

Overview and Scrutiny: 16 July 2013**Portfolio Holder Priority Statement****Councillor John A. Wilson, Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services****Introduction**

The priorities held by Councillor John A. Wilson, Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services for 2013/14:

1. Young People
2. Road Safety (Killed or seriously injured)
3. Health Inequalities (including families with 0-5 years)
4. Housing Services
5. Parks and Leisure Services

Priority 1: Young People

Maidstone has approximately 18,700 young people aged 10 – 19 years. The borough is made up of two thirds of young people living in the urban areas and one third of the young people living in the rural areas. Children and young people are being affected by deprivation in both rural and urban areas. Data demonstrates that Maidstone has a relatively high number of 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET); with the unemployment figure in 2010 for under 24 years at 30.2%. The Borough has a high proportion of schools leaving achieving five or more A* - C grade GCSEs (87.3%). The year has seen many changes for how we achieve outcomes for young people. Savings have been made and innovative ways on how to continue valued projects achieving real outcomes for young people have been developed. Maidstone Youth Forum's online information service 'In the Stone' for young people, parents and professionals within the Maidstone Borough continues to be well used with an average of 10,000 hits every quarter.

Priority 2: Road Safety (Killed or seriously injured)

The costs and impact of road collisions (killed and seriously injured) are significant in both financial and human terms. Maidstone is a large district in size with the majority of crashes located in the town centre and arterial routes leading to and from the town. Maidstone has amongst the highest population (total) for any district in Kent. Maidstone had the highest number of casualties in all Kent roads in 2009 (705). The number of killed and seriously injured (KSI) was 64 in 2009. Although figures are decreasing, they are still amongst the highest in the county. Maidstone has recorded a high proportion of people travelling to work by car and this is reflected in the statistics, as the district again recorded the highest number of car user casualties in 2009 (510). Maidstone has also recorded the highest number of 17-24 year old casualties in the last 3 years and an increased number of child casualties over the same period. Crashes involving 17-24 year old casualties are spread throughout the district, when looking specifically at the 15 KSI crashes these are split evenly between the built up and no build up areas, 47% occurred on 30mph roads. Powered two wheeler crashes in Maidstone make up 10% of the county's total. Whilst there are a high number of P2W crashes in the Maidstone town centre, they are also located on the strategic routes into/out of the town centre, particularly the A20, A229 and A274.

Safety in Action is an annual, two-week programme designed to help Year 6 pupils develop their competence and confidence in responsible citizenship and safety skills. It is

hoped the programme will help students deal with potential life-threatening situations and aid their transition period from Primary to Secondary School by making them more safety aware. The Road Safety team contributes to the event by providing a 'Road Safety' scenario, focusing on pedestrian safety. 76% of children who attended Safety in Action said they learnt a lot at the event with teachers commenting "A fantastic rotation of real life activities designed to challenge the children's choice making"

3,359 pupils were seen by the Road Safety team through the Schools education programme. The programme includes RUSH, License to Kill and Car'nage and looks at the dangers to young people on the roads and provide them with strategies to help keep themselves and others safe.

Priority 3: Health Inequalities (including families with 0-5 years)

Relative deprivation impacts on a person's ability to participate in or have access to employment, occupation, education, recreation, family and social activities and relationships. People in deprived circumstances often do not present with major health problems until too late. Barriers to presentation include structural issues such as poor access to transport; language and literacy problems; poor knowledge; low expectation of health and health services; fear and denial and low self-esteem.

In Maidstone, the difference in life expectancy between the most deprived and most affluent wards in Maidstone is 8.9 years. Further analysis shows that the differences in life expectancy are directly linked with levels of deprivation, worklessness, access to healthy housing, attainment in education, good support networks and access to clean green spaces for recreation. By enabling young people to develop their life skills they will be more ready to achieve better whilst in education, become ready for employment and learn those skills and have positive aspirations to pass onto their children. The Marmot report identified that by age 6 the attainment of a child from a poor socio economic background with high cognitive skills will be overtaken by a child with poorer cognitive ability from a better off background.

50% of offenders leaving prison are unable to read and write – improving basic education attainment will reduce the cost of re-offending and crime.

