

Interview Summary

Interview Schedule

Day One	15 November 2018
Day Two	22 November 2018
Day Three	29 November 2018

Interview Panel

Interview Panel Members	Councillor Fran Wilson
	Councillor Fay Gooch
	Councillor John Perry
	Councillor Marion Ring
	Councillor Denise Joy
Interview Panel Substitute Members	Councillor Steve McLoughlin
	Councillor Clive English

Interviewee Summary

Members Interviewed	17
Officers Interviewed	7

Interview Questions

Q1	Are there any ways that the Committee system could be improved at Maidstone?
Q2	Are there any ways that decision making processes could be adjusted to improve the speed and efficiency of the system?
Q3	Are there any ways that reports could be presented differently to Committees to enhance the decision making process?
Q4	What is your view on the decommissioning of the Democracy Committee and allocating its functions to other Committees? What are your reasons for this?
Q5	What is your view on the inclusion of “economic development” in the remit of the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee? What are your reasons for this?
Q6	Do you have any other comments about the balance of committee responsibilities?
Q7	What is the best way to avoid duplication of work across Committees?
Q8	How clearly do you understand Committee procedures?
Q9	What training could be provided to assist you in your role at Committee?
Q10	Do you have any other comments about the Committee system in Maidstone?
Supplementary questions were asked by the interview panel as appropriate.	

Theme	Comments
Committee Structures	<p>Structure options could be based on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 4 Objectives in the new Strategic Plan • The key services provided by Maidstone Borough Council • The responsibilities of the Heads of Service • Grouping similar skillsets/interests • The creation of a separate Economic Development Committee, with service committees shaped around this • Whole-system suggestions provided by Councillors as feedback <p>Key considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjusting the overall number of committees • Clarity of Terms of Reference (ToRs) • Equality of status and workload for all service committees • How CLT and JTB interact with the structures • Inclusion of functions currently within the remit of the Democracy Committee, Employment Committee and Urgency Committee • Inclusion of a committee with a focus on the ‘internal workings’ of the Council, potentially as a General Purposes Group • The use of Joint-Committees and Sub-Committees • Promotion/Inclusion of a Scrutiny function • Committee membership size • Frequency of committee meetings • Political balance of all committees
Committee Mechanics	<p>Terms of Reference</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that ToRs clearly state the remit of each Committee • Clarifying which Committee is the ‘final decision maker’ for various topics • Emphasis on a Committee’s function to provide clear direction to Officers through resolutions • Clear process and requirement for references between committees • Clear process and requirements for securing funding from the Policy and Resources Committee • Clear process and requirements for Extraordinary Committee meetings • Adapting Committee remits to reduce/remove the inclusion of items for noting <p>Cross-Committee Working</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An agreed process for ensuring that topics spanning more than one Committee are decided in an efficient manner and do not require discussion at both Committees • Promotion of guest speakers, both internally and externally, to enhance understanding of topics

	<p>Procedure Rules</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promotion/Clarification of the agenda item request functionality • Creation of a process to ensure that agenda item requests are traceable • Development of a process for Urgent Updates so Members have time to consider these in advance of Committee meetings • Potential inclusion of Visiting Members during a debate, rather than limiting contributions to the beginning of the item • Committee Members should, where possible, construct potential motions fully prior to debate • Clarity around the process and possible uses of adjournment and deferment • Front-loading agendas with noting items to ensure these are covered promptly and there is adequate time for debate on decision items • How to effectively resolve a procedural issue at committee <p>Agenda Publication and Distribution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that both electronic and paper agenda packs are available in good time – perhaps through tweaks to postage and courier run arrangements • Reinforcing the expectation that reports are to be read ahead of Committee, once distribution of paper copies is assessed • Encouraging Members to raise queries with Officers ahead of a Committee meeting so that a comprehensive answer can be provided for all Committee attendees
<p>Maidstone Borough Council Constitution</p>	<p>Development to the Constitution</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing duplication and inconsistencies in the content • A gap analysis of the current content • Creating a consistent page numbering system <p>Delegated Authority</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity regarding the scope and implementation of decisions that are made using delegated authority <p>Key considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that the Constitution is ‘reader friendly’
<p>Committee Chairmanship</p>	<p>Appointment of Chairmen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Chairman needs to be trusted by the whole committee, and should therefore be appointed on ‘who is the best person for the job’ • Chairmanship should be universally understood as a facilitation role, and not perceived as a Cabinet Member position • All members should be encouraged to consider being a Chairman to develop a breadth of potential candidates

