

Annual Report

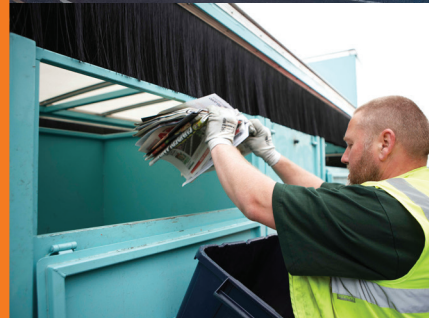
April 2013 – March 2014

Our Priorities

Great Opportunity, Great Place, Great People



Ensuring that Maidstone Borough remains a vibrant, prosperous 21st century urban and rural community at the heart of Kent, where its distinctive character is enhanced to create a safe, healthy, excellent environment with high quality education and employment where all people can realise their aspirations.



Introduction from Leader and Chief Executive

This annual report sets out what we have achieved from April 2013 to March 2014 to deliver our Strategic Plan priorities to 2015 of 'Great People', 'Great Place' and 'Great Opportunity'.

We also want to share some of the key activities for the coming year such as our work to improve opportunities for young people to find work and improve our parks and play areas.

“excellent environment where people can realise their aspirations”

Your views are important if we are to ensure that Maidstone Borough remains vibrant and prosperous with an excellent environment where people can realise their aspirations. Towards the end of 2013 we carried out one of our regular residents' surveys to find out what local people think about the borough and the council's services.

The results are summarised at the end of this report. We also consulted local people on the draft local plan. More than 2,000 responded and we will make sure that all the comments are taken into account before we consult on the next draft plan.

This year we will prepare another strategic plan, making sure that we continue to deliver your priorities for the borough. We will continue with work to regenerate Maidstone town centre and to improve our parks and open spaces and our play areas. Work to help young people and others find employment and to deliver affordable homes will remain important.

These are challenging times with government grants to us reducing year on year. We will continue to work with partners to make the best use of public service budgets and to provide services jointly with neighbouring councils. We will also look to make the council more commercial, providing new services and investing in commercial opportunities.



Annabelle Blackmore
Leader of the Council



Alison Broom
Chief Executive

Our Vision and Priorities to 2015

The Council shares the vision for Maidstone, identified in the Sustainable Community Strategy 2009 - 2020:

“We want Maidstone Borough to be a vibrant, prosperous 21st century urban and rural community at the heart of Kent, where its distinctive character is enhanced to create a safe, healthy, excellent environment with high quality education and employment where all people can realise their aspirations.”

This can be described in six words -
Great Opportunity, Great Place, Great People.



Great Opportunity - For Maidstone to have a growing economy.

In essence, Maidstone will be a good place to work and do business. The economy will continue to grow with a wide range of employment and business opportunities.



Great Place - For Maidstone to be a decent place to live.

Maidstone already has a clean, attractive and well designed and built environment. We wish to maintain this and ensure that proper respect is paid to its diverse and valuable assets so that Maidstone is a place where people want to live. We will continue to support our most vulnerable residents and seek to reduce the different forms of deprivation across the Borough in both urban and rural areas.



Great People - Corporate and Customer Excellence.

The Council will have a productive workforce with people in the right place at the right time, delivering cost effective services. Services will be affordable, delivered on time and to agreed standards in an accessible way.

More information about our priorities can be found on our Strategic Plan which can be downloaded from our website www.maidstone.gov.uk/council/strategies,-plans-and-policies

Performance Highlights

Our performance management system allows us to monitor our services, to keep on track, focus on areas for improvement and celebrate success.

In 2013-14 we ...

Processed **1496**
planning applications,
83% in statutory time.
Granted **17**
tree preservation orders.
Engaged with **1,121**
residents through
neighbourhood planning.



Great Opportunity

Provided **2,960** places
for residents on courses or at
events organised by the community
development team.
Provided **32 work**
experience
placements
within the council.

Delivered **189 new**
affordable homes.
Improved **295 private**
sector homes, providing
insulation and energy efficiency
improvements. Welcomed
734,599 visitors
to Maidstone Leisure Centre.



Great Place

Footfall in Mote Park increased by
6% compared to 2012/13.
More than **200 schools**
from across Kent and Medway visited
Maidstone Museum for curriculum led
workshops and activities.

