

BUSINESS SUPPORT

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19 MARCH 2014

ATTENDANCE OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

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Summary

This report sets out activities and progress on work areas within the Housing and Community Services Portfolio, which fall within the remit of this Committee. This information is provided in relation to the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services being held to account.

1. Background

1.1 The areas within the terms of reference of this Overview and Scrutiny Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services are:

- Adult learning
- Bereavement and Registration Services
- Disabled adaptations to housing
- Homeless and housing options
- Housing allocations for social housing
- Housing Strategy
- Private sector housing
- The development and management of the Council's housing stock

2. Achievements for 2013-14

2.1 Adult learning

- 2.1.1 As a result of the OFSTED Inspection in 2013 the Council has restructured curriculum management to enable the service to look at the amount of managers required and their job profiles. This has helped to drive the service forward regarding to the improvements required .We now have a more robust two tier management structure with 4 Programme Area Managers (PAMs) and 6 Programme Area Leaders (PALs) assigned to each strand of curriculum. This new staffing structure has allowed the team to work closer together and ensure that consistency throughout the Quality Assurance system impacts service wide. The PAMs role is to ensure effectiveness of leadership and management, review strategic planning and oversee the curriculum. The PALs role is to ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good and support the Tutors on a one to one basis to help them improve their teaching, learning and assessment practice.
- 2.1.2 Since the opening of the Medway Adult & Community Learning Service (MACLS) Centre at Gillingham in November 2012, focus on work skills training has been successful and additional work skills courses have been set up at our Rochester Centre and outreach Centres to support the rise in numbers on the programmes.
- 2.1.3 A total of 982 learners were on the Workskills programme in 2011/2012 and from September 2013 (6 months) to present, there are a total of 624 learners. This number will increase by July 2014 with more provision planned. Due to demand and having to increase the provision planned at Gillingham, building work is taking place at present for three additional ground floor classrooms and these will be available from March 2014.
- 2.1.4 The Community Learning provision has increased during 2013-14, and from September to date we have a total of 2,095 learners compared in 2012-13 of 2,387 learners, with an anticipated outturn by July of 3,750 learners. Job Centre Plus (JCP) has been referring clients to the ESOL (English as a second language) provision and this area has been extremely successful. MACLS are able to offer training to learners starting at a very low level. A total of 465 learners went through this programme in 2012/13, from September 2013 to present date, a total of 394 learners have completed or are currently on programme We are expecting at least an increase 10% within this strand by the end of July 2014, due to demand from JCP and mainstream provision.
- 2.1.5 Within English and Maths there were a total of 374 learners in 2012/13. From September 2013 to present we have 340 learners on programme and are expecting a further 60 to enrol onto programme through to July 2014.
- 2.1.6 The initial assessment process has been reviewed and managers and tutors are using initial assessment results to determine where the

learner's starting point is, whether learners require additional support and to ensure that appropriate support is in place. From a restructure we identified the need for two induction officers to support the initial assessment for English and Maths learners prior to enrolling onto courses. This is working well and learners are accessing courses within a two week turn around.

- 2.1.7 MACLS continues to have excellent partnership working with the Job Centre Plus, Probation Service, Housing and the Work programme. This programme commenced in January 2012, and from September 2013 we have had a total of 183 learners over 39 courses. This figure is anticipated to increase within this year from referral agents continuing to send their clients to us for skill base training in English and Maths.
- 2.1.8 On Friday 10 and Saturday 11 January 2014, our promotional stand at Hempstead Valley shopping Centre was visited by a total of 178 people who were interested in finding out about our courses. Follow up phone calls by our managers have produced additional enrolments onto programmes. So far this has resulted in around 50 new enrolments.
- 2.1.9 MACLS have booked a promotional stand at Hempstead Valley Shopping Centre during early September 2014, to help raise our profile and give information and advice to those who may be interested in enrolling onto our courses in September 14 and curriculum staff will be available at this event

