

**REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
29 JULY 2008**

WORK PROGRAMME

Report from: Neil Davies, Chief Executive
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Summary

The item advises the Committee of the current work programme and enables adjustments to be made in light of latest priorities, issues and circumstances. It gives Members the opportunity to shape and direct the Committee's activities over the year.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

1.1 Under Chapter 4 – Rules, paragraph 22.1 (v) General terms of reference, each overview and scrutiny committee has the responsibility for setting its own work programme.

2. Background

2.1 Appendix 1 to this report sets out the existing work programme for the Committee.

3. Agenda planning meeting

3.1 Members will be aware that Overview and Scrutiny Committees hold agenda planning meetings on a regular basis. These give officers greater guidance on information Members wish them to provide when scrutinising an issue. However, no agenda planning meeting took place for this meeting, as the Waste Contract Task Group met on 21 July 2008 to discuss the matters being reported.

4 Future work programme

4.1 Cabinet's Forward Plan

Additional items have been added to the Forward Plan which fall within the remit of this committee. These are listed below:

Museum Acquisition and Disposal Policy 2008-2012 2 Sept. 2008
Under the National Accreditation Scheme for Museums and Galleries (Phase 3) the museum service must have a comprehensive written Acquisition and Disposal Policy.

Award of contract: Medway Park 23 September 2008
This report presents proposals for the award of a contract at Gateway 3 of the procurement process (contract approval).

4.2 Referral from Rural Liaison Committee

4.2.1 At its meeting on 27 May 2008, the Rural Liaison Committee considered an item from Hoo St. Werburgh Parish Council concerning an incident on 26 February 2008, that had resulted in the loss of gas supply to the Peninsula following a burst water main. The Parish Council was unhappy about certain aspects of the response, in particular the way the distribution of heating and cooking equipment was undertaken by Southern Gas Networks. The parish council expected Medway Council to manage or monitor the response from the utility companies, police, social services and charitable organisations.

4.2.2 The Parish Council believed that notification to all the affected households, including those physically unable to fend for themselves, could have been better organised and that there was no real method of distinguishing who needed electric heaters. No checks or records appeared to be made of who was getting what assistance. The Parish Council also highlighted issues regarding the water supply to Hoo which had caused the gas supply outage.

4.2.3 The Rural Liaison Committee agreed the following decision:

“The concerns of Hoo St Werburgh Parish Council in respect of the recent incident which had resulted in the loss of gas supply in Hoo and the water supply problems in Hoo generally be referred to the Council's Regeneration and Development Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a request that these issues be included on that Committee's Work Programme.”

Director's comments

4.2.4 Course of events: initial notification of the problem in Hoo came via a media enquiry to the council's media team. The Emergency Planning team were informed and within 40 minutes of initial contact were in discussion with the on-site co-ordinator for Southern Gas Networks and the incident coordinator for Southern Water.