Answered **174,823 calls**
in the contact centre –
the average wait time was
2 minutes 51 seconds.
Saw **41,047**
people in the Gateway
Paid **98%** of invoices from local and
other businesses
within 30 days.



Great People

Reduced our
processing times
for new and change of circumstances
for housing and council tax benefit by
over a day, processing now
takes on average just over
8 working days.

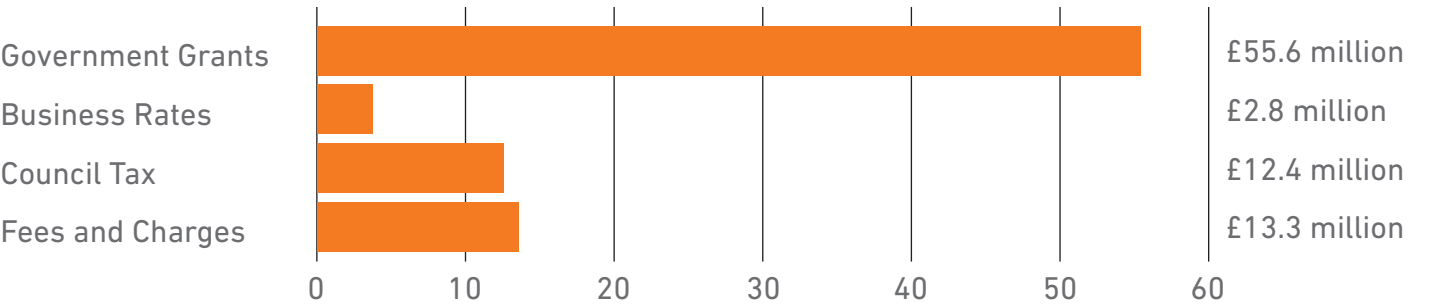
For more information on our performance visit our website
www.maidstone.gov.uk/council/performance-and-stats
or contact The Policy & Information team - policyandperformance@maidstone.gov.uk

Financial Summary

The council is committed to providing value for money services and has a responsive approach to the level of council tax needed to deliver the priorities set out in the strategic plan. In recent years it has set small increases in council tax, below Consumer Price Index inflation levels. The council will remain flexible on the level of increase in future years in order to set a balanced budget.

A full statement of our accounts is available on our website www.maidstone.gov.uk/council/finance-and-performance/annual-accounts. For more information about the council's accounts contact Paul Holland – paulholland@maidstone.gov.uk

Where our £84.2million Income comes from:

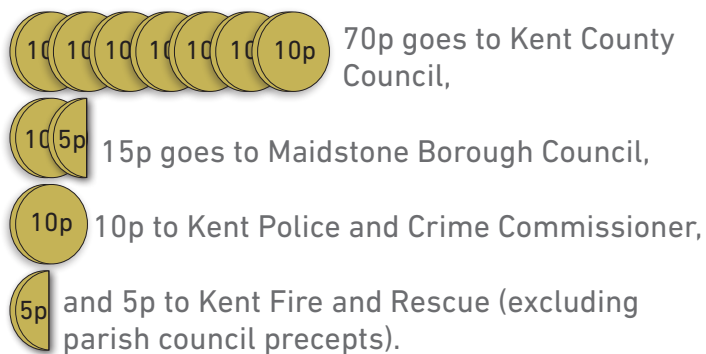


How the money was spent



Your Council Tax

Out of every council tax pound that we collect



How Maidstone council spends your council tax pounds:

Car Parking & Public Transport 3p



Cemetery & Crematorium 1p



Community Safety & Development 2p



Culture & Tourism 5p



Democracy 2p



Economic Regeneration & Employment 2p



Environmental Services 2p



Housing 3p



Licensing 1p



Other Corporate Services 8p



Parks & Open Spaces 3p



Planning & Building Control 4p



Revenues
& Benefits 56p



Sport & Recreation 1p



Street Cleansing 2p



Waste Collection & Disposal 5p



Capital Investment

Last year we spent £5,753,000 on capital projects such as property, vehicles and equipment, and on grants to build new subsidised housing and to renovate existing properties:

Property Purchases £1,250,000

High Street Regeneration £1,216,000

Housing Grants £1,078,000

Other Community & Leisure Schemes £908,000

King Street Car Park Demolition £597,000

Corporate Property £343,000

IT Software & Hardware £160,000

Vehicle Purchases £113,000

Other Capital Schemes £88,000

“We raise £12.4 million from Council Tax which is a lot less than the £47 million we spend on Revenues & Benefits.”



