

Cabinet Information Bulletin



Fran Wilson — Leader of the Council

Local Area Agreement and Partnership working

It is quite clear, after only a few weeks as the new Leader of the Council that one of the most important things I have to do is to be fully engaged with the County and other Kent Districts in producing the new Local Area Agreement.

Local Area Agreements are target driven contracts between Government and Local Government and, as such, have a growing impact on the funding and freedoms we receive. The current Local Area Agreement in Kent is administered by KCC through the Kent Partnership and will conclude in March 2008. The next LAA (or Kent Agreement 2 as it is known locally) should ideally be in place by 1st April 2008.

However until the publication of the Comprehensive Spending Review, new Local Area Agreements will not be able to be negotiated and finalized as no one will know what government targets will be expected. The Comprehensive Spending

Review has been delayed and it is expected there will be yet another delay due to the change in Prime Minister from Tony Blair to Gordon Brown.

So many other partnerships and funding streams hang on achieving an excellent Local Area Agreement. For example SEEDA has produced a consultation paper outlining that their preferred approach to future partnership working will be via the Local Area Agreements that will be in place across the Region.

We are therefore in a period of some uncertainty but I am spending a great deal of time in engaging with our partners at County and in the Kent Districts to do all I can to improve our partnership working at all levels and position the Borough to take full advantage of whatever finally emerges.

Climate Change

We cannot ignore the challenge of Climate Change, it is quite clear that it impacts upon everything we do. Because aspects of the work to combat or minimize the results of climate change

are apparent in every department and contained within each Cabinet Portfolio I have made the decision to be the Council's Climate Change Champion.

This council led the way with an excellent Scrutiny Report which was followed by the Primrose Promise made to our primary school children. This promised that Maidstone Borough Council would be carbon neutral by 2010. Now we must rise to another level of activity so that the Council becomes a role model for best practice in the wider community.

I would like to thank everyone who took part in the 'Lights Out London' evening. This was not a stunt but a serious attempt to try and raise awareness of how quite small efforts made by many individuals can make a big difference collectively in conserving energy.

Special points of interest:

- New Health Action Team - Pg 2
- New Improved Website on the way - Pg 3
- Waste Minimisation - Pg 4

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Mike FitzGerald – Community Services

The Community Services Portfolio has responsibility for Community Safety, Social Inclusion, Communications, Lifelong Learning, Healthy, and External Affairs including Parish Councils, Young People and Youth Forum. These are all vitally important activities that affect everyone's daily lives, prosperity and quality of life.

I have been responsible for some of these areas of work before but I am working hard to get up to speed with the changes in direction that have taken place and needs to take place, to reflect the changing pressures of the community and the current developments, funding streams and monitoring needed to successfully deliver for the people.

Those Councillors who I meet with at Scrutiny will know that from the programme I have highlighted against my areas of responsibility I will be prioritising the following key issues.

Urban Parishing

This is not a quick fix but to help take this forward and accelerate the process I am holding a meeting on the 26th July at Senacre Hall for Ward Members and interested parties. We will have input by both the Kent Association of Parish Councils and serving Parish Councillors while also providing an opportunity to raise questions in an open forum. I am keen to agree a possible spread of parishes to complete the likely mapping in the urban areas and to take forward say initially one or two proposals and to set a timetable for progress.

Communication Strategy

This is so important if we are to interact with the people and much has changed in the way people access information since this was last published. The communications team have started to review the best way forward to produce a best practice document which will include wide consultation and again a timetable for delivery

Health Action Team - Community Health Plan

A Health Action Team (HAT) for Maidstone is being set up to oversee and support the development of the Community Health Plan.

Performance indicator KPI 51 asks for - Development of a healthier communities plan with the Primary Care Trust. This will involve the wider partners necessary to deliver our ambitions. Work has already started on a policy document and although not a framework document it will be consulted on as appropriate. This I am also asking to be delivered against a timetable to help ensure there is no slippage.

Cabinet Member Decision

I have asked that my decision notices include a time and opportunity for Members to discuss with me any concerns they have.

Peter Hooper—Corporate Services

Website

Whilst in the past our website won awards, it is clear that what we currently have is now behind the times. With that in mind I asked Paul Taylor to set his team working on a new up to date website that Maidstone can be proud of. They have taken on the challenge and within a very short space of time have templates designed and plenty of ideas for the new site.

My objectives are to have a site that is:

- Easy to navigate
- Accessible to all
- Up to date in terms of what is available in technology

Some of the early work involved removing the out of date pages that littered the site. That done, a way to ensure that it will be quick and easy to check that the pages were kept up to date had to be found and this has now been achieved. Eventually the number of pages will be reduced to approximately 500 from the current number of 2500.

