

# **REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**3 OCTOBER 2013**

## **ATTENDANCE OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH**

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### **Summary**

This report details the area covered by the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Development and Economic Growth, which falls 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 the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Development and Economic Growth is:

- Building\* and Development Control
- Community centres
- Economic development
- Europe
- Local Development Framework
- Planning
- Rural Strategy
- Social regeneration.

\* The Leader and Full Council have delegated the Council's building control functions to the South Thames Gateway Building Control Joint Committee. The Terms of Reference of the South Thames Gateway Building Control Joint Committee are set out within the Council's Constitution and include executive and non-executive functions. Councillor Chitty is appointed to sit on the South Thames Gateway Building Control Joint Committee.

## **2. Achievements for 2012-13**

### **2.1 STG Building Control Partnership**

- 2.1.1 Further development of consultancy services offered to internal and external customers, e.g. energy assessments, code for sustainable homes, clerk of works and condition surveys, generating over £100,000.
- 2.1.2 17% reduction in Medway contributions over the lifespan of the next partnership term 2012-2017.
- 2.1.3 Investment in IT funded by surpluses in 2011/12 and 2012/13, introducing a web based system, which will allow for mobile working and self-serve enquiries by customers (increasing productivity and reducing waiting times for customers).
- 2.1.4 Ongoing discussions with a number of Kent Authorities regarding expansion of the Partnership.
- 2.1.5 Comprehensive Audit carried out in 2012/13 by Mid-Kent Audit which concluded that the Partnership provided substantial levels of assurance to the three Partners and that the procedures and governance could be used as an example of best practice in setting up and running shared services.

### **2.2 Community Centres**

- 2.2.1 Total income from hall hire increased by 10.2% from the previous year to £139,229.
- 2.2.2 Income from hall hire rose to 46.6% of gross expenditure in 2012-13, compared to 21% in 2008-2009.
- 2.2.3 An annual footfall of over 100,000 user visits, an average of over 2,000 user visits per week.
- 2.2.4 There are 50 different regular groups using the 4 centres
- 2.2.5 Community Centre Customer Survey Satisfaction levels are at an all time high with more 'excellent satisfied users' than ever before.
- 2.2.6 Ongoing improvements to White Road community centre - a new community garden installed, new youth outreach services set up.

### **2.3 Economic development**

#### **2.3.1 Employ Medway**

Helped a total of 324 unemployed people to find work during 2012/13, a 38% improvement in performance compared to 2011-12.

Helped 228 previously long term unemployed residents to remain in a job longer than 6 months during 2012/13 - a 43% increase compared to 2011-12.

Provided intensive employment advice and support to over 1,200 local long term unemployed residents.

### 2.3.2 Innovation Centre Medway

95-100% tenant occupancy at the Innovation Centre achieved, increasing overall rental income by 16% compared to 2011-12. There are now over 60 business tenants at the Centre and 275 jobs.

### 2.3.3 “Seeds for Business Growth” programme

Through the Council’s business support programmes, intensive assistance has been provided to 272 local business representatives, creating and protecting 275 private sector jobs. (This relates to the following initiatives):

- I) Start up grants;
- II) Partners for Growth loans;
- III) Apprenticeships;
- IV) Innovation Vouchers;
- V) “Master-class” seminars and workshops;
- VI) Recruitment Services;
- VII) Managed Business Workspace.

### 2.3.4 Innovation Vouchers programme

Secured funding with the University of Greenwich and through the EU Interreg IVA programme for a further 40 business innovation voucher schemes offering University research and development expertise and facilities to local ‘innovation’ companies.

### 2.3.5 New TIGER Loans Fund for Local Businesses - £20 million

In partnership with KCC and North Kent local authorities, we have secured £20 million from the government’s Regional Growth Fund in order to launch the TIGER programme, offering large interest free loans to small companies to invest in growth and job creation.

### 2.3.6 Project RECREATE – Creative Industries in Chatham Town Centre

Successful bid for £500,000 of EU and UK government funding for project RECREATE, to transform vacant commercial space near Sun Pier into a multi-purpose business hub for over 30 creative enterprises and artists.

## 2.4 **Europe**

### 2.4.1 Successful bid for £2 million of European Regional Development Fund to benefit Medway via 5 new projects:

- IMPRESS – Job coaching for the unemployed
- GREENFIT – Improve the energy efficiency of business parks
- RECREATE - Transform vacant town centre commercial premises into work space, exhibition and studio space for creative enterprises
- ICR – Assist creative entrepreneurs / artists to develop the quality of their products and services, supporting professional development
- CYC – Cyber Youth Connections – Detached youth development programmes, benefiting disaffected young people in Medway.

## **2.5 Local Development Framework**

2.5.1 Medway's Local Development Framework Core Strategy was submitted for Examination in February 2012 and the initially scheduled hearings were held in June 2012. These initially progressed satisfactorily but late evidence on nightingales submitted by the RSPB caused Natural England to change its position on Lodge Hill. This followed 17 years progressing the project including more than 40 consultations.

2.5.2 This has caused a most unfortunate delay in progressing the Core Strategy and it is unlikely that the way forward will be clear until the end of November 2013.

