

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

**Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and
Scrutiny Committee**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 3 DECEMBER
2013**

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

71. THE COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER WHETHER ALL ITEMS ON THE AGENDA SHOULD BE WEB-CAST

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

72. APOLOGIES

It was noted that apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hotson.

73. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

Councillor Brindle substituted for Councillor Hotson.

74. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS/WITNESSES

There were no Visiting Members.

75. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures.

76. TO CONSIDER WHETHER ANY ITEMS SHOULD BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE BECAUSE OF THE POSSIBLE DISCLOSURE OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be taken in public as proposed.

77. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 5 NOVEMBER 2013

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2013 be agreed as a correct record and duly signed.

78. REVIEW OF COMPLAINTS JULY-SEPTEMBER (QUARTER 2) 2013

The Chairman introduced Sam Bailey Research and Performance Officer, Jennifer Shepherd, Waste and Street Scene Manager, Sandra Marchant, Customer Services Manager and Councillor Brian Moss, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services.

The Committee considered paragraph 1.5.1 on page 5 of the agenda which referred to the increase in the number of complaints received in Quarter 2. It was explained that the rise in complaints reported at Quarter 2 specifically related to the introduction of the new waste contract. Concerns were raised about the long wait times faced by residents who rang the Contact Centre in relation to the new waste contract.

Sandra Marchant, Customer Services Manager, informed the Committee on some of the mitigating circumstances that had impacted on call wait times as follows:

- A number of staff had left the Contact Centre and new staff had started in August at the same time as the waste contract;
- Waste calls had increased from 600 calls per week to 1700 calls per week;
- New staff were at a trainee level but had solely contracted on waste calls; and
- In the past 6 weeks calls had reduced to approx 600 to 700 per week, wait times had been reduced to 14 seconds and 100% of calls were answered.

The Committee was informed that the implementation of the new waste contract had involved a project team and it was not felt that the changes would have a great impact on residents as the model was based on Maidstone's existing scheme; the two other partnership authorities, Swale and Ashford faced operational changes as a result of the new scheme. It was however unforeseen that the existing contracted waste collection rounds changed before the commencement of the new contract. It was clarified that the changes were made by Kent County Council as the disposal authority. Prior to this all Maidstone borough had its refuse collected one week and its recycling the following week.

Jennifer Shepherd, Waste and Street Scene Manager, explained that the new contract included the disposal of waste for the three partnership authorities and therefore the waste flow was more difficult to manage. Kent County Council had found that if it was to continue with operations in the same way for all three authorities as there would have been peaks and troughs in disposal rather than a continuous flow. It was confirmed that there was nothing Maidstone could have done to influence this change as it was within the jurisdiction of Kent County Council as the disposal authority.

The result of the late changes to collection rounds resulted in an impact on rural collections. There were steeper learning curves for vehicle operatives learning new rounds with most of the missed collections reported occurring in rural areas.

Members questioned the financial penalties that had been included in the new contract. It was explained that there was a grace period that had

been applied. The grace period had now ended and defaults and rectification processes were being applied.

The Committee questioned the lessons learned as a result of the implementation of the new waste contract and the number of complaints received. Mrs Shepherd told Members that the 2007 restructure of waste collections and the more recent introduction of the food waste collection had been evaluated alongside the new waste contract. The number of complaints received as a result of the new scheme was higher than those received during the introduction of food waste collection therefore the impact on residents that should be considered and managed going forward was operational changes rather than service changes.

The Committee felt that the way in which complaints were reported to it could be improved as the overall picture was positive and the waste contract was an anomaly which should be made clear in the report.

Members noted that the new contract arrangements would result in significant savings to the Council going forward.

RESOLVED: that

- a) The report be noted; and
- b) The way in which complaints are reported be improved so that any anomalies similar to the implementation of the waste contract be separated to the overall complaints figure to ensure there is more transparency and clarity in quarterly complaints reports.

79. MID-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN PERFORMANCE REPORT 2013/14

The Chairman introduced Clare Wood, Policy and Performance Officer and Georgia Hawkes, Business Transformation Manager.

The Committee considered the Mid-Year Strategic Plan performance Report and its appendices which included the following:

- Mid- Year Strategic Plan Update and KPI performance Report 2013/14;
- Indicator Definitions 2013/14;
- Customer Service Improvement Programme Mid-Year Update; and
- Borough Profile

Members queried the purpose, length and content of the covering report. It was clarified that the covering report provided contextual information to the comments provided by officers in relation to their Key Performance Indicators. Ms Wood, as the report's author and the Council's Performance Officer, was able to provide analysis of the Council's performance in the covering report.

