

Cabinet Information Bulletin



Paul Oldham — Corporate Services

Property & Procurement

The Council is continually on the lookout for savings through efficiency, innovation and smarter purchasing. Examples of such savings which have recently been achieved or are being implemented include:

Energy audits - with energy prices on the increase energy audits will be carried out by the Carbon Trust on appropriate buildings to highlight areas where energy usage can be reduced.

Voltage optimisation - following an investigation of electrical usage at King Street multi storey car park which suggests that savings in the order of 15%, or approximately £2500 per year, could be achieved through voltage optimisation, a quotation is awaited for the installation of equipment. A pay back period of two years is expected.

Waterless urinals - these are proposed to be introduced as a trial in Palace Avenue public conveniences, to see if there is a worthwhile water saving, and whether maintenance and cleaning costs can be reduced.

Automatic locking and movement actuated lighting in Public

Conveniences - these are currently being installed to reduce the cost of manually opening and closing public conveniences and to reduce energy costs. This was originally proposed through the Staff Innovation scheme.

Pool car - following the success of the first pool car, a dual fuel Toyota Prius funded by savings in casual and essential mileage claims, a second pool car, a Toyota Aygo, has recently been leased. The Aygo is a small petrol fuelled runabout to complement the larger Prius. These cars are two of the most efficient available in fuel consumption and CO2 emissions.

Bio-diesel - manufactured from waste vegetable oil or direct from crops will be introduced as a trial in some of Maidstone Borough Services vehicles as a replacement for diesel. Savings of around 15p per litre are expected. Success of the trial has the potential of extending the use of bio-diesel across the whole of the fleet, which uses approximately 150,000 litres per year.

Road sweepers - Two road sweepers were recently ordered from Marden firm Scarab Ltd, on behalf of Maidstone Borough Services. Negotiations on the

Special points of interest:

- Leader meets Chief Superintendent Hope – Pg 2
- Peace One Day event – Pg 2
- Visitor figures for Museum reach record high – Pg 4
- New fleet of Refuse Collection vehicles coming on stream – Pg 5
- Spotlight on Enforcement – Pg 6

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price of the vehicles resulted in a discount of £2500 being agreed.

Joint working - As the first phase of a joint working relationship with Ashford Borough Council we are examining our respective IT, leased car and advertising procurement arrangements for efficiencies through joint procurement. It is

hoped that the success of these will lead to a longer term relationship in the procurement of a wider range of goods and services. Joint working on procurement with Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is currently being discussed.



Eric Hotson – Leader of the Council

I had my first meeting with Chief Superintendent Hope to discuss policing in Maidstone. We discussed issues of mutual interest, including KCC Wardens and shift times, the Council's CCTV facility, partnership working and further review of policing numbers in the Town Centre. I am awaiting Mr Hope's recommendations in this regard. We will continue to have quarterly meetings.

If there are comments or concerns you wish me to convey to Mr Hope, please do not hesitate to advise me.

I have met with Officers of the Town Centre initiative. I was pleased to hear that, following internal review, they will endeavour to portray a higher profile.

I have been invited to speak at their next Board Meeting when I can, hopefully, hear from local businesses as to their criticisms and compliments of the Council. I will report to Members following the meeting.

Members will have been disappointed with the news that Maidstone Weald

Primary Care Trust's Board would not be progressing the development of a new health facility in Union Street to replace Maidstone Children's Centre and Foster Street Clinic. The proposal was linked to the Government's NHS Local Improvements Finance Trust (LIFT) initiative.

Hopefully, new funding sources will be found and the project resurrected at the earliest opportunity.

The Cabinet are in the initial stages of the budget process, whereby they look closely at their portfolio spending. Their proposals for efficiency savings and capital revenue spend will be formulated within the next few weeks in readiness for comment by Scrutiny Committees within the scheduled cycle of meetings.

We are all desperately waiting for the White Paper on Local Government – late again! However, the majority of District Councils are pushing forward with enhanced Two-Tier Working i.e. District and County. There could be substantial financial benefits for local government in Kent and the sooner the White Paper is issued, the better.

Allan Bradshaw — Community Services

Youth

A joint Youth Conference will be held at the end of the year, the Borough Council and KCC are formulating a joint youth agreement to deliver a better deal for young people. This will avoid duplication of effort and waste of money and should show where we can plug any gaps in services to our young people.

Maidstone Youth Forum are holding an event called PEACE ONE DAY on September 16th. There will be music, BMX events and skating in Whatman Park.