Achieving our priorities



Great Opportunity

Outcomes by 2015:

- *a transport network that supports the local economy, with a focus on the delivery of an integrated transport strategy in conjunction with Kent County Council.*
- *a growing economy with rising employment, catering for a range of skill sets to meet the demands of the local economy, with a focus on the following areas;*
 - *Creating the right planning environment*
 - *Developing key infrastructure*
 - *Business expansion*
 - *Inward investment*
 - *Developing stronger business relationships*
 - *Tackling worklessness*

Key Achievements in 2013 - 14

- ✓ Maidstone's Lower High Street improvement project was completed on time and within budget.
- ✓ A borough wide industry led Business Partnership was established to overcome barriers to business growth.
- ✓ Helped 33 businesses affected by the winter flooding with Business Support grants totalling £214,825.
- ✓ Worked with Network Rail on major improvement works to the High Level Footbridge at Maidstone East Station.
- ✓ Won the Tourism South East Beautiful South Awards for Visitor Information Provider.
- ✓ Installed new visitor signs and information monoliths in Maidstone town centre.
- ✓ Improved Maidstone's Christmas Lights display.
- ✓ Helped young people find work - providing 30 work experience placements, staging two jobs fairs in partnership with Jobcentre Plus and Golding Homes and promoting training, apprenticeships and work experience opportunities for young people to businesses in the borough.

Plans for 2014 - 15

- Designs and plans will be prepared for the next phase of Maidstone's town centre improvement project.
- Over 60 businesses will be supported to help them become more resilient to flooding in the future.
- Work to secure and deliver £3million improvements to cycle routes and access to the River Medway.
- Over 135 individuals will be given advice, guidance and support to start up in business.
- A new business website will be launched to promote Maidstone as the Business Capital of Kent including a free vacant property search.
- Aiming to provide 40 work experience placements for young people and promote the benefits of apprenticeships to local businesses.
- A new fully responsive tourism website with commercial opportunities for income generation.
- Stage two jobs fairs with partners to help people find work.



Achieving our priorities



Great Place

Outcomes by 2015:

- *Decent, affordable housing in the right places across a range of tenures, with a focus on*
 - *Developing sustainable communities*
 - *Increasing choice and improving the quality of life for vulnerable people*
 - *Improving existing homes*
 - *Improving access to housing and working to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping in Maidstone*
- *Continues to be a clean and attractive environment for people who live in and visit the borough by;*
 - *Implementing new waste management arrangements*
 - *Implementing a new cleansing model*
 - *Reducing the Council's energy consumption*
 - *Implementing an Air Quality Action Plan*
- *Residents are not disadvantaged because of where they live or who they are, vulnerable people are assisted and the level of deprivation is reduced, focusing on key areas; early intervention work with young children and their families to tackle disadvantage reducing health inequalities and undertaking work to help families who have multiple needs.*

Key Achievements in 2013 - 14

- ✓ The Mid Kent Joint Waste Contract improved recycling services and will save Maidstone taxpayers more than £1million a year.
- ✓ Mote Park, Whatman Park and Clare Park were awarded Green Flags and Mote Park was voted the third best loved park in the UK in the People's Choice Awards 2013.
- ✓ Volunteers gave 3,354 hours of work to look after Mote park.
- ✓ Major improvements at Cobtree Manor Park included the Cobtree Zoo play area, new paths, and a sculpture trail, designed by local artist Jason Mulligan.
- ✓ The multi-agency Operation Civic reduced ASB incidents by 19.6% in our most deprived areas.

Plans for 2014 - 15

- Improve bulky collection services to enable greater re-use and recycling of unwanted items.
- Improve recycling services for people living in apartments and flats with new weekly food waste collections.
- A new visitor Centre at Cobtree Manor Park will be open in spring 2015.
- More than £1.5 million will be invested in play areas across the borough to meet our target for most residents to live within 12 minutes of a good quality play area.
- A new visitor centre staffed by the Mote Park Fellowship volunteers will be established in Mote Park.

