

REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28 JANUARY 2016

ATTENDANCE OF THE DEPUTY LEADER AND PORTFOLIO HOLDER

FOR HOUSING AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

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

Summary

This report sets out progress made within the areas covered by the Deputy Leader and 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 Deputy Leader and 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 2015

2.1 Greenspaces

National Accreditation & External Funding

Green Flag

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 eight consecutive years, Hillyfields seven years, Capstone Farm six years and Broomhill five years and Gillingham Park and Great Lines Heritage Park two years. Green Flag accreditation is the national quality benchmark for parks.

Play Areas & Outdoor Gyms

Play Areas - since the last annual report to Overview & Scrutiny, the Greenspace Development Team has delivered a further phase of play project improvements. Projects to be delivered this financial year include improvements at The Strand, Hempstead Recreation Ground, Gillingham Park, Friston Way & Knights Place.

Outdoor Gyms – funding was secured this financial year for the provision of two new Outdoor Gyms at The Strand and Hempstead Recreation Ground. On completion this will bring the total number of Outdoor Gyms provided across Greenspaces to seven (Rainham Recreation Ground, Rochester Riverside, Canal Road, Esplanade, Maidstone Road Recreation Ground, the Strand and Hempstead Recreation Ground).

Volunteering

Overview – ongoing focus around supporting and developing Greenspaces Friends Groups working across Medway undertaking a range of activities from volunteer task days, delivering site improvement programmes to securing external awards (Green Flag). Performance to date (end of Quarter 3) is 13,872 against a year-end performance target of 12,000.

Grounds Maintenance Contract

Performance the grounds maintenance contract is now in its second year of delivery through the Medway NORSE Partnership and despite challenging weather conditions for grass cutting there has been an improvement in standards from Year 1.

A fundamental review of the operating model for Grounds Maintenance has been undertaken to (a) improve and safeguard service standards and (b) drive efficiencies. The outcome of this review that will take effect from next financial year will result in the of transfer of the Greenspaces Client Team to Medway NORSE to create a single management structure.

2.2 Heritage

Rochester & Upnor Castle

Visitor Performance Figures - Rochester Castle 65,843 visitors (Q1-Q3), 90% of the annual visitor total and an increase of 15% on the same period the previous year and Upnor Castle 23,030 visitors (Full Season Figure), an increase of 10% over its annual visitor target and 7% above the previous year's total.

Siege 1215 - Heritage Lottery Funded (£37,000) Events & Activities Programme to celebrate the 800th anniversary of King John's siege of Rochester in 1215. The focal point of Siege 1215-2015 was a temporary exhibition at the Guildhall Museum featuring a new model of the Castle (created in partnership with the University of the Creative Arts) that attracted 54,000 visitors. In addition, a series of activities were provided centred around Rochester Castle that included a summer-long programme of family events; a new medieval walking trail in paper and phone app format; a film made with the assistance of pupils at Strood Academy and a series of new workshops for local schools.

The great siege of Rochester Castle is possibly the most famous siege of the medieval period due mainly to the fact that its outcome would ultimately decide whether the crown of England would stand or fall. It is also the best documented of all medieval sieges. Over 6,000 people watched the story of the Siege of Rochester Castle unfold via a stunning live event comprising of live battle scenes and action by re-enactors, filmed action projected onto the Keep, Digital mapping projection – which enabled the simulation of the collapse of the south east tower, pyrotechnics, stunning lighting, smoke and sound effects and a comprehensive introduction by Dr Marc Morris – one of the leading authorities in the world on King John. The event was held as part of the celebrations to mark the 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta, which ultimately led to the Great Siege.

Guildhall Museum

Visitor Performance Figures- Guildhall Museum 82,750 visitors (Q1-Q3) and in December alone 10,355 people visited the Museum. Current performance is circa 1,000 below the year-end performance secured in 2014-15.

External Funding – Guildhall Museum led a consortium of Kent museums in obtaining grant aid from the Arts Council England. 'Visitor Experience and the Resilient Museum' is a partnership project involving seven museums from the Kent & Medway Museum Partnership. The partnership has received funding of £67,000 to develop bespoke training programmes for the visitor experience (front of house) workforce providing an improved visitor experience, leading to increased visitors and income. The Museum is also benefitting from a second partnership project funded by the Arts Council. The '100 Objects that made Kent' project brings together educators and curators of six of the county's larger museum services to work with local schools to develop new programmes and resources to meet the needs of the new curriculum. The project has received grant aid of £263,000 to be shared by the partners.

Friends of Guildhall Museum - The Friends of the Guildhall Museums are now registered as a charity and have secured £15,750 (Rochester Bridge Trust & City of Rochester Society) to assist with the restoration of the Museum's façade. This work is being undertaken in two phases: phase one encompassed emergency works including the removal of the 17th century coat of arms and a detailed survey. Phase two is the restoration of the Guildhall's historic front elevation. Restoration of the Guildhall's coat of arms has been completed and work on the façade is

within budget and on programme to be completed by the end of February 2016.

Old Brook Pumping Station

Visitor Performance & Events – operated in partnership with Medway Industrial Archaeological Group a total of 850 visits (Q1 – Q3) that represents 72% of the Annual Target and a 68% increase on the same period in 2014-15. This year, a new audience development plan was agreed with the Group. Events such as classic car show and printing press workshops helped to increase visitor use by 68% in the year to date. However, due to the attraction's limited opening hours, use of the facility remains relatively low. An increase in the number of events offered, and extended opening hours are planned for 2016/17.

