

Medway Council
Meeting of Medway Council
Thursday, 25 November 2010
7.15pm to 11.34pm

Record of the meeting

Subject to approval as an accurate record by the Council

Present: The Mayor (Councillor Brake)
The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Hewett)
Councillors Andrews, Avey, Baker, Kenneth Bamber,
Janice Bamber, Bhutia, Bowler, Burt, Carr, Rodney Chambers,
Mrs Diane Chambers, Chitty, Clarke, Crack, Doe, Etheridge,
Filmer, Gilry, Godwin, Griffin, Griffiths, Gulvin, Harriott, Haydock,
Hicks, Hubbard, Jarrett, Jones, Juby, Sheila Kearney,
Stephen Kearney, Kemp, Mackinlay, Maisey, Maple, Mason,
Murray, O'Brien, Reckless, Royle, Ruparel, Shaw, Smith,
Stamp, Sutton, Wicks and Wildey

In Attendance: Rose Collinson, Director of Children and Adults
Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and
Culture
Neil Davies, Chief Executive
Mick Hayward, Chief Finance Officer
Richard Hicks, Assistant Director, Customer First, Leisure,
Culture, Democracy and Governance
Julie Keith, Head of Democratic Services
Jane Ringham, Head of Elections and Member Services
Caroline Salisbury, Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator
Deborah Upton, Assistant Director, Housing and Corporate
Services/Monitoring Officer

546 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 14 October 2010 was agreed and signed by the Mayor as correct.

The Mayor also announced that Mr Bryan Fowler had requested that it was clarified that when he asked the Leader a question at the previous meeting on 14 October 2010, the Leader had mentioned that Mr Fowler had been in attendance at the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 September 2010, when in fact he had not been there when the specific item had been discussed.

547 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Brice, Bright, Chishti, Tony Goulden, Val Goulden and Hunter.

548 Declarations of interest

Councillor Griffiths declared a personal interest in any discussion that may take place during the course of the meeting with reference to NHS Medway because he was a Non-Executive Director of the Trust.

Councillor Mackinlay declared a personal interest in any discussion that may take place with reference to the Interface Land (located in Chatham Dockyard) referred to in the Cabinet minutes, as he was a Trustee of the Chatham Historic Dockyard.

Councillor Murray declared a personal interest in agenda item 10(E) (Members' questions) as she was employed by Mid Kent College but added that she would take part in the discussions as it was a national issue.

Councillor Shaw declared a personal interest in agenda item 14 (Referral from Hearing Sub-Committee of Standards Committee) as she had been a member of the Sub-Committee.

The Monitoring Officer reported that a personal interest for all Members of the Council would be recorded with reference to agenda item 14 (Referral from Hearing Sub-Committee of Standards Committee) as the item related to the appointment of a particular Councillor to Committees and other bodies on which the Council was represented.

549 Mayor's announcements

The Mayor welcomed Councillor John Jones, the new Member for River ward, to his first meeting.

The Mayor advised of the death of Ex-Councillor Cyril Button last week. He paid tribute to Mr Button and Members recorded their sincere condolences to his family at this sad time. Councillor Filmer also paid tribute to Mr Button who had been a family friend.

The Mayor advised that he would like to write on behalf of the Council to congratulate Prince William and Kate Middleton on their recent engagement and this was agreed.

The Mayor reminded Members that he was due to hold a charity quiz evening at Rochester Cruising Club on 24 January. Tickets were available from the Mayor's office.

The Mayor welcomed Tony Dance, one of the Independent members of the Standards Committee to the meeting and reminded Members that Council

Council, 25 November 2010

meetings were now recorded to assist in producing an accurate record of supplementary questions and answers to questions.

550 Leader's announcements

There were none.

551 Petitions

There were none.

552 Public questions

(A) Peter Cook of Gillingham asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Councillor Jarrett, the following question:

"With regards to city status, how much will it cost to 're-label' Medway's schools, hospitals, police and so on including stationery, labels, websites and all media that will need to change if you succeed?"

Councillor Jarrett responded that the Council did not intend to re-label schools, hospitals and the police as a result of a successful bid for City Status. Medway had a strong case for City Status and he was very hopeful that the bid would be successful.

Peter Cook asked a supplementary question suggesting that the Council should reinstate the City of Rochester upon Medway, a long established brand with a much greater set of possibilities of gaining approval by Her Majesty the Queen?

Councillor Jarrett responded that the people of Rainham, Gillingham, Chatham and Strood and probably most of those living in Rochester, would not agree with this suggestion of the questioner and neither did he.

(B) Naushabah Khan of Gillingham asked the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, Councillor Wicks, the following question:

"Can the Portfolio Holder tell me how many students in Medway have received the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) since it was introduced by the Labour government?"

Councillor Wicks responded that the Educational Maintenance Allowance was administered by the Young Person's Learning Agency, not by the Council, and that agency is sponsored by the Department for Education.

