

Medway Council
Meeting of Regeneration, Community and Culture
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 10 April 2014

6.30pm to 9.10pm

Record of the meeting

Subject to approval as an accurate record at the next meeting of this committee

Present: Councillors: Bright, Carr (Chairman), Etheridge, Griffiths, Adrian Gulvin (Vice-Chairman), Hubbard, Juby, Mason, Osborne, Stamp and Turpin

Substitutes: Councillors:
Griffin (Substitute for Clarke)
Mackness (Substitute for Mackinlay)

In Attendance: Councillor Rodney Chambers, OBE, Leader
Councillor Mrs Diane Chambers
Councillor Vince Maple, Leader of the Labour Group
Robin Cooper, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture
Stephen Gaimster, Assistant Director, Housing and Regeneration
Andy McGrath, Assistant Director, Front Line Services
Tim England, Head of Safer Communities
David Bond, Transport Operations Manager
Hannah Langford, Senior Lawyer (Planning and Projects)
Ellen Wright, Democratic Services Officer

988 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 30 January 2014 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

989 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Clarke and Mackinlay.

990 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

991 Declarations of interests and whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other interests

Councillor Stamp referring to agenda item 8 (Actions Update of Fair Access to Credit Task Group) advised the Committee that his partner was the Chief Executive of the Citizens Advice Bureau but that he would remain in the meeting as the Committee was just being asked to note progress on this agenda item.

992 Attendance of the Leader

Discussion:

The Leader, Councillor Rodney Chambers, attended the meeting to be held to account for the areas of his portfolio that fell within the remit of this Committee.

Members asked questions and commented and Councillor Rodney Chambers responded as follows:

- **Reinstatement of the site/car park at the Brompton Academy site adjacent to the Great Lines**

Planning consent for works at this site included a landscaping condition that the site must be reinstated therefore reinstatement of the site/car park would be the responsibility of Brompton Academy. The Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture was requested to let Councillor Juby know when the works would be undertaken in compliance with the planning consent.

- **World Heritage Site Status**

It was disappointing that having received early indications that the Council's bid for World Heritage Site Status would be favourably received, the bid had subsequently not been supported. Whilst it was accepted that different assessors had taken the decision not to grant World Heritage Site Status to Medway, it was difficult to understand such inconsistency. The World Heritage Partnership would continue its work and look to how it could overcome factors within the assessment for the future.

- **Relocation of Strood Library**

In order to make libraries more accessible, the Council had decided to locate Community Hubs in library buildings. This has already been achieved at Gillingham and Chatham and Strood Library would now be relocated at a more accessible location with a Community Hub.

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- **Section 106 funding for The Strand**

The Council was aware of the need for further investment at the Strand and, in addition to the funds already acquired for works at The Strand through the Planning Committee imposing Section 106 funding agreements on planning consents, there would be further future opportunities to acquire additional funds as and when other developments proceed.

Section 106 funding had also provided a positive benefit to the local community at Hillyfields through use of funds from Berkley Homes.

- **Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) – Works at Commodore Hard and the launching slope at The Strand**

It was confirmed that minor repairs had been undertaken to remove seaweed and algae to make the area safe. The Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture agreed to provide the Committee with details as to whether this site was included within any other Local Enterprise Submissions.

- **Inward Investment**

Five companies invested in Medway during the first half of 2013-14. Two were office based and two were industrial space. The Leader agreed to notify Councillor Griffiths direct of the type of business of the fifth company.

- **TIGER**

Of the 23 businesses awarded TIGER loans to date, six had been Medway businesses. The value of loans awarded to Medway businesses so far totalled £831,000.

A number of promotional events and roadshows had been held across Kent to promote the TIGER scheme.

Whilst a question relating to the criteria and the approvals process, would be better directed to the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Development and Economic Growth, as she served on the TIGER Board which considered funding applications, the Leader suggested that the Director for Regeneration, Community and Culture to provide a briefing note on the numbers of applications submitted to the Board and the criteria used by the Board to assess applications.

- **Chatham Town Centre Improvements**

The Leader advised that he was unable to provide an update as to the future plans for the Trafalgar Centre as this was not operated by the

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Council. However, one of the Council's submissions for Growth Fund funding was for work on the Pentagon and its adjacent buildings. This could result in a substantial planning application being received relating to development on the corner adjacent to The Brook Theatre.

