

# Maidstone Borough Council

## Cabinet Bulletin – January 2013



Welcome to the January 2013 edition of the Cabinet Bulletin, in which Maidstone Borough Council's cabinet members provide details of the key issues going on in their areas of the council's work.

The council has 55 councillors who meet as a full council to set the budget and overall council policy and to set the level of Council Tax. It also chooses the Leader, who then selects the cabinet.

The cabinet, consisting of the Leader and cabinet members, takes decisions on council services. All decisions must be in line with the overall policy and budget frameworks set by the council.

A lot of work is going on both behind the scenes and in the public realm, and this bulletin gives an overview of what's going on to make Maidstone a great place to live, work and visit.

If you have any comments on any of the work going on, please contact the relevant cabinet member using the details on their page.



Cllr Chris Garland, Leader

# News from the Leader



To contact Cllr Chris Garland, Leader of the Council, email [christophergarland@maidstone.gov.uk](mailto:christophergarland@maidstone.gov.uk) or call 01622 721463 or 07766 343024

This year, in my role as Council Leader, I am focussing on three key areas of work:

- Finance and budget
- Place shaping – core strategy, planning and commercial projects
- Communities and the government's troubled families scheme

## Council Finance

We received confirmation from DCLG of the Maidstone council's allocation of resources from central government just before Christmas. It was initially good news in that we were allocated £150,000 more than we had anticipated. However, the allocations for 2014/15 were also confirmed which indicated that we would receive £141,000 less than we had planned for that financial year. On balance, therefore, the allocations of resources for DCLG were in line with our expectations. Our savings target of £1.26m remains for 2013/14. Again, as in previous years, we have sought savings from sharing of back office functions, outsourcing services and, where possible, prudent staff savings. We have also, as part of our overall strategic approach, begun to consider and implement commercial projects to generate additional revenue.

## Core Strategy

I have been on the air waves and in the news recently highlighting the potential need for more housing in the borough over and above our current target of 10,080 new homes. This is not a political desire but an evidenced based assessment. The government requires all Local Plans to be evidence based and Maidstone's population trend suggests a need for a further 6,000 homes; whether or not Maidstone can actually deliver that, when considering availability of sites and ecological and environmental constraints is unknown. Plans not only need to be evidence based but also deliverable; whilst population trends suggest this additional need, the availability of suitable sites coming forward following our recent call for sites may constrain our ability to deliver 6,000 additional new homes and lead to a lower housing figure.

## Tackling Economic Inequality

I attended a recent seminar on health inequalities; empirical evidence was presented that suggested, for any given level of intelligence at age 22 months, those in lower socio-economic backgrounds progress at a much slower rate than those in higher socio-economic groups and that if left unresolved inequalities in society would persist and worsen. Intervention at a later age beyond year 10 has proved ineffectual.

Whilst MBC will have a limited impact on helping early years' development and breaking this cycle, nonetheless I wish to do what we can with our partners, via the Locality Board, to confront this issue. We need to develop local approaches and solutions to this issue of early years' development and help break this cycle.

# News from Economic and Commercial Development



To contact Cllr Malcolm Greer, Cabinet Member for Economic and Commercial Development, email [malcolmgreer@maidstone.gov.uk](mailto:malcolmgreer@maidstone.gov.uk) or call 01634 862876 or 07890 174824



We hope that work on Phase 2 – the refurbishment of the **Lower High Street** will commence in March/April, with completion due in October 2013.

December and January at the **Hazlitt** have been dominated by festive fun. Cinderella has played to sell out audiences and we have received an unprecedented number of complimentary comments this year. We then opened our own Christmas musical – Christmas Comes but Once a Year, written by Martin Cleverley (youth and education manager) with music by Richard Healey. This is the 4<sup>th</sup> year that we have produced a show in the Exchange Studio, but the first year that we have created it in house.

The new extension to the **Museum** is an ongoing success story. Visitor numbers show an increase of 20% compared with the same period last year, and school visits are up 50% on last year.

We are working with ACE (Arts Council England) to engage further with schoolchildren across Kent, making them aware of their culture through museums. This initiative also engages with the British Museum and the Royal Opera House.

Work on KIMS (**Kent Institute of Medicine and Surgery**) is progressing to time and on budget, with a Topping Out Ceremony planned for February 11. This is a good source of local employment, with 544 multi discipline construction workers being inducted to date– 30% of whom live within a 10 mile radius of Maidstone. Construction work will be completed in early 2014, with commissioning leading to the hospital opening in Spring 2014. The hospital will then employ 450 multi discipline medical and ancillary workers. We are expecting a planning application for Phase 2 in Spring 2013 which, when completed, will generate over 3,000 jobs.

Dialogue with Solum, the agent for the redevelopment of **Maidstone East**, is ongoing and a public consultation is anticipated in February. Plans are ongoing for **Wrens Cross** with a planning application anticipated in early spring.