	<p>Involvement in the Report Cycle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that Chairmen and Vice-Chairman are kept informed of the direction of reports throughout the report writing process • Clarifying the responsibility of Chairmen and Vice-Chairmen with regards to ensuring reports are suitable for Committee, recommendations are appropriate and relevant options have been fully explored • Quarterly Chairman Meetings could be increased in frequency, if individual Agenda Setting/Chairman Briefing meetings were stopped <p>Role at Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring that debate is constructive and focussed • Providing a consistent approach to the 'order of debate' • Ensuring that items for noting are not excessively debated or discussed • Clarification about the support, advice and guidance provided by Democratic Services or Legal Representative
<p>Committee Reports</p>	<p>Report Structure and Style</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specification of whether a report is for 'noting', 'discussion' or 'decision' on the front page of the report • Colour coding report pages so that 'noting' reports are easily identifiable, in a comparable process to that used for Part 2 pages • Potential re-location of the 'Risks and Cross-Cutting Issues' section • Reworked 'Risks and Cross-Cutting issues' to reflect the new Strategic Plan • A universal approach for completing the 'Risks and Cross Cutting Issues' section of reports • A common approach to appendices, ensuring that reports provide a concise summary of pertinent details • Increased use of visualisations to reduce the word count in reports • Identification/labelling of legislative requirements so Members are fully briefed on these requirements, and do not debate a topic that cannot be changed <p>Presentations at Committee</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clarity around the requirements for presentations, so that Officers provide a concise summary for the Committee • Pre-recording of presentations to be circulated in advance of meetings, which can be displayed on TV screens at the meeting
<p>Member Briefings</p>	<p>Scope and Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefings should be limited to a single complex topic, or should combine multiple topics, to streamline the amount that are arranged • Briefings should be used as an opportunity to discuss key strategic topics and not explore the minutiae of topics

<p>Training</p>	<p>Combined Officer-Member Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using Snap Committees as an induction meeting for new Members and Officers • ‘Role Playing’ training for Committee procedures • Public speaking • Adapting recommendations at Committee to form a resolution • Clarity around the roles of the Democratic Services Officer/Legal Support at Committee • A broad introduction to the Council, including functions and how decisions are made • A ‘tour’ of the things that each Committee is responsible for • Promotion of a culture of informal feedback to help with continuous development <p>Officer Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report writing • Report presentations <p>Member Training</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Induction - how committees work, committee and report timelines, division of responsibilities of committee members and officers, agenda setting approach, spend and scope of committees, delegated authority • Mentoring/Buddying • Acting as Substitute Members • Procedures – Decision Referral, How to use procedures to get the desired outcome at Committee, • Local Plan • Budgetary training • Key Officer contacts • Chairmanship <p>Written Information/Guidance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct at Committees • Committee Procedures and Key Phrases – such as encouraging Members to say ‘I move that...’ • An ‘easy-read’ and concise pack of key information and constitutional guidance for Members
<p>Information Sharing and Participation</p>	<p>Sharing Information with Members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing a list of upcoming agenda items via the Weekly Notice of Meetings <p>Promoting Public Involvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptation of how agendas and decisions are published to ensure for easy-access • Navigation facility within webcasts to allow viewers to skip to the relevant debate