

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**COUNCIL**

**5 MARCH 2014**

**REPORT OF THE CABINET HELD ON 12 FEBRUARY 2014**

**STRATEGIC PLAN REFRESH 2014-15**

**Issue for Decision**

The Council is asked to approve the refreshed Strategic Plan 2014-15, and to give delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, to make minor amendments to the document as required.

**Recommendation Made**

1. That the refreshed Strategic Plan 2014-15 (attached as Appendix A) be approved.
2. That delegated authority be given to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, to make minor amendments to the document as required.

**Reasons for Recommendation**

The Cabinet considered the report of the Chief Executive regarding the refreshed Strategic Plan 2014/15.

In September 2013 the Cabinet agreed that the Strategic Plan for 2011-15 be retained and refreshed rather than a new plan being developed for 2014-15 and beyond. The last refresh (2013-14) focused on updating the action plans for the seven outcomes in the Strategic Plan.

The Sustainable Community Strategy was refreshed in July 2013, when the original eight priorities were narrowed down to three focused priorities with seven outcomes. The vision can be distilled into great opportunity, great place and great people which is then reflected in the Council's three corporate priorities. The programme of employee engagement in the Council's priorities has continued during 2013 and is scheduled to continue into 2014.

The Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee has considered the draft Strategic Plan and its changes have been incorporated. Recommendations included updating information relating to the

Autumn statement and defining the targets for the outcome that residents are not disadvantaged because of where they live or who they are, vulnerable people are assisted and the level of deprivation is reduced.

In October 2013 the Council commissioned the LGA to undertake a corporate peer challenge. The review considered the following questions:

- Does the Council understand its local context and has it established a clear set of priorities?
- Does the Council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
- Does the Council have effective political and managerial leadership and is it a constructive partnership?
- Are effective governance and decision-making arrangements in place to respond to key challenges and manage change and transformation?
- Are organisational capacity and resources focused in the right areas in order to deliver the agreed priorities?

In addition, the Council identified two issues for the team to explore:

- How well placed is the Council to deliver its future ambition?
- Further strengthening the approach to economic development

The draft report following the challenge was largely positive identifying a number of opportunities and challenges for the Council going forward. A full report and action plan will be reported to Cabinet later in the year. The Corporate Improvement Plan has been amended to reflect the recommendations made in the report. For reference the draft executive summary is set out below:

*"Maidstone is the county town of Kent, with the headquarters for Kent County Council, Kent Police and Kent Fire and Rescue Service all based here. It is a growing borough in terms of population with an aspiration to grow its economy and has become a desirable place to live with extensive leisure and cultural assets.*

*Maidstone Borough Council is undergoing a period of change to help it better meet major strategic challenges to the borough around balancing economic growth, with protection of rural areas and dealing with notable demographic challenges due to the growing population. The financial position of the authority has changed in recent years and the future will see the council borrowing to invest in supporting services. The council continues to undertake significant work to shape its vision and strategic direction, leading up to a refreshed corporate/strategic plan in 2014. Work has been undertaken to support members and for members and senior officers to set a new ambition, with local growth at its core.*

*The planned changes to the senior management structure and governance arrangements around overview and scrutiny took place in June this year, and whilst it is still early days, the team were able to see the good start being made in re-focusing its ambition to place economic growth at its core.*

*The council has a strong history of achievements on which to build and has clearly identifiable strengths in partnership working, service delivery through shared services, and a politically-led passion for growth through increased opportunities for employment. It understands the significance of a highly motivated workforce and sends out a clear message to all staff with its strong message of 'Great Opportunity, Great Place, Great People'. It describes the underpinning priorities as 'outrageous ambitions' – language which attracts attention.*

*Senior members and managers are highly regarded by members, staff and partners and the council's commitment and focus on improving the prosperity, health and wellbeing of their communities is widely recognised. Staff are generally well motivated and positively view the aim to achieve IiP Gold Award by 2015.*

*The Challenge Team were asked to focus on the council's ability to deliver their ambitions and how to further strengthen its approach to economic development. The council developed a comprehensive timetable for the challenge enabling the team to meet a good mix of appropriate stakeholders – all of whom actively engaged in forward looking discussions.*

*Fundamental to the feedback is the need to develop a clear, shared vision for Maidstone Borough Council. Whilst visions and values are articulated in council documents – and by members and staff – they are less understood by partners. Partners expressed the desire to engage more with the council, not least to have an opportunity to discuss how they can work together to tackle future challenges and deliver shared ambitions. The team met a mixed group of business and third sector partners who were very keen to meet collectively to share their ideas.*