Maidstone has a higher estimated percentage of obese adults than the England average – at 26.5 per cent (24.2% nationally). Reception year children classified as obese is similar to the England average, but school aged children spending at least 3 hours a week on physical activity at school is 11.3% below the national average. Kent has seen an overall reduction in teenage pregnancy of 18%, compared to a national reduction of 19%; however Maidstone figures have increased by 11%. However, rates in hotspots have significantly reduced.

Priority 1: Young People: 2013/14 Action Plan

Action	Description	Deadline	Assigned to
Support the Switch Youth Cafe in running Maidstone Youth Forum	Increase youth participation in the Forum and develop the Forum's link across initiatives key priorities including, alcohol and substance misuse, positive relationships and health and wellbeing	March 2014	Julia Fraser Sarah Shearsmith
Support the organisation of the Youth Sport Achievement Awards	Working in partnership with Active Maidstone to improve sports/club partnerships and deliver YSAA	February 2014	Sarah Shearsmith
Encourage youth engagement via our social media channels	Promote and develop In the Stone website and social media platforms e.g. Twitter and Facebook	December 2013	William Solly Sarah Shearsmith
Encouraging young people to take more of an active role in the council's democratic services process.	Working in partnership with Democratic Services during Local Democracy week to run a programme of activities for young people	March 2014	Julia Fraser Sarah Shearsmith

Priority 2: Road Safety (killed or seriously injured): 2013/14 Action Plan

Action	Description	Deadline	Assigned to
Support a town centre road safety poster campaign	Promote Maidstone Road User targeted messages through the town centre and Urban Blue bus.	December 2013	Duncan Bruce
Support a parishes road safety poster campaign	Work with Kent Road Safety team to promote their 'Drinking and Driving' poster in the parishes	March 2014	Duncan Bruce/Emma Fagg
Promote a road safety event where key stakeholders promote road safety issues to the public and businesses	Promote road safety campaigns at Safety in Action and Maidstone Mela, working with KFRS	March 2014	Duncan Bruce/Sarah Shearsmith

Using the Borough Update as a means of publicising the road safety message	Promote road safety messages to residents, with input from Kent Police, Fire and Rescue Services and Kent and Medway Safety Camera Partnership;	December 2013	Duncan Bruce/William Solly
Ensure Police are consulted with regard to new large developments to identify potential road safety problems	Kent Police Crime Prevention Design Advisor advised by MBC Planning at pre-application stage of proposed large developments	Ongoing	John Grant/MBC Planning

Priority 3: Health Inequalities (incorporating 0-5 years)

Action	Description	Deadline	Assigned to
Develop the strategic direction and priorities for action to tackle health inequalities in Maidstone	Host a Health Inequalities Stakeholder event	July 2013	Katie Latchford
	Draft a Health Inequalities Action Plan for the Maidstone Borough	August 2013	Katie Latchford
Work with Maidstone partners, including the Kent Public Health, West Kent CCG, PPG and Healthwatch, to encourage better joint working and develop funding opportunities	Re-establish a Health and Wellbeing delivery group in Maidstone	September 2013	Sarah Robson
Work with Maidstone partners to develop a joint action plan to allow better joint working and pooling of resources and funding	Host a task and finish group to develop a 0-5 years Action Plan to support key areas including; literacy and reading, road safety, healthy weight and eating and practitioner training	September 2013	Katie Latchford

Priority 4: Housing Services

1. Homelessness Strategy

The council's current Homelessness Strategy was adopted in 2009 and runs until 2013 and a key piece for work this year will be to review the strategy and adopt a replacement.

Since 2009 Maidstone has seen levels of homelessness rise, with an increase in the number of households accepted as being homeless and in priority need from 7 households in 2009/10 compared with 198 households in 2012/13.

This sharp rise in homelessness has been driven by a range of factors that have influenced the local housing market and the wider economy. The range of welfare reforms introduced from April 2013 are also starting to impact negatively on homelessness and the replacement of Housing Benefit with Universal Credit presents a further negative pressure on homelessness.

2. Housing Strategy refresh

The council's Housing Strategy was adopted in 2011 and runs to 2014/15. Since the adoption of the strategy the local housing market across Maidstone has changed markedly. The strategy would benefit from a refresh to ensure that the action plans continue to meet our needs moving forward, however, we need to be mindful of the developing Local Strategic Plan and the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document, as these should dovetail with the Housing Strategy.