- 4.2.5 The incident happened at around 6.45am when Southern Water attended a reported leak that was caused by a burst to their three inch main. The technician smelt gas and it was subsequently discovered that the burst water main had caused the neighbouring gas main to rupture. This in turn led to water flooding the gas pipes and the loss of gas supply to 1,053 homes.
- 4.2.6 Southern Gas Networks set up a control and information point in a car park on Hoo from where they distributed heating and cooking equipment to anyone who said they needed it. This response was a normal part of the company's operational response to a supply disruption.
- 4.2.7 Medway Council supported Southern Gas Networks by providing four Community Safety Officers to assist with knocking on doors and the posting of leaflets. This support lasted for most of the week. In addition to this, the officers also delivered heating and cooking equipment (supplied by Southern Gas Networks) to some residents who were unable to get to the distribution point.
- 4.2.8 Social Care officers were contacted and identified clients in the Hoo area and notified the appropriate care service providers. Contact was made with Medway Primary Care Trust to advise them of the problem. A press release asking anybody that needed assistance during the outage should contact the council. No such calls were received. The emergency planning team also contacted the police and the fire service to make them aware of the incident.
- 4.2.9 The incident lasted over a week although for some residents this was longer. The delay in reinstating supply was due to the safety procedures necessary to reconnect supplies. It was necessary for a corgi registered gas fitter to go into every home affected in order to safely reconnect the gas supply. .
- 4.2.10 During this time the emergency planning team visited the control and information point set up by Southern Gas Networks to keep up to date on the situation. The team also provided, via housing contacts, details for corgi gas fitters to assist speeding up the reconnection process.
- 4.2.11 Post incident review: Two debrief meetings were held. The first was an internal one with the Assistant Director, Social care and attended by officers from that service, a community safety officer and the Resilience Manager from emergency planning. Whilst in general the meeting agreed that the distribution of the heating and cooking equipment could have been managed in a different way, it accepted that the hand out to all who asked had to be balanced against the need to distribute the equipment quickly, given that by that time it was late afternoon, early evening.
- 4.2.12 The second de-brief was held between the Emergency planning team, Southern Gas Networks and Southern Water on 16 April 2008. At that meeting it was recognised that a better understanding between the organisations involved may have improved the distribution process.

The companies agreed that they had not expected people to ask for equipment they did not need, nor for it to be stolen whilst they were there.

4.2.13 The emergency planning team in conjunction with colleagues from Kent County Council's emergency planning team organised a multi-agency meeting in May 2008. The purpose of the meeting was to share the lessons learnt from the Hoo incident across a wider network of Utility companies to promote a greater understanding across the county should this type of incident occur again.

4.2.14 The committee is requested to consider whether it wishes to consider this matter further.

4.3 Update on task groups

Disabled Parking Bays task group

The task group will hold its first meeting on Monday, 28 July and report back to the committee when it has completed its work.

Lower Thames Crossing task group

The Department for Transport has a study underway into the options available for a Lower Thames crossing but the results are not expected to be published until the end of 2008. Therefore it would be premature to consider forming a task group until the various options are published, as these will form the basis and dictate the remit of the group's work. However, a briefing note can be provided on this matter later in the year.

4.4 Local Area Agreements (LAA) – the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on 'Local Area Agreements update and next steps' and agreed the decision detailed below. Therefore a report has been included on the work programme for consideration on 28 August 2008:

- (a) The report was referred to the other overview and scrutiny committees drawing attention to Appendix 1 which maps the LAA targets across each committee;
- (b) It was agreed that each overview and scrutiny committee should consider the action plans attached to relevant LAA targets and identify areas where further member development is required so that this committee can commission and coordinate a further programme of briefing sessions to which all councillors are invited;
- (c) It was agreed that a facilitated event would be organised later in the year to bring together the Local Strategic Partnership Board, the five thematic groups and overview and scrutiny councillors to discuss the accountability framework for the LAA and how overview and scrutiny committees can effectively and constructively scrutinise and challenge the lead partnerships;

(d) A session for all Members will be organised to provide an introduction to the new performance management framework and software as set out in paragraph 3.3.2 in the report.

- 4.5 Medway tunnel - the current work programme requests that the Assistant Director for Corporate Services and Housing attends a future meeting to discuss issues concerning the Medway Tunnel. However, a decision has now been made about the future of the tunnel and Members may now wish to remove this item from the work programme, unless there are any further outstanding matters for consideration.
- 4.6 Community and Culture - this committee now has community and cultural matters within its remit but it is recognised that there are no reports on the work programme covering these areas of the council's business. Once the Assistant Director for Leisure and Culture has been appointed, this will be an opportunity for Members to take stock and identify matters for consideration.

5 Legal and financial implications

- 5.1 There are no financial or legal implications arising directly from this report.

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 Members are requested to consider the Committee's current workload and identify items for cancellation and/or for inclusion in the work programme (as detailed in paragraph 4), set out at appendix A.

Background papers

None.

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