

Medway Council
Meeting of Business Support Overview and Scrutiny
Committee

Thursday, 25 June 2015

7.00pm to 8.05pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Avey, Carr, Clarke, Freshwater, Hall, Howard, Maple, Royle, Tejan and Wildey (Chairman)

Substitutes: Councillors:
Osborne
Price
Purdy

In Attendance: Nick Anthony, Strategic Property and Energy Manager
Stephanie Goad, Assistant Director Communications,
Performance and Partnerships
Perry Holmes, Assistant Director, Legal and Corporate
Services/Monitoring Officer
Julie Keith, Head of Democratic Services
Ian Price, Managing Director, Medway Norse
Michael Turner, Democratic Services Officer
Phil Watts, Chief Finance Officer

63 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 3 February 2015 and the Joint Meeting of Committees held on 27 May 2015 were agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

64 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Griffiths, Maple, Murray and Etheridge.

65 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

66 Declarations of interests and whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

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There were none.

Other interests

Councillor Carr disclosed a non-pecuniary interest in agenda item no. 5 (Update on Medway Norse) as a member of the Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust in relation to the award of grounds maintenance contracts to Medway Norse. With regard to the same agenda item the Assistant Director Communications, Performance and Partnerships disclosed that she was a Director of Medway Norse.

67 Update on Medway Norse

Discussion:

The Assistant Director Legal and Corporate Services introduced a report which outlined Medway Norse's achievements and performance up to the fourth quarter in its second year of trading and its plans for future growth and development.

Regarding the grounds maintenance team, a Member referred to grass not being cut on a regular basis at some sites and queried whether there was sufficient capacity in the team. Members were advised that there had been a spurt in grass growth in recent weeks and this, together with some problems with machinery, meant the grounds maintenance team were behind with their schedules. Regarding discrepancies with grass cutting at particular sites the Managing Director replied that there were plans to annualise the hours of grounds maintenance staff which should address these issues

With regard to SEN transport a Member reported concerns from some parents that home to school journey times had increased and were unreasonable. The Managing Director replied that children were now being transported on minibuses. Whilst some journeys were longer than before no journey from home to school lasted longer than 70 minutes, in line with the service standard set by the Council.

A Member asked if there was any scope in the SEN contract to transport some elderly people experiencing problems getting to day centres. The Managing Director replied that schools were the priority but Norse would do what they could to help on non school days.

A Member referred to Berengrave nature reserve which had been waterlogged and overgrown for some time and asked for a strategy to be put in place to address these issues. An undertaking was given to provide a briefing note for Members on this.

A member asked why the amount of the surplus that the Council would receive from Medway Norse in future years was decreasing. The Assistant Director Legal and Corporate Services replied that this was in accordance with the 10

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year agreement between the Council and Medway Norse which set out the level of surpluses to be returned to the Council.

In response to a question about the cost to Medway Norse of paying the living wage to its staff the Committee were advised this would cost in the region of £450-500,000 pa.

Decision:

The Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to note the report and asked for a briefing note on addressing problems at the Berengrave nature reserve.

68 Procurement Strategy

Discussion:

The Assistant Director Legal and Corporate Services introduced a report which updated the Committee on the progress made against the Council's Procurement Strategy 2013-2016.

A discussion took place about the efforts made by the Council to facilitate conversations between local businesses to encourage collaboration. The Assistant Director Legal and Corporate Services considered that there was probably little more the Council could do on this but his team would continue to provide information to businesses on opportunities to bid for council contracts. In response to comments from Members, the Assistant Director Legal and Corporate Services undertook to look at the occasions where collaboration had been successful and see what lessons could be learned for the future.

Members congratulated the team on saving £8.8m in the first two years of operating the new category management approach by procuring differently. More detail was requested on how these savings had been achieved and an undertaking was given to provide a briefing note.

A Member referred to the fact that the majority of the measures of success set out in the Procurement Strategy had been achieved and queried whether this meant the Council had not been sufficiently ambitious. The Assistant Director Legal and Corporate Services responded that whilst he was happy to review the targets he did consider the Strategy was ambitious in nature.

Regarding the Council's relationship with the Business School of the University of Kent the Assistant Director commented that this was a mutually beneficial relationship.

Members discussed the target of 40% spend with local SMEs and whether this was achievable. The Assistant Director Legal and Corporate Services replied that it was a challenging target but performance had improved from 21% to 25%.

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A Member asked for information about the views of local SMEs of the Council as a provider. The Committee were advised that feedback was sought from SMEs on a regular basis and details of this could be shared with the Committee.

In response to a question about whether the Council benchmarked its performance on procurement against other Councils, the Assistant Director Legal and Corporate Services replied that this was a difficult area but he would investigate the possibility of benchmarking with the CIPFA family group of similar councils.

A Member asked what the purpose of purchasing cards would be and was advised that the introduction of these was still under consideration but the aim was to significantly reduce the number of low level transactions.

Decision:

The Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to

- (1) note the progress made against the Procurement Strategy 2013-2016 and
- (2) request briefing notes on
 - the breakdown of the £8.8m achieved in procurement savings,
 - feedback received from SMEs about their experience in the procurement process and
 - the possibility of benchmarking performance on procurement with similar councils

69 Topics for In-Depth Scrutiny Reviews - Priorities and Timetable

Discussion:

The Head of Democratic Services introduced a report which invited the Committee to discuss and agree a timetable and process for the selection of topics for the next round of in-depth scrutiny reviews.

Decision:

The Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- (1) agreed that a Task Group on housing: demand, supply and affordability in Medway should be the first to commence in late August/ early September 2015 and that the membership of this Group should be five Councillors (in the ratio 3:1:1) to be drawn from this Committee and the Regeneration, Community and Culture O & S Committee.
- (2) agreed the process and timetable for the selection of the next round of in-depth reviews as set out in paragraph 3.2 of the report

70 Work Programme

Discussion:

The Democratic Services Officer introduced a report advising the Committee of the current work programme which allowed them to adjust it in light of the latest priorities, issues and circumstances. The report gave details of the items listed on the Cabinet Forward Plan that fell within the remit of this Committee and Appendix 2 to the report set out the work programmes of the other three Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Decision:

The Committee agreed to:

- (1) note the work programme;
- (2) agree the changes to the work programme as detailed in paragraphs 3.3.1 and 3.3.2 of the report and
- (3) note the work programmes of all overview and scrutiny committees (set out in appendix 2 to the report).

Chairman

Date:

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