He reported that this agency held figures from 2007 for Medway as follows:

2007/08	2,851
2008/09	3,038
2009/10	3,134.

(C) John Ward of Chatham asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Councillor Jarrett, the following question:

“Although we share a dislike of in-year budget cuts, most people now realise that this was unavoidable.

Medway Council's Conservative Administration has stated all along that front line services would be the last to be considered for cuts, so would the Portfolio Holder kindly place on public record the items of unnecessary expenditure that have been removed in order that front line services can be maintained?”

Councillor Jarrett responded by agreeing that in-year cuts were unavoidable as a result of the shambles that the last government had made of the economy but he did agree that the scale and depth of the cuts which had to be endured in Medway were unavoidable but he had placed that on record before and he would do so again.

Councillor Jarrett stated that the regular monitoring reports to Cabinet identified in some detail the savings that the Council had agreed in response to the in-year funding reductions. Those reports also showed how the Council was performing in achieving the savings although there would inevitably be some shortfall given the need to consult staff and the costs associated with some staff redundancies and retirements.

He reported that the Council had sought to minimise the impact of the reductions in terms of front line services but where the funding was quite specific to activity then it had taken a view that the activity will cease together with the funding stream. He made particular reference to time limited funding for extended schools activities and the national strategy support for schools.

Mr Ward then asked a supplementary question. He stated that Medway Council currently employed several types of jobs identified as unnecessary by the Tax Payers' Alliance including Diversity Officers, Client Change Officers, European Officers and Political Assistants. There were 85 other councils that did not have these posts at all and, as they cost Medway tax payers a sixth of a million pounds a year, he asked when these particular jobs would be scrapped.

Councillor Jarrett responded that fortunately, elected representatives ran Medway Council and not the Tax Payers' Alliance. All posts were under scrutiny at the present time during the construction of the budget for 2011/12. However, Councillor Jarrett stated that this administration fully supported the posts of Political Assistants, as they add a great deal of value to the Council's democratic process, as well as the support that they gave to the political groups across the Council. Councillor Jarrett stated that there would not be, in the 2011/12 proposals made in February 2011, any proposal to reduce the number of Political Assistants. What had happened over the last year was to ensure that those posts are balanced and filled on a pro-rata basis.

(D) Robert Heathfield of Chatham asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following question:

In Strood the former Foyer flats on Canal Road, owned by MOAT Housing Association, are less than fifteen years old yet they have not been occupied for several years. Given Medway's ever lengthening housing needs list – only likely to increase exponentially given recent Coalition cuts – what is the Council's Housing Department doing to help MOAT make the flats available for residence to needy local families and individuals?

Councillor Doe responded that the empty property was the Crescent Foyer building which was owned by Moat Housing and consisted of twenty four x 1 bedroom units and was a supported housing scheme that was decommissioned several years ago, as the building was not fit for purpose.

A number of alternative uses had been considered for the building by Moat Homes, including shared ownership, and none could be found that enabled it to stay open in its current form. The reasons for this were that the building was poorly designed and not fit for purpose and on a site that had since been designated by the Environment Agency as being one at a high risk of flooding.

Councillor Doe stated this was why the Council had been working closely with Moat to overcome the issue of the building remaining empty, and Moat had advised that it would be demolishing the property at the beginning of December. The Council would continue to work closely with Moat and use the maximum pressure to ensure that the site is left in a decent and reasonable condition.

Mr Heathfield asked if it was true, that due to an inability to repay the housing grant necessary to sell on the building, a property which would be able to site several potential homes would now be demolished at significant cost. He asked if it would have been more economically viable to renovate the building for future use and asked what the Council was doing to resolve this nonsense?

Councillor Doe replied that the place was not fit for purpose and had to come down.

(E) Bryan Fowler of Chatham asked the Chairman of the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Bright, the following question:

“At the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 September, Members of the Conservative party, appeared to be acting in unison, by opposing the request of my Ward Councillor and your fellow Committee Member, that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee write to the owners of the Pentagon Centre about the matter of the refurbishment of the Shopping Centre toilets for which a public grant of over £200,000 was made.

The Pentagon Shopping Centre management did not replace the old, cracked washbasins and have levied a charge of 20p for each shopper using them.

Council, 25 November 2010

The decision not to write to the Pentagon Centre management indicates that the majority of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are content with the quality of work performed and approve of £200,000 of public money being spent without any negotiated outcomes from the funders' point of view. Could the Chairman of the Committee comment on his Committee's reasons for doing what it did?"

The Mayor responded that unfortunately Councillor Bright, the Chairman of that particular Overview and Scrutiny Committee, was not at the meeting. However Councillor Hicks, the Vice-Chairman, would reply on his behalf.

Mr Fowler advised that he wished to withdraw his question as he thought the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be there to answer and that he wished to ask the question at a later stage.

