

MAIDSTONE BOROUGH COUNCIL

Economic and Commercial Development Overview & Scrutiny Committee

MINUTES (PART I) OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2014

Present: Councillor Paterson (Chairman), and
Councillors Butler, Cuming, Fissenden, Mrs Hinder,
Hogg, McKay, Powell and Mrs Wilson

Also Present: Councillors Greer, Mrs Grigg, Newton and
Round

68. THE COMMITTEE TO CONSIDER WHETHER ALL ITEMS ON THE AGENDA SHOULD BE WEBCAST

RESOLVED: That all items on the agenda be webcast.

69. APOLOGIES

Apologies were noted from Councillors Vizzard and Harper. Councillor Hogg sent apologies for lateness.

70. NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The following substitute members were noted:

Councillor Mrs Wilson for Councillor Vizzard.
Councillor McKay for Councillor Harper.

71. NOTIFICATION OF VISITING MEMBERS

Councillors Greer, Mrs Grigg, Newton and Round were present as visiting members for all items on the agenda.

72. DISCLOSURES BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

There were no disclosures by members or officers.

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

RESOLVED: That items on Part II of the agenda be taken in private as proposed.

74. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 OCTOBER 2014

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed.

75. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 OCTOBER 2014

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 28 October 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed.

76. AMENDMENT TO THE ORDER OF BUSINESS

RESOLVED: That the Future Work Programme item be taken before the Enterprise Hub item.

77. TWILIGHT ECONOMY REVIEW

Councillor Greer sent apologies on behalf of Natalie Price and Georgie Grassom from the Hazlitt Arts Centre.

Bill Moss, Town Centre Manager, was invited to speak on this item.

Mr Moss gave a presentation to the committee about the Twilight Economy in Maidstone that covered the following areas:

- Over the twelve years Mr Moss had been Town Centre Manager he had seen massive changes for the better regarding the dining offer in Maidstone. There were as many eating outlets in the town centre as fashion outlets, however this was not the case before.
- Despite several initiatives, other than at Christmas time, late night shopping had never been a success. It was reasonable to conclude that there was little demand for late night shopping in Maidstone.
- Other than the excellent restaurant offer, Maidstone didn't have a huge variety of other activities in the Twilight Economy.
- There was an increasing number of people living in the town centre, meaning there needed to be a variety of activities available. This also gave businesses in the town centre a target market.

Following Mr Moss's presentation, members had a number of questions. Mr Moss responded that he welcomed the proposed investment in the public realm. With regard to encouraging more leisure attractions to the town centre, it was stated that in the past it had proven difficult to attract a multiplex cinema or large leisure facility. In answer to concerns about lighting the committee was informed that following the regeneration of the town centre, the lighting situation had improved. However both Kent County Council and Maidstone Borough Council had been slow to replace blown bulbs, with Kent County Council's service standard being for bulbs to be replaced within 28 days. Mr Moss went on to suggest that whilst the live music offer in the town was strong it could be improved, for example more live music could be staged in Jubilee Square. It was identified that whilst there was enough car parking in the town centre to support the Twilight Economy the location of parking could be improved.

Finally, the committee asked Mr Moss what the council could do to improve the Twilight Economy.

Mr Moss stated that marketing the Twilight Economy could be very useful to businesses in this sector. Maidstone already had a very strong restaurant sector, as well as other leisure activities that could be combined with eating. For example, cinema or bingo and restaurant offers.

Mr Moss suggested that businesses in the Twilight Economy could probably learn some lessons from the nightclubs. The nightclubs in the town were very sophisticated in their marketing- they knew who their customers were and how to appeal to them. Mr Moss suggested owners of dining and leisure businesses may not have had such a clear picture of their customers as the nightclubs.

Prior to the meeting, the committee toured the Twilight Economy area in the town centre. The following observations were made by members:

- That the town was not well lit- even with Christmas lights up. Some streets had several streetlights that were not on.
- Lighting up buildings in the town centre might help to make the town centre more attractive.
- There were several new restaurants opening up, some of them on Week Street.
- Although the area around Maidstone East train station was a little run down, there seemed to be plenty of restaurants and food outlets at that end of the town.

