

COUNCIL

26 APRIL 2012

REPORT ON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTIVITY

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Summary

This report provides a summary of the work of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees since the last report to Council on 12 January 2012.

1. Policy and Budget Framework

1.1 The Council's constitution allows for reports on overview and scrutiny (O&S) activity to be reported to Council meetings.

2. Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2.1 2 February 2012

2.1.1 The Leader in attendance

The Leader of the Council addressed the Committee in relation to democracy and governance and responded to questions on the following topics:

- introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER)
- election of Police and Crime Commissioner in November 2012
- Localism Act
- Referendums
- The reduction in the number of Council meetings.

2.1.2 The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Customer First in attendance

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Customer First addressed the Committee in relation to Customer First and legal matters and responded to questions on the following topics:

- IT contingency plans for Customer First and its reliance on technology

- Modernisation of the Blue Badge scheme (for disabled car users and their carers)
- Employment contracts for consultants – legal examination prior to commencement
- Better for Less programme.

2.1.3 Powers to bring empty properties back into use and a review of long-term empty properties

The Committee had requested information on this matter at a previous meeting and the report outlined the council's approach to bring empty properties back into use and the powers available to the Council in order to do so.

Members re-inforced their concerns over the number of long-term empty, dilapidated and uninhabitable properties in Medway and requested a detailed briefing note on a variety of issues on this matter, including how much Council Tax had been lost by any of them being deemed uninhabitable.

The Committee also requested six-monthly monitoring reports to include up-to-date information of what had been achieved to bring empty properties back into use.

Officers were asked to consider extending the remit of Community Wardens to identify empty dwellings and report back to the council tax and housing sections in order that they could begin action on the property.

2.1.4 Housing Revenue Account capital and revenue budgets 2012/2013

This report set out the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) proposals for 2012/2013 including proposals for rent and service charges increases. It also gave details of the introduction of a scheme under the Localism Act for a self-financing regime for the HRA that removed the former Housing Subsidy calculation.

The report also contained details of some inconsistencies in rent charging schemes and an inequality in classification of some properties, together with a decrease in the turnaround period of void properties and the decrease in the level of rent arrears.

Some Members voiced concern about the proposed rent increases which would be very difficult for a lot of families in the current economic climate. Officers advised that the government had previously determined that council rents and services charges would progress to converge with those of Registered Social Landlords and this increase was to achieve that convergence by April 2015.

The Committee agreed the recommendations set out in the report and requested a detailed breakdown of the planned maintenance programme for housing services to be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny

Committee in the future.

2.1.5 Treasury Management Strategy 2012/2013

Officers advised that the strategy remained fundamentally the same as last year with only a few minor amendments. Members discussed and asked about the following:

- how the corporate risk of who the council invested in was taken into account, rather than just the country's sovereign rating
- Credit Default Swaps and creditworthiness policies
- Ethical investments.

The report was noted.

2.1.6 Draft revenue and capital budget 2012/2013

The Committee commented on the current budget process, where Members only had seven days in which to analyse and understand up-to-date complex financial information, as the budget reports at overview and scrutiny Committees were out of date.

A number of Members asked why there was no public engagement or consultation at the end of the budget process when a choice had to be made between different services being reduced. The Committee was advised that the Council used consultation to influence services overall and develop policies, so that the public's priorities and concerns were taken into account as part of the overall process.

Members also questioned the contractual inflation assumptions included in the budget and were advised that these had been reported to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee but that officers would investigate every possibility to contain rises including variations to the terms of contract if appropriate.

The report was noted and the Committee's comments forwarded to the Cabinet for 14 February 2012.

2.1.7 Draft revenue and capital budgets 2012/2013 (reports from other Overview and Scrutiny Committees)

The comments of the other Overview and Scrutiny Committees were discussed and forwarded to the Cabinet meeting on 14 February 2012.

2.1.8 Draft Council Plan 2012/2013

It was explained that the Council Plan was a high-level business plan which should be considered alongside the Council's budget. There had been a radical review of the Council Plan last year and no major changes were proposed in the overall priorities for the Council this year; the focus had been to strengthen the measures of success.

