
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the co-located Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Tunbridge Wells Town Hall, Mount Pleasant Road, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN1 1RS on Monday 12 January 2015 from 7.00pm – 8.10pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Sylvia Bennett, Andy Booth (Chairman), Mike Henderson, Peter Marchington, Ben Stokes and Ghlin Whelan.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Bob Pullen.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Lloyd Bowen, John Coulter, Mark Ellen and Mike Haywood.

418 MINUTES AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Minutes of the co-located meeting held at Tunbridge Wells Town Hall on 7 July 2014 were noted.

No interests were declared.

419 REPORT OF THE JOINT MID-KENT IMPROVEMENT PARTNERSHIP (MKIP) TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The Chairman of the Joint Task and Finish Group, Councillor Booth from Swale Borough Council, introduced the Group's report and recommendations. He began by reiterating the Group's remit, namely: to consider how the Mid-Kent Improvement Partnership's (MKIP) governance arrangements should be taken forward and how an MKIP communications plan should be developed.

Councillor Booth thanked his fellow members of the Task and Finish Group, as well as the Overview and Scrutiny support officers, service liaison officers and all those who had given up their time to meet with the Group and assist with the review.

Councillor Booth explained the methodology followed by the Group, with a number of question and answer sessions having taken place with: members of the MKIP Board; shared service managers; client heads of service from each of the authorities; heads of communication; S151 officers; monitoring officers; and external partners. He added that the Group had undertaken a detailed analysis of the governance arrangements for MKIP and questioned witnesses on the methods of communication currently used, internally and externally.

Councillor Booth advised that the key findings of the Group were set out in their report; these highlighted where it was felt that enhancements could be made to improve current procedures and to strengthen the practices of the Mid-Kent Improvement Partnership, within the two areas of the study, governance and communication.

The Chairman of the meeting, Councillor Rankin, invited other members of the Task and Finish Group to comment, before the discussion was opened up to wider debate.

Councillor Gooch (Maidstone BC) stressed how strong the collaboration had been amongst the three authorities in examining this issue. She added that this also reflected the view of the three council leaders in terms of the level of trust that existed.

Councillor Hills (Tunbridge Wells BC) endorsed that view. He advised that, initially, the MKIP joint delivery of services had been viewed with suspicion amongst some councillors in the three authorities; he added that, while that same attitude might continue, he was very hopeful that the findings and recommendations would help to build confidence in MKIP, if approved by the MKIP Board and respective Cabinets.

Councillor Woodward (Tunbridge Wells BC) fully supported the findings and recommendations of the Task and Finish Group, adding that it had been an interesting project and a good learning experience. However, he also voiced some outstanding concerns, caused by the complexity of the issue and the time pressures the Task and Finish Group had been required to operate under.

The Chairman then opened up the issue for general debate.

Councillor English (Maidstone BC) welcomed the report, which he felt was timely and well-written. He proposed the following additional recommendation, which was seconded by Councillor Wilson (Maidstone BC), which was of particular relevance to his authority at this stage, due to its plan to revert to a committee structure from May this year:

(n) That, given the change in governance arrangements at Maidstone BC from May 2015, consequential amendments be made to reflect that the Overview and Scrutiny function will be absorbed within the Policy and Resources and three other service committees.

In response to that proposal, Councillor Mrs Gooch, Chairman of Maidstone's Strategic Leadership and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, said she felt that this aspect would be covered by the proposed new Policy and Resources Committee anyway, adding that the necessary wording and procedure was currently being worked on. However, she acknowledged the importance of protecting the Overview and Scrutiny position under the new governance arrangements.

Councillor Henderson (Swale BC) advised that he had been a fully-active member of the Task and Finish Group throughout its work but that he was absent from the meeting at which the recommendations had been brought together. He proposed four minor amendments, as follows:

Recommendation (a) – Councillor Henderson stressed the importance of Overview and Scrutiny consideration before MKIP Board approval of any proposal;

Recommendation (e) – Councillor Henderson felt that this special meeting should resolve to recommend that the post of MKIP Programme Manager should be confirmed without delay.

