

**MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP AND CORPORATE SERVICES  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 1 APRIL 2014**

**Present:** Councillor Mrs Grigg (in the Chair) and  
Councillors Barned, Black, Butler, Chittenden,  
Hotson, D Mortimer, Newton and Mrs Parvin

**Also Present:** Councillors Garland and Moss

121. CHAIRMAN

In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman took the Chair.

122. WEBCASTING

**RESOLVED:** That all items on the agenda be webcast.

123. APOLOGIES

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from the Chairman (Councillor Mrs Gooch) and Councillors Nelson-Gracie and Pickett.

124. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following Substitute Members were noted:

Councillor Barned for Councillor Nelson-Gracie  
Councillor Chittenden for Councillor Pickett  
Councillor Newton for Councillor Mrs Gooch

125. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS/WITNESSES

Councillor Garland, the Leader of the Council, and Councillor Moss, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, were in attendance as witnesses to explain the progress made on their priority areas during the 2013/14 Municipal Year (agenda item 8).

126. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

127. EXEMPT ITEMS

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

128. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 MARCH 2014

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed.

129. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 4 MARCH 2014

Minute 115 (c) and (e) – Review of Complaints October-December 2013 (Quarter 3)

In response to a question, the Committee was informed that its recommendations regarding the possibility of (a) offering a market supplement to recruit a Development Manager and a Principal Planning Officer and (b) charging a fee for responding to Freedom of Information requests had been referred to the appropriate Officers. Their response would be reported back to a future meeting of the Committee.

130. LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CORPORATE SERVICES - REVIEW OF PRIORITIES FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2013/14

Councillor Garland, the Leader of the Council, and Councillor Moss, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, updated the Committee on the progress made on their priority areas during the 2013/14 Municipal Year.

Councillor Garland highlighted the following issues:

The Local Plan and Communication Relating to Strategic Issues

The production of the Local Plan had been of pre-eminent importance in the agenda of work over the past year. The independent housing needs analysis conducted as part of the Local Plan process had identified that Maidstone had an objectively assessed housing need of 19,600 new dwellings from 2011-2031. A number of Member Workshops had been held where the evidence base had been explained and discussed. The Cabinet had made decisions relating to the allocation of sites and had announced a housing target of 17,100. All elements of this had been communicated rigorously and comprehensively to Members, and whilst there had been a difference in views, there seemed to be no major objections in terms of the evidence. The communication strategy in relation to the Local Plan had been quite comprehensive; the Plan was now out to consultation, and feedback was awaited.

Finance – Revenue and Capital Savings

A balanced budget had been delivered with a 1.99% increase in Council Tax. In terms of revenue, he was confident that the savings identified at the Council meeting on 5 March 2014 would be achieved. The revenue outturn for 2013/14 was showing an under spend as in previous years. The Capital Programme remained buoyant in terms of resources, and substantial sums of money could be directed to the delivery of the Integrated Transport Strategy in future. The Council had received

significant New Homes Bonus funding and this would be used not to support the revenue account but for capital purposes to assist in moving forward the infrastructure required for whatever housing numbers needed to be accommodated.

### Policy and Performance

In October 2013 the Council commissioned the LGA to undertake a Corporate Peer Challenge to look at its priorities and strategic planning processes. The team met with a mix of appropriate partners and stakeholders and the feedback was largely positive identifying a number of opportunities and challenges for the Council going forward.

As a result of the review the number of indicators that would be monitored at strategic level had been reduced in the refreshed Strategic Plan 2014/15.

The team had identified the need for the Council to strengthen its approach to economic development. On occasions there were tensions between planning and the Council's ambitions in relation to economic development. Discussions would take place with residents and businesses regarding the new Economic Development Strategy currently emerging.

He was pleased to announce that the Council had been awarded the IiP Silver Award. This demonstrated the Council's commitment to developing its employees and was a step towards its ambition to achieve the IiP Gold Award by 2015.

In 2014/15, the Council would be talking to the public about the performance information they would like to see to ensure that the Council is transparent and accountable. This would involve meeting with the public and asking them to identify what is important to them about the Council and how it operates.