78. SKILLS AND EMPLOYABILITY UPDATE

Councillor Hogg arrived during the item, at 19:30.

Abi Lewis, Economic Development Officer, was invited to give an update on the Skills and Employability projects.

Miss Lewis gave a presentation, which focused on the following points:

- The previous approach to Skills and Employability was to directly address skills needs for young people at a grassroots level, for example by arranging work experience at the council. Whilst this approach had its merits, the Council recognised it would have greater impact if it took a more strategic approach in line with the Draft Economic Development Strategy. The council would work best as a facilitator, helping to match training provision with the needs of employers in the borough.
- Two key pieces of work had been planned in the Skills and Employability Work Programme to provide a greater understanding of skills and employability needs as well as training provision:
 - A business skills survey; and
 - A training provider survey.
- Local business visits to discuss skills needs directly with them.
- The launch of a communications campaign to educate companies on the benefit of taking on an apprentice.

- £100,000 funding from the Department for Communities and Local Government had been secured to create a 'skills exchange' programme- a private business to business forum, allowing businesses to exchange workers at threat of redundancy within Maidstone to prevent job losses.

Miss Lewis gave an example of the sort of work the team carried out. Miss Lewis told the committee about a company in Headcorn that refurbished and repainted aircraft. The company was finding it difficult to attract workers with the skills required. The Economic Development team had been assisting the company to recruit an apprentice by accessing funding and identifying training providers on their behalf.

Miss Lewis explained that there was a need to work with local education providers to ensure there was suitable provision for young people who did not attain GCSEs in Maths and English prior to leaving school. This was a significant barrier to these young people entering employment, or wanting to further improve their education or training.

Miss Lewis told the committee about the team's training portal project. This was a new website being launched that listed training providers and training courses in the area. This was being implemented alongside the Skills Exchange project.

In response to a question, Miss Lewis said that there were other cohorts of people who required support for skills and employability besides young people that were not in education employment or training. For example, people over 50 faced barriers to finding new jobs.

The committee enquired what, in Miss Lewis' opinion, was the biggest barrier to young people finding employment. Miss Lewis responded that lack of work experience tended to be a significant barrier for a large number of people. Work experience that had been offered at the council had been considered a success, and Miss Lewis was working on extending the work experience programme to external organisations.

The committee asked whether any of the efforts with engagement were focused on the public sector, as well as the private sector. Miss Lewis explained that the majority of the work around engagement had taken place in the private sector, but the public sector was an area that the team would consider for the future.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The Cabinet Member for Economic and Commercial Development be recommended to give further consideration to job opportunities and training needs in the wider public sector when developing the skills and employability work programme.
- 2) Miss Lewis be requested to provide an update on the Skills and Employability work programme to the appropriate committee in six months' time.

79. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

Sam Bailey, Research and Performance Officer, was invited to speak on the Future Work Programme item.

Mr Bailey asked the committee to confirm who would be available to attend the committee meeting on 23 December 2014. Councillors Butler, Cuming, Paterson, Powell and Mrs Wilson indicated they would be available for this meeting.

Mr Bailey asked the committee to confirm who would be available to visit Canterbury, in relation to the Twilight Economy review, on Monday 8 December. Councillors Butler, Cuming, Paterson and Mrs Wilson indicated they would be available for this trip.

Mr Bailey drew the committee's attention to the skills workshop, due to take place on Wednesday 3 December, on getting the most from meetings.

The committee discussed whether to undertake a review of Skills and Employability, following the item earlier on in the meeting. It was agreed that a working party should be set up to scope a possible review of skills and employability with relevant officers.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The proposed committee meeting go ahead as planned on 23 December 2014.
- 2) The visit to Canterbury go ahead, as planned.
- 3) A working party be set up, and a meeting arranged in the evening, in order to scope a possible review of Skills and Employability.

80. ENTERPRISE HUB

Karen Franek, Principal Economic Development Officer, was invited to speak on this item.

