

# **BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**7 FEBRUARY 2013**

## **ATTENDANCE OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

Report from: Richard Hicks, Assistant Director Customer First,  
Leisure, Culture, Democracy and Governance

### **Summary**

This report details the areas covered by the Leader which fall within the remit of this Committee. These are listed each time a Cabinet Member is invited to attend any of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees to be held to account.

### **1. Background**

1.1 The area within the terms of reference of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered by Councillor Rodney Chambers, the Leader of the Council, is:

- Democracy and Governance.

### **2. Democratic Services**

#### **2.1 2012/13 Achievements**

- Completion of three in depth scrutiny reviews with recommendations all agreed by Cabinet. 1. Under performance in Medway schools looking specifically at performance at key stage 2 in primary schools, 2. Fair Access to Credit and 3. Supported Accommodation.  
The next review on street clutter has just started.
- Localism Act 2011 – Full Council considered the provisions in the Act in July 2012. A new streamlined Standards regime has been adopted and implemented with Democratic Services supporting the Monitoring Officer to put the new arrangements in place. The Council agreed to retain the Leader/Cabinet model of governance rather than taking up the option of moving to a Committee system and the Council also agreed to continue to run a petitions scheme although the duty to have one has been revoked.

- Following the implementation of the Localism Act and the Council decision to continue with the Leader/Cabinet model of governance a review of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny arrangements has been carried out at the request of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The review concluded that Medway's arrangements reflect best practice and identified a number of areas for further development locally. The improvement programme includes further Member development around use of performance information and scrutiny of partners, review of methodology used for task group work, scope for collaboration with Universities in Medway in relation to research and review of programming of the Overview and Scrutiny committee timetable to maximise capacity.
- In September the Government made changes to the arrangements to the rules relating to access to information about executive decisions in local authorities. Representations were made to the Minister about the new requirement to publish every executive decision taken by officers and the burden this represents for local government. In response the DCLG clarified that the requirement did not extend to the day- to- day operational decisions taken by officers; only those closely connected with the business of the Cabinet. The Council's new arrangements reflect this.
- Involvement throughout 2012 in developing the governance arrangements for the Police and Crime Panel (PCP), culminating in two seats on the Panel for Medway and the appointment of Councillor O'Brien as Vice Chairman of the PCP
- Democratic Services supported the establishment of the Shadow Health and Wellbeing Board and is working up the governance arrangements for the Board once it becomes a Committee of the Council together with the changes required to the Constitution to accommodate the transfer of Public Health to the Council in April.

## **2.2 Key work streams for the future**

- Delivery of two remaining scrutiny reviews in current programme: street clutter and mental health – by Summer 2013
- Programming of next round of scrutiny reviews using criteria developed by Members for selection of topics – process underway
- Governance arrangements for Health Wellbeing Board and go- live as a Committee of the Council
- Review of protocol with NHS for health scrutiny – in light of changes to regulations, establishment of Clinical Commissioning Group and NHS Commissioning Board

- NHS consultation with Joint Kent and Medway Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on provision of acute mental health beds in Kent and Medway.
- Implementation of improvements agreed for Medway's Overview and Scrutiny arrangements

### **3. Electoral Services**

#### **3.1 Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections**

- In the lead up to the elections, a review of polling places and districts undertaken in conjunction with the Working Party, and Council agreed a revised schedule in January 2012.
- Successfully planned and conducted the elections on 15 November, which were the inaugural elections for new Police and Crime Commissioner for Kent.
- Turnout for the elections in Medway and across the country was low – in Medway 15.73% which is largely thought to be the result of having the elections in November and decisions made by the Home Office not to fund a leaflet for candidates.
- As has become usual practice, a wide ranging review has been undertaken on all aspects of the planning and conduct of the elections and a series of recommendations will be submitted to the Returning Officer for future implementation.

#### **3.2 Register of Electors 2013**

- In an attempt to make the 2013 Register more accurate for the PCC elections, the Secretary of State made an Order that meant the canvass for the 2013 register took place earlier than normal and that the Register had to be published on 15 October rather than 1 December.
- Despite the additional challenges, the team successfully planned and implemented the annual audit which saw the production of the 2013 Register of Electors on 15 October as required by law.
- The earlier than normal canvas and fewer personal canvassers contributed to a reduction in the number of households responding to the annual audit. 86% of households responded, which is a decrease of 5% from last year.
- Response rates across Kent, and indeed London where there are comparable demographics have seen similar reductions in response rates.

- The electoral services team continues to undertake several checks before publishing the new Register including checking for duplicate entries, checking Council Tax second home discount lists, empty properties lists, and housing void records, and writing separately to registered landlords of multiple occupation properties to remind them of their duty to provide information about who is resident at their properties.

### **3.3 Individual electoral registration (IER)**

- It is understood that the Government is still committed to introducing IER with effect from 2015 and work has already been done by the Cabinet Office to develop a national electronic registration service that people will be encouraged to use to register or re-register to vote. This will make the service easier for the public to use as well as minimising the volumes of forms processed by the electoral services team.
- What is currently emerging is that in 2014, Electoral Registration teams will check the details of everyone on the register in July 2014, against the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) database, and that those who are successfully matched, will automatically be confirmed as registered and included in the 2014 Register. These electors will be canvassed every year but will only have to re-register if their circumstances change and pilots across the country have indicated that as many as 60-70% of electors could be matched in this way.
- For those who do not match, the Electoral Registration team may check details against local data sources, which will be an important element of the process. The remaining non-matched people, and those identified as not registered from other data sources, will be invited to send details on a Household Enquiry Form which will then be followed by an IER form to collect their date of birth and national insurance number. It is currently anticipated that this process will involve around 30-40% of currently registered electors.
- In recognition of the significant procedural change that IER represents, the Government is proposing that electors who fail to re-register or provide their NI number or date of birth are carried forward on to the 2015 Register which will be used for the General Election and Local Elections scheduled to take place in May 2015.
- There are cost implications inevitably, but the Government has indicated that they will fund the additional burden.

#### **4. Members and Mayoral Services**

- Support for the Member Development Advisory Group to develop and deliver an ongoing programme of Member development and this year has seen improved methods of seeking feedback on sessions and of identifying individual Councillors' training needs.
- Planned and successfully completed arrangements for key Mayoral events including the Dedication Service, Charity evenings and Remembrance Services.
- Development of the Armed Services Covenant involved the participation of over 50 signatories to the Covenant, culminating in a signing ceremony at the Royal Engineers Museum on 3 July last year.
- Research and other support to the Independent Remuneration Panel whose recommendations for the 5% reduction to Members' allowances was successfully implemented in this financial year.

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#### **Background documents**

None