### Policy Development

In terms of policy development, the Strategic Plan for 2011/15 had been refreshed, a Communications and Engagement Plan had been produced to support the final year of the current Strategic Plan and a Communications and Engagement Strategy would be developed in 2014/15 to support the new Strategic Plan for 2015/20.

The One Council Engagement Plan had been rolled out to explain employees' role in achieving the Council's priorities.

### Value for Money

The Council had continued to make efficiencies through joint working such as the three-way ICT shared service. The new three-way Planning Support and Environmental Health shared service, which was going live this year, would achieve economies of scale through the amalgamation of back office functions across the three authorities.

## The Future

Savings of just over £1m had been made across the Council during 2013/14; from a strategic position, the feedback was that these had not been felt by local residents. The Cabinet was now looking at its priorities for 2015/20 having regard to planned reductions in central government grant and the eventual need to be self financing. The Council would be engaging with local residents, businesses, Members and staff to discuss the way forward.

In response to questions by Members, Councillor Garland explained that:

- In terms of assuring the public that their participation in consultation exercises was worthwhile, he could confirm that all representations regarding the Local Plan would be considered. However, with regard to the objectively assessed housing need of 19,600 new dwellings, it would be necessary to provide evidence to support any assertion that the number should be lower.
- The broad principles of the Integrated Transport Strategy (ITS) had been agreed by the Cabinet earlier in the year. It was now necessary to work out the detail of specific schemes with Kent County Council. The Council would be reliant on the Local Enterprise Partnership for funding for the delivery of the ITS package and gyratory changes. The Planning Committee had recently agreed transport improvements along the A274 to support development sites in South East Maidstone. Provision had been made in the Capital Programme to fund the transport schemes deemed necessary to support the housing numbers decided upon. New Homes Bonus funding would be used for capital purposes to move forward the infrastructure improvements required.
- Compared to other local authorities in Kent, Maidstone had taken a far more rigorous and analytical approach to the development of the ITS running alongside the Local Plan. In terms of planning and the allocation of housing sites, the Local Plan remained pre-eminent and the Inspector would have regard to that.
- He and other Members of the Executive had been working closely with Kent County Council in the delivery of the Local Plan. There were differences in opinion, but the reality of the planning system meant that any counter arguments needed to be clearly evidence based.
- In terms of the Council's relationship with Parish Councils on matters such as the Local Plan, there was going to be opposition given the significant number of houses proposed. Failure to have a Local Plan in place with housing numbers based on evidence would lead to a Developers' Charter for Maidstone and a loss of control over development. Consultation and involvement with the public, including Parish Councils, was therefore key to getting the message across. Parish Councils had valid concerns and a number of

meetings had been held already with, for example, Marden and Coxheath Parish Councils, and more were planned. Parish Councils were invited to submit formal representations on the Local Plan as part of the current Regulation 18 consultation and they would be involved in each of the Plan making stages going forward.

- New Homes Bonus (NHB) was not ring fenced and other Councils were using it to mitigate the impact of the need to make savings as a result of the reduction in Revenue Support Grant as part of the Government's drive to reduce the national deficit. At Maidstone, the decision had been made to use NHB for capital purposes which meant that it had been necessary to make significant savings on the revenue side as a result.
- In terms of changing priorities, transformation and commercialisation of services was moving up the agenda to reflect the ongoing reduction in Revenue Support Grant from Government and the need for the Council to be in a position by 2020 that it is not reliant on it.

Councillor Moss highlighted the following issues:

#### ICT – The Digital Inclusion Group

During the past year, the IT team had been involved in rewriting the website and the introduction of the new automated telephone system. In conjunction with partners (local housing associations, Age Concern and the CAB etc.), work had now commenced on the Digital Inclusion Group project to encourage local residents to access Council services online. In this connection, visits were being arranged to a number of venues, including one frequented by older people, to encourage local residents to become computer literate. However, it had been argued that increasing internet use could be socially isolating.

#### The Availability of Fast Broadband

The Council was working with KCC and other partners to secure better broadband for parts of the Borough where provision was poor or could be improved in order to promote economic growth (for example at the Parkwood Industrial Estate) and social inclusion.

#### Commissioning and Procurement

The Commissioning and Procurement Strategy was settling in well, and smaller, local businesses were being encouraged to seek to provide goods and services to the Council.

