

## **BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**3 APRIL 2013**

### **TOPICS FOR INDEPTH SCRUTINY REVIEWS – PRIORITIES AND TIMETABLE**

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

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#### **Summary**

This report invites the Committee to discuss and agree a programme of in-depth scrutiny reviews for 2013/14 with indicative timescales. The topics recommended by the Chairmen and Opposition Spokespersons of all the Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the suggested priority order of reviews are reflected in the report and are set out at Appendix A.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

1.1 The Council's Constitution states that each Overview and Scrutiny Committee is responsible for setting its own work programme, which should take into account the wishes of all Members of the Committee.

1.2 This Committee has within its remit the provision of guidance and leadership on the development and co-ordination of the scrutiny function for all Overview and Scrutiny Committees, including guidance on priorities for scrutiny activities.

#### **2. Background**

2.1 In June 2011 this Committee agreed to exercise a more pro-active role than previously in prioritising the programme of in-depth scrutiny review work in light of a Council decision that a maximum of three reviews or themed meetings can be undertaken annually across all four Overview and Scrutiny Committees. In line with best practice the Committee also decided to adopt a more systematic process for the selection of topics.

2.2 The current programme of in-depth reviews was agreed in September 2011 and is as follows:

Lead Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Topic	Indicative timetable
Children and Young People	Effective challenge to address under performance in schools	November 2011 - March 2012. (Reported March 2012).
Business Support	Fair Access to Credit Task Group – added to programme by Full Council in January 2012	March - June 2012 (Reported September 2012)
Regeneration, Community and Culture	Supported Accommodation	Late September to December 2012 (Reported December 2012)
Regeneration, Community and Culture	De-cluttering of town centres and main roads in Medway	January - April 2013
Health and Adult Social Care	Mental Health	May to July 2013

2.3 On 6 December 2012 this Committee agreed to start the programming of reviews for the eighteen-month period starting in July 2013 to allow time for Overview and Scrutiny Members to contribute suggestions for this Committee to consider and prioritise. The process agreed was as follows:

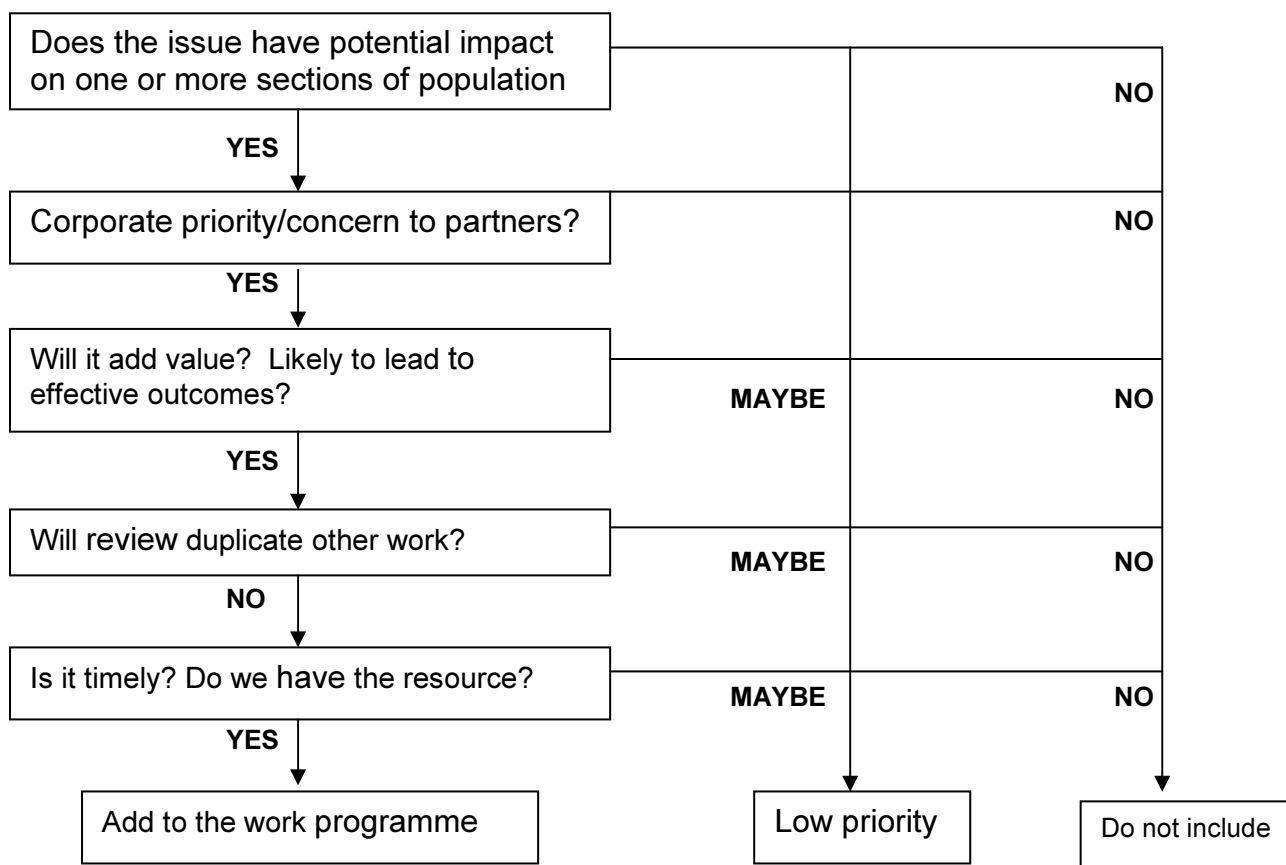
- (i) **6 December 2012 to 28 February 2013** - Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee was notified of the timetable and process for the determination of the next round of in-depth reviews and Members were invited to submit suggestions for topics to Chairmen and Opposition Spokespersons taking into account the criteria adopted for the selection of reviews (as set out in the template attached at Appendix A);
- (ii) **11 March 2013** – All Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chairmen and Opposition Spokespersons met with officer support to consider and prioritise the list of topics;
- (iii) **3 April 2013** - The Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee is being asked to consider and agree a programme of in-depth reviews for the period July 2013 to December 2014.

### 3. Outcome of discussion by the Chairman and Opposition Spokespersons of each Overview and Scrutiny Committee

3.1 The list of topics put forward by the Chairman and Opposition Spokespersons of each Overview and Scrutiny Committee is attached at Appendix A to this report with supporting information under each of the headings in the template this Committee agreed should be used. The covering sheet summarises the long list and sets out key questions to assist in deciding the priority in which topics should be programmed. (Note: The suggestion of a review of Housing was added at the meeting on 11 March 2013)

3.2 This process for selecting topics was recommended by an external trainer at the Effective Scrutiny training session held in Medway on 28 July 2011 (attended by 19 Councillors) and can be summarised as follows:

### Questions to ask when prioritising topics for review



#### 4. Outcome of informal meeting of Chairmen and Opposition Spokespersons held on 11 March 2013

4.1 The meeting on 11 March was attended by Councillors Avey, Bright, Carr, Cooper, Griffiths, Juby, Maple, Murray, Price, Smith, Stamp and Royle. Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Kearney.

4.2 The questions set out in the covering sheet at Appendix A were discussed in relation to each of the topics on the long list. In summary, it was suggested that the next round of in- depth reviews should be as follows:

Lead Overview and Scrutiny Committee	Topic	Indicative timetable
Health and Adult Social Care	Health Inequalities across Medway wards and how to direct investment where it is most needed	August – November 2013
Business Support	Impact of Welfare Reforms	December 2013 – March 2014
Children and Young People	Preventing Looked After Children from becoming criminalised	April to July 2014
Regeneration, Community and Culture	Housing in Medway – demand, supply and affordability	August to November 2014