(F) Tracy Coutts of Chatham asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Rodney Chambers, the following question:

"With regard to bids for Medway to gain City Status, excluding the proposed bid which Medway Council is currently pursuing, could the Leader of the Council kindly confirm whether Medway Council has made previous applications or bids for City status for Medway, and if so the number of those previous applications or bids and the costs of such."

The Leader responded that there had previously been two bids for City Status, in 2000 and 2002. In all cases the cost of the bid was kept to the minimum, as was the case now. The bid activity was carried out as an addition to existing work projects, without resorting to taking on extra staff. Although he was unable to give a detailed answer, the individual costs of both of these bids came to less than £20,000 each.

Tracy Coutts asked a supplementary question expressing the view that as evidenced by these previous bids and by the fact that a City of Medway logo had been produced by the Council and was currently in use, it appeared that the decision to pursue City Status for Medway had already been made. She asked the Leader of the Council to state his opinion as to the relevance of public consultation and tonight's Members' debate on this matter. Additionally, if Medway bids but does not officially get City Status in 2012, would the Council continue to use City of Medway in its advertising, even though Medway wouldn't officially be a city?

The Leader responded that on the basis of previous city status bids, although they were unsuccessful, the Council had been told that it had come to the attention of central government, just by making the previous city status bids and that this had helped to achieve other resources that were bid for at the same time. So, even by making a city status bid, Medway could be put 'on the map'. It had certainly happened previously and it would certainly happen now.

(G) William Knott of Rochester asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Rodney Chambers, the following question:

“The Council enjoys very fine toilets in the St Georges Centre, and in the municipal buildings at Gun Wharf, both free at the point of use. Does the Council Leader think that the same facilities should apply to the Council Tax payers in Chatham and Strood?”

The Leader responded that there were free toilets available in both Strood and Chatham town centres. In Chatham there were free toilets in the library, as well as in some shops, supermarkets, fast food restaurants and cafes. A full list of these was recently published in a local newspaper. In addition, the toilets in the Brook Theatre were generally open to the public during the hours it is 'open' and at the Central Theatre when the Box Office is open but not when there were shows or rehearsals taking place due to security issues.

The Leader reported that the public toilets at the new bus station would also be free of charge and that in Strood, there were also free toilets in the local supermarkets, fast food restaurants and cafes.

William Knott asked if the Council was proud that Chatham and Strood were the only towns in Kent that had no public toilets in their High Streets?

The Leader replied that he had nothing further to add.

(H) Peter Cook of Gillingham asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Rodney Chambers, the following question:

“Can you explain why you have attempted to censor public opinion by blocking comments on websites, monopolising the local media, in my opinion, with brainwashing adverts and advertorial giving misleading figures to the public regards City Status?”

The Leader responded that the Council had not censored public opinion in the ways that had been suggested.

He reported that the City of Medway campaign website allows visitors to leave comments or feedback about the city status bid. 99 comments had been made since it launched. Of these 99 comments, 33 had been submitted by Mr Cook. No comments have ever been blocked.

The Leader said the Council cannot and did not seek to control the local media. Media organisations formed their own independent points of view on issues that were important to their readers.

Mr Cook asked if Councillor Chambers or Jarrett would like to answer either of the questions he had posed before?

The Leader replied that he had nothing further to add.

Council, 25 November 2010

(I) Robert Heathfield of Chatham asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following question:

“Will the Portfolio Holder join with me in thanking Greenspaces Council officers and the local friends group for making such a success of the newly installed children’s play equipment in Strood’s Broomhill? A £50,000 Community Spaces Big Lottery grant, secured by Friends of Broomhill, a sum matching funding monies from the last Government’s Playbuilder grant, was spent on providing facilities for older children, and providing two viewing platforms for the benefit of all park users.”

Councillor Doe replied that he would be delighted to. This was a great example of the Council working together with Friends Groups to bring investment into a local park and the Council was also hoping this would help to secure a Green Flag award in 2011.

Mr Heathfield asked the following supplementary question. The current coalition government had slashed numerous budgets including year 2 of the £1.1 million Playbuilder grant awarded to Medway. He added that he had observed that next week’s Cabinet papers had cut the number of year 2 sites from 11 to 9 and that the funding was now no longer ringfenced to the Playbuilder scheme. What guarantee could be given that the proposed new children’s play facilities would be built and the money not siphoned off elsewhere?

Councillor Doe responded that the decision still had to formally go to Cabinet but that he personally hoped that the recommendation would be that all the money was utilised through the programme. As to the reference to two site being lost, under the Members’ priority programme one of those sites had already had investment declared for it and would go ahead from the Council’s own resources. The second of those, which was The Strand, was part of a much larger programme which would be brought forward for various aspects of that site, so if recommended by Cabinet, there would be a very good value for money programme.

(J) William Knott of Rochester asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Rodney Chambers, the following question:

There are no signs in Chatham High Street to indicate the whereabouts of toilets. Would the Council consider erecting signs to indicate the presence of toilets in the Central Theatre, the Brook Theatre, and the library? This would help to save Council Tax payers the cost of using the Pentagon toilets.