Operation 'Othello' has proved to be a great success. The borough council has funded low key police patrols during the summer holidays in the places where youngsters congregate.

This enables the police to talk to the young people on an informal basis, telling them how to keep out of trouble. Local residents are then reassured as any anti social behaviour can be curbed before it gets out of hand and becomes a problem.

It is easy to blame just the youngsters for all the alleged anti social behaviour that is certainly on the increase. I was most impressed by the 'Hotfoot' programme and saw for myself young people giving up their time and energies to work with the children. Some children were disabled and the teams took care of them and included them in the fun and games.

Health

Services for the Disabled

The map showing 'Access to the Town Centre' has been published, and is available for distribution. The Mobility Focus Group will continue to deal with problems faced by the disabled, living up to its title and improving their quality of life. Maidstone Weald and South West PCTs have announced plans - Turnaround Plans - to deliver more cost effective health services and to address the £9.6 million overspend. Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust have plans to develop an acute stroke unit to improve the specialist care service for patients. The business case will be heard in early September and will look at whether one or two acute stroke units are needed.

Stroke patients currently receive CT scans at both Maidstone and Kent & Sussex hospitals within 24 hours of being admitted as an emergency. There are two 64-slice CT scanners, one at each hospital which can provide a much more detailed diagnostic analysis than anything seen before.

As portfolio holder I will be monitoring all developments in this area and especially in the proposed dispersal of medical facilities from Maidstone.

Crime

A new post of Operational Controller is to be established within the Community Safety Scheme. The post holder will undertake a co-ordinating



Allan Bradshaw – Cont'd./ ...

Social Inclusion

Kent County Council and Maidstone Borough Council have agreed to develop a Joint Service Level Statement to fund MVB (formerly called Maidstone Volunteer Bureau) as the main Voluntary and Community Sector Infrastructure organisation for Maidstone Borough. Under Priority Theme 6: Sustainable Communities, Key Objective 28 includes the aim to "facilitate better voluntary and community sector working". This Service Level Statement supports that key objective.

The Council is funding the statement with £9000 approved from Local Authority Business Growth Initiative fund and with £14000 from existing role of all the partners and maintain a comprehensive database of anti-social behaviour and criminal

damage and will co-ordinate appropriate responses.

budgets for 2006/7. KCC is providing an additional £18500 from 2006/07. MVB is a registered charity and among other intentions it aims to provide trained staff to deliver high quality advice and support services to the Voluntary Community Services in the Borough of Maidstone.

Communications

Residents of the Borough must be kept aware of our actions as a Cabinet and also as the Council. Communication is vital, our residents must know where to come for information and for help. Information Technology is part of the process, Digital Maidstone will be encouraged to play an even greater role.



Brian Moss – Leisure and Culture

The 'BBC Walking with Dinosaurs' exhibition has proved a great success with children (and indeed their parents!). Sir David Attenborough visited to launch the exhibition and spent much time with children having his photograph taken and signing autographs. Over 1500 people attended on that day alone. Sir David was impressed with the Museum's range of important collections, and was particularly interested in the huge number of artefacts donated by Julius Brenchley, in whose travels he has a particular interest. When time permits he would like to visit the Museum again.



Sir David signing autographs

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The Museum has reached a record of 20,000 visitors in August, the highest since records began many years ago.



Deanna was the 20,000th visitor to the Museum in August. Deanna was visiting the Museum with her Grandma and said the Exhibition was "Fantastic, but not as good as DisneyWorld!" The photo above shows Deanna receiving a free gift from the Museum Shop.

The 'Maidstone Marker' part of the Elemental Art Project is in the design stage and will be erected in this financial year. Press publicity has been good and the response from the public encouraging. An artist and a design for the lighting project covering the Maidstone and St Peter's bridges have been chosen and public and staff consultation is under way. I believe this again is an exciting project with a design chosen complementing the 'Maidstone Marker'. It will be interactive! If you want to know more please speak to Sarah Robson and she will show you the design. This should be the first part of the project to be completed with a tight timescale. Our target is to switch on with the Christmas lights on 19th November.

The South Park play area implementation has been agreed and we are now in the consultation stage in respect of Giddyhorn Lane. The school summer holidays have seen a tremendous increase in the use of the play areas in particular Mote Park and Penenden Heath. we can count these areas a huge success - visitors have come from many towns in Kent.