(Subsequently, Councillor Henderson acknowledged that the wording “if the post is confirmed” within recommendation (e) actually referred to the Mid-Kent Services Director post, so he withdrew this proposed amendment.)

Recommendation (f) – Councillor Henderson proposed that the transfer of the management of the Planning Support and the Environmental Health shared services ‘under the Mid-Kent Services umbrella’ should be worded more strongly than “...early consideration should be given...”.

Recommendation (k) – Councillor Henderson proposed that the following should be added at the end of the sentence: “...before it happens”.

In summary, Councillor Henderson advised that the rationale behind his proposed amendments was both to strengthen and provide greater clarity to the recommendations.

The Chairman of the meeting invited the remaining members to comment on the proposed amendments. Councillor Hills felt that: (a) a certain point of agreement had to be reached first, which he believed should be at the MKIP Board; (e) there remained a need first of all to define more clearly the Programme Manager’s role; and (f) placing these two services within the Mid-Kent Services remit should be supported. Councillor Woodward added that perhaps in relation to (e) it could be phrased to recommend ‘the need to re-examine the role of the MKIP Programme Manager’.

In the wider discussion which followed, Councillor Wilson (Maidstone BC) voiced her appreciation for the quality of the Task and Finish Group’s report. She proposed one amendment, relating to recommendation (f) – the ‘early consideration’ of the transfer of the Planning Support and Environmental Health shared services – under which she suggested that this issue should be deferred until the next special meeting of the three Committees, due to take place in February. Councillor Wilson felt that, at that stage, Committee members would be able to consider MKIP Planning Support in the light of the independent audit undertaken from project implementation.

Councillor Booth (Swale BC), Chairman of the Task and Finish Group, felt that, based upon the very careful consideration of the wording amongst the Group’s members, the proposal set out under (e) was the best way forward. Councillor Rankin supported this view. Councillor English added that, while he would prefer deferral, he could accept the wording as set out.

Councillor Henderson responded to the points made, arising from his proposed amendments. On recommendation (f), he acknowledged that, provided there was only a short delay before a decision on bringing Planning Support (in particular) and Environmental Health within Mid-Kent Services, then he would withdraw his amendment. With recommendations (a) and (k), he still urged that these be strengthened.

The Chairman of the meeting, Councillor Rankin, summed up the discussion and proposed that recommendation (a) be amended to read:

“That opportunities for pre-scrutiny should be provided within existing governance arrangements at each authority prior to any new shared service proposals being considered at a tri-Cabinet meeting (i.e. after MKIP Board *consideration*, if not before).”

This was accepted by Councillor Henderson and supported by all present.

With recommendation (k), Councillor Rankin, having listened to the comments made, proposed that the existing wording should remain unaltered. This too was supported by all members present.

Councillor Mrs Gooch firmly believed that, with recommendation (k), the outcome was beneficial for all councillors, as all would have improved access to what was happening at both a Shared Service Board and MKIP Board level. Councillor Mrs Stockell (Maidstone BC) endorsed that point and signalled her full support for the set of recommendations, as an effective action plan.

The following represents the decision of the Swale members present. (Maidstone BC and Tunbridge Wells BC undertook their own, separate, voting processes.)

RESOLVED –

(1) That recommendation (a) be amended to read: That opportunities for pre-scrutiny should be provided within existing governance arrangements at each authority prior to any new shared service proposals being considered at a tri-Cabinet meeting (i.e. after MKIP Board consideration, if not before);

(2) That recommendations (a) (as amended) to (m) be approved;

(3) That an additional recommendation be added under the ‘governance’ section, namely:

(n) That, given the change in governance arrangements at Maidstone BC from May 2015, consequential amendments be made to reflect that the Overview and Scrutiny function will be absorbed within the Policy and Resources and three other service committees.

(4) That Swale Borough Council Cabinet be requested to consider and respond to the recommendations, which have arisen from this joint study of MKIP governance and communications.

