

REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

2 OCTOBER 2014

ATTENDANCE BY THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC GROWTH

Report from: Councillor Chitty
Portfolio Holder for Strategic Development and
Economic Growth

Summary

This report sets out activities and progress on work areas within Councillor Chitty's Portfolio which fall within the remit of this Committee. This information is provided in relation to the Portfolio Holder 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 Strategic Development and Economic Growth are:

- Building Control (STG Partnership)
- Development Management
- Economic Development
- Europe
- Local Plan
- Planning Policy
- Rural Planning
- Social Regeneration
- Community Centres

Note – 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.

Achievements for 2013-14

2. South Thames Gateway (STG) Building Control

- 2.1 Despite increased competition from the private sector, building regulation applications increased by 19% against the previous year with STG winning a 78% market share.
- 2.2 A new back office system was installed without any loss of service to customers. The new web-based system allows access whenever an internet connection can be made and will introduce mobile working delivering increased productivity and an improved service to customers.
- 2.3 Facilitated by mobile working and hot desking principles, smaller accommodation has been negotiated which will reduce accommodation costs significantly.
- 2.4 Comprehensive fire risk assessments were carried out on the communal areas of flats owned by Medway Council (HRA) and fire risk training delivered to housing managers and site based staff.
- 2.5 Further discussions are ongoing with another Kent District Authority for their building control group to join the partnership. A project board has been established with working groups set up to look into HR, IT, Finance, Legal and operational issues.
- 2.6 A £35k surplus delivered in 2013/14 which will be used to meet the costs of moving and adapting the new premises, without placing any pressure on Partner Authorities budgets.

3. Economic Development

3.1 Inward investment and business start-up support

- 3.1.1 482 jobs have been created and 183 protected through inward investment and business support.
- 3.1.2 507 units of advice / workshops have been delivered to local businesses. Medway Council has worked closely with partners, such as Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, BAE Systems and the University of Greenwich, to deliver a number of business networking events, including:
 - Kent 2020 in May 2013, the premier B2B event in Kent and Medway
 - 600 delegates attended the inaugural manufacturing and engineering expo at Chatham Dockyard in July 2013
 - Medway Business Awards, culminating in a gala evening in November 2013

- 3.1.3 Medway Council was highly commended in the national Enterprising Britain Awards (2013) for its Seeds for Growth recession-busting programme.
- 3.1.4 Medway businesses benefiting from the **EU Recreate** project (£667K) include 50 businesses using refurbished creative workspace at Sun Pier and elsewhere, 14 start-up businesses supported with business plan development and growth programmes for 20 established businesses (to be launched in autumn 2014).
- 3.1.5 The refurbishment of Sun Pier House has created 35 jobs. The opening of POP creative space has allowed 81 artists to exhibit their work for free, with more than 500 visitors.
- 3.1.6 Recreate will launch free French lessons for creative businesses later this year and has organised a Medway and North Kent film festival to give students, graduates and film makers the opportunity to show their work.
- 3.1.7 The **EU INCOMPASS** project (£150K) examines best practices in the field of creative industries incubation and financial sustainability. 30 people from 11 European countries have visited creative spaces in Medway. The project provides funding for a Regional Implementation Plan, to include recommendations for projects which can be successfully applied in Medway in close partnership with universities and private organisations.

3.2 Innovation and Growth

- 3.2.1 During 2013/14 seven Medway businesses have accessed TIGER loans totalling £881k (since then this has increased to 13 businesses, with a total of £3.2 million).
- 3.2.2 Medway Council (in collaboration with the University of Greenwich) is delivering an **Innovation Voucher** programme to support business growth. Eleven vouchers have been awarded for projects such as:
- Product prototyping
 - Enhancement of existing products
 - Business analysis and diversification planning
 - Development of a new marketing strategy
 - Development of overseas markets
- 3.2.3 Medway Council is delivering an innovation **Master Class** programme, consisting of eight workshops, to encourage innovation in small businesses. During 2013-14 four workshops were delivered with 60 businesses attending. The workshops covered topics as diverse as social media; business planning, marketing and innovation management.
- 3.2.4 The **Innovation Centre Medway** (ICM) is witnessing its best performance since it opened its doors in 2009. With occupancy rates at 100% and a waiting list of around 25 companies the centre

currently hosts 55 companies creating in excess of 275 jobs. The centre is also assisting 75 virtual based companies that operate from the centre.