Members commented that the draft plan did not set out how the Council planned to achieve its stated priorities. They acknowledged that prior to 2011, the plan had become too large and had required a complete review but that it had now become too lean.

The Committee asked that a distinction was made between the offer and take-up of personalised budgets, as some service users would not want to have a personalised budget.

The Council Plan 2012/2013 was noted and the comments forwarded to Cabinet for 14 February 2012.

2.1.9 Petitions

The Committee noted the petition response in relation to an appeal against the removal of pot plants at Temeraire Manor, Brompton, Gillingham and the appropriate officer action.

2.1.10 Work Programme

The Committee discussed the additional Task Group that had been set up at a recent Council meeting and the implications this might have on the timetable for the existing programme of in-depth reviews and in particular, the review of mental health services. Members were reassured that the Task Group on mental health had been set last on the programme as information from a Common's Select Committee and the Dilnott Committee were awaited, together with the re-organisation of the Council's own mental health services – all of which were to be completed prior to the commencement of this review.

The Committee also discussed the cross-party group that had been set up to respond to proposals for a new airport in the Thames estuary and asked what opportunities Members would have to comment on this issue. They were advised that it was a cross-party Cabinet Advisory Group and the Committee might be able to consider the group's report when it was published on the Cabinet's Forward Plan.

2.2. 21 March 2012

3. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

3.1. 19 January 2012

3.1.1 Attendance of Portfolio Holder For Children Services

The Portfolio Holder for Children Services addressed the Committee and responded to questions on the following topics:

- tackling domestic violence issues and the impact it has on children and young people
- improving performance at key stage two
- improving leadership in schools
- University Technology College (UTC)

- reliability of data for school place planning
- quality of careers advice
- robust auditing to ensure funding to schools is spent wisely
- timescales for Ofsted inspection actions
- schools in special measures
- School Governor training.

3.1.2 Medway Safeguarding Children Board – annual report 2010 and Business Plan 2011/2012 – progress update

The Independent Chair of the Medway Safeguarding Children Board introduced the report and updated Members on progress made against the objectives of the board and the next steps. This included the enhanced role of the board following the outcome of the Munro review into child protection; improving the way agencies shared information about domestic violence incidents; improving the quality assurance framework; a recent serious case review; a sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) campaign; and improvements in terms of Child Protection Conferences being quorate.

3.1.3 Outcomes of the Children Services Assessment and the Ofsted/CQC announced inspection of safeguarding and children in care

Following a presentation about the inspection, its format, findings and recommendations, Members discussed a number of questions which included:

- referrals to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)
- interventions for summer-born babies who statistically had poorer learning chances
- re-organisation of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs)
- reduction in the bureaucracy relating to child minders, while maintaining safeguarding of children
- looked after children attending health appointments.

The Committee requested a Briefing Note on what services are currently provided and what are proposed in the future for the early years service. Members also requested that a letter is sent to the Ofsted Chief Inspector explaining their concerns relating to bureaucracy around childminding regulations and the need to streamline these while maintaining safeguarding standards.

3.1.4 Work Programme

The Committee considered its work programme and added a visit to the Accident and Emergency department at the hospital to look at the new arrangements in place for children and requested a report on careers advice, following a recent Medway Youth Parliament report on this issue.

3.1.5 School Admission Arrangements for 2013

The Committee was advised of the key outcomes following a consultation on the school admission arrangements for 2013 and Members asked questions on a number of issues including the following:

- the Published Admission Number (PAN) for Delce Junior being increased, when last year it had been reported that there were surplus places in the school
- whether primary schools could be forced to participate in holding the selection tests at their schools
- fair access panels – who sat on them and how frequently they were held
- parents applying online without an email address.

In addition, a number of Members raised concern about the removal of the denominational criteria tick box from the admission form for voluntary controlled schools because evidence must be sought and officers undertook to research the possibility of having a supplementary form for parents to provide evidence, if they chose a school for denominational reasons.

Following further discussion on the practical implications of holding the selection test in primary schools, the Committee agreed that more information was required in the report submitted to Cabinet, to allow the Cabinet to make a fully informed decision around the future of carrying out the Medway selection test. On the basis of the information it had, the Committee agreed that its preference was for selection tests to be carried out in primary schools (Option A) subject to the following additional information: provision of a supplementary form for evidence for denominational preference; further consultation with Primary Headteachers on the practical implications of holding selection tests in primary schools and the outcome of this to be included in the Cabinet report; and that all logistical implications of both options for selection testing is set out in the Cabinet report.