Partnership Working

- 2.1.10 In partnership with Employ Medway we are working on a European funded project with Chichester College to provide two new strands of employment related training. Skills Support for Redundancy which seeks to help people who are at risk of redundancy or are newly redundant, and Work Place Learning which seeks to help those with low skills who are already employed but may be wishing to improve their prospects. This project started in January 2013 and so far we have had 31 learners on the Chichester College course and 13 on workplace learning.
- 2.1.11 An additional project we are now involved with is Skills Support (SSR) working in partnership with South East College. This will enable employers to access further training, even if their staff already have a level 2 qualification or equivalent. Under the SSR we have worked with two large organisations, who have employees at risk of redundancy. So far over 40 people have accessed this training.
- 2.1.12 Through the new partnership between MACLS and MidKent College (MKC), we are planning to deliver courses, on Saturdays and across the summer holidays, using the College facilities. The Programme Area Managers and the Programme Area Leaders visited the College recently and met with key curriculum staff who they will work with in planning new programmes. We will be producing a joint marketing publication outlining the courses and sign posting progression for

September 2014 starts at MKC. MACLS will be attending the promotional open day events at MKC in March, May and June 2014.

Business Development

- 2.1.13 Business development, community and partnership working has noticeably increased, both internally with teams at Medway Council and externally with community groups and charities. This includes an increased contribution to corporate training at Medway Council (the Council income to adult learning is £72,000) covering a range of courses plus the re-instatement of the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) and Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) Leadership and Management qualification, which are due to start this month.
- 2.1.14 There are new initiatives with Public Health with two very exciting projects in development: Falls prevention for the older person's workforce and a formal referral pathway programme with the Healthy Medway and Stop Smoking service.
- 2.1.15 A more strategic approach has been established for working with Children's Centres thus ensuring a wider coverage of targeted provision for those groups identified at risk, aligned to Council priorities. We are currently running 41 courses with places for over 490 learners. MACLS is also contributing to the Troubled Families programme, offering courses that support the hard to reach outcomes of the project – budgeting, alcohol dependency, nutritional issues, social exclusion, employability skills etc. thus offering a clear pathway out of poverty. This is relatively new, but we have 30 individuals interested with the potential to enrol on several courses.
- 2.1.16 The Medway College of Social care is part of MACLS and is the main provider of social care training to the Private and Voluntary Care sector. We have increased this provision by offering a range of core competencies required by the workforce and now work very closely with social care teams across the area, including the Medway Direct Payment Service for the personal assistant workforce; Adult Social care for care managers and social workers and JCP offering a NVQ level 1 in care and a direct route to employment. Current income from these programmes is £77,000.
- 2.1.17 MACLS has recently become an I Care Ambassador Service – a national initiative promoting employment in social care, and MACLS is the first provider in the south-east to be involved. The aim of the project is to promote a more positive image of social care as a career through presentations, supporting work placements and providing information at recruitment events. Ongoing plans for increased business at MACLS includes closer links with schools and libraries as well as working with local community groups such as the Active retired, Sunlight Trust and Ethnic Minority Forum.
- 2.1.18 MACLS has also recently agreed to run a new construction and trade skills qualification as a pilot project. This has been identified as a

growth area and one lacking in skills by the JCP, especially with a view to the new Paramount Park project.

OFSTED Inspection

- 2.1.19 The service was inspected by OFSTED week commencing 4 February and the inspection report should be published or around 14 March 2014. There will be an update at this meeting on the outcome.

Looking Forward:

2013-2016 Skills Funding Statement Overview

- 2.1.20 On 10 February 14, Department of Business Innovation and Skills released The Skills Funding statement .The Statement sets out funding priorities for 2013-2016 to help accelerate skills development in the community. These priorities are:

- focus on giving people the transferable skills and job specific skills to enter and progress in work
- support apprenticeships as the core offer for young people
- focus on turning around the lives of local people by maximising the impact public funding has on the social and economic well-being of families and communities particularly those who are most disadvantaged
- provide an extended Traineeship offer, making 24 year olds eligible, enabling us to help more young people get the skills they need to become work ready
- ensure all those who have not yet reached English and Maths GCSE at A*-C are supported to do so
- extend flexibility to the sector so that FE can deploy resources more effectively.