- 4.3 A range of issues and potential reviews were discussed during this process and in addition to the long list of topics set out in Appendix A, Members have asked for the following additional items to be added to Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programmes:

Business Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business rates – Member briefing/Q and A session prior to consideration of the Medium Term Financial Plan</li> <li>• Category Management – regular updates</li> </ul>
Children and Young People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth Service provision/clubs across the authority – update report</li> <li>• School Improvement – update report to Committee in May 2013 on implementation of 2012 action plan</li> </ul>
Health and Adult Social Care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Obesity – Member briefing requested with an invitation to attend extended to Members of the Children and Young People O and S Committee</li> <li>• Prescribing medication – possible report or briefing note to include whether adequate information is provided to patients and whether over-prescribing is an issue eg anti biotics and anti-psychotic medication</li> </ul>
Regeneration, Community and Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High marginal cost of bus travel – report on how costs in Medway currently compare with other local authority areas – bus companies to be invited to attend</li> <li>• Long term empty properties – report on scale of issue and action being taken</li> <li>• Community Officer Service – review of impact of any changes implemented following Better for Less review</li> </ul>

## 5. Risk management

- 5.1 Risk management is an integral part of good governance. The Council has a responsibility to identify and manage threats and risks to achieve its strategic objectives and enhance the value of services it provides to the community.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
In-depth scrutiny reviews fail to make an impact	In published guidance on effective work programming for Overview and Scrutiny Committees the Centre for Public Scrutiny says “effective work programming is the bedrock of an effective scrutiny function. Done well, it can help to lay the foundations for targeted, incisive and timely work on issues of local importance, where scrutiny can add value. Done badly, scrutiny can end up wasting time and resources on issues where the impact of any work done is likely to be minimal”	This Committee has agreed a rigorous process for identifying and prioritising topics for inclusion in the in-depth review work programme for the next eighteen months.

## 6. Consultation

- 6.1 Members of each Overview and Scrutiny Committee have been able to contribute suggestions for topics to be included in the programme of scrutiny in-depth review work. The outcome of these discussions is summarised in Appendix A to this report.

## 7. Financial and legal implications

- 7.1 The reason for the limitation of in-depth scrutiny review work and the introduction of a new work programming process is a response to reduced capacity across the organisation to support this work.
- 7.2 The Committee is asked to ensure that the agreed timetable of reviews is consistent with the decision of the Council that no more than three reviews or themed meetings in total can be programmed in each municipal year. Support for only one review at a time can be provided from within the Democratic Services Team.
- 7.3 There is a budget of £5210 within Democratic Services to support activity associated with in-depth scrutiny review work in this financial year. This can be used for Member level visits, expenses claims from those invited to give evidence, expert advice and support with community engagement and other review expenditure.

## **8. Recommendations**

8.1 The Committee is recommended to agree that the following reviews should be included in the scrutiny in-depth review work programme as follows:

- Health Inequalities across Medway wards and how to direct investment where it is most needed
- Impact of Welfare Reforms
- Preventing Looked After Children from becoming criminalised
- Housing in Medway – demand, supply and affordability

8.2 The Committee is asked to note the additional items to be added to Overview and Scrutiny work programmes arising from discussion about potential in-depth review topics as set out in paragraph 4.3 above.

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### **Background papers**

Minutes of Council meeting – 14 April 2011

A Cunning Plan? Devising a scrutiny work programme – guidance published by Centre for Public Scrutiny

**LONGLIST OF INDEPTH TOPICS SUGGESTED BY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES 2013/14**  
**Aid to prioritising the work programme**