The Leader advised that he was pleased to say that signs would be erected once the new bus station had been completed indicating the new public toilet within these facilities and at the library.

Mr Knott, as his supplementary question, said that he would like to repeat the last question. Is the Council prepared to indicate the presence of toilets in the Central Theatre, the Brook Theatre and the library?

Council, 25 November 2010

The Leader replied that he had nothing further to add.

553 Leader's report

Discussion:

Members debated the Leader's report, which contained the following issues:

- Local Enterprise Partnership
- City Status
- Visit by HMS Chatham
- Medway's calendar of events.

The Council agreed to place on record its thanks to Geoff Waters, Youth Manager – Operations, as he approached retirement.

554 Overview and scrutiny activity

Members received and debated a report on overview and scrutiny activities. The following issues were discussed during the debate:

- The effectiveness and future of Partners and Communities Together (PACTs) in Medway
- Highway Winter Service – Task Group review
- Sure Start Children's Centre
- Carer's Services

555 Members' questions

(A) Councillor Crack asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor Rodney Chambers, the following:

"Does Councillor Chambers think that the Queen will be pleased with the fact that this Council has put a new Medway City logo on street waste collection carts before she has given her approval?"

The Leader responded that the logo referred to was a promotional logo that formed part of the campaign to raise awareness of the bid to secure city status for Medway in 2012. Parallels could be drawn with the London 2012 bid which used a promotional logo before securing the Olympic Games. He reported that Veolia, as an enthusiastic supporter of the bid, did add the logo to a small number of waste collection carts, which was at no cost to the Council. However, when put on the carts it should have been made clear that this was in support of the bid and not a re-branding exercise.

(B) Councillor Stephen Kearney asked the Chairman of the Planning Committee, Councillor Mrs Diane Chambers, the following:

"Will Councillor Mrs Chambers give her view on the impact on good governance of the recent withdrawal of the facility for Councillors to acquire and take away copies of large plans from the planning department?"

Council, 25 November 2010

Up until now this facility has enabled Councillors, either as Members of the Planning Committee or as Ward Councillors wishing to address the Committee, to deal with residents' enquiries and/or understand in some detail the issues relating to planning applications ahead of decision making by the Committee?"

Councillor Mrs Diane Chambers responded that the Planning Department had not, as was suggested, withdrawn any facility. Where there was a spare set of plans with an application the Department was still happy to provide that set for Councillors to use. If there was not a spare set, then again, as in the past, the planning office was happy to lend that set of plans to Members to use on a temporary basis provided that they were returned within 48 hours so that they were available for general public inspection at Gun Wharf. The issue though was where an application was submitted electronically and in that circumstance there was only one hard copy set of plans and they were with the officer's file.

Councillor Mrs Chambers stated that over the years, the Development Management team had consistently introduced ways of working more efficiently and providing savings. This included the greater use of electronic communication, as encouraged by past and present governments. There was a cost of printing further copies of plans and in these times of tight financial budgets it was not considered prudent to print out copies which were all available to view on the internet and at the offices at Gun Wharf.

(C) Councillor Bowler asked the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, the following:

"Last winter people in Rochester East ward were very inconvenienced by the low priority the Council allocates to some of our roads when it comes to gritting during snowy weather. This particularly affected those living on Cecil Road, Onslow Road, St William's Way and the side roads associated with them. Can the Portfolio Holder confirm that the Council will support residents this winter and give these areas a higher priority for gritting?"

Councillor Filmer advised that the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee had asked for a report on last year's winter service. The committee had set up a task group to review the Winter Service Policy and the Winter Service Plan. The task group, which included Councillor Godwin, was established in June 2010 and their report was presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 November.

Various changes were made, firstly to the policy, which in turn impacted on the winter service plan. All of the task group's recommendations were agreed for implementation by the Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture under his delegated authority.

The main changes were around the level of salt stocks at Volker Highways depot out at Cliffe where 3,200 tons were stored and that had been increased to 5,000 tons. An additional stock of 50 tons was being held at Gillingham to enable the Veolia cleaning staff to clear footpaths and car parks in the main town centre.

Council, 25 November 2010

Councillor Filmer reported that the Council would also produce an information leaflet and there would also be an article in Medway Matters advising residents what they can do regarding clearing snow and ice from the pavements.

In response to Councillor Bowler's specific question, Councillor Filmer stated that these roads were already either on the primary or secondary salting routes. The primary route network was maintained all last winter. However, due to the national salt restrictions, the delivery to Medway of replacement salt did not take place and officers had to restrict the salting of roads to purely the primary routes, which affected all of Onslow Road and parts of Cecil Road which are on the secondary route.

However, the Council now had additional salt stock in Medway and also had access to an external store of salt that the contractors held in London, should the weather conditions be bad like last year, which was probably the worst for 25 years.