The recent rains, whilst not popular, have benefited our parks, gardens and sports areas. Grass is greener but climate change is very much on our minds and the need to protect these areas in future.

A new tree planting plan has been drawn up, with planting being concentrated into manageable areas, rather than just spread all over the borough. This will allow better watering, establishment and growth and we confidently expect fewer trees to need replacement. Currently up to half newly planted trees can require replacement in the first 12 months.

Now that autumn approaches a new series of entertainment is programmed for the Hazlitt Theatre. A new computer system will allow on-line booking. This intimate venue is worthy of your support, there is something to cater for all tastes. The outdoor summer productions of 'Macbeth' and 'The importance of Being Ernest' were greatly appreciated and the weather was kind.



Daphne Parvin – Environment

Fly Tipping

In recent weeks we have had two successful cases of fly tipping at Court. In both of the cases the miscreants were fined and had costs awarded against them. These cases were brought to Court due to information provided by members of the public. This co-operation is much appreciated by the Council, helping to keep our streets and lanes free from dumped rubbish.

public asking to recycle as much as possible.

Maidstone Borough Act 2006

We have managed, with much hard work by Officers, to obtain an Act of Parliament giving the Council powers, amongst other things, to prohibit pedlars selling "hot dogs" etc. on the streets within the Borough without a Street Trading Licence issued by our Licensing Department.

Recycling



The Recycling Roadshow has been on its rounds in the last few weeks, visiting the Mall Chequers Centre, Tesco's, Chart Sutton and Morrisons. Interest was keen as always with the

Refuse Collections

Our new refuse collections contract is now up and running with SITA, making a seamless takeover. The new vehicles are now coming on stream. Look out for the new bright orange fleet.



Chris Garland – Regeneration

I have this month focussed on two key policy issues - they are enforcement; and the beginnings of the implementation of "Local Area Character Assessments" to be incorporated into the Local Development Framework and Core Strategy.

Enforcement

Enforcement has been a major issue with many members and reached a critical point with some 800 cases outstanding. In discussions with senior officers a number of strategies have been discussed and are to be implemented. They are:

- An increase in one extra staff, at neutral cost, by combining savings with environmental enforcement.
- Systems and processes reviewed to introduce a structure of timescale targets for cases - along the lines of planning applications.

- Improvement of management information systems to improve monitoring of cases.
- Gypsy Survey and issue of transit site(s) ongoing and due for first draft in September including presentation to members.
- Management of expectations for Parishes, Councillors and the public in terms of *what we can and cannot do within current government legislation.*

I am pleased to report that the outstanding 800 cases has declined significantly to around 500 cases and the direction of travel is clearly in a downward direction - I will seek to maintain this.

I am also looking into the possibility of an Enforcement Register for publication to members; the idea being that members will be able to keep tabs on enforcement

Chris Garland – Cont'd. / ...

generally and specifically with cases occurring in their own wards.

Local Area Character Assessments

Following on from Cllr. Fran Wilson's question at full council concerning 'Area Character Assessments' I have had discussions with officers and councillors about this issue.

It is clear to me that in order for Maidstone to maintain its general and individual character during the next twenty years clear policies must be derived to ensure that this is so. General principles for consideration and discussion include:

- Need to translate Planning Policy Statement 3 into 'area character assessments'.
- Local Character Assessments to be derived from the Core Strategy to set out the key characteristics of the built environment in an area in terms of the type & design of housing; its relationship to its site and to the street and general area.
- This should inform type of development, parking allocations, garden sizes and extensions.
- This should be cross-related to the landscape character assessment.

This would need to be formally drawn up as a **Supplementary Planning Document** upon which specific 'Area Action Plans' can be implemented.

These guiding principles will then enable us as a council to ensure that the programme of development, both in terms of house building and economic development, proceeds in the way we want it to proceed -

preserving the character of individual areas and also of Maidstone in general.

It is my intention that the design appraisal and design assessment policy making must form an early part of the Local Development Framework and plans will be implemented, with concomitant resources, to make this an early part of the work being undertaken for the LDF and Core Strategy.

Other Issues

Housing

I have requested officers to ensure that all housing enquiries dealt with at London House, whether pre-arranged or speculative, are carried out in one of the two offices at reception. I have visited London House reception and have noticed that the Duty Housing Officer often carries out interviews in full view and audibility of other members of the public. I believe this is unacceptable as this does not provide privacy for the interviewee when dealing with a sensitive and private matter such as housing.