

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

Thursday, 29 January 2015

6.30pm to 10.15pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Carr (Chairman), Griffiths, Adrian Gulvin (Vice-Chairman), Juby, Irvine, Turpin, Stamp, Hubbard and Griffin

Substitutes: Councillors:
Harriott (Substitute for Osborne)
Willey (Substitute for Bright)

In Attendance: James Bilsland, Assistant Head of Legal - Place
David Bond, Transport Operations Manager
Alan Brier, Senior Tree Officer
Councillor Rodney Chambers, OBE, Leader
Sarah Dagwell, Head of Waste Services
Councillor Howard Doe, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services
Ruth Dulieu, Head of Integrated Transport
Councillor Jane Etheridge
Stephen Gaimster, Assistant Director, Housing and Regeneration
Rosie Gunstone, Democratic Services Officer
Dave Harling, Site Business Manager, FCC Environment
Mick Hayward, Chief Finance Officer
Richard Hicks, Deputy Director, Customer Contact, Leisure, Culture, Democracy and Governance
Mr and Mrs Lisgarten, petitioners
Rob Lucas, Greenspace Services Manager
Andy McGrath, Assistant Director, Front Line Services
Melanie Tong, Contracts Manager Medway Municipal (South Region) Veolia Environmental Services (UK) PLC
Christine Wilson, Head of Legal Services

721 Chairman's announcement

The Chairman stated that Councillor Etheridge had left the Committee and been replaced by Councillor Irvine following a reallocation of Committee seats at full Council the previous Thursday.

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He, and other Members of the Committee, paid tribute to the Chief Finance Officer who was attending his final meeting of the Committee prior to his retirement and wished him well for the future.

722 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 18 December 2014 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

723 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bright and Osborne.

724 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

725 Declarations of interests and whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other interests

Councillor Stamp advised the Committee of an interest in agenda item 8 (Annual Review of Waste Contracts) by virtue of his employment with the Environment Agency but emphasised that he did not regulate any sites in Medway.

Councillor Juby declared an interest in the same item by virtue of the mention of Kemsley Paper Mill as his daughter works there.

Whipping

There were no declarations of whipping

726 Petitions

Discussion:

At the invitation of the Committee the lead petitioner, Mr Lisgarten, introduced his petition, which had been referred to the Committee for further consideration.

He set out the reason for his petition requesting the removal of unsuitable large trees (such as sycamores) which he felt had been planted too close to his property boundaries on the south side of Kingsfrith Park Playing Field.

He gave the Committee a history of the problems he had experienced with the trees including the blocking out of sunlight and the problem with leaves and

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seeds being blown into his property. This subsequently caused a problem with self-seeded trees and blocked gutters. The lead petitioner then handed round a copy of a re-submission to the Local Government Ombudsman requesting a review of his complaint.

The Committee were advised of the background to the development of the land in Magnolia and Primrose Avenues where it was specified that only single storey dwellings could be built on them "in order to preserve the open aspect over Kingsfrith Fields Park". They were informed that once trees had been planted there, without any consultation with the neighbouring householders, it was impossible to have them cut down as the Council would not remove healthy trees.

The point was made, by the lead petitioner, that the Tree Officers had not been very helpful in dealing with the petitioners concerns and that the last two letters from the lead petitioner had not been answered.

Responding to Members' questions the Greenspace Services Manager stated that as part of the Council's policy, trees were reviewed every three years and problems dealt with as required. He distributed photographs of the trees at Kingsfrith Fields Park and it was confirmed that well over 40 trees had been removed over the years. Pruning also took place periodically.

The Deputy Director, Customer Contact, Leisure, Culture, Democracy and Governance explained that the Council needed to keep within the policies set out in the Tree Policy and within the Council's budget but stated he was sympathetic to the points made. Some Members felt that the problems experienced by the lead petitioner were replicated across Medway in various places and was not unique to this particular area, and that trees made a positive contribution to the urban environment.

The Tree Officer confirmed that the trees at Kingsfrith Fields Park had been inspected in 2014 and some thinned.

The lead petitioner stated that a number of residents would be prepared to pay for trees to be cut down if that were to be permitted.

Decision:

- (a) The Committee noted the petition response and appropriate officer actions in paragraph 3 of the report; and
- (b) The Committee recommended no further action be taken in respect of the petition but that officers would keep the area of Kingsfrith Fields Park under regular inspection and review.