- 2.1.21 Loans will continue to be available for learners aged 24 and over who want to develop their skills at level 3 and above. Loans are not suitable for employers of prospective Apprentices and in the wider reform adult Apprenticeships will be supported through a contribution of public funds.

- 2.1.22 We are currently reviewing our mission and service plan and will build these priorities into the plan together with our aim to diversify and seek other business opportunities.

2.2 Bereavement and Registration Services

Medway Crematorium Improvement Programme

- 2.2.1 The scope of this project was to install new cremators fitted with mercury abatement equipment, extend and improve the two chapels and provide additional car parking. The drivers were better customer experience and government legislation. The budget for this project was set at £2,724,938, funded from a mix of a reserve fund held by

Bereavement Services (an historic fund, specifically set up to deal with cremator improvement work) and Prudential Borrowing, funded from the annual contribution to the reserve fund.

- 2.2.2 All three new cremators have been installed, together with the mercury abatement equipment. The East and West Chapels have been completed and improvements to car parking and the road surfacing undertaken.
- 2.2.3 Over the summer of last year, the supplier and installer of the cremators (Crawfords Europe) entered into voluntary administration. The principal contractor, Provia, secured alternative suppliers, IFZW, to complete the works, but as would be expected, there have been cost implications as a result. These additional costs can be met by extending the Prudential Borrowing for the project, funded from the annual contribution to the reserve fund.
- 2.2.4 Key Members have been updated on progress with the programme, with a site visit over the summer, and a further visit for all Members of the Committee has been arranged for 20 March.
- 2.2.5 The team at the Crematorium has ensured that high levels of service continued to be delivered throughout the programme, and any disruption has been kept to a minimum.
- 2.2.6 Customer satisfaction continues to be high and the most recent customer satisfaction survey showed excellent levels of satisfaction with the service provided at 81% for Bereavement Services.

Registration Service

- 2.2.7 Despite an ever-increasing demand for registrations, the service continues to exceed the performance standards set by the General Register Office. Over the last calendar year there have been 4895 babies registered, 830 civil marriages, 20 civil partnerships and 480 people made British Citizens.
- 2.2.8 Customer satisfaction is high with the service, and the last customer satisfaction survey showed satisfaction at 86%.

2.3 Disabled adaptations to housing

- 2.3.1 The Council has assisted for the financial year (2013/14) to date 116 households to undertake alterations and adaptations to allow them to remain living independently in their homes. The demand for this assistance, provided by way of Disabled Facilities Grants continues to increase and the Council has announced an additional investment of £500,000 into this scheme.

2.4 Housing solutions and housing options

- 2.4.1 In line with regional and national trends the number of households approaching the Council seeking advice and assistance has increased overall by about 12% compared with 2012/13. However, in common with many other London and southeastern authorities we

have seen the highest number of applications made for the year to date with 706 homeless decisions being made, compared to 435 for last year. For the first three quarters of the year 43% were accepted as homelessness, which is slightly lower than the national average.

- 2.4.2. There is no single reason for the increased number of applications but it includes higher demand for private rented accommodation, the reluctance of landlords to take on vulnerable households, financial hardship, changing demographics and limited support for many of the most vulnerable within our community.
- 2.4.3. The number of households being placed in temporary accommodation has also increased from 106 at this point in 2013 to 139 in the current year, but at a lower rate compared to the number of applications.

2.5 Housing allocations for social housing

- 2.5.1 The Council has adopted a new Social Housing Allocations Policy, which was implemented in September 2013. This now means that consideration can be given to the current housing needs of households, whilst also allowing for additional priority to be given to households who are considered to be making a positive contribution to their community. We are also now able to reduce priority for applicants in certain circumstances, including where applicants have been found guilty of ASB, or have refused two reasonable offers of accommodation. In addition the Council will not register households who have lived in the area for less than 2 years, or where they have a limited housing need or the means to address their housing needs on their own.
- 2.5.2. As at February 2014 5,703 households have been placed into active bands within the Housing Register. Information on other households is maintained and reviewed on the presentation of additional information or changes in household circumstances.