Key Achievements in 2013 - 14

- ✓ Launched the Maidstone BME (Black and Minority Ethnic) Forum in partnership with Voluntary Action Maidstone and Kent Police to provide a stronger voice for BME communities and improve integration and community cohesion.
- ✓ Worked with the National Flood Forum to support communities hit by the Christmas and New Year floods, providing advice on the repair and renewal grant and other resilience measures.
- ✓ Supported armed forces veterans into employment and work experience by successfully securing Armed Forces Covenant funding of £31,000 towards a veterans up skilling employment scheme in partnership with Mid Kent College and MBC Housing Services.
- ✓ Opened a Maidstone Domestic Violence One Stop Shop at the Maidstone Gateway and reduced incidents of domestic abuse by 79 incidents.
- ✓ Launched the Maidstone Older Person's Rural Forum to provide information on health, housing, and benefits advice to older people in our rural communities.
- ✓ Helped more than 600 families find affordable homes through the Kent Homechoice choice based lettings scheme.
- ✓ Brought 106 empty homes back into use.
- ✓ We enabled the delivery of 180+ new affordable homes for both rent and low cost ownership.
- ✓ Interventions to encourage landlords to improve 276 private sector dwellings making homes safe and tackling disrepair.
- ✓ Consulted on the draft Maidstone Borough Local Plan policies and land allocations to meet the borough's housing and employment needs to 2031.

Plans for 2014 - 15

- Provide a £1.5m purpose built supported accommodation unit in Maidstone for vulnerable and at risk veterans and service leavers.
- Support vulnerable and at risk older people through winter 2014-15 to reduce admissions to hospital as a result of accidents in the home and other care environments.
- Help for young people to get jobs. The Maidstone Engage project will work with and support young people aged 16-24 years currently not in employment, education or training project.
- Set up an assertive outreach team to help rough sleepers find accommodation and tackle street based alcohol and other problems.
- Refurbishing a previously empty block of flats to bring 12 empty properties back into use as affordable homes.
- Enable the delivery of a further 250 new affordable homes in 2014-15.
- Thousands had their say on the draft Local Plan. We will consider all the comments received before going out to consultation again later in the year.

“ The Mid Kent **Joint Waste Contract** improved recycling services and will save more than **£1 million** a year. ”



Achieving our priorities



Great People

Outcomes by 2015:

- *Customer focused services that residents are satisfied with*
- *Effective, cost efficient services are delivered across the borough*

Key Achievements in 2013 - 14

- ✓ Launched a new customer focussed website to make it easier for people to access council services.
- ✓ People can now pay securely and easily for more things on our website such as bulky waste collections.
- ✓ Introduced new devices and rules to save an estimated £43,000 in printing costs in 2014-15.
- ✓ Made it easier for people to renew their residents' parking permits. Permits can now be renewed by telephone or in person at Maidstone Gateway.
- ✓ Made our website easier to view on mobile devices.
- ✓ Paid suppliers directly into their bank accounts rather than by cheque which is better for them and has saved us £10,000.

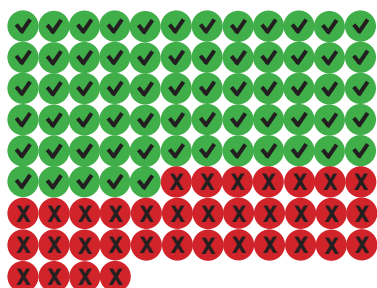
Plans for 2014 - 15

- Introduce more online services such as applying for and renewing residents' parking permits.
- Improve online facilities to make it easier for people to report issues like fly tipping and litter on a map. It will show if something has already been reported and you will get real time updates on the issues we are dealing with. Our crews will get instant updates to respond to problems quicker and more efficiently.
- Make the letters we send out for Council Tax and Housing Benefit easier to understand and will improve our online offer for these services.
- Work with Swale and Tunbridge Wells councils to provide joint planning support and environmental health services, saving Maidstone taxpayers more than £50,000 a year.

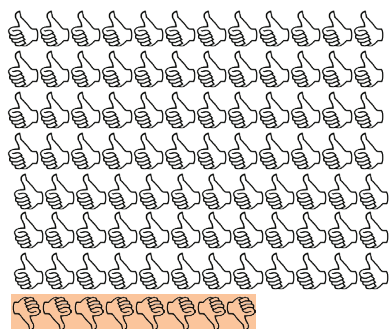
“Launched a **new customer focussed website** to make it easier for people to **access council** services.”

If there were only 100 people in the borough of Maidstone...