**Property Investment:** We are negotiating to bring 3 additional properties into our portfolio, which will be used for B&B and short term accommodation, thus reducing our B&B bill.

I am working with officers to **showcase Maidstone**, including a major Maidstone Show in the spring at Leeds Castle, having a stand at the Kent Property Market Launch in the autumn, and holding regular breakfast meetings with local businesses.

# News from Community and Leisure Services



To contact Cllr John A Wilson, Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services, email [johnawilson@maidstone.gov.uk](mailto:johnawilson@maidstone.gov.uk) or call 01622 720989

The work carried out in **Mote Park** to make it accessible through the year has been really successful, and visitor numbers are the highest they have been at this time of year for a long time. It's great to see so many families getting out into the park even though the ground away from the paths is so wet. The **volunteer team** plays a really important part in maintaining the park, organising and stewarding events and helping with administration. If anyone is interested in working with the volunteers please contact [alanfrith@maidstone.gov.uk](mailto:alanfrith@maidstone.gov.uk)

Stargazing Live, in partnership with the BBC, will take place on 26 January at Maidstone Leisure Centre from 6.30pm. One of the highlights of the night will be visiting one of two planetariums, which will take you on a journey through the stars. To keep up with everything that's happening in Mote Park join <http://www.facebook.com/motepark>.

The second phase of the new play area in **Cobtree Manor Park** is currently being installed. This will take about 10 weeks and will be based on the theme of the Cobtree Zoo which was part of the estate of Sir Garrard Tyrwhitt-Drake between 1934 and 1959. We received over 250 responses to the consultation for the **new play area on Shepway Green**. These are currently being reviewed and we are aiming for the new play area to be open in time for the summer holiday.

The operators of **Maidstone Leisure Centre**, Serco, took advantage of the quietest time of the year at the Leisure Centre in December to refurbish the Lagoon Pool. This work is now complete and the pool back up and running.

Six community projects received a total of £30,000 **Pride in Maidstone** funding in September to develop thriving neighbourhoods and develop innovative community projects.

I was pleased to introduce the Gateway as a collection point for the Kent Messenger's **"You Can Help"** campaign, collecting food and other items for the homeless over Christmas.

The 22<sup>nd</sup> annual **Youth Sport Achievement Awards** will be held on 25 January at Maidstone Leisure Centre and will feature special guest speakers Hugh Robertson MP, Minister for Sport and Tourism, and GB Paralympics wheelchair rugby captain Steve Brown.

A one-stop shop for victims of **domestic abuse**, offering free, confidential and impartial advice and support, has been set up in Maidstone. It takes place every Tuesday 9:30-11:30am at the Maidstone Community Support Centre in Marsham Street.

The next **Maidstone Older Person's Forum** will be on 30 January at the Hazlitt Arts Centre. Please contact Sue at Voluntary Action Maidstone on 01622 677337 for more details or to book a free space.

Funding for the popular **taxi marshal programme** has been extended in Maidstone Town Centre. Taxi marshals have helped thousands of revellers get home safely after a night out in the town centre, maintained order at taxi ranks and provided a visible reassurance for visitors.

# News from Planning, Transport and Development



To contact Cllr Stephen Paine, Cabinet Member for Planning, Transport & Development, email [stephenpaine@maidstone.gov.uk](mailto:stephenpaine@maidstone.gov.uk) or call 07906 271325

Our **Ancient Woodland** is a very special, valuable resource. We have worked with other districts for the first time and mapped our woodlands right down to areas below two hectares in size. The work will form part of our landscape character work and will help us secure its long-term future. You can read the review here:

<http://www.maidstone.gov.uk/PDF/Maidstone%20Ancient%20Woodland%20Inventory%20October%202012.pdf>

Members and officers from MBC and KCC met to discuss the **Integrated Transport Strategy** following its rejection by the Joint Transportation Board. Our group looked at the controversial St Andrew's Road gyratory proposal, which is vociferously opposed by local residents, as well as the Sutton Road Bus Lane idea. We looked at alternatives and other measures that could be used to improve public transport and reduce congestion. Demand management seems to be the key, but solutions are not easy to find. The group has resolved to meet again to continue discussions.

**Core Strategy:** Officers have analysed thousands of comments from the public. They are now amending policies and finalising housing allocations in the North West and South East. Officers met with a cross-party group to discuss possible changes and improvements in those areas. Further work is also being conducted to see how much additional housing is required on

top of our previous plans. The new SHLAA and SEDLAA (finishing at the end of January) will demonstrate how much more development we can accommodate sustainably.

I visited children at Loose Infant School in December to thank them for decorating our **Park and Ride** buses for Christmas. The kids did a wonderful job; the buses looked very bright and festive indeed. The future of Park and Ride is still uncertain. We've recovered a significant amount of cost this year by reducing bus frequency at quiet hours, but the loss is still great. Fewer people are using the service and we need to address this decline. This year, we have subsidised the service with profits generated in our Parking section – but we need a sustainable solution.