3.2. 14 March 2012

3.2.1. The development of the health visiting service in Medway 2012-2015

The Head of Children's Services (Medway Community Healthcare) introduced the report and corrected the budget figure set out in the financial implications which should have read £3 million instead of £1.9 million. She stated that there would be an increase in the number of health visitors in Medway (equivalent to 27.4 full time posts) enabling all families to access the service. She then responded to Members' questions relating to a request for a glossary of acronyms in future paperwork, how recruitment and retention of staff would be achieved and where the funding was coming from to implement expansion of the service.

3.2.2. Changes in overnight short breaks/closure of Preston Skreens

This item was considered as an urgent matter in order for the Committee to be able to determine whether or not the proposed closure constituted a substantial variation or service development for Medway, which would require a meeting of the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee with Kent County Council should Kent County Council's Health Scrutiny Committee also consider the matter to be substantial.

Members expressed their disappointment about the late engagement with the Committee over the issue, made a number of comments and put forward some questions in relation to the condition of the building and the involvement of the Care Quality Commission.

The Committee noted that 30 Medway children currently using Preston Skreens would be accommodated at new provision being developed within Medway. Members felt that this was a substantial variation.

As a result of the late engagement, it was agreed that the Chairman of this Committee and Chairman of Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee should meet with senior representatives of NHS Trusts in Medway and the Clinical Commissioning Group to refresh the protocol on substantial variations/service developments and plan more timely engagement for the future.

An update report will be considered at the next meeting.

3.2.3. Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care and Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services

The Portfolio Holder for Children's Social Care addressed the Committee, covering the following issues:

- The increases in referrals, children subject to Child Protection Plans and the number of looked after children (LAC)
- The outcome of the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission announced inspection
- Educational achievements for LAC
- Adoption
- A small rise in the number of foster carers and in the number of foster carers trained to foster care plus level
- Short breaks for children with disabilities
- The Old Vicarage Children's Home, which had been judged as outstanding at its last Ofsted inspection
- Aut Even, which had been judged as good in its last Ofsted inspection and had been reported as making good progress at Ofsted's interim visit in February 2012

Members then asked a number of questions on a range of issues, which included:-

- Questions about referrals and children in care, including what support was put in place by the Council

- Partnership working between schools and organisations
- The number of children waiting for adoption and how many had been successfully adopted
- How the Portfolio Holder monitored the service

The Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services then updated Members on the following:

- The role and core function of the Independent Reviewing Officers
- Child Protection Conferences
- The possibility of recruiting mentors, as volunteers, to support children with Child Protection Conferences

The Portfolio Holder responded to Members' questions and stated that he hoped to meet the Independent Reviewing Officers in the near future.

3.2.4. Outcomes of consultation for the proposed prescribed alterations at Wainscott Primary School

The consultation responses were summarised for the Committee and officers were asked to work with colleagues in the Directorate of Regeneration, Community and Culture to resolve any issues relating to traffic and parking.

The Committee recommended the Cabinet to

- approve the proposals to expand the lower age range and enlarge the premises at Wainscott Primary School by way of statutory prescribed alterations;
- approve the revised public consultation meeting procedures set out in appendix 8 to the report, subject to the attendance of a Cabinet Member being included.

3.2.5. Arrangements for the Medway Test – September 2012

Officers responded to Members' questions relating to:

- whether there would be fewer test centres and how far children would have to travel
- clarification around the source of additional funding
- clarification of who can be independent invigilators and how people can apply
- Queries around schools opting in and out or testing within their own school

3.2.6. Improving performance at Key Stage 2

The Chairman, on behalf of the Task Group, introduced the report on the indepth review into improving performance at Key Stage 2 and the Task Group members responded to the Committee's questions.

The Committee agreed to recommend to the Cabinet the findings and recommendations of the Task Group which are set out in full the Cabinet

record of 17 April 2012 meeting, which can be found elsewhere on this agenda and summarised below.