#### Mid-Kent Legal Services

Mid-Kent Legal Services was being restructured to provide a more resilient, cost effective service to the three partner authorities reducing

the need to use consultants and providing opportunities for career progression.

### Review of Enhanced Scrutiny Arrangements

As part of a review of the enhanced Scrutiny model, which was introduced at the beginning of the Municipal Year, a short survey was undertaken of all Members. Nineteen responses were received and ten of the respondents thought that there had been an improvement in Scrutiny since the changes. In his opinion, although the monitoring of performance and complaints and involvement in the budgetary process were areas of work that required particular attention, the Committee should have a more interesting and influential work programme.

In response to questions by Members, Councillor Moss explained/confirmed that:

- In terms of future work development, he could not see, given the nature of the budgetary process, how Scrutiny could be involved at an earlier stage. However, the development of a new Strategic Plan for 2015 onwards would be a key topic next year, and the Committee would have the opportunity to influence its emphasis.
- Consultation with residents, for example through the Residents' Survey, was the key to ensuring that services are focused and residents are satisfied with them (an outcome under the priority of corporate and customer excellence). The thrust was excellent customer service embedded in the culture of the organisation.
- The County Council was taking the lead on improving broadband speeds across the County. Access to faster broadband was being rolled out by BT. All the Council could do was to negotiate with KCC and BT to ensure that improved broadband services were rolled out as quickly as possible.
- He would be prepared to meet with the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee to discuss topics where Overview and Scrutiny and the Cabinet could work together in 2014/15.

Councillors Garland and Moss then updated the Committee on progress in relation to MKIP.

It was noted that:

- The original objectives of the Partnership were to improve the quality of service provision, improve resilience in service delivery and deliver efficiency savings. To speed up the process, consideration was given to alternative operational models, but it was concluded that the investment required could not be justified in terms of the savings that would accrue. As a result, the MKIP Management Board had agreed to trial a "single lead provider director" model of operation to take MKIP forward, and Paul Taylor,

Director of Change and Communities at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, had been appointed to the position on a secondment basis for a period of twelve months.

- MKIP was now well embedded as a culture within the three partner authorities as a tool to deliver efficiencies and savings in face of the financially challenging times within which local authorities were operating. All three Cabinets would be involved in decisions regarding the migration of services to MKIP.

In response to questions by Members, Councillors Garland and Moss confirmed that in terms of the governance arrangements of the partnership, the new "single lead provider director" model maintained the sovereignty of the partner authorities in terms of front-line services. The only change that local residents should notice was an improvement in efficiency.

The Chairman thanked Councillors Garland and Moss for their frank and honest appraisal of progress in relation to their priority areas during the 2013/14 Municipal Year. Councillors Garland and Moss confirmed that, if in office, they would be prepared to take part in a seminar facilitated by the Centre for Public Scrutiny to discuss building the relationship between the Cabinet and Scrutiny as a way to help improve pre-decision scrutiny.

**RESOLVED:** That the progress made by the Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services in relation to their priority areas during the 2013/14 Municipal Year be noted, and that arrangements be made for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Committee to meet with the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services to discuss topics where Overview and Scrutiny and the Cabinet could work together in 2014/15.

#### 131. COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT PLAN 2014/15

The Head of Policy and Communications introduced the draft Communications and Engagement Plan 2014/15. She explained that:

- The purpose of the Plan was to ensure that the Council communicated and engaged effectively with residents, Councillors, partners and staff to meet its priorities.
- The Plan was designed to support the final year of the current Strategic Plan, and a Communications and Engagement Strategy would be developed in 2014/15 to support the new Strategic Plan for 2015/20.

During the discussion, reference was made to the following:

- The need for further clarification of the reference in the Plan to the Council's stakeholders and to include specific examples;

- The valuable contribution Scrutiny could make to the development of a new Communications and Engagement Strategy as part of the Strategic Planning process for 2015/20;
- The challenges associated with engaging local residents in, for example, the process of setting budgets and priorities;
- The need to assure members of the public that their participation in consultation and engagement activities is worthwhile;
- The engagement work being undertaken by Design South East in relation to the Local Plan as an example of co-production; and
- The difference between consulting, informing and engaging with the public.

