

## **MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL**

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

#### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 7 JULY 2014**

**Present:** Councillor Mrs Gooch (Chairman), and  
Councillors Black, Butler, Long, Mrs Parvin and  
Pickett

**Also Present:** Councillors Mrs Blackmore and  
McLoughlin

12. **APOLOGIES**

It was noted that apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Edwards-Daem, Councillor Mrs Grigg and Councillor Mrs Stockell.

13. **NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS**

There were no Substitute Members.

14. **NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS/WITNESSES**

Councillor Mrs Blackmore, the Leader of the Council, and Councillor McLoughlin, the Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, were in attendance.

15. **DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

There were no disclosures by Members or Officers.

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

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

17. **REVIEW OF THE MID KENT IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP**

The Chairman welcomed Councillors from Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Swale Borough Council and Maidstone Borough Council to the meeting to enable joint consideration of the issues around governance, communication and the role of the Mid Kent Services Director within the Mid Kent Improvement Partnership (MKIP).

Alison Broom, Chief Executive of Maidstone Borough Council, explained that the partnership had been formed in 2008 between Ashford, Maidstone, Swale and Tunbridge Wells borough councils. Ashford had

subsequently withdrawn from the partnership. The first MKIP partnership was Mid Kent Audit which went live as a four-way shared service in 2009.

MKIP was one of a number of ways that the three authorities entered into partnerships, with each authority being able to opt in or out as opportunities arose. Over the years the number of partnership services had grown and included:

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| § Audit (Ashford, Maidstone, Swale, Tunbridge Wells)       | § Legal (Maidstone, Swale, Tunbridge Wells)            |
| § Environmental Health (Maidstone, Swale, Tunbridge Wells) | § Parking Enforcement (Maidstone, Swale)               |
| § Graphic Design (Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells)              | § Planning Support (Maidstone, Swale, Tunbridge Wells) |
| § HR (Maidstone, Swale)                                    | § Revenues and Benefits (Maidstone, Tunbridge Wells)   |
| § ICT (Maidstone, Swale, Tunbridge Wells)                  |  |

It was explained that the percentage of staff employed and the overall budget of the shared services had subsequently grown but had demonstrated good value on investment. By the end of 2013/14, MKIP would have delivered £5.5m worth of savings for £1.8m worth of investment. On existing business case projections this was predicted to rise to £13.3m (£2.25m annually) for £2.15m of investment after 10 years of MKIP (2017/18). This represented £6 returned for every £1 invested.

William Benson, Chief Executive of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, stated that the partnership began with a relatively 'light touch' approach to governance recognising a desire to get on and deliver shared services and to establish a track record that could subsequently be built upon.

The partnership had begun opportunistically but had become more structured in its approach following a recognition that certain support services (such as ICT and HR) were important 'enablers' to shared services.

In 2008, each authority had agreed a set of formal governance arrangements that stated that Overview and Scrutiny arrangements would be undertaken individually by each of the Parties when the Parties considered Proposals and Recommendations from MKIP as part of their decision making processes. However, it was envisaged that joint scrutiny meetings would be considered when appropriate. The Lead Director/Project Manager for a particular project would attend meetings as required.

Whilst key decisions remained with the individual cabinets of each of the three authorities, MKIP was overseen by an MKIP Board on a day-to-day basis which was made of up the Leaders and Chief Executives.

MKIP had adopted a 'Gateway' model to assess whether a shared service should be implemented. Whilst the initial stage of a project was overseen by the MKIP Board, decisions to proceed to implement a shared service were reserved to the individual Cabinets.

Committee members raised a number of questions regarding governance, namely:

- Who scrutinised the MKIP board?
- Were there any minutes taken of the board meetings?
- Who challenged the board when a decision not to proceed had been taken?
- Who else would consider whether a business case for a shared service was acceptable?
- Who considered MKIP's recommendations?

The Committee was advised that the MKIP board was made up of the Leaders of the three authorities supported by the Chief Executives. The decisions were made on a consensual basis. Where there was no consensus the decision was not taken forward and that could make it difficult to challenge.

MKIP's recommendations were considered by the cabinet of the individual authorities but that could lead to slightly different decisions being made at different times so it was better to make joint decisions at the same time where that was possible. However, there was need to get a more established and regular procedure that could involve Overview and Scrutiny.

Committee members further questioned:

- Who decided the level of budget given to the shared services?
- How often had Overview and Scrutiny powers been invoked by the MKIP board?
- The Partnership's governance arrangements should be reviewed annually- when and how had that happened?
- Did MKIP audit itself?
- What level of performance monitoring was undertaken and who monitored it?

The Committee was advised that the level of budget was considered each year by each of the authorities based on a level of population basis. The Partnership's Governance arrangements were reported annually to each council through the respective audit and or governance committees and the performance management information reported quarterly to each of the council's cabinets. Auditing was done through the normal internal audit process as well as by external auditors.

Paul Taylor, Mid Kent Services Director and Jane Clarke, MKIP Programme Manager advised the committee of their roles which included consolidating existing partnerships, overseeing the work programme of projects to be considered by the MKIP board and looking at proposals for the future direction from 2015/16.

The Committee noted that MKIP was intending to develop a communications plan and it was felt that for the non executive members it was important to know what information was available and where and how they could influence the decision making process.

The Committee in considering the recommendations to the report agreed that it would be beneficial for the Overview and Scrutiny members of the three councils to work together to look at the work of MKIP. An initial first stage should be the establishment of a joint task and finish group to look at the Governance arrangements and the development of a communications plan.

It was felt that the Task and Finish Group should consist of six members with two representatives from each of Tunbridge Wells and Maidstone Overview and Scrutiny Committees and Swale's Scrutiny Committee.

It was agreed that the work of the task and finish group should be completed in time for a meeting in December 2014.

It would also be appropriate for the Mid Kent Services Director to report to this meeting with an interim update on the progress of MKIP which should include the independent appraisal of the Director's post which was being undertaken by a cross authority project team.

**RESOLVED:** That

(a) A Task and Finish Group comprising two representatives from each of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Maidstone Borough Council's Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Swale Borough Council's Scrutiny Committee, be established to consider how MKIP's governance arrangements should be taken forward and how a MKIP communications plan should be developed,

(b) The Task and Finish Group report back to a December Joint meeting of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Maidstone Borough Council's Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Swale Borough Council's Scrutiny Committee,

(c) A contact list be circulated to staff and elected members of the three authorities on the key contacts for shared service enquiries, and

(d) The Mid Kent Services Director report back to a December Joint meeting of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Maidstone Borough Council's Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Swale Borough Council's Scrutiny Committee, on an interim update on the progress of MKIP that should include the independent appraisal of the Director's post which was being undertaken by a cross authority project team.

18. DURATION OF MEETING

19:15hrs – 20:35hrs