

BUSINESS SUPPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 FEBRUARY 2015

ATTENDANCE OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Report from: Richard Hicks, Assistant Director Customer First,
Leisure, Culture, Democracy and Governance

Summary

This report details the areas covered by the Leader which fall 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 Councillor Rodney Chambers, the Leader of the Council, is:

- Democracy and Governance.

2. Democracy and Governance

2.1 Democratic Services

2.1.1 The Democratic Services Team continues to support a wide range of meetings including full Council, Cabinet, Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Task Groups set up to conduct in-depth reviews, other Committees established by the Council including the Audit Committee, Planning Committee, Licensing and Safety Committee and the Health and Wellbeing Board, School Admission appeals and Exclusion Reviews.

2.1.2 The team also continues to lead on the management of public engagement in formal meetings, maintenance of, and revisions to, the Council's Constitution, administration of representation on outside bodies and the Council's electronic Committee Management System (modern.gov) which includes the Council's Petitions Scheme.

2.1.3 During 2014 two of the in-depth scrutiny review Task Groups in this round of reviews have completed their work, with recommendations all agreed by the Cabinet. These were the Task Groups on Health

Inequalities and Welfare Reform. The Task Group on Support for Care Leavers expects to conclude its work in March with a report of its recommendations to Cabinet on 4 April 2015.

- 2.1.4 The Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee has played an important role in monitoring the implementation of the outcomes of the NHS review of acute mental health inpatient beds in Kent and Medway following Medway's referral of the matter to the Secretary of State and his decision that the reconfiguration should proceed. The Committee continues to scrutinise the impact on patients and their families of having to access services outside of Medway including mitigating action being put in place by the NHS to address transport difficulties and increased travel costs, the levels of out of area placements which remain high nationally as well as locally, and the pace and impact of delivery of enhanced community based services to offset the impact of the reconfiguration of acute mental health inpatient facilities.
- 2.1.5 The Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee also continues to scrutinise and seek assurances about measures being taken to address the findings of the Care Quality Commission following successive inspections of Medway Maritime Hospital. The Committee relies heavily on to Healthwatch Medway and the co-optee representing the Medway Pensioners Forum for insight and feedback on patient experience at the Hospital.
- 2.1.6 Following the LGA Peer Review of Children's Safeguarding in 2014 action has been taken to strengthen the capacity of the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to effectively scrutinise safeguarding. The Committee has discussed the way forward, advice has been taken from experts at the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) and action has been taken including an all Member briefing on safeguarding and circulation of relevant CfPS guidance, which has been updated specifically for Medway.
- 2.1.8 The Head of Democratic Services has reported to Council on any new legislation requiring changes to the Council's Constitution and has implemented new working practices as appropriate. Specifically there is a new requirement for a recorded vote at the Council's Budget meeting on any decision relating to the making of a calculation or the issuing of a precept. Regulations came into effect in August 2014 introducing a right for members of the public to record, film and report on meetings and an extension of the duty to record and publish certain decisions taken by officers.
- 2.1.9 Levels of public interest and engagement in Council meetings remains high and the Democratic Services team continues to work hard to ensure members of the public are advised of the relevant procedures and supported with advice and guidance ahead of meetings.
- 2.1.10 Work is underway within Democratic Services to plan for the Annual Council meeting and Member Induction after the Local Elections in May 2015.

2.2 Electoral Services

- 2.2.1 The last annual canvass under the old “household” system of registration was conducted early, and a Register published on 17 February 2014.
- 2.2.2 The team successfully conducted the European Parliamentary elections on 22 May with 65,000 votes counted with pinpoint accuracy, and Medway amongst the first in the region to post our results.
- 2.2.3 Implemented Individual Electoral Registration (IER) from 10 June, followed by a write-out culminating in the publication of a further Register on 1 December.
- 2.2.4 Successfully conducted the Rochester & Strood Parliamentary by-election on 20 November, with positive feedback from the Electoral Commission, again delivered with 100% accuracy.

Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

- 2.2.5 The introduction of IER required significant planning and preparation, including developing an engagement strategy to ensure that all electors were given the chance to register under the new arrangements, particularly those traditionally less represented such as students, those who move regularly and live in rented accommodation. The Cabinet Office provided funding for the additional costs incurred by the Council and everything was in place by June 2014 when IER was introduced.
- 2.2.6 All Members were briefed on the introduction IER by email from the Head of Elections and Member Services who explained that in July 2014 a Confirmation Live Run exercise was undertaken by which all existing electors were matched against the Department for Works and Pension (DWP) database. With some additional local data matching against Council Tax data, 88% of all electors (178,724) were successfully matched and were sent letters in July 2014 explaining that they would not need to re-register unless their circumstances changed.
- 2.2.7 The remaining unmatched electors (18,702) were sent new-style Invitations to Register (ITR's); the letters encouraged people to use the Government's new Digital Service to register on-line, with their NI number and date of birth being checked against the DWP database and the results being sent to Medway electronically. Paper applications could also be made.
- 2.2.8 9600 households where no-one was registered were sent new-style Household Enquiry Forms to request information about who was resident at the address. 7279 electors who had not responded to the 2014 canvass and had been carried forward were also sent Household Enquiry Forms as well. These electors were specifically advised that unless they responded they would not be included in the 2015 Register. Where there was a response the electors were sent ITRs encouraging them to register using the new process.

Combined Local/General/Parish elections 7 May

- 2.2.9 These combined elections are the first for Medway and the most complicated from the point of view of electoral administrators since they involve different rules about eligibility, slightly different statutory timetables and around 300 prospective candidates; the situation in Medway is further complicated in that the constituency of Chatham & Aylesford is shared with colleagues at Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council. Medway's responsible for the conduct of the election for that constituency and early planning discussions have already taken place in conjunction with the Returning Officer at Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council.
- 2.2.10 A review of polling places and districts has been undertaken in conjunction with the Member Working Party on this and Council agreed a revised schedule on 22 January. There may be some further changes to polling stations but the Returning Officer will consult Ward Councillors and the Working Party as appropriate.
- 2.2.11 It is intended to conduct the verification of all ballot papers after the close of poll on Thursday 7 May and then to continue with the count for the General Election. It is then proposed to re-convene later on Friday afternoon to count the Local and any contested Parish Elections.

Other electoral registration activities

- 2.2.12 The Government is encouraging further electoral registration activities prior to the elections in May and are providing funding for such activities. It is intended to send a Household Notification Letter to each household in Medway, in the next few weeks; these will confirm the details currently held on the Register and encourage people to register if not already included or to advise if changes need to be made. It is hoped this will maximise registration so that people are entitled to vote in the combined elections on 7 May.

2.3 Member and Mayoral Services

- 2.3.1 The team continues to work with the Member Development Advisory Group to develop and deliver an on-going programme of Member development, and this year has seen briefings on a range of subjects. Work is also underway to plan and deliver a comprehensive Induction programme for Members after the May elections.
- 2.3.2 The team has planned and successfully completed arrangements for key Mayoral and civic events including the Dedication Service, Admiralty Court and the Admiral's Cruise, Charity Evenings and Remembrance Services.
- 2.3.3 In the last 12 month period the team has successfully planned and supported 321 Mayoral diary engagements.

2.3.4 The Head of Elections and Member Services continues to provide key research and support to the Independent Remuneration Panel. The Panel has recommended and Council has approved arrangements for SRAs for the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Health & Well-Being Board. 5 new members have recently been recruited and inducted with the support of the South East Employers organisation. The Panel is due to report back to Council on a review of the whole Members Allowances scheme, including the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, before May 2016.

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Background documents

None