<b>COMMITTEE</b>	<b>Does issue have potential impact on one or more sections of population?</b>	<b>Corporate concern/issue for partners?</b>	<b>Will it add value/lead to effective outcomes?</b>	<b>Will review duplicate other work?</b>	<b>Is it timely/ do we have the resources?</b>	<b>Scope for service improvement?</b>	<b>Priority order (4 reviews to be selected by members to take place over the next 18 months)</b>
<b>Business Support</b>							
Impact of welfare reforms <i>(top priority of the three topics)</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes, if held after November 2013	Yes	2
Participatory budgeting	Yes	No	Unknown	No	Yes (timely)	Yes	
Access to and use of ICT in Medway	Yes	No	Unknown	Yes	Yes	Yes	
<b>Children and Young People</b>							
Preventing LAC from becoming criminalised	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	3
<b>Health and Adult Social Care</b>							
Health inequalities across Medway wards and how to direct investment where it is most needed	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	It is timely. Resource needs scoping	Yes	1
<b>Regeneration, Community and Culture</b>							
Improving the street scene	Yes	Yes	Maybe	No	Maybe	Yes	
Review of the Community Officer Service	Yes	BfL review underway	Unknown	Yes	New structure due to be implemented in June 2013	Limited	
Housing – demand, supply and affordability	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	4

LONGLIST OF SUGGESTED INDEPTH REVIEW TOPICS 2013/14Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee – (Topic 1 of 3)

<p>Impact of welfare reforms (<i>priority topic</i>)</p>	<p><b>Reason for Review</b> The impact of Central Government's plans to radically reform the welfare benefits system will have a direct impact on the council and residents in receipt of welfare benefits from April 2013.</p> <p><b>National/local context</b> This national policy of welfare reform will have an affect on the disposable income of a very significant number (circa 15,000) of the population of the borough. This in turn will have an impact on the local economy, potentially anti-social behaviour, child poverty, mental health and other NHS issues as well as a direct impact on council revenue for housing rents, council tax and other income generation areas such as leisure facilities. The political issues raised will also be of direct concern for the reputation of the council and we have already seen considerable media interest in the affairs of a Rainham resident and her two disabled children as a case in point. There will be a time lag for the effects of the changes to be felt in terms of non-payment of rent and council tax, potential evictions, homelessness cases etc and it is considered that there is more likelihood of an adequate evidential base of information for a task group to research approximately 6 months after this comes into force (April 2013), so it is recommended that a task group is not formed until at least November 2013.</p> <p><b>Performance indicators (where relevant)</b> There are no performance indicators in the Council Plan 2013/2014 relevant to this topic albeit it features on the Council Risk Register.</p> <p><b>Public feedback/interest in issue (where known)</b> There is on-going work to contact people affected by these reforms. Mixed understanding of future welfare reforms and impact on financial income for households. Officers are in the process of holding road shows, Member briefings, installing a town centre information unit specifically for housing, video guide on website and public information leaflets etc. Housing has also set up a welfare reform team to deal with this matter.</p>
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**Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee – (Topic 2 of 3)**

Participatory budgeting	<p><b>Reason for Review</b></p> <p>Participatory budgeting (PB) allows the citizens of an area to participate in the allocation of part of the resources available to the Council or another statutory agency (eg health service, police). In practice PB provides citizens with information that enables them to be engaged in prioritising the needs of their neighbourhoods, in proposing and debating new services and projects and setting spending priorities.</p> <p>Members have suggested the community in Medway has the capacity to manage projects at a local level. Some communities already apply for Heritage lottery funding or other funding for a local scheme and currently there seems to be an information and training deficit to assist local communities in their endeavours, which is not in line with the 'Big Society' theme.</p> <p><b>National/local context</b></p> <p>The Coalition Government launched the Big Society programme in 2010 with the aim of giving more power and responsibility to individuals and communities to help people improve their neighbourhoods and local services. This includes provisions subsequently made in the Localism Act 2011 for a register of assets of community value and a right for community interest groups to bid when these assets are sold, and a community right to challenge requiring local authorities to respond to expressions of interest in providing services on behalf of the Council from local groups.</p> <p><b>Performance indicators (where relevant)</b></p> <p>There are no performance indicators in the Council Plan 2013/2014 relevant to this topic.</p> <p><b>Public feedback/interest in issue (where known)</b></p> <p>The August 2012 Citizens' Panel asked respondents about their ability to influence decisions affecting Medway and if they would like to have a say in what the council does and the services it provides. Over a quarter of respondents (28%) agree/strongly agree that they can influence decisions affecting the Medway area. However, almost a third of respondents disagree/strongly disagree (31%) and a third remain neutral on this issue (33%). In terms of having more say in what the council does half of respondents would like to know what the council is doing, but are happy to let them get on with their job (50%), whilst almost 1 in 10 felt that they are already involved with the council and the services it provides (9%). However 3% would not like to have more say in what the council does and the services it provides, while almost a quarter would like to have more say (24%).</p>
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**Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee – (Topic 3 of 3)**