- **Rochester Airport**

Responding to a question as to whether he considered the £4.4 million funding would be sufficient for works at Rochester Airport, the Leader responded by stating that he had no reason to believe that the £4.4 million to be expended on Rochester Airport was anything but a fair figure. He referred to the Business Park and confirmed that there would be significant capital funding required to undertake works at the Business Park and drew attention to paragraph 2.4 of the report which had Rochester Airport Business Park Development listed as a scheme submitted for funding to the Local Enterprise Partnership.

- **City Deal**

The Leader confirmed that the Council would continue exploring the possibility of a City Deal for Medway and that meetings have already taken place with Ministers to ensure that Medway's voice is continued to be heard.

- **Former Civic Centre site, Strood**

It was confirmed that the priority works required at this site was increasing the height of the river wall. A submission for flood defences has been made as part of a bid to the Government on Local Growth.

- **Sun Pier**

The Leader confirmed that the Council had always had aspirations to create a cultural quarter with associated businesses in the vicinity of Sun Pier through to the existing Rochester Railway Station. This continued to be an ambition and resources were now coming in. He advised that the Council had secured creative arts workspaces at Rochester Riverside.

Referring to Sun Pier, he confirmed that works at this site had been undertaken following receipt of £2.9 million funding for Chatham Town Centre – a small part of which has been used for the Pier. This site would now form part of the cultural quarter. He confirmed a desire to have greater use of the river for both leisure use and transportation.

Decision:

- a) The Leader was thanked for attending the meeting and answering Members' questions.

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- b) A briefing note be provided to members on how the TIGER scheme works, to include how the Board allocates funds and examples of both successful and unsuccessful schemes that have sought funding from the Board.
- c) A presentation be made to a future meeting on the Kent and Medway Growth Deal.
- d) The Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture provide a copy of the Kent and Medway Growth Deal document to all members of the Committee.

993 Suggestion from Member - Possible Snow Angels Project

Discussion:

The Committee received a report setting out a response to an issue raised by a member in October 2013 as to the possibility of the Council introducing a scheme along the lines of the 'Snow Angels' project.

The basis of a 'Snow Angels' project was outlined as being a scheme to enable pavements to be cleared of snow and ice during winter conditions by enlisting the assistance of individuals and community groups on a voluntary basis.

Once registered, volunteers could be mapped into CONFIRM (the Council's asset management system) so that officers could maintain a list of footpaths which would be covered by the scheme, thus allowing officers to co-ordinate the clearance of entire lengths of pavements, subject to sufficient volunteers signing up.

Given the uncertainty of the take up of such scheme, it was suggested that if supported, a pilot scheme be considered for three wards across the authority in an inner urban, outer urban and rural setting. This would enable Officers to gauge the potential of such a scheme going authority wide and the financial implications involved.

Details of costs based on 100, 250 and 500 residents was submitted.

The Assistant Director, Frontline Services confirmed that following consultations, the Council's Highway's term contractor, VolkerHighways had offered to sponsor the pilot project with the exception of the anticipated £7,500 costs associated with advertising and administration but it was confirmed that this funding could be met from existing budgets within the Directorate.

Noting the sponsorship offered by VolkerHighways, the Committee supported the introduction of a pilot 'Snow Angels' project in three wards across Medway based on 250 units, with an emphasis on areas which would provide benefits to elderly persons.

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The Committee commended Councillor Osborne for bringing forward the suggestion of a Medway Snow Angels Project.

Decision:

- a) The Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services undertake to introduce a pilot 'Snow Angels' project with such pilot project being introduced in three wards across Medway based on 250 units, with an emphasis on areas beneficial to elderly persons.
- b) It be noted that VolkerHighways has agreed to sponsor the pilot project with the exception of the administrative and advertising costs which could be met from within the Directorate's budget.

994 Smart Ticketing Update

Discussion:

The Committee received a detailed report responding to questions raised by a Member following the issue of Briefing Note 2014/03 relating to Smart Ticketing.

It was reported that Medway Council and Kent County Council were currently working in partnership to promote joint transport smart cards beginning with a pilot in the Maidstone area in May 2014 of a transport e-purse to the national specification known as Stored Travel Rights (STR). This would include all Arriva services between Maidstone and Medway. Such system would reduce waiting times at bus stops thus benefiting traffic and service reliability and the reduction in the use of cash.