In addition:

The information Champions - those that have the task of updating the pages - are regularly reminded to review their pages to ensure their accuracy

There will be a root and branch review of the whole website

The website will be transferred to new servers to improve stability and enable additional features

Links and pages will be rationalised to improve navigation

There will be more interactive features to increase interest

The design will be updated to bring a new look and feel of the site to improve the visitor experience.

The aim is to have the new site going live by the end of October.

Office Move

After a few delays, work is now progressing on the building of the Maidstone Gateway and also the refurbishment of Stoneborough - soon to be Maidstone - House. The contractors fit out of the latter is progressing particularly well and we are on target for the building to be handed over to our fit out team in November. Despite the delays that have occurred we are still on target for a move in June 2008.





Tony Harwood — Environment

Environment Portfolio Priorities

The role of the Executive is to implement the Council's will through implementation of the Corporate Plan, 20/20 Vision and other key plans and strategies. I am therefore not going to set out a dramatic, ambitious but ultimately unachievable priority list for the Environment portfolio over the coming civic year, rather I will pledge to work alongside councillors, officers, KCC and other partners to help deliver good quality and cost effective core services to the residents of Maidstone.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on tonyharwood@maidstone.gov.uk if you have any ideas, big or small, on improving policy and working practices. I genuinely believe that Maidstone Borough Council's staff and councillors are second to none and I really would appreciate your advice in what will be a challenging year.

Waste Minimisation, Recycling and Refuse Collection:

There are many challenges ahead including the delivery of a financially viable, publicly acceptable and environmentally sustainable waste minimization, re-use, recycling and refuse collection service. I have facilitated a review of this service and hope to report back early to councillors and public with a draft scheme for discussion and hopefully refinement. I have already had a very positive engagement with KCC on this matter and hope for better and closer partnership working in the future. Domestic waste accounts for only some fifteen percent of overall refuse and I have engaged with the Kent Waste

Partnership to ensure greater attention to waste minimisation within the commercial sector. Indeed, I hope that we, MBC, will soon be able to announce an innovative new waste minimisation initiative in the Borough.

Clean and Tidy Borough:

I am determined that the public profile of the Clean and Tidy Borough campaign is raised over coming months and that littering and fly tipping is targeted with tough enforcement in both urban and rural areas. Securing fly tipping hot spots to un-authorized vehicular access will be a priority as will more and improved lasso multi-agency crackdowns against unauthorised movement of trade waste. The re-invigoration of MBC's popular Clean Sweep events is another key aim.

Transportation:

Maidstone Borough is faced with an inexorable rise in traffic levels and related pollution problems. I am working closely with officers, KCC and my Cabinet colleague Clive English (Regeneration) to ensure that the evolving Local Development Framework is informed by a progressive and forward looking transportation system which will provide realistic alternatives to the private car. Close working with the Highways Agency to ensure that the M20 becomes a better neighbour to Maidstone's residents has also been energized and I hope to see major improvements delivered in the coming year. The spectre of the



Tony Harwood — Cont'd./

designation of the entire urban area of Maidstone as an 'Air Quality Management Area' is now a real threat. Tackling this blight, with all its grim implications for human health, the environment and the wider economy, is a key priority. Park and Ride has served Maidstone well for some twenty years but I believe that the time is right to fundamentally review and update the service if optimum environmental and financial performance is to be maintained.

Parking Services:

Footway and verge parking has long been a problem in many residential neighbourhoods and it is my hope that enforcement by staff and contractors under the Road Traffic Act 1984 will prove effective. A pilot is due to take place in Park Wood ward and my thanks must go to the Environment and Leisure Scrutiny Committee (and especially Cllr. Daniel Moriarty) for their policy development role on this project. I look forward to a continuing close relationship with Overview and Scrutiny, which must maintain its high profile role as the policy development and conscience of the council.

Climate Change:

Maidstone Borough is in the frontline of climatic change in a UK context and is very vulnerable to drought, adverse weather events, flooding and habitat degradation. It is therefore crucial that Maidstone is at the forefront of innovation in adaptation and mitigation to climate change. I am delighted that the Leader of the Council Fran Wilson has taken on the mantle of Climate Change Champion and believe that this sets out a marker of intent that

environmental sustainability will be a defining principle informing all MBC policy and practice.