In response to questions, the Head of Policy and Communications informed the Committee that:

- There was scope for Members to take an active part in Local Democracy Week, and their contribution would be welcomed. Pitched correctly, there were ways to engage young people in the democratic process, and the Democratic Services Team was keen to take this forward.
- In terms of developing Member engagement, the initial feedback from the digital technology project (the use of iPads by Members at meetings etc.) was positive. Fifteen Members had taken the opportunity to trial the iPads from October/November 2013 and a further nine had joined the trial in March 2014. The purpose of the trial was to provide improved and instantaneous access to Council papers and emails for effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of Member services both to the Members themselves and their constituents. The original fifteen Members were asked to complete an evaluation form and eleven were returned. The responses showed that most Members were using the iPads daily for accessing emails and Council papers. They would be happy to receive papers electronically rather than in hard copy, and all but three were using their iPads at meetings although it was more difficult to use them at some meetings than others. There were legal requirements regarding the provision of documents to Council Members prior to meetings, but the Secretary of State had responded to representations and was looking at the introduction of legislation to allow a wholly electronic delivery.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the Leader of the Council be recommended to approve the Communications and Engagement Plan 2014/15 subject to further clarification of the reference to the Council's stakeholders and the inclusion of specific examples;



- (b) That the involvement of the Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee (or a Working Group of the Committee) in the development of a new Communications and Engagement Strategy as part of the Strategic Planning process for 2015/20 be included in the draft Work Programme 2014/15 for discussion by the Committee at its first meeting in the new Municipal Year;
- (c) That the Officers be requested to involve Members of the Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the development of plans for engaging local residents in, for example, the process of setting budgets and priorities, and that this topic be included in the draft Work Programme 2014/15 for discussion by the Committee at its first meeting in the new Municipal Year;
- (d) That as part of the Annual "You Said, We Did" campaign, the Officers be requested to address the need to assure members of the public that their participation in consultation and engagement activities is worthwhile;
- (e) That further information regarding the work being undertaken by Design South East in relation to the Local Plan be circulated to all Members of the Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee as an example of "co-production"; and
- (f) That a copy of a document produced by the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames to explain the difference between consulting, informing and engaging with the Council's stakeholders be circulated to all Members of the Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee for information.

#### 132. RESIDENTS' SURVEY 2013 - RESULTS

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Policy and Communications setting out the results of the Residents' Survey undertaken during October and November 2013 to inform priorities and work planning and to gauge satisfaction levels with the Council and service provision.

During the discussion, reference was made to the number of residents who had indicated that they were "undecided" and the implications in terms of analysing, weighting and interpreting the data.

In response to questions, the Head of Policy and Communications informed the Committee that:

- Where possible comparisons had been made to the results of the Residents' Survey undertaken in 2011, but some questions were amended for the 2013 survey so that the Council could benchmark the results against other authorities. The data for Maidstone had

been submitted to LG Inform (the Local Government Association's benchmarking data service) for verification, and the benchmarked results could be circulated to Members as soon as they became available.

- Scrutiny Members could help to take matters forward by participating in action planning for improvements informed by the results of the 2013 Survey.

**RESOLVED:**

- (a) That the results from the Residents' Survey 2013, attached as Appendix A to the report of the Head of Policy and Communications, be noted;
- (b) That the areas where out-turns have improved and declined compared to 2011 be noted;
- (c) That the benchmarking data should be circulated to Members as soon as it becomes available from LG Inform; and
- (d) That volunteers be sought for a Member Working Group to meet as soon as possible to assist with action planning for improvements informed by the results of the Residents' Survey 2013.

133. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered its future work programme. The Chairman reminded Members that a special meeting of the Committee had been arranged to take place at 10.00 a.m. on Tuesday 15 April 2014 to discuss MKIP. The Director of Environment and Shared Services had confirmed that he would be able to attend the meeting scheduled to be held on Tuesday 6 May 2014 to discuss the future of Maidstone House. The June meeting would focus on the development of the work programme for 2014/15.

**RESOLVED:** That the future work programme, as set out in Appendix A to the report of the Senior Corporate Policy Officer, be endorsed.

134. DURATION OF MEETING

6.30 p.m. to 8.10 p.m.