<p>Access to and use of ICT in Medway</p>	<p><b>Reason for Review</b> Members suggested a review of access by residents to information on-line and to decent high-speed internet facilities. Anecdotally, it is said that Medway has a lower level of internet users than elsewhere in the South East region. However, more businesses, organisations, government agencies and the council rely on the internet as their main source of contact, to give information about and access to their services. Members suggested that an aim of this review could be to identify internet usage in each ward in Medway and to establish how best to reach residents in those wards and give access to services, information, etc. Members also suggested reviewing the ease with which on-line forms can be accessed and other electronic transactions completed.</p> <p><b>National/local context</b> Factually, the ONS data for Q2 2012 for the south east (<a href="http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-268719">http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-268719</a>) shows that 87.6% of people in the south east claim to have ever used the internet (83.8% in Kent). The Medway quarterly tracker which surveys a representative sample of real Medway residents shows on average over the past year that 88% of Medway residents have internet access at home. Around 65% also report having internet access on a mobile phone - and this number is growing annually. However it is worth noting that whilst online access in Medway is in line with the national average, there will be variations across the area. The national pattern demonstrates a broad correlation with deprivation which is likely to be reflected in Medway with below average internet usage in the more deprived wards.</p> <p>The Council's Head of Communications and Marketing advises that the data currently available is robust enough for the decision making around communications and channel shift. If this review goes ahead he would recommend a focus on driving up digital literacy as a more beneficial way of increasing usage of online services - the barriers are not about awareness but skills and confidence using online tools</p> <p>The Council's website has the highest possible rating from SOCITM's annual independent audit of all council websites and is rated in the top 20 council websites nationwide.</p> <p>If this topic is selected it is recommended that the focus of the review should be to look at raising levels of digital literacy among the many communities in Medway,- which would help benefit residents in the longer term and about user-centred design - ensuring the Council creates online content and forms that are designed with users in mind and are extensively tested with users to ensure that the functionality meets need.</p> <p><b>Performance indicators (where relevant)</b> There are no performance indicators in the Council Plan 2013/2014 relevant to this topic.</p>
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**Public feedback/interest in issue (where known)**

The August 2012 Citizens' Panel asked respondents about preferred method of access to information about a Medway Council service or event; 42% of respondents indicated they would look at the Council website this was the highest preferred method. Those aged 16 to 54 were more likely to access information via the Medway Council website than those aged 65 and over. Respondents with a disability were also less likely to access information via the council website.