Crematorium and Burial Grounds:

A key challenge will be maintaining the superb staff and attractive settings and landscapes that cement the good reputation that makes MBC facilities the first choice as a resting place for their loved ones for bereaved families across Mid Kent. Dealing with the technical and air quality implications from mercury pollution will be a short term focus.

Smoking Ban starts on 1st July:

Smoking in enclosed public spaces will be banned in England from 1st July. The ban covers all enclosed public places including offices, factories, pubs and bars, but not outdoors or in private homes. It follows similar bans in the Eire, Scotland and Wales. Maidstone Borough Council has received £70,000 from the Department of Health to fund education and enforcement responsibilities related to the ban. I have ensured that the unprecedented media profile currently afforded to smoking by the ban is used to broadcast the range of safety messages related to smoking and safe disposal of cigarette butts. I have further made clear my expectation to see tough enforcement against smoking litter implemented from day one of the ban - in parallel with the provision of more cigarette butt receptacles.





Clive English – Regeneration

Planning Policy

Over the last few years Maidstone has been hindered by a lack of a robust Local Plan and inadequate supplementary planning documents and policies.

My priority over the coming year is to address the complex issues surrounding our weaknesses in this crucial area.

Work has already begun on this and over the next few months I intend to ensure that the LDF Core Strategy and supporting policies are fit for purpose.

The next few weeks will see a need to refine the Core Strategy to take account of public responses to the consultation and to ensure that it can properly shape the Boroughs development.

As importantly, I am determined to see that Development is accompanied by the appropriate infrastructure, both physical and Social.

In relation to SPDs there is a need to speed the delivery of documents on gypsy sites and air quality amongst others,

Area Character Assessments

These will be a long awaited and essential weapon in our armoury and I am pleased that we are approaching the launch of our 2 pilot studies in Loose/South Ward and the Buckland area of Bridge Ward. Making further rapid progress with character assessments will be a priority.

Conservation Area Appraisals

Progress is being made with the completion of draft appraisals for Detling and Linton.

Transportation

I am giving urgent consideration, along with my colleague Councillor Harwood, to the necessary actions to integrate improved transportation policies and operations, within the context of the LDF.

Development Control and Enforcement

The council can have as many policies as it likes and a perfect system for approving applications, but if enforcement falls down none of that matters.

I am building on my predecessors' work to tighten procedures, deal with staffing issues and structures, simplify advice to the public and improve the availability of information.

Housing

It is a priority to improve the quantity and quality of Affordable Housing. It is pleasing to note the upturn in completions of new units and I am recommending further schemes to Cabinet shortly.

It is also important to improve the quality and quantity of private rented housing and officers have been asked to explore some possible options for achieving progress in this area.

Dan Daley – Leisure and Culture

It was good to see the interest from young and old at the opening ceremonies to recognise the regeneration of South Park.

This excellent facility in Armstrong Road is home to so many opportunities for sport and relaxation - from skateboarding to serious Hockey and Tennis, to one of the best of children's play areas. The skateboard and BMX park is, according to one user who comes from London regularly to enjoy it, "one of the best he knows". To me it just looks impossible!!

Much time and energy (and, of course money) has gone into the project to bring this area to being the super facility it now is. A great vote of thanks is due to the staff who have overseen its creation and those who made sure the place was spick and span at the time of the official opening on June 23rd.

The weekend of June 23rd was also the time of the Maidstone Jazz Festival. In spite of the weather trying to put a brake on the rhythms, the groups played superbly and the town centre was the happier for the experience. It turned out to be very much applauded by the general public who stopped and enjoyed the various groups' programmes. A big vote of thanks to Town Centre Management and all the musicians for their time and enthusiasm.

Maidstone's Festival Month of Music and Dance is now well under way and

there are very many different opportunities to see and hear performances throughout the month.

I wonder why it is that this event, which is now in its 15th year, is not so well known as some of the other Festivals up and down the country? Please try to be at some of the performances before the Festival finishes at the end of July with the River Festival weekend.

One of my first actions since taking the Portfolio was in being able to bring to fruition a long-running saga which used to be called (unflatteringly) 'Area D' in Grove Green. This 18 acre site of original heath land is now preserved for generations to come and will now, by popular vote, be known as 'Weaving Heath'.

If you have not yet had an opportunity of visiting the site, please make your way to Shepherds Gate Drive and stand and enjoy the wonderful views across the open heath to the North Downs. Maidstone should be proud that this facility has been brought into being in these days of mass building. In spite of all the delays and disappointments of the past, the Heath will now give people of all ages an opportunity to enjoy the open space. More work is yet to be done to provide more facilities for young people - but that is in the pipeline and should not be long in coming.



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