*With this vision agreed and communicated the council will be able to move forward on shared action plans for the delivery of economic growth. The development of a communications strategy for key policies will be an integral part of this. Members will have a key role in creating certainty for the public, partners and staff by agreeing and communicating those issues which are not in dispute across political parties.*

*Within the council improved performance management should be a priority to ensure its ambitions are met. This includes performance management of staff, specifically the continuing inconsistency of line management for example in the application of staff benefits. The trend of worsening sickness absence figures warrants a review of sickness absence management. The future of Maidstone House should be clarified and decisions made.*

*The council is clearly a learning organisation and has many examples which demonstrate this. In future, it could benefit members and managers to look further than Kent for examples of best practice and take advantage of opportunities to meet with exemplars elsewhere, as well as showcasing its own examples of best practice."*

From the review there are clear messages in terms of how we engage our partners and key stakeholders in developing our strategies and vision in the future, and these will be applied to the development of the next full Strategic Plan 2015-2020 as well as the development of our Local Plan and Economic Development Strategy.

The current financial context for the Council presents us with challenges in terms of how we deliver services and increases the pressure to generate income. We know that in 2014/15 Government funding will reduce by 13% or £950,000 in 2014/15. As well as the reduction in funding we face additional pressure through increased take up of key services.

The refreshed Strategic Plan 2014-15 is attached as Appendix A and includes updates to action plans for each outcome. Following the recent peer review we have reduced the number of indicators that will be monitored at a Strategic Level to 46 and moved towards outcome focused indicators where possible. The performance indicators and targets are still subject to review. They will be agreed with managers and then Cabinet as part of the review of the performance plan in March 2014.

In June this year the Council restructured its senior management team to ensure it was fit for the future as well as to deliver savings. The review resulted in a reduction of posts at a senior level and a new clarity in terms of responsibilities for key roles.

The Council has also created a new Maidstone Culture and Leisure Service under a new Head of Economic and Commercial Development Post. This represents the Council's desire to become more commercial and eventually self funding. Key aims for the new service are:

- The adaption of the current business plan for the Council's museums, developing new ways to generate income.
- The establishment of a consolidated events programme with new and varied entertainment.
- The introduction of a leisure card to offer a range of discounts and promotions to both residents and visitors.
- The principle of a Mote Park adventure zone, subject to the necessary approvals and consents being achieved.
- The possible provision of a new café and retail outlet for Mote Park to be considered as part of the Council's capital programme.

The Council has continued to make efficiencies through shared services recently entering into an arrangement for a strategic ICT shared service across Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells and Swale. The Council is also currently in the process of sharing Planning Support Services and Environmental Health.

Progress with the Local Plan continues with the recent approval at Cabinet of the second group of 30 policies relating to spatial planning, development management policies Borough-Wide and countryside for public consultation. The draft consultation Green and Blue Infrastructure strategy has also been approved for consultation with key stakeholders. Green and blue infrastructure refers to our green spaces and water with the strategy seeking to promote co-ordination, integration and investment into this important infrastructure.

We have carried out a resident survey in October – November so we can measure public satisfaction with the Council and with Maidstone as a place to live. The survey looks at a number of important issues including the priorities of Maidstone residents and we have a number of indicators in the plan which directly relate to the survey.

Service design principles are set out in the Strategic Plan to address how we will design our services to deliver our priorities. One of the principles in the plan is that: “We will commission services to meet agreed outcomes and deliver them in the most appropriate way”. We have recently adopted a commissioning and procurement strategy which sets out our approach to service delivery. The strategy identifies that services will be reviewed to identify whether they should be provided in-house, outsourced, delivered through partnership or via community groups or decommissioned. To embed this approach training is planned for unit managers during 2014.

An update on the 29 Strategic Plan Actions was given as part of the mid year performance report to Cabinet in November 2013. Some of the actions have been completed since the last update including:

- The new waste contract has been rolled out and residents are benefiting from being able to recycle a wider range of items at the doorstep (OUT 004.06);
- The High Street Regeneration project phase 2 is now complete and was ‘opened’ on 16 November (OUT 002.06);
- A new Housing Assistance Policy was adopted in September (OUT 003.02);
- Parkwood Leisure have taken over the management of the Hazlitt Theatre under a 15 year contract (OUT 004.05)&(OUT 007.01);
- Mote Park succeeded in gaining a green flag and was awarded bronze in the Green Flag People’s Choice Award (OUT 004.05); and
- Progressing the shared services programme: Business cases for Planning Support and Environmental Health were agreed in June (OUT 007.02).