The Committee considered the Hazlitt Theatre, the running of which had recently been taken over by an external company. In response to their questions Members were informed that there were two indicators in place,

004.05 and 007.01, to measure the quality of the service that would be provided.

Ms Hawkes informed the Committee on the Customer Services Improvement Plan at Appendix C to the report which collated the performance of all projects that were part of improvements plans for the Council. Members questioned the progress of the Customer Services Channel Shift Project which was reported as 'amber'.

Ms Hawkes informed the Committee that there had been a drop in visits to the Council's website. However this was considered to be good with a new, improved transactional website as combined with fewer visits there was a lower 'bounce' rate. A slight increase had been seen in the number of pages visited which demonstrated that whilst visiting the site more pages were being visited. The results had been compared with other Councils who had launched similar websites and the same was found. It was highlighted that the new website had 500 pages compared with its previous 3000.

Members questioned the Council's performance in terms of its energy consumption which was included under the Asset Management Work stream. They were informed of the Carbon Management Strategy which set out a number of measures that were being undertaken by the Council. The Committee commented on Major Asset Review – King Street, also included in the Asset Management Work stream, and the need for cross-departmental awareness of its possible future uses. The Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, Councillor Moss, informed the Committee that the Council would be giving careful consideration to this asset and no quick decisions would be made.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted and the recommendations as set out at 1.2.1 in the report be agreed.

80. BUDGET WORKING GROUP - BUDGET WORKSHOP RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee considered the minutes and recommendations of the Budget Working Group – Budget Workshop held on 1st October 2013.

Paul Riley, Head of Finance and Resources and Councillor Brian Moss, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services were invited to advise the Committee on its recommendations and how best to take them forward as savings proposals for the Budget Strategy and Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The Committee agreed that the following recommendations be taken forward by Mr Riley as part of his report on the Budget Strategy 2013-14 onwards to Cabinet on 18 December 2013:

- That Head of Environment and the Public Realm be instructed to investigate the options going forward for the Park and Ride.

Evidence should be provided and investigation undertaken of the following:

- Areas where Park and Ride was a success?
 - The location of current sites should be reevaluated particularly Sittingbourne Road
 - The feasibility of a Park and Ride model where you pay to park for a £1?
 - What are the alternatives to a Park and Ride service? The principle of Park and ride should be challenged - Is Park and Ride right for Maidstone and what is its actual impact on traffic and congestion?
- That the Head of Commercial & Economic Development investigate the parking arrangements at Mote Park and the possible introduction of variable charges to combat all day commuter parking, the impact of local schools using Mote Park for parking and the cost of enforcement;
 - That the Head of Finance and Resources begin looking at the options for Council office accommodation in preparation for the end of the lease on Maidstone House in 2023. Options should be considered now (in line with decisions on the Gateway and the 2016 1st floor break clause) to enable the correct long-term decisions for the Council. The Budget Working Group recommends that the plausibility of the Council building its own offices be given primary consideration; and
 - That from the start of the 2014/15 Municipal Year Cabinet be invited to a Workshop session with the Strategic Leadership & Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to undertake its prioritisation exercise of services within each portfolio area. Consideration should be given to both statutory and non-statutory functions; should the Council continue to provide them and could they be commissioned. This should take place on an annual basis going forward

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Ride right for Maidstone and what is its actual impact on traffic and congestion?

- b) That the Head of Commercial & Economic Development investigate the parking arrangements at Mote Park and the possible introduction of variable charges to combat all day commuter parking, the impact of local schools using Mote Park for parking and the cost of enforcement;
- c) That the Head of Finance and Resources begin looking at the options for Council office accommodation in preparation for the end of the lease on Maidstone House in 2023. Options should be considered now (in line with decisions on the Gateway and the 2016 1st floor break clause) to enable the correct long-term decisions for the Council. The Budget Working Group recommends that the plausibility of the Council building its own offices be given primary consideration; and
- d) That from the start of the 2014/15 Municipal Year Cabinet be invited to a Workshop session with the Strategic Leadership & Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee to undertake its prioritisation exercise of services within each portfolio area. Consideration should be given to both statutory and non-statutory functions; should the Council continue to provide them and could they be commissioned. This should take place on an annual basis going forward.

81. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its future work programme. It was felt that an additional meeting was required in January for the Members to consider the report on the MKIP Operational Model and scope a review. It was agreed that the meeting would take place on 9 January at 10am at Maidstone House.

RESOLVED: that an additional meeting be arranged for 9 January at 10am to consider the report on MKIP Operational Model and scope a review.

82. DURATION OF MEETING.

6.30pm to 8.40pm