727 Attendance of the Leader

Discussion:

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Members received an overview of progress on the areas within the terms of reference of this Committee and covered by the Leader as set out below:

- Inward investment
- Regeneration
- Strategic Partnerships

The Leader then responded to Members' questions and commented as follows:

- **Growth Fund** – A Member referred to a recent announcement of positive news in respect of funding. The Leader explained that the Council had been successful in bidding for £4.4m from the Growth Fund towards infrastructure at the airport. In respect of a later question about whether the plans for Rochester Airport were more important than repairing roads he stated that the money for road repairs did not come from the Growth Fund but, in his opinion, the work at the airport was very important.
- **River taxis** – Following a question as to progress with the development of the use of river taxis, the Leader stated that before anything further could be done the landing points would need to be put in place. Discussions were continuing with Chatham Maritime Trust for a site adjacent to dockside and plans for a landing adjacent to Upnor Castle were also being considered.
- **Apprentices** – In view of the success of the apprenticeship scheme in the past a question was asked as to whether this success could be maintained. The Leader explained that a further boost of achieving another 100 apprenticeships in 100 days was being planned for late February/early March.
- **Twydall library** – In response to a question about when the work at Twydall library would commence the Leader stated that the scheme had been delayed as there had been enquiries made by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.. Following a second question he stated that he was supportive of progressing the scheme but could not give any definite information about timescales. During consideration of this matter the Chief Finance Officer confirmed that HRA funds could only be used to fund HRA assets and confirmed that general funds were being used to pay for the works in Strood.
- **Lower Thames Crossing** – The Leader confirmed, in response to a question, that the Cabinet supported the option C variant which was to have a crossing linking to the A2/M2, down Bluebell Hill to join the M20. Kent County Council were also in support of the same option.
- **Friends of the Great Lines Heritage Park** – Following a question about the need to promote the existence of the Friends of the Great Lines the Leader stated that he had been involved in presenting the organisation

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with a Green Flag award recently but agreed that it would be helpful to promote the community group through Medway Matters.

- **Land redevelopment at Brompton Academy** – Further to a query about the land redevelopment at Brompton Academy the Leader stated that the work was progressing to reinstate the playing field.
- **Victory Pier and Chatham Waters development** – discussion took place about the merits of being able to develop the railway line between Chatham Waters and Gillingham station particularly to relieve pressure on traffic when the Northern Link is developed. The Leader confirmed this was something which could usefully be considered.

Decision:

- (a) The Leader was thanked for his attendance and response to Member questions and congratulated on obtaining the £4.4m for the Rochester Airport works;
- (b) Officers were asked to investigate the possibility of using the old Dockyard railway line as a transport corridor.

728 Attendance by the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services

Discussion:

The Chairman welcomed the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services and pointed out to the Committee that the heading in paragraph 2 of his report should read Achievements 2014/2015.

Members then received an overview of progress on the areas within the terms of reference of this Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder for Community Services as set out below:

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

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, responded to Members' questions and commented as follows:

- **Twydall Library** – Responding to a question, the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services stated that he had spoken to the Leader about the scheme for Twydall Library and would proceed as soon as the finance was cleared and available. In relation to money

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from the budget being spent in Strood he stated that this was not part of his remit and was a matter which the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance would need to respond to.

- **Play area improvements** – A Member referred to the condition of some play areas in Medway and questioned whether the replacements were like for like. The Portfolio Holder for Community Services stated that two thirds of the play areas had been improved and confirmed that there was a rolling programme of improvements. There was also a full audit of these improvements as part of the evidence gathered for the new local planning framework.. In relation to comments about vandalism at Balmoral Gardens he stated that he would discuss the matter with the Health Centre staff to see if they had any CCTV footage of the vandalism taking place. Following a request, an undertaking was given to share with the Committee the rolling programme of improvements of play areas.
- **Tourism Bus** – Further to a question about the success of the Tourism Bus the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services confirmed the Dickens Country Experience Bus Tour trial had been even more successful than anticipated with 80% take up. Discussions were taking place about the possibility of progressing coach tours out of London given the interest in the Dickens Country bus. Confirmation was also given, by the Deputy Director, Customer Contact, Leisure, Culture, Democracy and Governance that the Dickens Country bus does take in the Peninsula.
- **Stirling Centre** – The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, responding to a question as to the development of the Stirling Centre, stated that the partnership with Kings School Rochester to develop a tennis centre had been very successful and should produce quality tennis players in Medway.
- **Christmas Dickens** – A Member stated that 268 coaches had come to Medway for the Christmas Dickens event and congratulated the Portfolio Holder on the number of successful events held in Medway.
- **Dickens Chalet** – The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, following a question, stated that the Council was working with the Dickens Fellowship around plans for refurbishment of the Dickens Chalet and Gardens. However, the plans were costly and would need to wait until sufficient funds were available. The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services undertook to arrange a visit for the Committee to see the planned improvements to Eastgate House, the Gardens and Dickens Chalet at a suitable point. Members also requested a presentation of the plans prior to the visit.
- **Guildhall Museum staff and staff at Eastgate House** – tribute was paid to the Guildhall Museum and Eastgate staff and it was stated that

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there was now a 'Friends of the Guildhall' group that had been formed. The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services referenced plans to redevelop the Guildhall area. He said that the visits to the Guildhall Museum were up by 41% on the previous year.