3. Reducing homelessness

The number of homeless applicants accepted as being in priority need has averaged 193 for the two years 2010/11 and 2012/13. While this is a symptom of a range of external factors it is important that our service continues to respond to changing demands and that we make use of innovative approaches to reduce homelessness and its negative impact.

4. Reducing the number of empty homes across Maidstone

The council's Empty Homes Plan was agreed in February 2013 and sets out how the council intends to both reduce the number of empty homes and bring empty homes back into use. Across Maidstone there are around 1,420 empty homes in total (2.11% of the total housing stock) of which around 1,350 are in private ownership. Maidstone has the third lowest percentage of empty homes across Kent and Medway, and many of these are transactional empty homes (e.g. in the process of being sold) with only around 420 homes that have been empty for more than 6 months.

The council is currently engaged in an innovative lease repair scheme for long-term empty homes working in partnership with the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and the work that the council is delivering has attracted national media interest.

5. Improving private rented housing

The private rented sector continues to grow and now exceeds the subsidised housing sector in terms of the number of units of accommodation. In Maidstone, due to the limited supply of subsidised housing, particularly one and two bedroom properties, the private rented sector is key to providing a range of housing options to our residents.

To support this the Private Sector Housing Team enforce the statutory requirements for private rented accommodation to be free from severe health and safety hazards, as well as the mandatory licensing requirements for larger HMOs. To provide a robust response and to support the private rented sector as a sustainable long-term housing solution, we will deliver a proactive inspection programme targeting high-risk accommodation.

6. Delivering a new approach for temporary accommodation

Due to the large number of homeless applicants approaching the council for advice and assistance, the number of applicants to whom the council owes a duty to provide interim accommodation has also risen. This has resulted in emergency temporary accommodation costs escalating.

To help address this demand we are working as part of the Commercialism Project to purchase suitable properties to use as emergency temporary accommodation which will both reduce the financial impact and improve our service to homeless applicants who require emergency accommodation.

7. Reviewing the council's Allocation Scheme

The council's Allocation Scheme for nominating housing register applicants was replaced from April 2013 with a new scheme which replaced the previous points-based system with a banded scheme where applicants are given priority based on the date they joined the register.

The new scheme requires that applicants have a local connection to Maidstone, along with a housing need, and has resulted in a reduction in the number of housing register applicants from over 3,000 to just over 1,100.

As the new scheme introduces a series of radical changes it is important that we review both the operation of the scheme and the impact on our customers to ensure that the scheme meets our aspirations moving forward.

8. Maximising capacity in the private rented sector

As demand for limited amount of available subsidised housing continues to outstrip demand, the use of the growing private rented sector as a sustainable housing option becomes more important. In February, the council also adopted a policy for ending the council's housing duty to certain homeless applicants by making an offer of private rented accommodation in accordance with the relevant legislation and guidance.

For the council to make best use of the private rented sector, we are re-launching our Bond Scheme which provides an incentive to private landlords where they offer tenancies to homeless by setting up Maidstone Homefinders which will provide a service for private landlords to advertise their accommodation to housing register applicants. The scheme will

also provide a range of incentives to private landlords with the aim of increasing the number of properties that are available to homeless applicants.

9. Improving home energy efficiency

Sadly, compared with Kent and Medway, there continue to be a higher than average number of excess winter deaths across Maidstone - largely as a result of poor thermal performance of homes as well as the incidence of fuel poverty. We are working closely within the Kent and Medway green Deal Partnership to deliver a range of cross borough interventions to provide improved home energy efficiency. These will include no cost insulation and energy efficiency measures, the introduction of collective switching for energy bills, and the extension of oil purchasing clubs in rural areas.

10. New affordable housing

We remain on track to deliver just under 200 new affordable homes this year. We will continue to promote the Help to Buy equity loan scheme makes new build homes available to all home buyers (not just first time buyers) who wish buy a new home through developers participating in the scheme. The government has just announced that it will continue funding new affordable housing post 2015; the details have yet to be provided but it will be an extension of the current programme that has to date enabled us to provide nearly 600 homes for families.