

REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

29 JANUARY 2015

ATTENDANCE OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Report from: Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community
Services, Councillor Doe

Summary

This report sets out progress made within the areas covered by the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services which fall within the remit of this Committee.

1. Background

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

- Events and Festivals
- Greenspaces
- Heritage
- Leisure services
- Libraries and Community Hubs
- Sporting Legacy
- Theatres and arts
- Tourism.

2. Achievements for 2012-13

2.1 Cultural Strategy

Medway's Cultural Strategy 2014-19 was formally approved, with the aim of establishing Medway as the destination for Culture, Heritage, Sport and Tourism.

The Strategy seeks to support and promote economic growth in the creative industries and tourism, two of the economy's fastest growing sectors.

The Strategy attracted significant local media coverage and has resulted in the LGA Culture, Sports and Tourism Board expressing a desire to visit Medway to witness our impressive progress at first hand.

2.2 **Greenspaces**

National Accreditation

Green Flag has been successfully secured for seven sites – The Vines, Riverside Country Park, Capstone Farm Country Park, Hillyfields, Broomhill Park, Gillingham Park and Great Lines Heritage Park following judging assessment in June. The Vines & Riverside Country Park have now secured the Green Flag award for seven consecutive years, Hillyfields six years, Capstone Farm five years and Broomhill four years. Green Flag accreditation is the national quality benchmark for parks.

Play Area Improvements

Since the last annual report to Overview and Scrutiny, the Greenspace Development Team has delivered a further phase of play project improvements funded by Developer Contributions and Member Priority Funding. Projects delivered this financial year include improvements at Rushdean Road, Laburnham Recreation Ground, Riverside Country Park, Broomhill Park and Lordswood Leisure Centre.

Since the financial year 2009/10 a total of £3,496,896 has been invested into Play, resulting in improvements to over 64 Play Areas.

Grounds Maintenance Contract

The Grounds Maintenance Contract transferred to Medway NORSE on 1 April 2014 with Quadron Services Limited (the previous Contractor) retained as Management Agent. As with all new contracts there were transitional issues around mobilisation and service delivery that were further compounded by challenging weather conditions for grass cutting. Consequently there were shortfalls on maintenance standards across Medway but these were well managed by the joint teams to minimise their impact. Medway NORSE and Quadron Services Limited with the support of Greenspaces, are looking to further improve service delivery for year 2 of the Contract through:

- Management Agent role being strengthened through the creation of a new co-ordinator post to improve work programming and performance
- Medway NORSE adopting a new management structure that has included the creation of 2 new Team Leader Posts to strengthen direct management of Team Performance.

Performance Analysis

Indicator	2014-15 YTD (Q3)	Target
Satisfaction with parks	85.3%	85%
Satisfaction with play	84.2%	85%
Citizen participation	10,002	12,000
Green Flag	7	7

2.3 Heritage

Eastgate House

The restoration of this Grade 1 listed gem in Rochester came a significant step closer in December with the awarding of the contract for the substantive works.

The project team are currently engaged with the successful contractor in pre-start discussions, with work due to commence in the spring. It is envisaged the work will take a year to complete.

Guildhall Museum

This year has witnessed significant increases in the numbers of customers visiting the Museum, in large part due to some excellent programming over the period. An extremely vibrant Friends Group has now been established for the Museum.

Archive

Proposals to relocate the Archive from the Civic Centre site have been put out to consultation, with a clear preference expressed to move to the Bryant Road site, which has been supported by National Archives.

2.4 Festivals and Events

The Festivals and Events team has successfully delivered the Council's programme to much acclaim, whilst continuing to attract very high attendance numbers. These include:

The English Festival – 97% satisfaction – 20,000 footfall

Sweeps Festival – 99% satisfaction – 90,000 footfall

Dickens Festival – 99% satisfaction – 60,000 footfall

National Armed Forces Day – 98% satisfaction – 20,000 footfall

Held once again on the Great Lines Heritage Park, in conjunction with the Royal Engineers' open day. This event has quickly become the region's most respected salute to Her Majesty's armed forces, attracting VIP guests such as The Under Secretary of State for Defence, High Sheriff of Kent and Admiral Sir Ian Garnett, amongst many others.

Medway River Festival – 97% satisfaction – 6,500 footfall

Plans are currently being put into place to see how this event can be used to enhance the planned commemoration of the 'Medway in Flames (Dutch Raid)' event in 2017.

The Castle Concert Series – 12,124 tickets sold

Despite appalling weather, this event proved as popular as usual last year, with the Castle Proms being regarded as one of the best in recent years.