The first phase would involve working with Arriva to allow the STR to purchase ordinary paper tickets and then move towards the purchase of smart products. The second phase would offer auto top-up and other enhance retailing options and the third phase a Medway/Kent wide multi-operator scheme. Whilst this would be similar to the London Oyster card, it would be more flexible as it would enable additional applications to be added e.g. contactless payments, car park charging, cycle hire etc.

In response to questioning, it was confirmed that neighbouring authorities in the South East were also keen to join the scheme and were currently awaiting the outcome of the pilot in Maidstone.

Whilst it was planned for the scheme to have a phased implementation, it was hoped that, subject to discussions with Kent County Council that the scheme would be operational in Medway within 12 months.

Decision:

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The Committee noted that for the reasons set out in the report, it would not be appropriate for the Council to adopt an 'Oyster' type smart ticketing scheme and recommended to the Director for Regeneration, Community and Culture under his delegated powers that:

- a) an 'Oyster' type smart ticketing scheme is not adopted in Medway for the reasons stated' and
- b) once the Kent and Medway smart ticketing scheme has been successfully implemented and Transport for London (TfL) has moved to an ITSO compatible system, an approach be made to TfL to see whether it would be willing to extend its commercial agreement to include Kent and Medway.

995 Actions Update of Fair Access to Credit Task Group Review

Discussion:

The Committee received a report setting out an update on progress made on the recommendations from the Fair Access to Credit Review, agreed by the Cabinet on 4 September 2012.

It was noted in particular that as of 1 April 2014, responsibility for regulating the consumer credit market passed from the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) to the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). While the FCA had carried across many standards from the Consumer Credit Act (CCA) and the OFT guidance, there were significant changes for payday lenders and debt management companies, including:

- limiting the number of loan roll-overs to two
- restricting (to two) the number of times a firm can seek repayment using a continuous payment authority (CPA)
- a requirement to provide information to customers on how to get free debt advice
- requiring debt management firms to pass on more money to creditors from day one of a debt management plan, and to protect client money.

The FCA had also published a factsheet for credit unions which could be accessed at:

<http://www.fca.org.uk/your-fca/documents/factsheets/factsheet-no-032>

On 12 March 2014, the FCA announced that payday lenders and other high cost short term lenders would be the subject of an in-depth, thematic review into the way that they collect debts and manage borrowers in arrears and forbearance. This review would be one of the first actions that the FCA takes as regulator of consumer credit, and reinforces its commitment to protecting consumers. This was one part of the FCA's agenda for tackling poor practice in the high cost short-term loan market.

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The FCA would also look at how high-cost short-term lenders treat their customers when they are in difficulty including how they communicate, how they propose to help people regain control of their debt, and how sympathetic they are to each borrower's individual situation. The FCA would also take a close look at the culture of each firm to see whether the focus is truly on the customer, or simply oriented towards making profit.

Beyond this review, as part of its regulation of the high cost short term lending sector, from 1 April 2014 the FCA would also:

- Visit the biggest payday lenders in the UK to analyse their business models and culture;
- Assess the financial promotions of payday and other high cost short term lenders and move quickly to ban any that are misleading and/or downplay the risks of taking out a high cost short term loan;
- Take on a number of investigations from the outgoing consumer credit regulator, the OFT, and consider whether it should begin its own for the worst performing firms;
- Consult on a cap on the total cost of credit for all high cost short term lenders in the summer of 2014, to be implemented in early 2015;
- Continue to engage with the industry to encourage them to create a real-time data sharing system; and
- Maintain regular and ongoing discussions with both consumer and trade organisations to ensure regulation continues to protect consumers in a balanced way.

The Committee discussed the report noting the changes outlined.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the progress made against the actions from the review and that the legal changes put in place since the Task Group have resulted in a much stronger national regulatory regime for controlling the practices of high cost credit providers:
- b) A briefing note be provided in 12 months time providing an update as to how the new systems are operating; and
- c) Officers undertake further discussions with the Medway Credit Union as to possible ways that the Council could support its work.

996 2013/14 Quarter 3 Performance Monitoring

Discussion:

The Committee noted the third quarter performance against the Key Measures of Success used to monitor progress against the Council Plan 2012/2013.