The side roads of Howard Avenue, Arthur Road, May Road and Highbank were all included on the Third Level salting routes and would normally be salted during severe weather conditions. For the same reasons as previously, the Council was unable to treat these as well as they would have liked to. However, this winter with the additional salt stocks, it is hoped that will improve.

Councillor Filmer stated that following the problems experienced in Onslow Road last year, a new salt bin had been installed at the junction with Amherst Road which could be used to help keep the road open during any future snow events.

Councillor Bowler advised that he was grateful for the information, specifically for some of those roads being on second priority routes. He stated that Onslow Road was one of the steepest roads in the Medway Towns and there had been a bad accident on it last year, fortunately no-one was badly injured. The Ward Councillors had been approached by residents specifically in Onslow Road and Cecil Road who would be willing, if appropriate, to have salt bins placed on their front yards. This would hopefully help with some of the theft problems across the Medway Towns last year and he asked Councillor Filmer to look into this possibility.

Councillor Filmer responded that he would look into that and respond to Councillor Bowler shortly.

(D) Councillor Murray asked the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, the following:

"The site of the old police station in Rochester is now vacant following demolition of the building. The site is up for sale by the police estates department and is opposite another unfinished building site at the back of Restoration House making the area look very bleak especially given its proximity to the Rochester Conservation Area.

Council, 25 November 2010

Would the Portfolio Holder be willing to work with police estates to turn the police station site into a temporary green area to enable local residents and schools to enjoy an amenity and help to prevent vandalism and anti-social behaviour in an area that has very few Council facilities?"

Councillor Doe advised that the police had outline planning permission to build on the former Police Station site. They had recently been on the market to sell the site and there had been several expressions of interest. There had also been pre-application discussions between the Planning Department and an interested party and a fresh planning application was expected to be submitted in the New Year. Given the applications expected, this alternative proposal for the site would not be appropriate in the circumstances.

Councillor Murray advised that she was aware of that situation but the last valuation that the Police Estates had for the site was very low indeed and the fact that somebody was asking for planning permission did not necessarily mean that there would be a successful sale. She asked if the Portfolio Holder agreed that by refusing to take any action he was taking a very short term view of how the Council could support the recovery of the local economy?

Councillor Doe replied that he had made contact with the Police Estates Department, which had advised earlier today that the sale of the site had been agreed and a new planning application would be submitted shortly. This should proceed fairly rapidly after Christmas so there would be no merit in turning this space into recreation space for a short period of time when there were no additional resources unavailable. The police had also indicated that they had no interest in such a proposal.

(E) Councillor Murray asked the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, Councillor Wicks, the following:

"Can the Portfolio Holder for education tell me what he is doing to support students in Medway who are facing additional debt and reduced access to further and higher education following the planned rise in university tuition fees and the abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance?"

Councillor Wicks responded that neither of the changes referred to had been introduced yet. An increase in tuition fees had been proposed for September 2012 but these were subject to a government white paper and a future vote in parliament. As far as the Education Maintenance Allowance was concerned, it was not being abolished but being replaced with an enhanced learner support fund grant and that would be paid directly to schools themselves, and to the colleges, who would then make the funds available to students that needed it. They would know best where to direct that funding.

He stated that the Council continues to work with schools to assist all students and there would be guidance made available to them when the details of the new schemes were known.

Council, 25 November 2010

Councillor Murray replied that before asking the supplementary question she would like to advise that the EMA had been abolished and the last application would be permitted in December this year leaving people on a two-year programme this year without funding for the second year of their programme. The Learner Support Fund was going to enjoy a very small rise, that was a means tested fund and one of the criteria was that students could not use it to help with travel, a main part of using the EMA.

Councillor Murray then asked if Councillor Wicks acknowledged that the cuts in tuition fees and the abolition of the EMA would undermine both the advances that young people could make in Medway and the regeneration of the towns, that had been started with the establishment of the universities, following huge investment under the last government.

Councillor Wicks responded that some of the points raised by Councillor Murray were factually incorrect. The fact was that three quarters of the people who received EMA themselves said they did not absolutely need it and therefore he did not agree with Councillor Murray's statement.

Councillor Wicks stated that the EMA had been replaced by a different scheme which would be targeted for those who were in particular need through the schools. The fact that the Council was in the situation where it had to make changes, is due to the financial retrenchment that had got to be made at national level and of course it was going to have effect at local level. The Council would support the youngsters, because it had amongst other things, the Youth Trust which was the vehicle for giving guidance to young people.

556 City Status

Discussion:

This report sought Council's support for a bid for City Status for Medway to be submitted once the competition was announced as part of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 2012.

The Leader, supported by Councillor Jarrett, proposed the recommendations set out in the report.

Councillor Griffiths, supported by Councillor Godwin, moved an amendment to the recommendations as follows:

"This Council:

1. supports a bid for city status for Medway being made once the competition is announced;
2. agrees that corporate sponsorship should be sought to both demonstrate support for the bid from business and to avoid additional council expenditure in these austere times;

Council, 25 November 2010

3. believes that the current re-branding as a city, and the comments of the Deputy Leader of the Council that “we can call ourselves what we like” are likely to undermine a successful campaign, and therefore calls on officers to explore what can be done to mitigate these ‘own goals’.