- **Litter** – responding to a query about litter being left at Cozenton Park and Splashes car park the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services stated that it was indeed difficult to keep on top of the litter problem but it was indicative of the fact that it was a very successful area, used at all hours of the day.

Decision:

- (a) The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services was thanked for his presentation and for responding to Members' questions;
- (b) A briefing note was requested in relation to the rolling programme for play area improvements;
- (c) A visit for the Committee to be able to see the planned improvements to Eastgate House, the Dickens Chalet and Gardens will be arranged at a suitable point.

729 Annual Review of Waste Contracts

Discussion:

The Head of Waste Services gave a brief introduction to the annual reports from Veolia and FCC. Dave Harling from FCC and Melanie Tong from Veolia gave presentations and answered questions on the work carried out in the past year, which included:

FCC

- An overview of the company – Fomento de Construcciones y Contratas (FCC)
- Recycling rates increased to 63%
- The introduction of recycling of separated paper and card and cooking oil
- High recycling rates at all three Medway sites achieved through strategy, diligence of staff and market innovation
- Reducing landfill and promoting reuse. This included details of the reprocessing of ridged plastics (505 tons in 2013), reuse of mattress contents, composting and developing relationships with local charities to increase the quantity of items sent for re-use in Medway
- An overview of the health and safety reporting and communications
- Details of reviews and investigations of accidents and safety campaigns
- Customer focus questionnaire which obtained a response of 97% to 98% of users stating they are 'very or fairly satisfied'. The site users stating they are 'very satisfied' with the overall service during the most recent survey showed an increase from 68% (May 2013) to 85% (August 2013)

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- Details of site resourcing and future contract development. In order to assist the Council meet its savings targets FCC are striving to improve reuse/recycling/diversion rates in an attempt to reduce disposal costs for the Council.
- Details of the development of a trade waste proposal in partnership with Medway to assist small and medium enterprises in providing a safe and legal route for disposal of waste. The aim was to reduce flytipping, support local businesses and reduce the impact and cost of trade waste on the current service.

The Committee asked various questions, which included:

- The plans for Hoath Way

It was stated that the site was just too small and attempts to restructure it had not been successful.

- Potential improvements for Capstone – re trade waste

The Assistant Director, Front Line Services stated that options for trade waste were being considered. He stated that at present the nearest commercial disposal site was in Sittingbourne which was difficult for Medway businesses.

Veolia

- An overview of the company and new service
- Improvements to vehicles by the introduction of a 360 degree camera with live recording system to provide significant benefits to the contract, such as missed bin reports, driving standards monitoring, health and safety and reductions in insurance claims
- The cost of the new fleet has been paid for from the award from the Department for Local Communities and Government which has reduce the collection cost per household
- A weekly recycling service was now provided to flats and further improvements are planed to introduce the twin stream service to flats
- The strong partnership working had contributed to Medway achieving Customer Service Excellence for the past two years
- Details of recycling tonnages, refuse tonnages, bulky waste, garden and kitchen waste and glass tonnages since 2009 were given
- Details of the WEEE (waste electrical and electronic equipment) collection and compliance scheme were given
- An overview of street cleaning was given. It was stated that the Response Team had assisted with 137 community clearances
- Waste and recyclable materials picked up by the manual street cleaning staff were separated into double bin barrows
- An alternative disposal location had been identified to recycle all of the street arising from mechanical sweepers providing 95% diversion from landfill

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- Details of street cleaning tonnage
- An overview of the disposal contract
- Details of the recycling and street cleansing performance
- Public satisfaction rates were given from the quarterly tacker and annual Residents Opinion Poll
- Staff development, staff welfare and health and safety training details were given

The Committee asked various questions, which included:

- Does Veolia work with residents associations in relation to people residing in flats?

Veolia and Waste Service staff are already working with Residents Associations on this.

- Can clothing be recycled in Medway?

This is not done via the kerbside but there are 40 bring sites where clothing can be recycled.

- Can anything be done to avoid people stealing from black sacks?

If Veolia see people going through bags this is questioned and reported to officers at Medway Council.

- How are dead animals disposed of and are any attempts made to identify owners in the case of pets?