In terms of considering our achievements so far in relation to the Strategic Plan by priority the following have been identified covering the period up until October 2013:

### **Corporate and Customer Excellence (Great People)**

- The Council's website was re-designed to improve the range of services available online.
- Following customer engagement and research we adopted a Customer Service Improvement Strategy and an implementation programme earlier this year. This includes reviews of all customer facing service areas (work is currently ongoing with parking and housing).
- We have refreshed our Workforce Strategy.
- We have rolled out a "One Council" engagement programme to enhance employees' understanding of the Council's priorities and how their roles contribute to achieving them.
- Following an Investors in People (IiP) peer assessment we identified key actions to improve the effectiveness of people management including coaching conversations for our managers, and a new competency framework has been designed around our values.
- We hold annual staff awards based on our STRIVE values: Service, Teamwork, Responsibility, Integrity, Value and Equality.

### **For Maidstone to be a Decent Place to Live (Great Place)**

- Maidstone Museum's East Wing received several architectural design awards.
- We created a 'Town Team' of Council and town centre stakeholders to promote Maidstone and provide events in the town centre such as the Christmas lights switch-on and market.
- Maidstone was awarded a Purple Flag for its safe and well managed night-time economy.
- Green Flag status was retained for Clare Park and the Whatman Millennium Park and achieved for Mote Park.
- 637 affordable new homes have been built from the start of the Strategic Plan in 2011 up until October 2013.
- We have approved 260 Disabled Facilities Grants for residents over the same period.
- In 2012/13 we assisted 50 vulnerable households into private rented accommodation through providing rent deposits.
- We have also recently launched an innovative lease/repair scheme to return 10 long term empty homes back into use by March 2015.
- Implemented a new housing allocation scheme which promotes employment and provides greater opportunity for applicants who provide a community contribution.
- Prevented 592 households becoming homeless.
- Set up a multi-agency street population task-force to improve life chances for vulnerable members of the street population.

- Launched Maidstone Homefinders scheme to increase supply of private rented accommodation through incentivising and working with private sector landlords.
- Raised awareness of rough sleeping and street homelessness with our 'Killing with Kindness' campaign.
- We introduced a new commercial waste collection to provide a flexible and cost effective service for businesses in the Borough.
- We reduced the Council's carbon emissions by approximately 4% compared with the previous year and are on track to meet our target to reduce our emissions by 20% by 2015.
- Launched Maidstone Families Matter, the local programme which is helping to improve the life chances of families on benefits in Maidstone and helping them back into work.

### **For Maidstone to have a Growing Economy (Great Opportunity)**

- Successfully delivered High Street Improvement Project phase 1 and phase 2 resulting in new event space, Jubilee Square and lower vacancy rates.
- Worked with KCC on the Regional Growth Fund bid called Escalate, a £5m recyclable loan fund for high growth businesses.
- Successfully bid to KCC, in partnership with Ashford Borough Council, to extend the business start-up advice and guidance delivered by the Chamber of Commerce.
- Member of the executive group for the Leader Programme, offering grants to support rural businesses and communities.
- Business Growth and Start-Up programme of events and business breakfasts, including being one of only two stops in Kent for national Business Start-Up Bus.
- Working proactively with developers and site owners to stimulate development and unlock stalled sites.
- We have undertaken a number of projects and initiatives to reduce youth unemployment in the Borough, including running work experience placements with 24 young people after which 13 found employment.
- In terms of working with others we have worked in partnership with Golding Homes and Job Centre Plus to organise two Jobs Fairs, with more than 1,000 people attending each one, and over 20 employers present at each.
- A campaign called Inspiring the Future has been launched which aims to get 100 business people to sign up in 100 days to volunteer in schools talking about their job and career.

The Strategic Plan 2014-15 refresh contains updates to the Local Plan timetable and an acknowledgement of completed actions. Actions have been added for the:

- Development of the Economic Development Strategy;
- Establishment of a Maidstone Economic Partnership;

- Review of Homelessness and new Homeless Strategy;
- A re-fresh of our Waste Strategy in 2014;
- Delivering the Health Inequalities Action Plan (created 2013);
- Delivery of Operation Civic; and
- One Council Engagement Plan in place and delivered.

### **Alternatives Considered and Why Not Recommended**

The Council could decide not to update the Strategic Plan. However, this would lead to out of date information being publicly available and make it difficult for Officers to maintain the 'golden thread'. The Council also needs to be able to demonstrate how it is reacting to changes in the local and national context.

Alternatively the Council could request the development of a new plan. However, this is not recommended as the development of a new plan would require additional resources and there is a risk it would not be produced in time for the new financial year.

### **Background Documents**

None