Following the debate and with the agreement of the Council, Councillor Griffiths agreed to alter the wording of his amendment to remove paragraph 3 and add the word “seek” in paragraph 2.

Decision:

The Council agreed:

- (a) to support a bid for city status for Medway being made once the competition is announced;
- (b) that corporate sponsorship should be sought to both demonstrate support for the bid from business and seek to avoid additional council expenditure in these austere times.

557 Petitions and E-Petitions

Discussion:

This report asked the Council to consider and adopt a new petitions scheme for inclusion in the Council’s Constitution following the withdrawal of statutory guidance. The report provided an update on the new duty for petitions and e-petitions and set out the recommendations from Cabinet.

The Leader, supported by Councillor Jarrett, moved the recommendations set out in the report at paragraph 7.1, with the addition that a valid postal address would also be required from people signing e-petitions, as well as a postcode.

Decision:

The Council agreed:

- (a) to adopt the petitions scheme attached at Appendix B for inclusion in the Council’s Constitution (as Appendix A to the Council rules in Chapter 4) with the addition of a valid postal address being required from people signing e-petitions;
- (b) that authority is delegated to the Monitoring Officer to determine when it would not be appropriate for a petition to be handled under the petitions scheme because it is deemed to be vexatious, abusive, otherwise inappropriate or excluded from the scheme, taking into account relevant law and statutory guidance;
- (c) that authority is delegated to the Assistant Director Customer First, Leisure, Culture, Democracy and Governance, in consultation with the

Council, 25 November 2010

Leader of the Council, to make minor amendments to the provisions in the scheme relating to e-petitioning if required once the system is in place to ensure the scheme accurately reflects the technical aspects of the IT arrangements;

- (d) to approve the changes required to the Constitution as a consequence of introduction of a petitions scheme as set out in Appendix C.

558 Allocation of Seats on Committees

Discussion:

The report set out the position regarding the allocation of seats on Committees following a by-election in River Ward on 21 October 2010.

Councillor Kenneth Bamber, supported by Councillor Doe, proposed the recommendations set out in the report.

Decision:

The Council agreed:

- (a) the allocation of seats on committees to political groups as set out in paragraphs 2.2 and 3.4 of the report;
- (b) the continued establishment of an ad hoc Committee to consider the removal of Council appointed school governors as and when necessary and to waive political balance in respect of this Committee;
- (c) that the membership of Committees should be adjusted accordingly in accordance with the wishes of the party groups.

559 Referral from Hearings Sub-Committee of Standards Committee

Discussion:

The report advised Council of a recommendation from the Hearings Sub-Committee of the Standards Committee relating to the appointment of Councillor Brice to Committees and other bodies on which the Council is represented.

Councillor Kenneth Bamber, supported by Councillor Doe, moved the recommendation of the Hearings Sub-Committee.

Decision:

The Council agreed that Councillor Brice should not be appointed to any committees, or to substitute on any committees, or to represent the Council in any way.

560 Medway Renaissance - Post March 2011

Discussion:

This report advised of the cessation of funding by the Homes and Communities Agency from 31 March 2011 and sought authorisation for the Director to consider and determine all consultation responses received in respect of the affected posts and to determine the residual functions from the Medway Renaissance Unit.

The Leader, supported by Councillor Jarrett, proposed the recommendations in the report, adding that it was regrettable to have to make this decision and it in no way reflected upon the work of the Medway Renaissance Unit.

Decision:

The Council authorised the Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture to:

- (a) consider and determine all consultation responses received in respect of the affected posts within the Medway Renaissance Unit and the post identified within the Business Support Department;
- (b) determine the residual functions from the Medway Renaissance Unit.

561 Review of Polling Districts and Polling Places

Discussion:

This report informed Council of the changes required to polling districts in the light of issues arising since the General Election in May 2010 and updated Members on the allocation of polling stations by the Returning Officer.

The Leader, supported by Councillor Jarrett, proposed the recommendation of the working group set out in paragraph 5.1 and 5.2 of the report.

Decision:

The Council:

- (a) approved the scheme of Polling Districts and Polling Places as set out in Appendix 1 of the report at item 16 of the agenda, including designating each Polling District as the Polling Place in respect of Parliamentary elections and to designate the Parliamentary Polling Districts and Polling Places as the Polling Districts and Polling Places for Local Government elections;
- (b) noted the designation of polling stations recommended by the Returning Officer as set out in Appendix 2 to the report at item 16 of the agenda.

562 Brompton Academy and Former Temple School Site Property Issues

Discussion:

This report sought approval to declare part of Temple School site surplus and to add an item to the capital programme.

Councillor Wicks, supported by Councillor Wildey, moved the recommendations set out in paragraph 8 of the report.