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The Assistant Director – Frontline Services introduced the report and answered members questions on the following areas:

- **HP 26 – Satisfaction with road maintenance**

In response to a Member's concern regarding the low target level for satisfaction with road maintenance and that this performance indicator had been identified as performing significantly under target for a prolonged period, the Assistant Director – Front Line Services confirmed that the statistics for this particular performance indicator were variable but intermittently reached target as in Quarter 2. The variance in the percentage figures across the various quarters were an indication of the volatility of performance indicators and did little to help Officers accurately assess what was happening. However, he confirmed that the Council was involved in a national highways scheme, the NHTC survey and, of the local authorities involved, Medway was placed eleventh out of thirty six for its road maintenance.

In addition, the Council had run Highway Focus Groups in November 2013 and responses to the issue of satisfaction with road maintenance had indicated that there was more dissatisfaction with maintenance of residential roads than through roads in Medway. A high level of dissatisfaction related to repairs undertaken by utility companies.

In addition, the Council undertook a J Cams survey each year and this showed that whilst the quality of the road network was reducing, compared with other local authorities in the South East, Medway was placed mid table. Experience of roads in surrounding areas confirmed this.

A member also sought clarification regarding repair works following the gas mains replacement in Gillingham Road between Beresford Road and Windsor Road as residents had been notified that these works were to be undertaken but the works had then not taken place. The Assistance Director – Frontline Services agreed to investigate this location and respond to the member direct.

He confirmed that Officers were working with the utility companies generally to improve the quality of reinstatement works to the highway.

- **NI 192 – Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting**

A Member drew attention to a problem with the lack of recycling facilities for residents in Council flats.

- **NI195c NEW – Improved street and environmental cleanliness – Graffiti**

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It was explained that this was not a measure of satisfaction but whether graffiti was seen when inspections were undertaken. It was confirmed that there was a low incidence of graffiti on land associated with the public highway.

- **SF15 – Percentage of people who feel Medway is safe**

It was explained that the reason for the discrepancy in these figures was as a result of the way in which the data was gathered by the Kent Crime Victims Survey. Statistics were therefore gathered from a Citizens Panel Survey in August 2013.

Other more general issues discussed included refuse collection, potholes, removal of flytipping, citizen participation hours and events.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report on the third quarter performance against Key measures of Success used to monitor progress against the Council Plan 2013/15 and the Officer's response to the various issues raised and requested that:

- a) Officers engage with colleagues in the Housing Section to resolve the issues of recycling in Council flats;
- b) A letter of appreciation be sent to the Friends of Broomhill for the work that they have undertaken on assisting with securing investment at the Broomhill site; and
- c) Officers discuss with the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Development and Economic Growth the issue of enhancing the visitor potential of Medway's markets.

997 Petitions

Discussion:

The Committee noted that since the last meeting, one petition relevant to the work of this Committee had been presented to Council on 23 January 2014 requesting that action be taken by the Council to stop reckless driving in Yarrow Road, Walderslade.

A summary of the response from the Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture was set out within the report and the Committee noted that the petitioner had not requested that the petition be referred to this Committee.

Decision:

The report be noted.

998 Work programme

Discussion:

The Committee considered its work programme and noted that the following items had been added at the pre agenda meeting:

- Food Safety – Presentation from Environmental Health
- Local Transport Plan – Timing of bus routes and bus punctuality

The Committee considered a number of other suggested changes to the work programme.

Decision:

The Committee agreed the following:

- a) Owing to the number of items scheduled for June meeting, the Food Safety Presentation, and the reports on the Review of Average Journey Times across Medway and the Local Transport Plan – Timing of Bus routes and bus punctuality be deferred until the August Committee.
- b) The Cultural Strategy be added to the Committee's work programme for October as pre-decision scrutiny.
- c) It be noted that annual action plans reviewing the progress of the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy will be reported to this Committee.
- d) Financial monitoring reports had yet to be added into the published version of the work programme.
- e) The attendance by Portfolio Holders has yet to be scheduled and will be added into the work programme when finalised.
- f) In line with the suggestion by the Leader, a presentation by the Kent and Medway Growth Deal be slotted onto the work programme for a future date.
- g) The Food Safety Presentation now scheduled for August, include information as to the number of inspections undertaken, how often catering areas are checked and whether such inspections are led by public referrals or on a rota basis.

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April 2014**

Chairman

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