Miss Franek outlined the general principles of the proposal, as follows:

- This proposal consisted of using a council asset to deliver a smaller scale Enterprise Hub.
- The advantage of this approach was that the council would be able to test the idea on a small scale, and if successful it could be scaled up. It also had the advantage of using a council asset rather than taking the risk of acquiring an additional asset.
- The proposed opening for the smaller scale hub was July 2015.

The committee enquired whether Kent County Council (KCC) had shown any interest in this smaller hub. Miss Franek replied that KCC's flexible working fund had now closed.

The committee asked Miss Franek why there were so many workstations with desktop computers in the plans, when most people were likely to

work from their own devices. Miss Franek confirmed that the sketches were indicative only, and helped demonstrate likely space usage and income projections. Once the hub was open, those working there would be able to bring their own devices.

The committee, wishing to discuss the financial projections of the project contained in the exempt appendix in private:

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded for this item, set out in Part II of the Agenda, because of the likely disclosure of exempt information for the reasons specified having applied the Public Interest Test

Head of Schedule 12A and Brief Description

Exempt Appendix: Enterprise Hub

Paragraph 3: Financial/Business Affairs

During the item being taken in private, the following principles were discussed:

- Costs of the proposal;
- Hours of operation;
- Charging policies;
- The legal status of those becoming members of the Enterprise Hub;
- Possible exit strategies; and
- Impacts on staffing.

Having discussed the information in private, the committee:

RESOLVED: That the public be re-admitted to the meeting.

FURTHER RESOLVED: That

- 1) The Cabinet be recommended to approve the proposal for an Enterprise Hub, as set out in the exempt appendix in Part II of the agenda.
- 2) That Karen Franek be requested to bring an update report to the appropriate committee in six, and twelve, months after the Enterprise Hub has opened.
- 3) That Cabinet be recommended to pay particular attention to staffing needs due to the likelihood of high usage of the hub, and also in relation to the existing workloads of the department.

81. REVIEW OF BUSINESS CASES

Dawn Hudd, Head of Commercial and Economic Development, and Marcus Lawler, Commercial Projects Manager, were invited to speak on this item.

Mrs Hudd explained that the business cases for commercial projects, outlined in the exempt appendices, had been developed as a result of the commercialisation strategy. The profits delivered from these projects would be used to contribute towards the council's future financial sustainability through the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Mrs Hudd advised the committee that if they wished to discuss the individual commercial projects, these would have to be taken in private as they contained commercially sensitive information relating to the council and other enterprises.

The Committee, wishing to scrutinise the four draft business cases outlined in the exempt appendices in private:

RESOLVED: That the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business because of the likely disclosure of exempt information for the reasons specified having applied the Public Interest Test.

Head of Schedule 12A and Brief Description

Exempt Appendix: Review of Business Cases (Animal Cremation)
Reason: Paragraph 3- Financial/Business Affairs

Exempt Appendix: Review of Business Cases (A Sustainable Future for Mote Park)
Reason: Paragraph 3- Financial/Business Affairs

Exempt Appendix: Review of Business Cases (Investment in Local Business)
Reason: Paragraph 3-Financial/Business Affairs

Exempt Appendix: Review of Business Cases (Brunswick Street Regeneration)
Reason: Paragraph 3- Financial/Business Affairs

The committee discussed three of the business cases contained in the exempt appendices, the Chairman having declined to take the item relating to investment in local business until further advice was available. The committee asked questions about the specifics of each business case, including the financial, environmental and legal implications for each business case and provided recommendations to the relevant officers or cabinet members.

Once they had finished discussing the exempt information, it was:

RESOLVED: That the public be re-admitted to the meeting.

Councillor Hogg left the meeting during this item at 21:18.

82. LONG MEETING

During the item on Review of Business Cases, the committee considered whether to adjourn the meeting at 10.30pm or to continue until 11pm.

RESOLVED: That the meeting continue to 11p.m, if necessary.

83. DURATION OF MEETING

18:34 to 22:58