2.6 Housing strategy

- 2.6.1 The Council has continued to work towards meeting the aims and objectives set out within its Housing Strategy, with good progress being made in most areas. Work is now starting on the next housing strategy, which will be considered by Councillors later in the year. A decision was made to review the Council's approach to homelessness in the light of changes in patterns of approaches and demand. This new Homeless Prevention Strategy has been adopted, and work is underway on its implementation.
- 2.6.2 By working with the Homes & Communities Agency, Housing Associations and Developers we have been able to deliver additional affordable homes to help meet local need. The current 3 year National Affordable Programme comes to an end in April 2014. To date over this period we have been able to secure a total investment in affordable housing of more than £87m, creating jobs, 822 homes and enabling on-going development of schemes. This has included

the provision of more than 160 units of extra care accommodation, with the most recent scheme having just been completed on Liberty Park.

2.7 Private sector housing

2.7.1 The size of the private rented sector continues to increase within Medway, and the number of complaints in terms of housing standards and management are also increasing by 23% year on year. Consideration is now being given to the circumstances and type of assistance to be provided, with a review of the Housing Enforcement Policy to be undertaken later in this year.

2.7.2 In some cases landlords are either unwilling or unable to invest in their properties to ensure minimal standards are maintained, and so action is required to resolve these issues. In other situations tenants have unrealistic expectations or fail to act reasonably and then an intervention is needed. As previously reported to this Committee the number of long term empty properties is currently at its lowest level at 0.87%.

2.7.3 As part of the Community Engagement Initiative we are working with 39 other agencies to undertake targeted area based action to tackle a range of housing, social and economic issues. This is allowing for the provision of specific advice to tenants on issues, identifying previously unknown HMOs and identifying properties where formal action is now being undertaken. There are currently 110 Licensable HMOs in Medway and all have either been licensed or we are working with the landlords to achieve this. We have also been able to undertake a programme or risk assessment and inspection of non-licensable HMOs.

2.8 The development and management of the Council's housing stock

2.8.1 **Performance**

The performance of the service overall continues to improve as at Quarter 3 (March - December 2013) the figures identified that :-

The service is in top quartile for: -

- Day time Emergency repairs – Mears (median to upper) - 99.8%
- Urgent repairs – Mears – 99.4%
- Gas Servicing Compliancy – 100%
- Customer satisfaction quality and service – Mears – 99%
- Average time to re-let all council dwellings (Calendar days) – 14 days
- % of rent lost through dwellings being vacant GN & HFIL – 0.56%
- Percentage of rent collected to date, excluding arrears bought forward – 102.87%

The service is in Median quartile for: -

- Routine repairs - all contractors (median to upper) – 99%

- Repairs fixed 1st time – Mears – 93.3%
- Average start - end time: all day reactive repairs – Mears –11.24 days
- Average call waiting time (seconds) (median to upper) – 10.4 seconds
- Current tenant arrears as a percentage of the annual rent roll (median to upper) – 1.67%

2.8.2 STAR Survey 2013 (Formerly Status Survey)

The service undertook a bi-annual customer satisfaction survey in Spring 2013 to ascertain tenants views on the service.

When compared to the previous 2011 Survey there was an increase in satisfaction for all areas of the service.

The repairs service saw a significant increase in satisfaction.

Landlord Services survey 2013 feedback

Results at a glance	2013	2011
Overall satisfaction with landlord services	84.7%	77.9%
Satisfaction with repairs and maintenance	82.1%	72.9%
Satisfaction with final outcome of contact	77.4%	62.5%
Value for money for rent	87.6%	85.7%
Keeping tenants informed	80.7%	73%

Overall satisfaction with Landlord Services has improved from 77.9% in 2011 to 84.7% in 2013. Satisfaction levels for most areas of the service have improved from 2011 to 2013.