Under Siege – over 4,000 footfall

Will Adams Festival – 97% satisfaction – 4,500 footfall

A significant tribute to the Gillingham born explorer, this event continues to develop a bigger audience each year and is very well supported locally as well as visitors from far and wide.

Bonfire and Fireworks – Footfall – 45,000 in the main arena and 15,000 at other vantage points.

Through special arrangements with Kent Fire and Rescue, who were involved in an industrial dispute, the event was one of the few that was not cancelled or postponed, resulting in very high attendance and a safe and successful event – still regarded by many as the best display in the region, this free to attend event is one of the highlights of the Council's annual events programme.

Dickensian Christmas Festival – 97% satisfaction footfall 90,000 and **The Christmas Markets**

Advance coach numbers of 268 contributed to the highest attendance figures in recent years to this year's Dickensian Christmas festival, regarded by traders, participants and visitors as probably the best yet.

Other Activities

The Events team has been involved with and delivered various activities, outside the scope of the annual events programme, such as Remembrance Day marches, The Royal Engineers' Corps Memorial March and Chinese New Year celebrations.

2.5 Future Planning

Magna Carta & The Great Siege of Rochester Castle (1215 – 2015)

Next year is the 800th anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta and the Great siege of Rochester Castle and special events are being planned to commemorate these historic events.

Medway in Flames – The Battle of Medway. (1667 – 2017)

Initial plans are being put into place to mark the 350th anniversary of the Dutch raid on Chatham in 2017. It is planned that this commemorative event will be of international significance, featuring involvement at Anglo – Dutch Government levels, and a high degree of involvement from the Navies of both countries.

It is intended that the event will include a major exhibition depicting the raid and its historic significance of the creation of the modern British Navy and its command of the Oceans, a civic event to indicate the establishment of 'The Hand of Friendship' between the two nations, as well as various sporting challenges between the two countries.

The commemorations will culminate in a spectacular event – 'Medway in Flames' – to be held on the river Medway and will feature a river pageant and a re-enactment of the Dutch raid, which will include a son et lumiere, fireworks and special effects – concluding in the image of Medway in Flames.

Arts Development

A Development Working Group meeting provided a forum for researchers, academics, Public Health, the Cathedral, a local Arts Business and the Council to scope out areas for consideration to apply for significant funding. Sidney De Haan Research Centre for Arts and Health submitted a joint proposal with Live Music UK and Age UK. Other project proposals have been submitted since this initial meeting and this work is ongoing.

Central and Brook Theatres

The Central Theatre continues to attract successful shows resulting in an increase in audience attendances. These include Russian State Ballet's Swan Lake, The Stylistics, Chas and Dave and Omid Djalili.

This year saw the engagement of a new pantomime production company – Jordan Productions, with their production of a very

traditional version of Snow White to much critical acclaim and enjoyment by the large audiences.

We continue to establish the Brook as a 'Creative Factory for Medway'. The professional creative resident companies all continue to thrive, excelling with the Christmas Show – Poppy the Pirate and the Christmas Star, which has outsold all previous years and received great plaudits, including an excellent write-up and a four-star rating in 'The Stage'.

Another success this year is the Performing Arts Festival for youth groups, attended by groups across the South East who enjoyed workshops from the choreographer from Phantom, a Warhorse puppeteer and a West End producer.

2.6 **Libraries**

Community Hub Development – Strood Library

The new building will replace the current Strood Library and Contact Point and will offer a state of the art improved service. The public not only will have the chance to access a wide range of Council Services, but will have an improved book stock, more free public access computers, free use of Wi-Fi and the chance to participate in a whole range of library related events and activities. The new building will open in early 2015.

Partnership Working

The Library Service has a very proactive approach to partnership working, partnerships exist with organisations such as the Reading Agency, Booktrust, Hi Kent, Macmillan Cancer, Medway Adult and Community Learning Service, most Medway Schools and Pre Schools, the Youth Service, Public Health, Customer Contact, Deaf Services, The Shaw Trust and the NHS Trust. Examples of the partnership work can be illustrated with the Children's book festival that took place in October. Sixteen authors provided sessions to over 2,500 young people (32 school groups). The service also provides the Children's mobile Library to over twenty schools that are not located near a static Library.

Customer Service Excellence Award

The Library Service first gained this award in 2011. 2014 saw the service reviewed again, the award was renewed with increased performance. More examples of best practice were highlighted. Libraries is one of only 4 Council Services that have secured Customer Service Excellence.

