

Parish Services Scheme

1. The Parish Services Scheme has the following aims:
 - To ensure equity of council tax funded service provision between non-parished and parished areas;
 - Accountability and Transparency;
 - To provide a mechanism to agree the local provision of services; and
 - To support provision of parish services subject to the financial constraints faced by Maidstone Borough Council.
2. Maidstone Borough Council (MBC) will provide funding via funding agreements for specific concurrent services provided by parishes in their area. Any service funded through this scheme will need to be assessed by applying the Test set out in point 4 below.
3. MBC will meet with representatives of the parishes on an annual basis to put in place a single funding agreement to cover multiple services. This agreement can be amended to include additional services or remove services at additional meetings with the parish. Funding agreements will run indefinitely, with the agreed services being amended when service provision changes at a parish or borough level.
4. In order to determine which services a parish provides that MBC will fund through this scheme a test will be applied to the services. That test is, would Maidstone Borough Council provide the service, or change its levels of existing service provision, in the theoretical absence of the parish council? If MBC would increase its service level or provide the service then funding will be provided to the parish for carrying out the service, if not then the service is being provided in addition to what MBC would provide and will need to be funded by the parish.
5. In order to provide clarity, MBC will not fund all activities or functions that fall under a priority service. It will only provide funding for those that it determines it would provide if the parish was not and this will be in accordance with its budget and service planning processes. For example, not all areas of open space will be funded by MBC, only specific funding for specific open spaces that MBC determines it would have provided will receive funding. The discretion on this is MBC's as the funding provider.
6. The amount of funding provided for each service will be equivalent to what MBC would spend on the service if it was providing it. In order to aid in this and maintain transparency, MBC will maintain a price list that will be revised every 3 years to reflect MBC's costs.
7. Funding will be provided for the agreed services in one lump sum that will not be ring-fenced to any particular service, but will need to be spent on the agreed services. In addition parishes will be able to carry over any underspend year on year in a capital pot to be spent on the agreed services.

8. The standards for the agreed services will be for parishes to determine and funding is not predicated on the basis of meeting any particular standard. However, MBC cannot absolve itself of certain responsibilities such as health and safety and those statutory minimums will have to be met.
9. At the end of each financial year parishes will be required to complete a return setting out how much of the funding provided has been spent on each service and whether any money has been carried over. Additionally, parishes will be required to state that they have met the statutory minimums for each service.
10. Parishes may from time to time be requested to provide financial information relating to scheme expenditure upon reasonable request. If they fail to do so then the next instalment of funding may be withheld.
11. In the unlikely event of expenditure of funding under this scheme on non-agreed services MBC reserves the right to recover the funding provided and may lead to the funding agreement being reviewed and the list of services amended or future funding provided adjusted.
12. Payments will be made to parishes in two instalments during the financial year on 31 May and 31 October.