In summary the findings were:

- Strong leadership is essential
- Expectations must be high with clear aspirations
- Governing Bodies need to ensure they carry out the role of challenge and holding to account effectively
- In good schools all members of the school community have a shared vision and focus relentlessly on raising the achievements of all children
- Pupil progress needed to be tracked effectively and frequently; and assessment is effective and leads to better learning
- Schools working in partnership are a good tool for sharing best practice effectively but the Task group found smaller groups may be more effective
- More schools should benefit from a specific synthetic phonics programme; which leads to the application of the phonics skills in reading and writing

3.2.7. Quarter 3 Council Plan Monitoring 2011/2012

The Director of Children and Adult Services introduced the report and responded to Members' questions which included:

- Clarification about the triage programme (a briefing note will be produced)
- Work to prevent exclusions and concern this may be having a detrimental affect on other learners and their results
- Concern that the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs) had risen (a briefing note will be produced)
- A request for a report on Medway Youth Trust

3.2.8. Work programme

The following additions were made:

- An update report on the changes to overnight short breaks
- A report from Medway Youth Trust
- A report on academies and governance arrangements

A briefing note on the SEN pathfinder was also requested.

4. Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

4.1. 26 January 2012

4.1.1 Fairer contributions for fairer access to services

Presentations were given on the background to the proposed changes to the council's policies on charging contributions for non-residential Adult Social Care services and Disabled facility Grant for adaptations. These proposals were to ensure that the system was as fair as possible and sustainable in the future.

Members sought clarification on the ability of some people to be able to repay a Disabled Facility Grant and, what was perceived to be, a possible unfairness of putting a charge on a property, which would affect other family members.

A proposal was made that the Cabinet should be asked to reconsider the proposed changes, and instead, look at how to use Council assets more effectively to move quickly to the provision of purpose built accommodation to meet the needs of disabled people using private investors and with affordable rents. On being put to the vote this proposal was lost.

The Committee agreed to refer its comments on to Cabinet and ask Cabinet to investigate the possibility of building specially adapted houses for people with a disability.

4.1.2 Medway Council's Vision for Commissioning and Providing Adult Social Care Services in Medway

The Committee considered each of the issues in turn.

Balfour Centre

The lead petitioners for several petitions and service users addressed the Committee and put forward the points they wished to raise in objection to the proposal to close the Balfour Centre. Members then questioned officers about the proposal and requested the list of alternative provision, along with some responses to frequently asked questions, to be provided at a consultation meeting to be held on 30 January.

Some Members expressed their concern that, without the use of the Balfour Centre, there would be very few places, which could accommodate a number of people using wheelchairs to allow these service users the opportunity to socialise. They felt this would increase the possibility of the service users becoming isolated and remaining at home.

In response to questions about whether the centre could be run as user led organisations, officers confirmed that discussions had taken place with other Council departments about the potential for using the centre

for other uses but these did not result in any solutions coming forward. In relation to alternative provision highlighted by officers, Members suggested that it would have been useful if the service users could have been given details of these options to allow assessment of them during the consultation period.

Details were given of further signatories to a petition from a number of Medway General Practitioners who were concerned about the prospect of no longer being able to refer people to the centre.

In referring its comments to the Cabinet, the Committee requested that appropriate support was given to people at the Balfour Centre and all people with disabilities to steer them through the choices available to them, and to a more independent life.

Outsourcing of Nelson Court, Platters Farm and Robert Bean Lodge

Lead petitioners, family members of service users and members of the public addressed the Committee highlighting their concerns, describing some examples of bad practice in the private sector and details of the good practice taking place daily at these three facilities.

Concerns were then expressed by a number of Members about privatisation, in particular the council's ability to intervene being significantly weakened if things went wrong.

In response to questions about more challenging residents, officers responded that the council would work closely with private organisations to protect the needs of the residents. Members were also informed that the establishments would all be subject to announced and unannounced inspections both by the Care Quality Commission and by Performance and Compliance Officers from the council. There were also emergency measures in place in the event that any residential home had to be closed at short notice.

The Committee agreed to forward to the Cabinet the comments made by the public, to be taken into account as part of the consultation process.