2.5.3 It is impossible to forecast the outcome but every effort is being made to contest the notification of the site at Lodge Hill as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

2.5.4 Notwithstanding, this work has been progressed on a number of other matters and include:

- The publication, for consultation purposes, of the masterplan for Rochester Airport and the Chatham World Heritage Planning Policy
- An assessment of planning policies and their conformity with the National Planning Policy Framework with a training event for Members on 10 October
- Publication of the Annual Monitoring Report
- Further evidence work to support the Core Strategy Examination.

## **2.6 Planning/Development Management**

2.6.1 During the year 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013, the authority received 1547 planning applications; compared to 1590 the previous year. Compared to other unitary authorities, Medway performed above the national average for determining major, minor and other applications within the statutory timeframe.

2.6.2 The Government has recognised that major applications which initially look as if they could be determined in time, could go out of time due, for instance, to the need for amendments to seek improvements but also because applicants may delay the completion of S106 agreements. They have therefore introduced a Planning Extension Agreement system, where applicants and Local Planning Authority's (LPA's) can agree extensions of time subject to there being a programme and clear end date to that extension. Medway have agreed two Planning Extension Agreements since July 2013.

- 2.6.3 Development Management is a member of a benchmarking club run by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS). The second round of PAS benchmarking data collection took place in November 2012. This focused on pre-application, customer experience and satisfaction, quality, enforcement and policy. The final report on the data collected has been produced and the findings show that Medway Council is performing well and cost effective when compared to other similar authorities. Consideration of the report did identify some minor areas where improvements can be undertaken and these have been discussed with staff and the necessary steps are being put in place to deliver those improvements.
- 2.6.4 Liaison with major house builders continues to assist them to meet commitments during challenging economic times. This has resulted in the negotiation of payment plans to assist developers to meet their S106 developer contributions. During the year 2012/13 S106 contributions of £900,729 were received.
- 2.6.5 Forums continue to be held with stakeholders to help determine how we can work in partnership to deliver a good quality service within the constraints we are working too. The annual meeting with major developers, Members and senior officers is scheduled to take place in October 2013 and will focus particularly on the use of planning extension agreements, Kent Design Initiative and sustainable urban drainage systems.
- 2.6.6 The Derelict Buildings Officer has been focusing on key areas and buildings, with those buildings in the worst condition or along key routes in Medway given highest priority. These includes a number of properties in the New Road and Star Hill to Sun Pier area. Four Enforcement Notices were serviced during the first quarter 2013.
- 2.6.7 Enforcement activity during the first quarter 2013 shows that 137 new cases have been received, 239 site visits have been carried out with 10 Notices being served and 4 prosecutions being undertaken.
- 2.6.8 Development Management successfully obtained re-certification of its ISO accreditation following an external assessment in June 2013. The assessment primarily focused on strategic/management issues and reviewed findings from its ISO assessments over the last three years. Assessment findings during this 3 year period have all been positive and have shown no non-conformities, a credit to the whole development management team.

## **2.7 Rural Strategy**

### **2.7.1 Leader Rural Development Programme**

Much of the Hoo Peninsula is included in the EU funded Kent Downs and Marshes Leader Rural Development Programme. The programme is a competitive process and the maximum grant available for any one project is £50,000.

In 2013 High Halstow Village Hall was awarded £50,000 towards a major refurbishment of the Heron Centre. The works are now nearing completion.

Over the life of the Leader programme, three projects in Medway were supported, bringing in grant aid of just under £150,000 to deliver schemes with a total value of over £500,000.

The Leader programme is currently in a transition period, preparing for a new funding round. Medway Council continues to work closely with local partnerships to ensure that our rural area is included in future funding programmes.

### 2.7.2 Broadband Development

Medway Council is a partner with Kent County Council to the Broadband Development UK (BDUK) programme. This government programme seeks to invest in telecommunications infrastructure to deliver improvements to broadband services. This has particular relevance to rural areas, where the dispersed location of businesses and homes is a disincentive to private sector investment.

Following a competitive tendering process, a contract has been awarded to BT to work in partnership with KCC and Medway Council to deliver improvements to broadband infrastructure. The programme targets are:

- At least 95% of all properties in Kent will have access to higher-speed fibre-based broadband infrastructure by the end of 2015;
- Every property in the project area will be able to access a broadband service of at least 2Mbps (the minimum speed that the Government says should be available in every home and business); and
- A minimum of 21% of premises will get superfast broadband of at least 24 Mbps.

Planning and surveying work is currently underway and information is expected later this autumn to confirm the timetable and locations to receive improved services. The build out will be completed by the end of 2015.

It is anticipated that remoter parts of the Hoo Peninsula, currently experiencing very poor broadband services, would be identified for further investment through the programme.

## 2.8 **Social Regeneration**

### 2.8.1 Project INSPIRER

Through this Interreg IVA project, the council has:

- Worked with teams of local residents to remove over 40 tonnes of fly tipping rubbish from the All Saints and Luton areas of Chatham
- Created two new community gardens – one at White Road Community Centre and the other at Wayfield Children’s Centre

### 2.8.2 Eco-advantage

Through this European Social Fund project, the council has:

- Set up a Medway Sustainability Information centre at Eastgate House in Rochester High Street, showcasing sustainable living and sustainable development to over 6,000 local visitors.

### 2.8.3 Benefit Reform Advice Programme and Medway Credit Union

The council has secured £75,000 of government funds via the Revenue and Benefits Team to set up a Benefits Reform Advice Programme and relocate Medway Credit Union to the Pentagon Centre.

#### **Lead officer contact**

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#### **Background documents**

None.