- 3.2.5 The Centre's unit rental rates compare favourably with other business centres and are similar to those west of London.
- 3.2.6 The Centre has also developed a strong reputation for providing excellent meeting space for businesses to network, support and coach. In 2013 in excess of 1300 events were held at the Centre. (The figure to date for 2014 is over 900).
- 3.2.7 The **My Desk** area within the Innovation centre is currently 63% occupied (7 occupied / 4 vacant). Medway Council is working with various agencies and the University of Greenwich to increase uptake, including sponsorship and business support for a recent University leaver.
- 3.2.8 A Head of Innovation Services, funded by the University of Greenwich, has a key role in promoting the Innovation Centre and attracting high growth, innovative companies to Medway. A recently adopted Innovation Strategy sets out a more rigorous rental policy and selection process to target the most innovative businesses.
- 3.2.9 The **EU BRIDGE** project (£44K) has increased awareness of environmental sustainability and brought forward a Green Charter to be introduced in our business centres. It was showcased at the Kent 2020 event, attracting 25 businesses from Normandy.
- 3.2.10 The **EU Ecotec21** project (£288K) focuses on Combined Heat and Power (CHP) and low carbon technologies. Consideration is being given to installing a glycerol-based CHP engine in Medway Park. The University of Greenwich, through its installation of a glycerol-based CHP engine, will save approximately £630,000 over the next ten years.
- 3.2.11 The **EU GreenFit** project (£223K) is improving the green credentials of business parks, making Medway a prime low carbon business location. GreenFit aims to regenerate business parks from a sustainable energy perspective including appraising options for retrofit. The project also explores how mobility within and to business parks can become more sustainable.
- 3.2.12 The **EU GIFT-T!** project (£240k) is developing green infrastructure on the Hoo Peninsula and will explore the creation of a business hub for companies involved in developing low carbon technologies.
- 3.2.13 The **EU INSPIRER** project (£593K) has supported energy efficiency measures in c. 60 properties (loft and window insulation and new boilers) in private sector and social housing. In partnership with the **EU Eco-Advantage** project, an Energy Day for residents was held, and an "Energy through the Eyes of Children" cross-border event engaged children with behavioural problems. A Water Efficiency guide for residents has been produced.

3.2.14 Medway Council is part of the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership steering committee for the Centre for Offshore Renewable Energy South-East (**CORE**). This has provided research on the supply chain in Kent-Medway, and the needs and opportunities of a thriving offshore renewable energy sector.

3.3 Town centre management and markets

3.3.1 The Chatham Town Centre Forum has agreed new Terms of Reference, reflecting an enhanced partnership approach. Attendance numbers for both Chatham and Rochester forums have increased.

3.3.2 The average retail vacancy rate across Medway is 6% lower than the national average (8.3% compared with 14.2%).

3.3.3 Over £27k income has been raised through town centre promotions.

3.3.4 In 2013 Christmas lighting and Christmas trees were organised across five towns and 2 district centres funded via section 106 and ward improvement funds. Christmas lights switch-on events were organised across five towns at an average cost of £3,300 per town. Visitor numbers were in excess of 3,000.

3.3.5 Medway Council has worked in partnership with the University of Kent business school to deliver Medway-wide retail workshops and shopper survey.

3.3.6 Medway Matters has featured a series on our town centres, and over 2,000 promotional newsletters have been delivered to town centre retailers and businesses. Festive free parking days have been promoted.

3.3.7 In Chatham Medway Council TCM service helped facilitate the Remembrance Sunday parade, Chatham Christmas 2013 campaign events, a hanging basket initiative working with the EU DNA project, and Chinese New Year celebrations.

3.3.8 In Rochester Medway Council facilitated liaison between Network Rail and local businesses, supported further development of markets, issued trader permits at festivals and began the development of a new retail guide.

3.3.9 In Rainham, Medway Council organised three 'Fun Time Friday' seasonal events.

3.3.10 Dates for Rochester Farmers Market are now linked to Rochester festivals and saw income increased by 24%. Rochester Farmers Market was a finalist in the 2014 Taste of Kent Awards.

3.3.11 The average number of traders at general markets stabilised at 35+ with an overall income for the financial year of £123,259.