Events Programme and Community Engagement

The wide-ranging programme of events continues to attract an increasing number of residents into our Libraries, last year for example we saw over 5000 more people attend these events. These events range from those for the very young like Baby and Rhyme Time and Toddler and Shake and Boogie to many evening talks and author events for adults. In fact it should be noted that Medway has now developed a national profile for authors talks because of the numbers of people attending and the amount and range of events that are promoted.

Libraries now support 16 readers groups, 2 visually impaired readers groups, a hard of hearing group, teenage group, poetry group, play readers, non-fiction and also ' Books beyond words' a group for those with communication and learning difficulties.

Community engagement continues to move forward through the Friends of Medway Library Service. They are a valuable, vibrant group that provide support to the whole service, providing advocacy and practical help at events and by supporting our Customer Satisfaction surveys (these are done twice a year at every library.)

The home Library service volunteers now deliver to over 200 people who cannot for various reasons get to their local library.

2.7 Sporting Legacy

En Route to Rio: Delivering Medway's Sporting Legacy

Medway has celebrated an historic Paralympic gold medal, a World Cup winner and the introduction of two new mass participation events in its expanding sporting legacy programme.

The Medway Sports Awards held in December celebrated an unprecedented year of success for Medway's sports people and clubs. Highlights included Charlotte Evans from Chatham winning Medway sports person of the year as she and her partner Kelly Gallagher won Britain's first ever gold medal on snow at the Sochi winter Paralympics.

Charlotte pipped Rachel Burford to the sports person of the year title, after Rachel was a key member of the women's rugby union team who won the World Cup in the summer. Both Charlotte and Rachel have been supported – both financially and logistically – by Medway Council since the implementation of the Medway athlete support and development programme in 2007.

The award formed the culmination of a successful year for Medway which saw the launch of two mass participation events, the Big Splash and the Big Ride, and the biggest ever Festival of Sport programme

stretching over 80 days between May and July, offering everyone the opportunity to play, compete and spectate.

The festival included the launch of ParkSport at the Strand this summer, allowing all residents to engage in free sporting activity, from target golf to tennis.

Disability sport also featured highly, with Medway developing its reputation as the home of wheelchair rugby league when it staged the Four Nations tournament. England were triumphant, winning all their matches.

The international sporting theme continued into early 2015, when Medway Park staged the men's handball U21 world championship qualifiers.

Medway Park

2014 was another record year for Medway's regional centre of sporting excellence with the number of visitors topping 800,000, providing ample evidence of how Medway Park provides world-class facilities attracting both elite athletes and ever-increasing numbers of local residents.

Strood Sports Centre

The centre is currently in the midst of a £1.9m facelift which will provide exceptional new facilities for customers.

These include a new, enlarged fitness suite, four new dance and aerobics studios, a refurbished wetside changing area, together with a new café and a more welcoming, modern reception area.

A number of the new facilities have already opened to the public, with work across the centre on target to finish in spring 2015.

The Strand

The Strand has undergone a number of improvements in 2014, which have enhanced both the look of the site and the quality of sporting and leisure facilities on offer.

Further works are currently being undertaken over the winter period to further improve The Strand and to create facilities which will allow greater usage of the site throughout the year.

Hoo Sports Centre

An enlarged fitness suite, a new spin cycle studio and a new functional training area have been complemented by a revamped reception area, to provide a much-improved centre for customers at Hoo.

Splashes

Splashes celebrates its 25th birthday this year (2015) and a programme of works is being undertaken to improve the centre's facilities, improving both the wetside and dryside offer for customers.

A feasibility study is also being undertaken to investigate ways of developing the centre to ensure it continues to meet the needs of residents.

Deangate Ridge

Improvements continue to be carried out to the course and clubhouse which has resulted in some excellent feedback from customers.

The new Par 3 Academy course is continuing to be developed, ready for opening in 2016.

Stirling Centre

In a ground-breaking partnership with King's Rochester, £500K of investment was made into the facility, and launched by the Minister for Sport.

2.8 Tourism

Dickens

In 2014 Medway set out to identify ways of celebrating its rich connections with Charles Dickens. In addition to the highly successful festivals, new signage welcoming visitors to Dickens Country were installed at entry points to Medway.

The Dickens Country Experience tour was also introduced in November and has been highly acclaimed, matched by sell-out tours in the build-up to Christmas.

Tourism Bus

Interest in the open-top bus service for visitors continued to grow, with more than 3,500 people hopping on board in 2014. Proposals are now being developed to expand the service in the coming year.

Background Papers

None

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