Decision:

The Council:

- (a) declared that part of the Temple school site shown edged black on site plan Appendix B of item 17 of the agenda is surplus and available for disposal;
- (b) recommended that a scheme is included in the capital programme, funded from the proceeds of the sale of the surplus Temple site, to fund the variation of the restrictive covenant on the land at New Brompton College and to facilitate the moves of the current occupants of Youth House to their new locations. In the first instance this is a sum of £350,000 for the adaptations to the Temple buildings with a further report on the proposal for relocating the Bradfields post-16 unit.

563 Treasury Management Strategy - Mid Year report

Discussion:

This report set out the mid-year review of the Treasury Management Strategy 2010/11.

Councillor Jarrett, supported by the Leader, proposed that Council should agree the report.

Decision:

The Council considered and agreed the report.

564 Motions

(A) Councillor Godwin, supported by Councillor Jones, submitted the following:

“Council notes that:

- (i) the Department of Transport financial settlement confirmed an increase of the cap on regulated rail fares to an average annual increase of RPI +3% for three years from January 2012;

Council, 25 November 2010

- (ii) on government figures this means fares will increase in real terms by 10% over the next four years;
- (iii) the Campaign for Better Transport has calculated that a 2015 season ticket from Gillingham to London Cannon Street will cost £4,995, an increase of £1,200;
- (iv) Kent Conservatives, Medway Fare's Fair and Kent Conservative MPs opposed a RPI + 3% increase in train fares prior to May 2010;
- (v) centralised setting of train fares was not a manifesto commitment of either the Conservative or Liberal Democrat parties in the General Election.

Council believes:

- (i) the Government has imposed upon South Eastern Trains a condition to run a subsidy-free network by 2014, resulting in an average increase in fares of 3% above the rate of inflation;
- (ii) this Government's imposition of year-on-year rail fare increases for Kent's commuters threatens to damage the Kent economy, deterring visitors, commuters and businesses from coming here;
- (iii) the increase in fares will discourage people from using public transport, impacting negatively both on its potential revenues, and on environmental targets;
- (iv) that Conservatives have targeted the squeezed middle class commuter and have undertaken a u-turn on promises made regarding fare increases set for an entire Parliamentary term.

Council resolves:

- (i) to urge all group leaders to write to the Secretary of State for Transport to highlight the major concerns of residents that the train fare increases are excessive and urging him to limit the increase to RPI;
- (ii) to write to each of the three Medway MPs and urge them to vote against any legislation that will seek to impose this fares increase."

Councillor O'Brien, supported by Councillor Filmer, proposed an amendment that the following part of the motion should be removed: "That Conservatives have targeted the squeezed middleclass commuter and have undertaken a u-turn on promises made regarding fare increases set for an entire Parliamentary term."

With the agreement of the Council, under Council rule 10.4, Councillor Godwin agreed to alter his motion to remove the second paragraph (iv).

Council, 25 November 2010

Decision:

The Council agreed to note that:

- (i) the Department of Transport financial settlement confirmed an increase of the cap on regulated rail fares to an average annual increase of RPI +3% for three years from January 2012;
- (ii) on government figures this means fares will increase in real terms by 10% over the next four years;
- (iii) the Campaign for Better Transport has calculated that a 2015 season ticket from Gillingham to London Cannon Street will cost £4,995, an increase of £1,200;
- (iv) Kent Conservatives, Medway Fare's Fair and Kent Conservative MPs opposed a RPI + 3% increase in train fares prior to May 2010;
- (v) centralised setting of train fares was not a manifesto commitment of either the Conservative or Liberal Democrat parties in the General Election.

The Council agreed to believe:

- (i) the Government has imposed upon South Eastern Trains a condition to run a subsidy-free network by 2014, resulting in an average increase in fares of 3% above the rate of inflation;
- (ii) this Government's imposition of year-on-year rail fare increases for Kent's commuters threatens to damage the Kent economy, deterring visitors, commuters and businesses from coming here;
- (iii) the increase in fares will discourage people from using public transport, impacting negatively both on its potential revenues, and on environmental targets;

The Council agreed to resolve:

- (i) to urge all group leaders to write to the Secretary of State for Transport to highlight the major concerns of residents that the train fare increases are excessive and urging him to limit the increase to RPI;
- (ii) to write to each of the three Medway MPs and urge them to vote against any legislation that will seek to impose this fares increase.

(B) Councillor Maple, supported by Councillor Murray, submitted the following:

"Council notes that:

Council, 25 November 2010

- (i) the coalition government proposes to scrap the current cap on tuition fees of £3,290 allowing universities to charge up to three times as much with fees of £9,000 per annum;
- (ii) the proposals will leave a 21 year-old student from Medway with a debt of up to £27,000, on leaving a 3 year course, a medical student with debts of up to £50,000;
- (iii) the Liberal Democrats proposed the abolition of fees during the General Election in 2010 and signed a pledge, led by NUS, to vote against an increase in student fees;
- (iv) the coalition government proposes to scrap the Educational Maintenance Allowance paid to low income further education students.