3.4 Employment support

- 3.4.1 **Employ Medway** has welcomed 313 new customers with a further transfer of 249 customers from Strood at the end of 2013/14. There were 255 job starts recorded for 2013/14 of which 160 were first time jobs.
- 3.4.2 The **EU GAPS** project (£392K) met its target of 50 apprenticeships for 2013 –14, and has this year secured 28 apprenticeships, in the following sectors:
- Business Administration
 - IT Software & Professional
 - Customer Service
 - Sign making
 - Early Years
 - Horticulture
 - Microsoft Systems and Networking
- 3.4.3 A new horticulture apprenticeships programme in partnership with Sainsbury's has recruited 28 apprentices working in Hoo
- 3.4.4 A successful bid to the **EU Creative Employment Programme** (£20K) has created nine apprentice and two intern vacancies in creative industries.
- 3.4.5 The **EU IMPRESS** project (£590K) has held 21 employer events, and supported 227 businesses. There have been 47 training sessions and two employer roadshows. The project has supported 618 beneficiaries: 445 of those have been able to sustain employment due to in-work support; 33 have been provided with training and six have been able to advance their career.
- ### 3.5 Social Regeneration
- 3.5.1 The **Benefits Reform Advice Programme** has supported the continued presence of the Medway Credit Union in the Pentagon Centre, and provided signposting/outreach advice to 218 clients to date.
- 3.5.2 The **EU AGIR** project (£107K) supports the inclusion of migrant residents in community life. It has funded the post of a Social Regeneration Outreach Officer, and will provide diversity training to local businesses, and support for an intergenerational project recording the history of migration in Medway. AGIR will also provide diversity training to 70 participants from local businesses, and support for an intergenerational project recording the history of migration in Medway.
- 3.5.3 The **EU INSPIRER** project (£593K) is entirely focussed in Medway's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. It has created five Community Gardens, and supported 43 community clean up events and seven healthy eating events. It has supported five community groups on the same theme. It has also supported the creation of a Healthy Recipe

Book with recipes collected from residents in Medway, France and Belgium. INSPIRER has supported Waste Services with a pilot for a new food waste collection service.

- 3.5.4 The **EU DNA** project (£300K) has provided hanging baskets throughout Chatham High Street, health checks for residents in accessible locations, community food initiatives and an Air Football programme for young people and adults in Chatham. It has supported new play equipment at Luton Infants School, and the forthcoming Theatre Royal Square.
- 3.5.5 A successful Job Fair event was held in September 2013 and has been repeated in 2014. The 2014 Fair, jointly organised between Employ Medway and Jobcentre Plus, comprised 32 stands on the upper level of the Pentagon Centre. 27 of these were occupied by employers advertising over 1000 jobs.
- 3.5.6 The management of Medway Council's community centres has been taken over by Norse.

4. Planning

- 4.1 During the year 1 April 2013 to March 2014 the authority received 1371 planning applications, compared to 1547 for the previous year. There has been an upturn in planning applications during 2014/15.
- 4.2 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 2013/14 contributions of £3,404,329 were received. This compares to £900,729 received during 2012/13.
- 4.3 The Government has recognised that planning applications can go out of time (beyond the government guidelines for processing applications) for various reasons including the need for amendments to seek improvements or delays due to the completion of S106 agreements. A Planning Extension Agreement system, where applicants and LPA's can agree extensions of time subject to a clear end date to that extension. Medway agreed 57 Planning Extension Agreements (PEA's) during 2013/14 and have agreed 95 PEA's so far during 2014.
- 4.4 To assist Major Developers with the submission and delivery of high quality development Medway planning service negotiated 5 Planning Performance Agreements (PPA's) during 2013/14 and have already finalised 6 PPA's during 2014/15.
- 4.5 A major national housebuilder has recently stated that they consider Medway's planning service to be in the top three in the south east. They confirmed that this is because Medway demonstrates that it wants appropriate regeneration and wants to engage with developers in a positive way.

- 4.6 The Local Planning Authority has commenced work on a new Local Plan. Initial work has included an independent assessment of population forecasts to enable a position statement to be agreed relating to housing delivery needs (1000 dwellings per year) and a "call for sites" to be undertaken. The call for sites is a requirement of the Local Plan process as part of establishing a strategic housing land availability assessment. The call for sites has now closed and officers are working through an assessment of those sites to consider which ones should be put to members for consideration as part of the first draft of the Local Plan. Cabinet has also approved an LDS which is the timetable for delivery of the Local Plan and sets out the steps necessary to meet that timescale. A statement of Community Involvement (SCI) for both the Local Plan and Planning applications will be reported to Cabinet on 30 September 2014 having been through its consultation stages including O&S Committee.
- 4.7 The Derelict Buildings Officer post has been made permanent. Regular updates on the successful work undertaken by the post holder are presented to Planning Committee and this includes significant successes in New Road conservation area and lower Rochester/Chatham High Street areas. Most of the improvements are secured through voluntary action following contact by the post holder but where necessary 6 Enforcement Notices were served and 1 prosecution undertaken in the year 2013/14. The main focus of the post holder is on buildings which are significantly deleterious or on the major routes through or into Medway.
- 4.8 Enforcement activity during 2013/14 shows 547 new cases have been received. During the year 9 Enforcement Notices were served and 15 prosecutions was undertaken.

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Background papers

None