67 would agree that they belong to their local area... and **33** would disagree



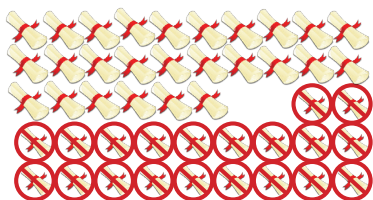
84 would be satisfied with their local area as a place to live... and **8** would be dissatisfied



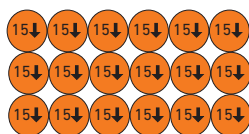
43 would agree the council provides good value for money



26 (over 16) would be qualified to NVQ 4+ (degree level) while **20** (over 16's) would have no qualifications



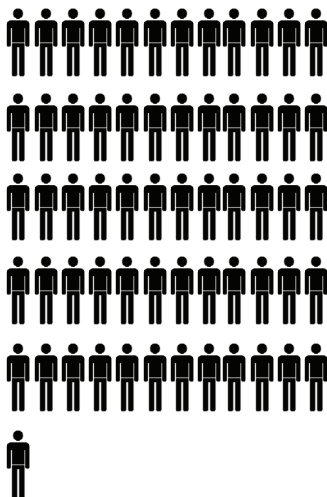
18 would be 15 years or younger



and **18** would be aged 65 and over



61 would say that they trust the Council



66 would be satisfied with the way the council runs things



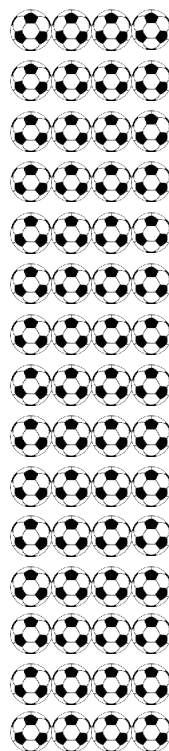
and **15** would be dissatisfied



73 would be economically active (employed and self employed) whilst of working age



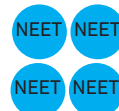
60 are likely to be physically active (adults)



26 would be likely to be obese



When aged 16 - 18 years old, **4** would be NEETs (not in education, employment or training)



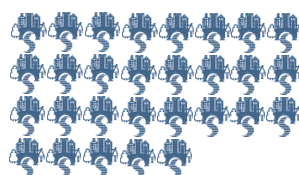
19 would be likely to smoke (over 16's)



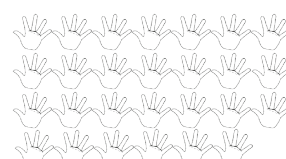
8 would claim an out of work benefit



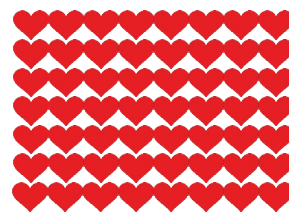
29 people would agree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area...



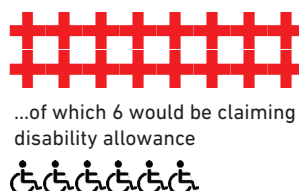
...and **27** would like to be more involved in the decisions that affect their local area.



56 would agree that people from different backgrounds get on together



16 would consider themselves to have a limiting long term illness...



6 would be from black and minority ethnic groups





Contact Details

Visit us at our 'Meet and Greet' reception at
Maidstone Gateway, King Street, Maidstone ME15 6AW.

- Mon–Fri 8.30am–5.30pm,
- Sat 9am–1pm, Sun Closed

Visit our information centre at Maidstone Museum, St Faith's Street, Maidstone ME14 1LH.

- Open Mon - Sat 10am - 5pm.

Visit our website at www.maidstone.gov.uk

Useful Telephone Numbers:

Main switchboard	01622 602000
Environmental Services Hotline	01622 602162
Housing Benefits	01622 602557
Housing Options	01622 602440
Council Tax	01622 602003
Environmental Enforcement	01622 602202
Parking Services	01622 602377
Planning	01622 602736
Land Charges	01622 602251
Bereavement Services	01622 602656
Payments	01622 602888
Complaints and compliments	01622 602640
Parks and Open Spaces	01622 602747
General Enquiries	01622 602750

Emergency after hours calls are routed to Medway Council via our main switchboard number 01622 602000
Use our 24hr Automated Payments Line 01622 602544 for paying council tax and parking fines.

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