public were consulted with regard to a range of services categorised as low priority in the table above where there is a statutory requirement for the Council to provide the service. This consultation complements the consultation carried out last year into discretionary services. The three services rated by the public as lowest priority were Licensing, Noise Control and Building Control. As a consequence of the public consultation, the Council will be reviewing our budgets for these areas.



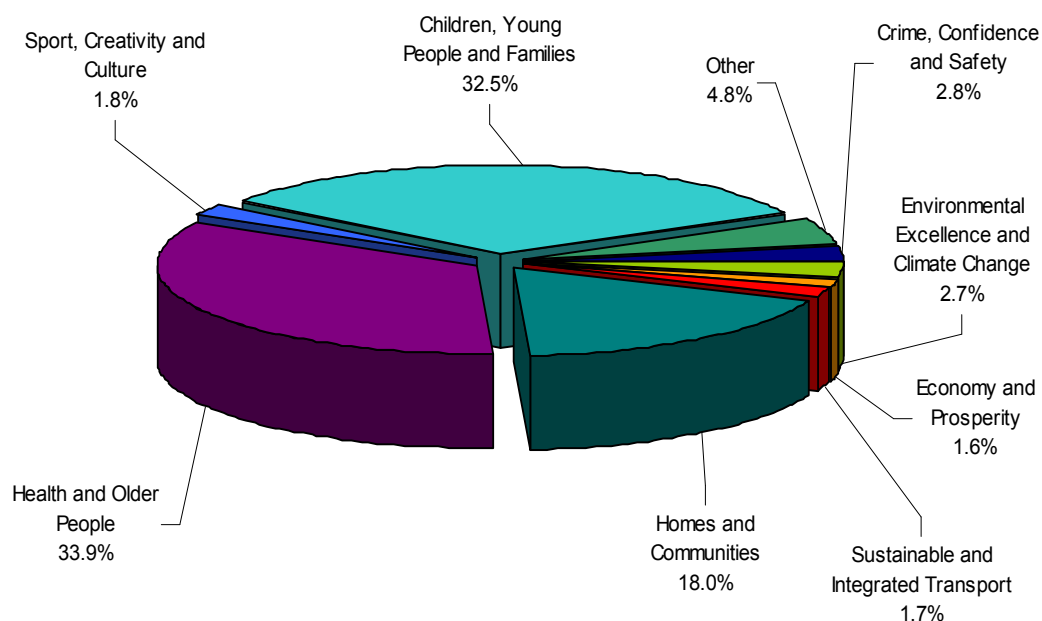
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During the consultation the public were also asked their views on a series of potential changes to customer service provision and as a result of these initial responses the Council will review opening hours of the Gateway and options for an automated switchboard. The Council has already taken action that will reduce management costs and will take further action to reduce staffing costs in the future years of this strategic plan. This will include reviewing the back office functions to make savings which will include shared services.

Working in Partnership: How Resources are Spent in Maidstone

In 2010 the Council took part in a study of how resources were allocated locally.

The study used data from different public bodies and agents in Maidstone to find out where money is spent locally by those bodies and what it is spent on. Information was submitted by a variety of agencies including the Council, KCC, Kent Police, the PCT and the Homes and Community Agency. Golding Homes, the local NHS trust and Kent Fire and Rescue's spending is not included in the data. It is estimated that £611 million was spent by the public sector across the Maidstone borough in 2009-10, equating to £4,062 being spent per person. The biggest area of spending locally is on health and older people, followed closely by children, young people and families.



Performance Management – Doing what we say we will

We are committed to being open and transparent and we will publish performance data on our website so that we are accountable to the public.

Furthermore, the Council's performance will be managed by the Corporate Management Team and Cabinet as well as held to account through overview and scrutiny. We have sought to review and reduce the number of performance indicators we use to measure and monitor success and target performance. The last performance plan contained 162 indicators covering 6 priorities and 22 key objectives. For the period 2011-15, we propose to use 60 indicators to measure performance.

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Indicators have been outlined for each outcome so we can measure and monitor our success.

Risk Management

The Council has reviewed the outcomes we hope to achieve by 2015 to identify any risks to those outcomes. Six strategic risks have been identified. Action plans to mitigate these risks will be put in place and reported to Management Team and Cabinet. Strategic risks and actions will be linked to the Council's service delivery plans. The actions set out to achieve each outcome in this plan will also be a key part of the risk mitigation. The performance on these will be reported regularly through our performance management processes to Management Team, Cabinet and Scrutiny.

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Glossary

Local Development Framework (LDF) including the Core Strategy – The Local Development Framework documents including the Core Strategy set out the Council's planning policies for the Borough, as well as where it wishes to see housing and commercial development.

Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) – the LSP is a group of private and public organisations in Maidstone who work together to deliver the Sustainable Community Strategy.

Planning for Real and Neighbourhood Action Plans – In the Plan we refer to the Park Wood Planning for Real activity and Neighbourhood Action Plans. Neighbourhood Action Plans have been developed across the UK to address local issues and improve the quality of life for residents. They are plans developed with and by our communities to identify and address local issues.

Neighbourhood Planning - A neighbourhood development plan can establish general planning policies for the development and use of land in a neighbourhood, like:

- where new homes and offices should be built; and
- what they should look like.

Neighbourhood plans allow local people to get the right type of development for their community, but the plans must still meet the needs of the wider area.

Performance Indicators – These are set out in the strategic plan as a means of measuring the Council's progress and performance against our outcomes.

Social Return on Investment – This is a means by which we can measure and account for a much broader concept of value. It incorporates social, environmental and economic costs and benefits into decision making, providing a fuller picture of how value is created or lost.

Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) – The Local Government Act 2000 placed a duty on every local authority to prepare a community strategy "for promoting or improving the economic, social and environmental well-being of their area and contributing to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom." The SCS is the overarching community plan for the area.

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Customer care and engagement

We want to ensure that you can access our services easily and in a way which suits you. We also know it is important that you are able to tell us how we can improve our services. To help us to do this we carry out regular customer satisfaction reviews and where we can, make improvements that you have asked for.

We have a customer care policy that tells you what standards you can expect from us and a corporate complaints system so that you can tell us when we get things wrong. We always try to get things right first time, but when this does not happen we make sure we learn lessons to improve customer service in the future.

For a number of years, the Council has helped parish councils to develop parish plans that have led to improved services and facilities for rural residents.

Last year the Council and its partners worked with over 600 residents in Park Wood to develop a pilot urban Neighbourhood Action Plan. New projects to help unemployed people back into work and provide more activities for young people as well as campaigns to tackle litter and dog mess have come out of this. The Council has evaluated this project and intends to roll it out to other priority urban wards.

We will be holding various consultation events through the year where you can come and give us your views on the issues that affect you. These will be advertised on our website www.maidstone.gov.uk