The greatest area of improvement since 2011 is with the repairs and maintenance service where satisfaction levels have increased by 12%.

In comparison to peer authorities Medway ranked in the median to upper quartile in terms of satisfaction levels for:

- The overall quality of the home
- Rent providing value for money
- Service charges providing value for money
- Homes For Independent Living respondents satisfied with the service provided

2.8.3 Repairs and Maintenance - Key achievements

- Repairs contract tendered Autumn 2013.
- Completed a full set of up to date Fire Risk Assessments for all Council owned blocks of flats

- As part of the Kent and Medway Green Deal Partnership have accessed up to £80m of external funding for ECO works.

This has allowed (as of December 2013):

Installation of Cavity Wall Insulation:

8 houses across the Council stock have benefited from the installation of cavity wall insulation.

3 blocks, which is a total of 46 flats, have also benefited from cavity wall insulation being installed to the external structure, these were:

- 1 to 10 Park Manor, 1 to 15 Austell Manor, 1 to 12 Clopton Court and 1 to 9 Victory Manor.

Installation of Loft Insulation:

13 houses across the Council stock have benefited from the installation of loft insulation.

Further works are scheduled to 6 blocks. In total 83 flats will benefit from these measures being installed, these are:

66 to 70 Goudhurst Road, 1 to 12 Welcombe Court, 1 to 12 Wilmecote Court, 1 to 12 Hathaway Court and St Albans Close (1 to 22 Snow House and 53 to 74 Cheffins House).

2.8.3 HRA Development Team

A new team has been set up to take forward new development plans for building new Council Homes. Members have agreed an initial house building programme of £5.5 million which will increase to £8.5 million over the next 4 years. This has and will be financed from borrowing "headroom".

Plans are underway to build new homes on sites across Medway as follows:

Hazlemere Drive	1 x 5b house
Buttermere Drive	2 x 2b houses
Tangmere Close	4 x 2b houses
Eastcourt Lane	1 x 4b house
Beechings Way	3 x 3b houses
Westerham Close	3 x 1b bungalows
Charing Close	2 x 2b houses
Begonia Avenue	3 x 3b houses
Romany Road	4 x 1b bungalows
Beatty Avenue	32 x bungalows

2.8.4 Welfare Reform/Income Management

- Rent arrears have reduced from £279,209 as at 2012/13 year-end to £227,509 as at end of 2013/14 quarter three.

- One of the positive impacts of the Welfare Reform team has led to a reduction in evictions when compared to last year as follows:

01 April 2012 to 31 December 2012 = 12

01 April 2013 to 31 December 2013 = 8

- There were originally 292 HRA households affected by the benefit changes as at April 2013. This has now reduced to 200 through effective management and assistance by the team. Examples of how this has been achieved include people down-sizing, taking in lodgers and gaining employment.
- 150 Tenants have attended 2 mutual exchange speed dating events to assist with moving this year.
- The team have worked with the Housing Benefits Team to identify £9,920 of backdated housing benefit for HRA tenants. This has assisted with clearing arrears and avoided court action.
- Rent collection has moved to top quartile in terms of benchmarking when compared to our family group of comparators.

2.8.5 **Discretionary Housing Payments**

- During the current financial year since April 2013 to date (*24 February 2014*), the Welfare Reform team has assisted HRA tenants to claim £36,627 in discretionary housing payments. This is 12.3% of the total (£297,661) of all Discretionary Housing Payments awarded/committed across all tenures in Medway that are claiming housing benefit.
- The welfare reform team continue to work with HRA tenants to secure further Discretionary Housing Payments to minimise the impact of the size criteria deduction, whilst assisting tenants identify and secure accommodation of a more appropriate size to fit the needs of their household.

2.8.6 **Leasehold Service charges**

These have seen an 18% increase in income recovered. Up to 17 February 2014 £122,356.75 had been collected against a total income collected throughout 2012/13 of £103,517.95.