The dead animals are disposed of as general waste and pets would be scanned through the microchip scanner in attempts to trace owners.

- Could more be done to clean walkways, particularly those linking roads together, not alongside a road?

It was explained that some of these did not form part of the area which Veolia were contracted to clean. The Assistant Director, Front Line Services confirmed this and stated that across Medway there were 350-400km of alleyways and it was not possible financially to clean them all. Some are privately owned, some are cleaned on a schedule and some are cleaned on demand.

The Head of Waste Services and the representatives from FCC and Veolia were thanked for their presentation.

Decision:

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The Committee welcomed the provision of a trade waste facility in Medway and requested further briefings in future with a possible visit, after May 2015, to recycling and transfer facilities.

730 An assessment of the cost of bus travel in Medway

Discussion:

The Parking and Transport Operations Manager gave an introduction to the response to Members' concerns about bus fare levels in Medway in comparison with other areas.

A Member explained the reasons for requesting this item to come forward to the Committee had been superseded by the Council deciding to encourage Arriva and others to lower fares to make them more affordable and more sustainable because of lower oil prices. The lack of competition in the area was referenced and it was felt that this had contributed to higher prices.

The Parking and Transport Operations Manager referred to Arriva's practice of purchasing fuel in advance which meant they were unable to currently pass on the reduction in fuel prices to customers in view of the fact they had purchased the fuel at a higher price. A request was made for details of the advance fuel purchasing, but it was stated that this was not something the Committee would be entitled to have.

The Assistant Director, Front Line Services responded and suggested that it might be helpful for there to be a Director- level meeting with Arriva to reflect Members' concerns. He also took the opportunity of introducing the newly appointed Head of Integrated Transport to the Committee.

Decision:

Further to the motion passed unanimously at Council the Committee noted that Medway has higher bus fares than other areas and requested that the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services and senior officers meet with operators to discuss the impact their fares are having on consumers.

731 Timing of bus routes and bus punctuality

Discussion:

The Parking and Transport Operations Manager introduced a report on the timing of bus routes and bus punctuality. He highlighted areas in need of improvement.

The suggestion was put forward that if traffic wardens went on some of the buses where pinch points occurred they would be in a position to deal with some of the parking problems.

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It was pointed out that as there were no parking controls in place this would require a Police officer to be able to enforce inappropriate parking.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report and requested officers to work with bus operators to improve the quality of bus punctuality including the use of parking enforcement and liaison with the Police where appropriate.

732 Member's item: Town Centre Markets

Discussion:

Councillor Etheridge addressed the Committee in relation to her item in which she had a number of questions for officers. She gave details of her research into the success of markets in other areas including Herne Bay, Canterbury and Bromley. She also referred to the use of Facebook by some stallholders which enabled people to order goods which can then be collected later from the stall. She was very keen to ensure that there is continued investment into the markets and better signage to the markets. In her opinion there also needed to be thought given to providing better facilities at the markets such as toilet facilities and electricity. She also felt the officer responses to her questions were not as detailed as she had hoped.

At the commencement of the discussion tribute was paid to Councillor Etheridge as a Ward Councillor and as a Councillor who had contributed to the success of the Strood market.

Discussion took place around the impact of markets on local small independent businesses and the need for careful planning to avoid market stallholders, who do not have to pay for rent or accommodation, taking business from them. The Assistant Director, Housing and Regeneration explained that two new market staff were being recruited and would no doubt bring their own ideas for development of the markets. He undertook to arrange for Council staff to meet with Councillor Etheridge to discuss her concerns further.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report and answers provided and requested that the market officers plans for expansion should be considered at a future meeting of the Committee.

733 Provision of a Neighbourhood Community Hub in Twydall

Discussion:

The Deputy Director, Customer Contact, Leisure, Culture, Democracy and Governance introduced the report outlining the indicative plans for a Neighbourhood Community Hub facility at Twydall, together with an update on the proposed funding for this project.

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Following a question, he confirmed that the Leader of the Council had expressed his support for the proposal.

Decision:

The Committee noted the current position concerning the establishment of a Neighbourhood Community Hub facility at Twydall, and noted the support of senior Members of the Council for this project.

734 Work programme

Discussion:

A request was made by Councillor Griffiths for a Member's item on the impact of the decision by Tesco to close their Chatham store. He had concerns about the impact of redundancy for the staff and the impact on the economic offer in Chatham alongside the potential for regeneration.

Mention was made that there may be another store closing in Chatham and officers were asked to consider this as part of their response to the Member's item.

Decision:

- (a) The current work programme was noted;
- (b) A Member's item from Councillor Griffiths, as set out above, be added to the work programme.

Chairman

Date:

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