

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF THE STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP & CORPORATE
SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 9 JULY 2013**

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Gooch (Chairman) and
Councillors Black, Butler, Mrs Grigg, D Mortimer,
Nelson-Gracie, Pickett and Yates

11. The Committee to consider whether all items on the agenda should be webcast.

It was **resolved** that all items on the agenda be webcast.

12. Apologies.

There were no apologies for absence.

13. Notification of Substitute Members.

There were no Substitute Members.

14. Amendment to Order of Business

It was agreed that Urgent Item: Use of 2012/13 Revenue Underspend be taken after the Strategic Plan Performance report.

15. Notification of Visiting Members.

Councillor English attended as a visiting member in relation to agenda items 8 and 9.

16. Disclosures by Members and Officers.

Councillors D Mortimer and Yates disclosed Other Significant Interests in the report of the Head of Finance and Resources relating to the use of the 2012/13 revenue underspend and the balance of the unused underspend from 2011/12. They explained that they were Trustees of the Maidstone YMCA which was working in partnership with Golding Homes to build a new community centre for the residents of Tovil, and one of the proposals for the use of the resources was for the Council to make a contribution of £167,000 towards the construction of the scheme.

Prior to consideration of the report of the Head of Finance and Resources relating to the use of the 2012/13 revenue underspend and the balance of the unused underspend from 2011/12, the Chairman and Councillors Nelson-Gracie and Pickett disclosed Other Significant Interests in the matter by virtue of being a member of Maidstone Town Team and/or a

Director of Maidstone Town Centre Management Board. One of the proposals was for funding of £50,000 to ensure the sustainability of the Town Team for future years. Another bid was for funding of £10,000 for a Christmas lights switch on event and marketing campaign in conjunction with partners expected to include Maidstone Town Centre Management.

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

It was resolved that the items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

18. Minutes of the meeting held on 4 June 2013.

It was resolved that the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 June 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed.

19. Strategic Plan Annual Performance Report.

Clare Wood, Policy and Performance Officer, presented a report regarding the end of year Strategic Plan action updates, Improvement Plan updates and Key Performance Indicator (KPI) out-turns for 2012/13.

60 KPIs relating to seven strategic outcomes had been included in the Strategic Plan 2011/15 for 2012/13. Overall 60.5% of KPIs achieved the annual target set and in relation to 43% of KPIs performance had improved. In 2011/12, 63% of the targets were met and performance in relation to 57% of KPIs had improved.

During the ensuing discussion, reference was made to a number of the KPIs/business improvement initiatives with Members raising issues and asking questions as follows:-

CDP 003 - Percentage of residents participating in neighbourhood planning as a percentage of the ward population

In response to comments that the use of the words "neighbourhood planning" was confusing and that the Performance Indicator should be renamed to reflect the community development nature of the activities being participated in, the Policy and Performance Officer agreed to review the wording of the indicator for future reports.

HSG PS 002 - Number of homes occupied by vulnerable people made decent

It was suggested that the new Performance Indicator measuring improvements made through public sector intervention to private sector dwellings should be compatible with the move towards a minimum Code for Sustainable Homes (or any future equivalent) of Level 4 for residential development in the draft Local Plan.

HRO 001/BV 12 - Working days lost due to sickness absence

In response to questions by Members, the Policy and Performance Officer explained that short term sickness currently stood at 3.24 days per employee. Staff sickness had an impact on productivity and performance and sickness levels across the Council were regularly reviewed and monitored. Appropriate action was taken by managers to reduce the level of sickness including obtaining further medical information from occupational health specialists or giving warnings if there were no underlying medical issues for the sickness absence. The Council also ran a health and wellbeing programme for staff to improve health and awareness.

BIM 002 - Percentage of financial transactions not carried out on-line or by direct debit/standing order

Referring to paragraph 1.5.13 of the report of the Head of Policy and Communications relating to KPI BIM 002, a Member sought clarification of the use of the word "smarter" to describe the way in which the Council carries out its financial transactions with customers. The Policy and Performance Officer explained that the word was being used in the context of accuracy, efficiency and effectiveness, but she would review the terminology used.

AMB 001 - Overall employment rates

In response to a question by a Member relating to the decline in the overall employment rate and the action being taken by the Council to influence this and the age profile of the workless population by, for example, providing work experience and apprenticeships, the Policy and Performance Officer advised the Committee that the Council was being proactive in this area. The Employability and Skills Officer, who managed a work experience programme both at the Council and elsewhere, would be involved in the development of the action plan to tackle the decline in the overall employment rate, and further actions would be included in the Quarter 1 report.

KCC 003 - Percentage of the working age population educated to NVQ level 4 or higher

AND

OUT 002.05 - Work with partners through the LSP to deliver a step change in Maidstone's learning and skills performance to ensure a high-quality skills base sufficient to enable people in Maidstone to realise their full potential

A Member enquired whether the Council had any plans in place to address the significant drop in the number of working age people educated to NVQ level 4 or higher given that the Maidstone Locality Board had been suspended. The Policy and Performance Officer said that she would ask the Community Partnerships Manager to provide an update on the actions being taken outside the worklessness initiatives to achieve positive outcomes for learning and skills development.