4.2. 1 March 2012 (special meeting)

4.2.1. Call in: Medway Council's vision for commissioning and providing adult social care social services in Medway (outcome of consultation)

Councillor Murray expressed her disappointment at the Cabinet decision in relation to the vision for commissioning and providing adult social care social services. She stated that the Labour group felt it was very important for there to be a mixed economy in relation to care homes. She referred to the high standards of care offered by the Council run care homes and the fact they were regulated by people of Medway as opposed to private organisations, many of which were run by organisations based in other countries. She felt that if the homes were to be privatised this would leave the Council in a weakened position with regards to any regulation and quality of service.

A proposal was put forward requesting the Cabinet to pause the tendering process and ask officers to bring forward a proposal for transferring the care home service to an arms length co-operative. On being put to the vote this was lost and it was decided not to take any further action.

4.3. 27 March 2012

4.3.1. Proposed merger of Medway NHS Foundation Trust with Dartford and Gravesham Trust

The Chief Executive of Medway NHS Foundation Trust updated Members on the outline business case for the proposed merger of Medway NHS Foundation Trust with Dartford and Gravesham NHS Trust. He responded to Members' questions in relation to a number of key points including:

- Financial modelling of the trusts/offset of debt
- Learning from the review of the merger in Bristol
- Impact on staff and staff losses
- Impact on Medway residents/whether there would be delays on waiting lists
- Explanation of the health profile of Medway residents compared to other areas
- Whether the residents of Medway would be displaced at the two hospitals owing to an influx of patients from outer London
- The compatibility of the IT systems between the trusts

In response to a query by the Director of Public Health, he undertook to include prevention of ill health in the development business case for the merger and agreed to update the Committee in six months' time.

4.3.2. Member's item – Marlowe Park Medical Centre, Strood

Councillor Igwe introduced his Member item expressing his disappointment at the lack of engagement from NHS Kent and Medway with the ward members and Committee on developments in relation to Marlowe Park Medical Centre in Strood.

Other Members contributed to the debate by expressing their own views on the lack of consultation and unsatisfactory arrangements made for the public meeting, which was held.

The Co-Medical Director for NHS Kent and Medway apologised for the unfortunate sequence of events and the difficulties involved. He emphasised that lessons had been learned from the process. A report back on progress was requested in three months' time. An all Member briefing was also requested on the implications and impact of the Health and Social Care reforms, taking into account a request for further information on the impact of competition rules which exist for General Practitioners.

4.3.3. Quality Assurance Issues – presentation

The Associate Director of Nursing and Quality, NHS Kent and Medway and the Programme Lead for commissioning Development and Safe Workforce at NHS Kent and Medway gave a presentation on how the Trust assures itself about quality of services provided.

An undertaking was given to update Members at a later date.

4.3.4. Diabetes update report

The Director of Public Health and the Project Manager, NHS Kent and Medway updated Members on a redesign of the diabetes service which is to improve the management of diabetes in Medway, supporting people with diabetes in Medway to live healthier and longer lives and to have the knowledge and information to self-manage their condition with confidence.

Members asked a number of questions relating to the increase in people suffering from diabetes, retinal screening, the co-ordination of care and manpower and the message about education and prevention in the community and in schools.

4.3.5. Mental Health acute in-patient beds review

The Director of Commissioning Adult Mental Health Services and Substance Misuse, NHS Kent and Medway and the Director of Acute Services, Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust introduced a report relating to inpatient mental health in Kent and Medway.

Members were informed of the reasons behind the review into inpatient mental health beds, which originated from a national drive to significantly develop local services to support people in an acute phase of mental illness so their needs can be safely met in the best place possible.

Following questions by Members, the Committee decided that the review constituted a substantial variation to service for the purposes of convening the Joint Health Scrutiny Committee with Kent County Council.

4.3.6. Patient transport

The Deputy Chief Executive, NHS Kent and Medway introduced a report setting out details of a patient transport service review by stating that it was not, at this stage, a substantial variation or service development in that it was purely a procurement exercise. In the event of there being subsequent changes to the service as a result of this they would be brought to the Committee. The Committee agreed with this view and requested that the item should be listed in the work programme for scrutiny at a later stage.