Council believes:

- (i) this move will target those from disadvantaged backgrounds and deter poorer students from applying to University, making the higher education system inaccessible for many;
- (ii) students who do choose university will be forced to choose the cheapest course not the one that is best for them, poorer students will be priced out of better quality courses and institutions;
- (iii) in a period of welfare, public sector and job cuts, education and training opportunities for young people are vital to reduce unemployment. The proposed increase in tuition fees, coupled with the proposed cuts to the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and cuts to the education budget, will undermine the life chances of Medway's young people, and thus the future prosperity of Medway;
- (iv) the Liberal Democrats have betrayed voters and have undertaken a u-turn on tuition fees, which will leave future generations of students with unprecedented levels of debt.

Council resolves:

- (i) to urge all group leaders to write to Vince Cable, the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, and Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education, and highlight the negative impact these proposals will have on the Universities at Medway, as well as future generations of students from the area - especially pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- (ii) to write to each of the three Medway MPs and urge them to vote against any legislation that will increase tuition fees."

Council, 25 November 2010

Councillor Wicks, supported by Councillor Wildey, proposed an amendment that the motion be replaced with:

“Council notes that:

- (i) the coalition government proposes to scrap the current cap on tuition fees of £3,290 allowing universities to charge up to three times as much with fees of £9,000 per annum;
- (ii) the proposals will leave a 21 year-old student from Medway with a debt of up to £27,000, on leaving a 3 year course, a medical student with debts of up to £50,000;
- (iii) the Liberal Democrats proposed the abolition of fees during the General Election in 2010 and signed a pledge, led by NUS, to vote against an increase in student fees;
- (iv) the coalition government proposes to scrap the Educational Maintenance Allowance paid to low income further education students.

Council resolves:

- (i) to urge all group leaders to write to Vince Cable, the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, and Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education, and highlight the negative impact these proposals will have on the Universities at Medway, as well as future generations of students from the area - especially pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- (ii) to write to each of the three Medway MPs and urge them to vote against any legislation that will increase tuition fees excessively.”

On being put to the vote the amendment was carried and became the substantive motion.

On being put to the vote the new substantive motion was carried and agreed.

Decision:

The Council noted that:

- (i) the coalition government proposed to scrap the current cap on tuition fees of £3,290 allowing universities to charge up to three times as much with fees of £9,000 per annum;
- (ii) the proposals would leave a 21 year-old student from Medway with a debt of up to £27,000, on leaving a 3 year course, a medical student with debts of up to £50,000;

Council, 25 November 2010

- (iii) the Liberal Democrats proposed the abolition of fees during the General Election in 2010 and signed a pledge, led by NUS, to vote against an increase in student fees;
- (iv) the coalition government proposed to scrap the Educational Maintenance Allowance paid to low income further education students.

Council resolved:

- (i) to urge all group leaders to write to Vince Cable, the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, and Michael Gove, the Secretary of State for Education, and highlight the negative impact these proposals will have on the Universities at Medway, as well as future generations of students from the area - especially pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- (ii) to write to each of the three Medway MPs and urge them to vote against any legislation that will increase tuition fees excessively.

(C) Councillor Godwin, supported by Councillor Gilry, submitted the following:

“Council notes that:

the Standards Committee advised that Councillor Nick Brice should stand down for bringing the Council into disrepute following a police caution for kerb-crawling.

Council believes:

Councillor Nick Brice has brought the Council into disrepute, and should therefore stand down.

Council resolves:

to call on Councillor Nick Brice to resign his seat. “

In accordance with rule 11.4 of the Council’s constitution at the request of six Members, a vote on the proposed motion was recorded as follows:

For: Councillors Andrews, Avey, Janice Bamber, Kenneth Bamber, Bowler, Brake, Bhutia, Burt, Carr, Mrs Diane Chambers, Rodney Chambers, Chitty, Clarke, Crack, Doe, Etheridge, Filmer, Gilry, Godwin, Griffin, Griffiths, Gulvin, Harriott, Mrs Haydock, Hewett, Hicks, Hubbard, Jarrett, Jones, Juby, Sheila Kearney, Stephen Kearney, Kemp, Mackinlay, Maisey, Maple, Mason, Murray, O’Brien, Reckless, Royle, Mrs Shaw, Smith, Stamp, Sutton, Wicks and Wildey. Total – 47

Against: none.

Council, 25 November 2010

Abstain: Councillor Baker. Total – 1.

Decision:

The Council noted that the Standards Committee advised that Councillor Nick Brice should stand down for bringing the Council into disrepute following a police caution for kerb-crawling.

The Council believes Councillor Nick Brice has brought the Council into disrepute, and should therefore stand down.

The Council resolved to call on Councillor Nick Brice to resign his seat.

Mayor

Date:

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