**PROPOSED TOPICS FOR IN-DEPTH REVIEW AND THEMED MEETING**

**Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee – (Topic 1 of 1)**

<p>Preventing looked after children from becoming criminalised</p>	<p><b>Reason for Review</b>  Creative and lateral thinking, including better use of restorative methods in our work with LAC is needed to reduce the numbers who enter the criminal justice system. 27% of the Youth Offending Team's (YOT) workload are looked after children (LAC) – this amounts to 34 out of 120 young people from the YOT cohort. However, the issue impacts on LACs themselves as well as other sections of the community who may be victims of crime or become drawn into criminal activity. The Members considered that this should be considered as a high priority. This is because the Council is a corporate parent for all looked after children and wishes to use this review to ensure it is acting as the best corporate parent it can be. In addition, there is an inspection of LAC (and potentially the YOT) anticipated later this year and this work could contribute to that. There may also be a short unannounced YOT inspection once the recent Ofsted and Serious case Review are published.</p> <p><b>National/local context</b>  There is an agreed understanding within the SE 7 local authorities group (seven authorities in the South East working together) to develop an across region approach to reduce LAC entrants into the criminal justice system. The thinking is to extend the corporate parent role to corporate “aunt/uncle” making support for all LAC more central to a wider range of agencies. There is a national consensus that the level of LAC in the criminal justice system is too high (can be up to 50% in custody). There is also a new strand of short YOT inspections that concentrate on the joint performance of YOT's and LAC Teams around reducing LAC's within the criminal justice system and how well the organisations cooperate.</p> <p><b>Performance indicators (where relevant)</b>  There are no national performance indicators for LAC involvement with YOT. However the Medway YOT Management Board do require the YOT to monitor LAC as a proportion of the YOT caseload and report this to each meeting. However no targets around reduction have been set, as there is not yet an agreed cross agency position around LAC reduction.</p> <p><b>Public feedback/interest in issue (where known)</b>  None</p>
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**PROPOSED TOPICS FOR IN-DEPTH REVIEW AND THEMED MEETING**

**Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee – (Topic 1 of 1)**

<p>Health inequalities across Medway wards and how to direct investment where it is most needed</p>	<p><b>Reason for Review</b>  In Medway, in 2006-10, there was an inequality in life expectancy between the 10% most and least deprived of the population of 9.4 years for men and 4 years for women. Within Medway in the same time period there was a 7 year gap in life expectancy between Gillingham North with an average life expectancy of 74 years and Hempsted and Wigmore with an average life expectancy of 81 years.</p> <p><b>National/local context</b>  Nationally, the Marmot Review into Health Inequalities 2010 highlighted the importance of the wider determinants of health in reducing health inequalities. It brought together national and international evidence on what works in health inequalities to make 6 main policy recommendations. These are focused around; giving every child the best start in life, good education and employment, ensuring a healthy standard of living for all, creating and designing healthy and sustainable places and communities and strengthening the role of ill health prevention.  To successfully impact on health inequalities requires action across all the Marmot policy areas and Medway Council and it's partners have a key role to play in delivering these recommendations.  Medway's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2012-17 has identified reducing health inequalities as one of its main priority areas and so has also been identified as a significant issue in Medway.</p> <p><b>Performance indicators (where relevant)</b>  Long term national indicators: life expectancy and healthy life expectancy, Short term indicators would be selected depending on specific issues and actions identified</p> <p><b>Public feedback/interest in issue (where known)</b>  Reducing health inequalities was confirmed by stakeholders as one of the key areas for Medway's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2012-17.</p>
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**PROPOSED TOPICS FOR IN-DEPTH REVIEW AND THEMED MEETING**

**Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee – (Topic 1 of 3)**

Improving the street scene	<p><b>Reason for Review</b> To improve the physical environment of many neighbourhoods in Medway, including litter, dumped rubbish, items left in front gardens and also the physical appearance of people's front gardens and the facades of properties, many of which are owned by private sector landlords. The review would also look at the enforcement services around these issues, together with bringing empty properties back into use. The council lacks an over-arching strategy to tackle these issues.</p> <p><b>National/local context</b> This would be a cross-cutting review across council services and with partners for waste, planning, community officers, environmental enforcement, housing and the police.</p> <p>The council has powers in this matter to enforce amenity issues through the Town and Country Planning Act and may also introduce selective licensing schemes, which allows the Council to exercise more control over the behaviour of private sector landlords.</p> <p><b>Performance indicators (where relevant)</b> An enforcement report is submitted to the Planning Committee on a quarterly basis.</p> <p><b>Public feedback/interest in issue (where known)</b> Resident's feedback to ward councillors and to council services, such as waste, housing, planning and environmental health.</p> <p>Three of the top five areas which need improving, according to respondents to the August 2012 Citizen's Panel, related to the street scene specifically Road and pavement maintenance, Keeping land clear of litter and Street cleaning.</p>
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Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee – (Topic 2 of 3)