4.3.7. Council plan monitoring – third quarter

Members asked questions about the change in housing benefit regulations and the impact this would have on the need for services. Disappointment was also expressed about the carers' assessments still not being near to target. The Assistant Director, Adult Social Care admitted that performance was not as good as he would like but that concerted efforts were being put in place through a s256 agreement to improve the position.

4.3.8. Work programme

The following items were added to the work programme:

- Supporting People report on 22 May 2012
- Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust application for foundation trust status on 22 May 2012
- Marlowe Park Medical Centre update on 26 June 2012
- An all Member briefing to be arranged on the Health and Social Care Act 2012

5. Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee

5.1. 31 January 2012

5.1.1 Kent Fire and Rescue Service – change in provision of services

The Director of Service Delivery at Kent Fire and Rescue Service gave a presentation and answered questions on the following points:

- the retention of three fire stations across Medway Council
- promotion of the campaign for free fire safety checks within the home plus the inspection and/or installation of smoke alarms
- information that a third of domestic fires were caused by cooking, another third by smoking and heating and the final third by electrical appliances, such as tumble dryers and dishwashers.

5.1.2 Kent Probation Service – prevention of future generations offending

A Director of Kent Probation Service gave a presentation and answered questions on the following points:

- the “Circles” project for sex-offenders and funding for high-risk sex offenders
- further information on the ‘Place 2’ project for families with inter-generational involvement with agencies and others
- the government’s recently announced “Troubled Families” project
- the work carried out for male offenders outside of the projects highlighted during the presentation.

5.1.3 Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Customer First in attendance

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Customer First addressed the Committee in relation to community safety and responded to questions on the following topics:

- further information on the 'Eat Out Well' campaign
- 'Love Medway' app
- Medway Community Alcohol Partnership
- recent re-structure of police services and the number of Police Community Support Offices (PCSOs) within neighbourhood teams
- future capacity of the CCTV system
- air quality.

5.1.4 Community Infrastructure Levy

The Committee was reminded that currently the council collected contributions from developers via section 106 agreements and the "Developer Contributions Guide" which was a supplementary planning document. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) would replace most of these contributions by introducing an overall levy, which would seek to fund infrastructure in Medway. An infrastructure plan would be produced to include highway improvements, flood defences, parks, leisure, etc. but affordable housing would not be funded by the new levy.

The Committee noted the report.

5.1.5 Petitions

The petition responses in relation to a petition objecting to the installation of an extractor chimney in Gillingham and a request that bus 116 stops at the Dockside Outlet Centre and not the Ramada Hotel, and the officer actions were noted.

5.1.6 Work Programme

The Committee was advised that a Briefing Note had been published with regard to the increase in powers for Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), rather than be submitted as a report to the Committee.

5.2. 3 April 2012

5.2.1. Attendance of the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council gave a presentation on inward investment to Medway, tourism and regeneration and responded to Members' questions in relation to:

- The changes the Leader foresaw for Medway over the next 20 years
- Funding of infrastructure in the future
- Better use by the Council of its assets, such as Rochester and Upnor Castles

- What was gained from the £13,000 spent on the city status campaign and whether or not the council lost the bid because it referred to itself as a city prior to the decision being made
- The current situation re the World Heritage status bid
- Clarity with regard to the £4.4 million Growing Places funding made available from the government
- The breakdown for the 600 jobs created, for example full-time, part-time or temporary employment and whether these were created by existing companies in Medway or by new companies locating here?
- The Council's position with regard to the relocation of Gillingham Football Club
- Small to medium enterprise schemes applied for recently by the Council, such as the Regional Growth Fund and the Mary Portas High Street innovation fund, as other local authorities in Kent had recently secured this type of enterprise funding?
- The reason for the Christmas market not taking place in Rochester in 2012
- The adoption of a new road to be created by Aldi in Strood to allow a better flow of traffic?
- Queries relating to the Medway Renaissance team regeneration projects
- Airport capacity in the UK and the consultation re a possible new airport in the south east
- The future of various empty buildings in Chatham, including Victory House, Mountbatten House and the Colonial Buildings

5.2.2. Presentation on housing services

Following the transfer of housing services to Regeneration, Community and Culture directorate, the Head of Housing Management and Head of Strategic Housing gave a presentation of the main services provided by their teams, which included:

- Five key standards to meet covering all aspects of the service
- Details of what the council, as a landlord service, provides
- Details of strategic housing services provided.