Business Improvement Plan 2012/13 - Building Control

In response to a question by a Member, the Policy and Performance Officer undertook to ask the Business Improvement Manager to provide an update on the opportunity cost/risk of addressing the capacity issue within the team in the context of the proposed partial commercialisation of the service.

DCV 002a - Percentage of major business planning applications having pre-application discussions

AND

DCV 002b - Percentage of those taking pre-applications advice where the application was then approved (Major Business Apps)

In response to questions by a Member, the Policy and Performance Officer undertook to ascertain the number of applications in the above categories.

Business Improvement Plan 2012/13 - Energy Consumption

The Policy and Performance Officer undertook to provide for Councillor Yates details of water and energy usage at Maidstone House. It was noted that this information would be useful when the Committee considered the future of Maidstone House as part of its work programme 2013/14.

In addition to the points raised above the Committee asked the Policy and Performance Officer to review the documentation to correct typographical errors and to provide an explanation of the use of covalent as a performance management tool.

It was resolved that subject to the points made in the discussion:

- a) The performance out-turns and end of year Strategic Plan action updates in the Strategic Plan Annual Performance Report attached at Appendix A to the report of the Head of Policy and Communications be noted.
- b) The update on the Improvement Plan work streams attached at Appendix B to the report of the Head of Policy and Communications be noted.
- c) It be noted that an action plan is being developed to tackle the decline in the overall employment rate (AMB 001); and
- d) The teams involved be thanked for their success in achieving their targets in relation to the following KPIs:
 - i. R&B 005 – Percentage of Non-Domestic Rates collected; and
 - ii. R&B 006 – Percentage of Council Tax collected.

20. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned from 7.35 pm to 7.40 pm

21. Use of 2012/13 Revenue Underspend

The Committee was to have considered the report of the Head of Finance and Resources setting out details of proposals submitted by Members and Officers for the use of the 2012/13 revenue underspend and the balance of the unused underspend from 2011/12 with a view to making recommendations to the Leader of the Council as to the use of these resources.

Since the disclosure of Other Significant Interests in proposals for the use of the 2012/13 revenue underspend and the balance of the underspend from 2011/12 would result in Members having to leave the room and the meeting being inquorate, the Committee confined its discussion to the reasons for the 2012/13 underspend and the outcome of the proposals for the use of the 2011/12 underspend.

By way of introduction, the Head of Finance and Resources advised the Committee that a revenue underspend of £0.275m had been reported for 2012/13 which combined with the balance unused from 2011/12 (£0.283m) had resulted in £0.558m being available for use whilst leaving an adequate level of balances. Proposals totalling in excess of £2.3m had been received and these had been evaluated against specific criteria i.e. sustainable projects that support the Council's priority of a decent place to live. The response by Members to the request for proposals had been quite substantial.

The 2012/13 underspend represented 3% of the net revenue budget whereas the 2011/12 underspend represented 12%. The 2011/12 underspend was the result of one off savings that had occurred earlier than expected. The 2012/13 underspend was due in the main to salary slippage with managers taking a prudential approach to recruitment.

In response to a question by the Chairman as to whether unnecessary reductions were being made given that underspends had occurred over the last two years, the Leader of the Council said that in his view it was very difficult to plan for either an underspend or an overspend. It was important to adhere to budgets and to deal with an underspend/overspend if one developed taking into account all of the facts.

Having noted the position regarding the underspends, the Committee thanked the Leader of the Council and the Head of Finance and Resources for their attendance.

The Democratic Services Officer undertook to seek the advice of the Monitoring Officer as to whether the way forward would be for the Committee to meet again to consider this matter with Substitute Members, but they too might have interests in proposals for the use of

these resources, or for the Members affected to apply for dispensations to enable them to participate.

It was suggested that Members' concerns regarding the stringency of the ethical standards regime and the need for greater awareness of the requirements of the Member Code of Conduct and, in particular, the disclosure of interests be included in the Committee's work programme. The Chairman indicated that the suggestion would be taken seriously.

It was resolved that the position with regard to the 2011/12 and 2012/13 underspends be noted at this stage.

22. Future Work Programme.

The Committee considered its future work programme. The Chairman advised Members that arrangements were being made for a joint meeting on MKIP with Tunbridge Wells and Swale. The Policy and Scrutiny Officer would update the Committee as soon as further details became available. The meeting would be in addition to the scheduled August meeting. In response to a question by a Member, the Committee was informed that the compilation and circulation of a list of all individual departments relevant to its areas of activity was in hand.

The Chairman then asked Members to identify any training needs. All Members indicated that they would welcome training on asking challenging questions.

It was resolved that no changes need to be made to the Committee's work programme at present and training be organised on questioning skills.

23. Duration of Meeting

6.35 pm to 8.10 pm