<p>Review of the Community Officer Service</p>	<p><b>Reason for Review</b> Seek to find ways to promote the service within the council and to the wider public across Medway. Consideration given to greater use of technology ('Love Medway' app) and examples of best practice in other Local Authorities. Members suggested the review could explore scope for a performance based incentive scheme for the service.</p> <p><b>National/local context</b> This service has recently been reviewed by the council and changes will be implemented in June 2013. Officers request that this review, if chosen, is not started until at least the beginning of 2014, in order that the new service has embedded and therefore can be effectively evaluated. Nationally, warden schemes are being reduced as Local Authorities prioritise their expenditure in view of shrinking resources, as this is a non-statutory service.</p> <p><b>Performance indicators (where relevant)</b> An appropriate performance framework will be developed for the start of the new service.</p> <p><b>Public feedback/interest in issue (where known)</b> Recent surveys results show that residents are unclear about the services provided by Community Officers. However, the feedback does suggest that many residents cannot differentiate between Community Officers and PCSO's.</p>
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**Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee – (Topic 3 of 3)**

<p>Housing – demand, supply and affordability</p>	<p><b>Reason for Review</b></p> <p>Members agreed to put forward a review of the demand, supply and affordability of Housing in Medway. In discussing the possible scope of this review members emphasised the key social and economic role that housing plays, particularly for those who are struggling to access affordable housing.</p> <p><b>National/local context</b></p> <p>The local situation mirrors in many areas national issues with provision of housing falling within 3 main groups; owner occupation, rented and affordable housing. The average house price in Medway is increasing slightly and currently stands at £136,234, but is still some 15% below the high of 2008, although at a local level there is significant variance between areas with average prices range from £106,029 to £274,673 across the area. Private Sector rents exhibit similar variances across the area but average levels are generally at their lowest levels for the last 2/3 yrs. Those households unable to afford housing costs may be eligible for Housing Benefit, which is paid up to a Local Housing Allowance. Affordable Housing is limited through a statutory regulated framework and is generally in-line with or below market rents. The housing situation in Medway is strongly influenced by a number of factors including the historic development of homes, social, economic and environmental. There are 106,200 households in Medway, with the new supply of homes in 2011-12 contributing just 0.75% to the overall supply.</p> <p><b>Performance indicators (where relevant)</b></p> <p>Various national and local indicators are available and their relevance will depend upon the direction of the review but could include household numbers, tenure, costs and new homes information.</p> <p>The following indicators are measured as part of the 2012/13 council plan monitoring requirements;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of affordable homes delivered</li> <li>• Number of households living in temporary accommodation</li> <li>• Care leavers in suitable accommodation</li> <li>• Average length of stay in B&amp;B of households with dependent children or pregnant women (weeks)</li> </ul> <p><b>Public feedback/interest in issue (where known)</b></p>
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Work around housing is likely to generate interest from the public and stakeholders depending upon the issues to be reviewed.

The August 2012 Citizens' Panel did not directly ask any questions regarding housing affordability. It did however ask respondents about the council priority of everyone benefiting from the areas regeneration. One of the areas of high importance to respondents was housing, with the commitment 'we will support the provision of decent new homes and improve the quality of existing housing' being rated as 'high' by 41% of respondents. As well as those who rated the issue as 'high', 45% rated its importance as 'medium' and just 1 in 10 rating it as 'low'. Those aged 35-44 were less likely to rate this commitment as 'high' importance (30% compared to 41% of the group as a whole). Socio-economic group E (state pensioners, casual or lowest grade workers, those who are unemployed or on state benefits) were more likely to rate housing as 'high' importance to them (58% compared to 41% of the group as a whole) and less likely to rate this as 'medium' (20% compared to 45% of the group overall).