They then responded to Members' questions concerning:

- Problem tenants
- Whether the council could act to consolidate smaller housing provision with others to have a bigger, overall effect
- Why the council doesn't award short-term tenancies
- How quickly the council intervened in rent arrears cases
- Whether housing benefit covered the cost of the charge for the caretaking service
- The impact on domestic abuse and sanctuary service following the Supporting People funding reduction
- The change to the benefit system and current economic climate had been factored in to future analysis, particularly for debt
- The powers available to the Council to prevent sub-standard properties owned by private landlords being rented.

Officers were requested to look into how best to keep Members informed of the potential changes due to the reduction of the Supporting People budget with regard to housing services.

5.2.3. Member's item: ownership and maintenance of retaining walls

Councillor Stamp introduced his Members' item and showed photographs to the Committee to illustrate the issues he raised with regard to retaining walls, particularly those on the A289 Gillingham bypass. Officers responded to Cllr Stamp's queries by stating that the £250,000 revenue budget did include the cost of inspecting 150 walls across Medway with not much left to improve the condition of the walls. The s106 legal agreement funding and the future Community Infrastructure Levy would only allow for those monies to be spent on new structures caused by and required for the new developments. It could not legally be spent on something that was already in the location that required maintenance.

Councillor Stamp asked officers to consider the Pier Road and Lower Woodlands Road walls priority due to their proximity to the A289 and the economical implications for the council should the wall collapse and the road have to be closed. A request was made that officers survey all retaining walls in Medway and establish their ownership, as the council was unaware of the extent of its liability but this was not agreed. Officers were requested to continue to pursue the powers available for ongoing work at the Pier Road and Lower Woodlands Road, together with the ownership of the retaining wall at Lower Woodlands Road.

5.2.4. Community Safety Plan 2012-2013

The Head of Safer Communities introduced a report on the Community Safety Plan by informing the Committee that with effect from November 2012 the Police and Crime Commissioners and Community Safety Partnerships would have a reciprocal duty to have regard to each other's priorities and work in co-operation with each other to tackle community safety issues.

The Committee discussed the following:

- Enforcement
- Work with multi-national retail companies over the display of, and access to, alcohol
- Duties of Community Officers being too varied and not concentrated on their local role
- Increase in targets for fixed penalty notices
- Licence to Kill campaign
- Lack of funding to continue the services of the SoS bus and the continued services of the street pastor scheme in Rochester High Street
- How the public and local communities were engaged in compiling the priorities for the partnership

- The future of funding for community safety issues in Medway following the election of the Police and Crime Commissioner in November 2012.

The Committee made a number of comments to the Cabinet on the Community Safety Plan and requested that officers give continued thought to how to engage a more varied demographic from across Medway to its statutory community safety event in future.

5.2.5. Quarter 3 Council Plan monitoring 2012/2012

Members questioned a number of areas of the Council Plan in particular the percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality and the percentage of people who think Medway Council helps people travel easily around Medway.

Responding to a query about the lack of comparative data the Assistant Director, Front Line Services explained that the national framework of indicators was removed 18 months ago, which made comparison with other local authorities hard, and there was a lack of trend analysis data as much of the data had changed.

Further in-depth information and analysis was requested in a future report on:

- NI4 - % of people who think they can influence decisions in their locality
- IT2 - % of people who think Medway Council helps people travel easily around Medway
- LRCC4 – number of jobs created and safeguarded

A briefing note was requested detailing the various surveys used to support the results for the Council Plan indicators and on the demographics of who is asked, the questions set and the weight given to the validity of the answer.

5.2.6. Work programme

It was requested that the Chairman of both the Audit Committee and this Committee discuss with officers the suitability of this Committee scrutinising the current position relating to Medway's markets.

It was agreed that a briefing note requested by Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee with regard to the £500,000 underspend of the concessionary bus fares budget is circulated to all Members of the Council for information.

The Committee agreed to review the recommendations of 'The future provision of water in Medway' task group scrutiny review from 2007.

Background papers

None

Contacts for further details:

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