2.8.7 **Tenancy Services**

253 tenancy audits have been completed so far and have identified no significant issues around tenancy fraud. There were 2 properties where sub-letting was taking place and this was resolved without legal action having to be taken.

2.8.8 **Housing Repairs and Maintenance**

Investment in the Housing Stock has continued.

The 2013/14 Programme estimates a spend of £4,938,935. Such investment underpins the Council's commitment to ensuring our homes continue to meet and surpass the Decent Homes standard.

To date in 2013/14 we have installed/refurbished/completed:

- 149 Domestic Boilers
- 42 Bathrooms
- 105 Kitchens
- 117 Front doors
- 57 Rear Doors
- Installed over 130 smoke detectors
- Installed 300 CO2 detectors
- 90 periodic electrical tests and remedial works
- 110 asbestos surveys and asbestos removals.

There are further plans by end March 2014 to complete an additional:

- 102 Domestic Boilers
- 83 Bathrooms
- 59 Kitchens
- 32 Front doors
- 15 Rear doors

Roof replacement programmes are also underway at Benenden and Harbledown Manor Twydall. New door entry system, windows, flooring, front doors, external and internal painting.

We will also spend £360,000 improving the fire protection and safety of HRA homes, followed next year with a further £1 million worth of investment. This year's final quarter programme will see us continue to install new fire resistant front doors and inclusive building works to communal doors, risers and utility cupboards.

2.8.9 **Resident Involvement**

Focus Groups are all held quarterly, and include the following

- Leaseholders Focus Group
- Estate Services Focus Group
- Tenancy Services Focus Group
- Homes for Independent Living Focus Group
- Resident Involvement Focus Group
- Editorial Panel

We have set up a designated persons panel to deal with customer complaints in accordance with the requirements of the Regulator – this board is made up of tenants and elected members.

The editorial panel have made suggestions for our publications such as Housing Matters and the annual report. The Resident Involvement group has played a key role in organising the community fun events.

Five Fun days were held last year in Brompton, Hazlemere Drive, Derwent Way, Skinner Street and Twydall.

Following a review with customers the tenant inspectors were re-branded as Tenant Champions and work has recently started to get this group up and running.

2.8.10 Partnerships

The HRA has continued to develop our partnership working and have:

- Secured funding to trial the provision of skips in deprived estates where we have a large concentration of our stock.
- Undertaken a two-day event whereby Solutions4Health service, commissioned by Medway Council Public Health team, visited our estates in the priority wards identified by "Free health check". This free service undertook health checks to residents identifying early stages of health conditions.
- Secured a free service of litter picking on our estates from the Community Payback team.
- As part of our response to the Welfare reforms and to increase employability amongst our tenants, a partnership with Medway Adult Community Learning Service has been developed. 1,300 of our tenants have been identified and contacted who may be entitled to free training. As a result the initial uptake is as follows:
 - 3 currently on Retail Entry Level Award course
 - 1 currently on Computing Introduction Skills for Work course
 - 2 currently on Getting Started in Business course
 - 2 currently on Customer Service Level 1 Award course
 - 1 booked in to start the 9-week Get That Job course
 - 7 booked in to start Customer Service Level 1 Award course
 - 2 booked in to start Retail Entry Level Award course
 - 2 on waiting list to attend an IT Initial Assessment workshop
 - 2 on waiting list for forthcoming Food Hygiene course
 - 3 on waiting list for forthcoming Computerised Accounts course
 - 1 on waiting list for forthcoming First Aid course
 - 5 on waiting list for forthcoming Health & Social Care course
- This is just the start of the work around the Employability Project for our tenants. The team will follow this work up with those who have secured employment to ensure the work is sustainable following the transition of benefit dependant to into work.
- The HRA is working with youth services, to target areas and publicise youth centres, undertaking diversionary activities.
- 7 of our tenants have also attended courses through the Kent Engagement Group, funded via a subscription fee paid by the

Resident Involvement Budget, that included 5 on the food hygiene course and 2 at the charring and committee skills.

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Background documents

None