The Chairman, Councillor Rankin, explained how it had been agreed to invite the Mid-Kent Services Director, Paul Taylor, to this meeting, in order for him to provide an update on the extent to which he was meeting his agreed objectives in the role.

Mrs Zena Cooke, the Director of Regeneration and Communities at Maidstone Borough Council, had also been invited to address the Committees, in her capacity as Chairman of the cross-authority project team, established to undertake an independent review of the Mid-Kent Services Director role. The project team's assessment criteria, against which it was possible to judge progress, had been appended to the agenda.

Mr Taylor presented his update report. He explained how, since his appointment in May 2014, he had focused on three elements: (a) consolidation; (b) delivery; and (c) planning for the future.

Mr Taylor explained that, with four out of five operational services, there were signed 'collaboration agreements' in place; he added that 'service level agreements' existed in three of the services out of five. With 'key performance indicators', it was noted that a shared set was in place and a reporting template had been produced which reflected each authority's service targets.

Mr Taylor also advised that a shared template had been put in place for service plans and that a shared risk log had been produced.

With service delivery, Mr Taylor advised members that all budgets were currently on target and agreed savings had been delivered. He drew attention to the recent completion of the Legal 'one team' under which staff were all now employed by Swale BC.

Mr Taylor also reported that the ICT partnership infrastructure was in place, which allowed staff to work across all three sites as well as from home.

For the future, Mr Taylor advised that a three-year business plan was being produced, to set out their strategic direction. He added that there would also be even greater engagement with staff, through team meetings, by providing a visible presence at each site and through partnership surveys.

Mrs Cooke provided her report. She explained how, following the decision to trial a single lead director model of operation for Mid-Kent Services for a period of twelve months, a project team had been asked to measure its effectiveness. Members were reminded that the project team consisted of: Phil Wilson, Chief Accountant (Swale BC); Jonathan MacDonald, Deputy Chief Executive (Tunbridge Wells BC) and herself. Mrs Cooke added that the assessment of the effectiveness of the role was based on the original assessment criteria; she added that the project team would provide recommendations for the MKIP Board to consider and discuss at its meeting in March 2015.

Mrs Cooke also advised that support for the project team continued to be provided by Val Green, Head of Organisational Development (Tunbridge Wells BC), Holly Goring, Policy and Performance Manager (Tunbridge Wells BC) and Jane Clarke, MKIP Programme Manager.

Mrs Cooke advised members that the project team's assessment would be based on evidence gathered during the period May 2014 to March 2015, adding that this would form the basis of the recommendations to the MKIP Board.

The Chairman of the meeting, Councillor Rankin, invited members to comment on the update report.

Councillor Woodward (Tunbridge Wells BC) drew attention to recommendation (e) under the previous item. This stated: "that the role of the MKIP Programme Manager should be re-examined and aligned with the reporting arrangements arising from the appointment of a Mid Kent Services Director (if the post is confirmed).

Councillor Woodward felt the future role of the MKIP Programme Manager remained an element of uncertainty, as there was no specific mention of 'change-related directions', which would have a direct impact. This, he thought, might have some implications for the Director role, a point which Mr Taylor acknowledged.

Councillor Henderson (Swale BC) asked Mr Taylor whether he felt his objectives could still be achieved if the Planning Support service were brought under Mid-Kent Services. Mr Taylor advised that, should that decision be made, the objectives set out for him would still be achieved within the same timeframe.

Councillor Mrs Gooch (Maidstone BC) pressed for Mr Taylor's views on the proposal to bring Planning Support services within the remit of Mid-Kent Services. Mr Taylor endorsed the proposal on operational grounds, adding that he would welcome the opportunity to be responsible for this area.

In summing up, Councillor Rankin reminded members that the work would continue, with a further meeting being arranged for the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees to meet to consider an independent audit of the project implementation of MKIP Planning Support.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the members of all three authorities thank Mr Taylor and Mrs Cooke for their reports; and***
- (2) That the reassurance provided by the Mid-Kent Services Director over achieving his objectives for the year be noted.***

Chairman

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