Cllr Brazier (KCC Member for Environment, Highways and Waste) and I have been putting an **electric car** through its paces after taking up an offer to test out a Peugeot Ion plug-in vehicle. MBC and KCC are looking for ways to encourage a shift to low-carbon motoring, including the provision of electric car charging points in the town centre.

**King Street Car Park** is due to be demolished shortly, but in the meantime we have decided to restrict the open hours to 7pm. Car park usage is very low between 7pm and midnight, so the impact on shoppers and employees should be minimal.

We have been looking at the feasibility of adding **cycle racks** to a number of small suburban shopping parades. This is part of a wider initiative to encourage people to ditch car travel for short journeys and cycle or walk instead.

# News from the Environment



To contact Cllr Marion Ring, Cabinet Member for Environment, email [marionring@maidstone.gov.uk](mailto:marionring@maidstone.gov.uk) or call 01622 686492 or 07890 174818.

The annual **Clean Sweep lunch** was held in December to thank community groups and volunteers who help clean up their local area. After a presentation about how the council is tackling litter and flytipping, volunteers had the chance to mingle and learn about what other groups were doing whilst enjoying a buffet lunch. This year over 60 people attended the lunch, making it one of the most successful yet.



The street cleaning department has a new **chewing gum removal machine** to help keep Maidstone's new granite surface in tip-top condition. The machine generates high pressure steam to remove the gum and was funded from littering fines.

Oakwood Park Grammar School was awarded a grant of £2000 towards the "eco classroom" project through the **Love Where You Learn** initiative. Funding from KCC, Kent Fire and Rescue and paid fines issued by the Environmental Enforcement team to litterers was used to provide the grant which supports the school's project to raise awareness of litter and other environmental issues in and around the school.

Irresponsible **dog owners** are set to face a £75 fine for allowing their dogs to enter signed exclusions zones or not cleaning up after their dogs. The introduction of 2 new Dog Control Orders under the **ResponsibleK9** (#RK9) initiative is part of the council's continued efforts to promote and support responsible dog owners.



A warning goes out to potential **fly tippers** after a local business owner was fined



£750 and ordered to pay £750 costs after being found guilty of fly tipping. The prosecution was brought when their trade waste was found deposited into a litter bin.

The annual **Christmas Market**, featuring Father and Mother Christmas, attracted around 50 traders on the last Tuesday before Christmas in a week which also saw us host the traditional Turkey Sale in the Agricultural Hall. The market was very well supported by the public and traders reported good sales which was a welcome boost at the end of what has been another challenging year for traders and retailers.

The **Pollution Control** team has been working closely with Public Health bodies to identify measures to improve air quality and provide the best outcomes for local communities.

The **Crematorium** celebrated its 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary on the 13 November and I was invited to cut the ribbon on the newly refurbished Book of Remembrance Hall. The Crematorium opened in the autumn of 1962 and almost 84,000 cremations have taken place at the site since then.

## News from Corporate Services



To contact Cllr Eric Hotson, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services, email [erichotson@maidstone.gov.uk](mailto:erichotson@maidstone.gov.uk) or call 01580 892312

I am looking forward to working with members on new governance arrangements following the council meeting on 21 January.

Officers have been working on a customer centricity project which will inform members about how the council will work with its customers in the future. I would appreciate members letting me know whether they will be available to attend a two hour briefing one afternoon in late January/early February.

Our new workforce strategy will be issued before the end of the municipal year.

**Property:** Work on roof repairs and the external cleaning and redecoration of the Town Hall has been deferred until the spring to avoid conflict with the scaffolding on an adjacent property.

An offer has been received for an affordable housing development at 26 Tonbridge Road; contracts are expected to be exchanged shortly. There have been some expressions of interest in the vacant area on the first floor of Maidstone House which will be followed up in the coming weeks; and demolition of the King Street multi-storey car park is expected to start in April.

There are now tenants in ten of the new "Start" units on Park Wood Industrial

Estate. Proposals to improve signage and landscaping will be put forward this month.

Cabinet has approved the council's procedures for managing the "Community Right to Bid".

**Facilities Management:** The Corporate Support and Facilities Management teams have been successfully combined with many of the staff now able to work in both areas.

Specifications for the cleaning contract and a print/post solution have been developed and tenders will be sought shortly. The print /post solution is expected to make significant savings.

**Procurement:** The procurement of the new waste collection contract, in conjunction with Swale, Ashford and KCC, has successfully concluded resulting in significant savings for all authorities.

Joint procurement, principally with Swale and Tunbridge Wells, is proceeding gradually. The provision of procurement services to other councils is a key element of the procurement team's business plan as it generates income and reduces costs for all involved.

The updated procurement strategy will be presented to the Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 5 February.

**Emergency Planning:** A series of half day training sessions for officers on emergency planning will take place in the coming months.

A review of the Major Emergency Plan and Flood Plan is underway, as well as a new directory of Rest Centres available to the council to provide temporary shelter to those made temporarily homeless or displaced during an incident.