

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

AUDIT COMMITTEE

REPORT OF HEAD OF POLICY AND COMMUNICATIONS

Report prepared by Angela Woodhouse

1. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT ACTION PLAN UPDATE

1.1 Issue for Decision

1.1 To note the update on the action plan as reported and recommend further actions as appropriate.

1.2 Recommendation of Head of Policy and Communications

1.2.1 That the update on the annual governance action plan be noted and the Committee recommend further action if required.

1.3 Reasons for Recommendation

1.3.1 The Audit Committee are a key part of the governance structure at the Council. The pillars of governance have been produced at **Appendix B** for reference. In August this year the Committee approved the annual governance statement, it was agreed that an update on the action plan arising from the annual governance statement would be reported to the Audit Committee on a six monthly basis. This provides the opportunity for greater Member involvement throughout the year. An updated action plan has been provided at **Appendix A**.

1.3.2 The first meeting of the Corporate Governance working group comprising the Head of Audit Partnership, the Head of Finance and Resources and the Head of Legal Services (Monitoring Officer) and the Head of Policy and Communications has been held to consider corporate governance issues. The results of the recent information management audit and the changes to financial procedure rules have been identified by the group as requiring further work and an additional meeting has been arranged for December.

1.3.3 Since the annual governance statement was agreed the Council has been subject to a Corporate Peer Challenge by the Local Government Association (LGA). The review considered the Council's capacity to deliver its ambitions; leadership and governance, financial planning

and capacity. The presentation from the LGA with regard to governance highlighted strengths including:

- Committed and focused Cabinet and Corporate Leadership Team (CLT)
- Great confidence in Chief Executive and CLT from partners, staff and members
- Strong relationship between members and officers, particularly between the Chief Executive and Leader
- Business engagement visits to the top 20 businesses by Chief Executive and portfolio holders
- Clear message on vision and values across the organisation including the values Service, Teamwork, Responsibility, Integrity, Value and Equality
- Effective scrutiny working demonstrating robust performance management
- Efficient decision making on shared services with joint Cabinet

Challenges for the authority going forward included:

- Completion of Local Plan essential
- Sustainability of strategies to be delivered in a changing political environment
- Partners and staff are not engaged in the early stages of some strategy development and feel it's a one way decision process without meaningful consultation
- Some operational staff appear complacent about the need for change
- Consider joint scrutiny of shared services

1.3.4 At the August meeting of the Audit Committee it was agreed that an update would be given on the effectiveness of the new enhanced scrutiny as well as an update on public meetings. This is proposed to come in March after there has been time for the model to bed in and following feedback from all members on the model. Following the concerns raised by the Committee in regard to public meetings the communications team have been considering alternatives to public meetings to engage local people in decision making and the Council. The progress made will be reported to Audit in March. The Constitution at present sets out a requirement to hold two public meetings a year, although this has not happened for some time:

“Public meetings will be held twice a year to allow the Council and its Strategic Partners to debate with the public topics chosen by the public.

At the conclusion of the debate the Leader of the Council will sum up and draw out the conclusions of the debate and ensure, at the appropriate time, feedback is given

9. Asset Management

1.8 Relevant Documents

1.8.1 Appendices

Appendix A – Annual Governance Statement Action Plan
Appendix B – Pillars of Governance

1.8.2 Background Documents

Annual Governance Statement 2012-13

<u>IS THIS A KEY DECISION REPORT?</u>		<u>THIS BOX MUST BE COMPLETED</u>	
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
If yes, this is a Key Decision because:			
.....			
Wards/Parishes affected:			
.....			