Eastgate House

Heritage Lottery Fund Project - the main contractor (Fairhurst Ward Abbot) went into administration during the summer period that has resulted in the project being suspended and the site being secured. The Eastgate House Project Team have progressed an award of contract to a new contractor (Buxton) to complete the project in accordance with Heritage Lottery Fund Grant Conditions and subject to securing consent to appoint the new contractor (Buxton) will take occupation of the site in January with completion by the end of the next financial year.

Medway Archives & Local Studies Centre Relocation

New Archives - After public consultation the relocation of MALSC to the former Strood Library site was formally added to the Council's Capital Programme at Full Council on 26 February 2015. The project budget is £971,604 and Clay Architecture has been appointed to develop the design to modify the former library building to make it suitable for use as an Archive and Local Study Centre. Construction work is due to commence in April 2016 and to be completed by the end of November 2016 with the new Archive and Local Studies (following environmental conditioning) to be opened to the public in March 2017. As part of this project, investment is also being made into the existing Community Hall.

2.3 Libraries

Community Hubs

Programme - The development of Community Hubs is the key strategic driver for libraries and delivers two key improvement strands (1) increased access to Council and Agency Services through dedicated reception and meeting points and (2) service improvements to the Library offer. At the completion of this phase of the Community Hub Programme we will have converted 6 out of the 16 libraries into Community Hubs representing a capital investment of £1.9 million.

Community Hub Strood - opened on 5 March (World Book Day) this state of the art new building has proved a major attraction for local residents and community groups. Since the building opened last March

130,183 residents have visited this building, which is a 28,307 increase on the same period in the old building.

Neighbourhood Community Hub Hempstead opened on 19 November 2015. Hempstead is the Council's first Neighbourhood Community Hub. The building, which includes a library, hall, classroom space and kitchen area has received a total refurbishment and has provision included for monthly Customer Contact surgeries.

Neighbourhood Community Hub Twydall – Project Board established and works contract awarded with works scheduled to be completed by July 2016. During the works contract phase the current library will be closed with a temporary pop-up library being provided in an adjacent vacant unit in the shopping parade to ensure service continuity.

Inward Investment & Accreditation

External Funding - Libraries secured £72,012 Arts Council Funding to rollout Wi-Fi to all 16 Libraries. Medway Libraries Award was the 7th highest out of a total of 69 Local Authority Applications. A further £40,000 was secured from the Arts Council for Outreach Partnership Working with the Council's Arts Team and the IKON theatre Group on a Literature Project called 23 Submarines

Accreditation – Customer Services Excellence (CSE) secured for the 5th year running and the overall assessment score (against the range of measures assessed) has improved from 2014-15. Judging Feedback was “Staff at Medway Libraries have prepared for this assessment exceptionally well. Evidence has been well researched and presented. Staff in libraries show good teamwork and there is a good understanding throughout of excellent customer service”. Libraries are one of only 4 Services within Medway Council to have secured CSE Accreditation.

Events Programme and Community Engagement

Summer Reading Challenge - The summer Reading challenge again proved popular this year with over 3000 young people taking part and also enjoying the 60 supporting events that were provided in July and August. It should also be noted that many young people volunteered their time to support younger children in this activity (over 300 hours' worth of volunteer time.)

Baby Bounce & Rhyme - continues to be a popular Libraries offer with over 28,000 adults and babies attending an organised event.

Adult Events - Adults continue to be well served with a range of readers groups, including 14 general groups, a poetry readers group, play readers, teen readers and groups for the visually impaired and hard of hearing. The Six Book Challenge again proved successful and 166 adults took part in this scheme to improve their reading confidence and enjoyment. The programme of Author Talks has remained very popular with highlights including Andy McNab To prove the added

value of these events we doubled the loans of Andy McNab books over this period

Partnership Working & Service Performance

Partnership Offer - through both the Community Hub Programme and the wider Library Network the service has entered into a range of partnerships to grow and improve the service offer. Currently Libraries has partnership buildings with Customer Contact, Youth Service (Lordswood and Hempstead), Medway Adult and Community Learning Service (Rochester), Surestart (Cuxton) and Thomas Aveling School (Thomas Aveling Library) Other partnership working includes the Reading Agency, Booktrust, Hi Kent, Macmillan Cancer, Medway Schools and Pre Schools, Public Health, Deaf Services, The Shaw Trust, Kent Association for the Blind, U&A and the NHS Trust. Libraries also provide the Children's Mobile Library to over twenty schools that are not located near a static Library. The Library Service is currently exploring the feasibility of moving the local Post Office into the Library. Permission has been sought from the owners of the building MHS and the definition of the model and negotiations are at an early stage.

2.4 Tourism

Dickens

The drive to use the Home of Charles Dickens to create an internationally-recognised tourism brand for Medway continues to bear fruit. In addition to the two established Dickens festivals already in the events calendar, the focus has been on developing Dickens-related visitor activities in the run-up to Christmas. Following the successful launch of the Dickens Country Experience tour in 2014, additional activities this winter included the introduction of horse-and-carriage rides around Rochester, weekend street entertainment, a new children's trail, and a series of sell-out performances of a Christmas Carol at the Guildhall Museum. The Dickensian Christmas festival attracted 290 coaches over the two days, an eight per cent increase on the previous year.

Magna Carta/Textus Roffensis

The 800th anniversary of the Siege of Rochester Castle and the signing of the Magna Carta put Medway on the tourist map.

Major activity included the son-et-lumiere retelling of the story of the Siege, while more than 17,500 visitors came to Rochester Cathedral to view the Magna Carta and Textus Roffensis. This attracted significant media coverage, including a feature in the Daily Express

Open-top bus (Tourism South East Beautiful South bronze award)

The Medway Open top bus enjoyed a highly successful year, with record numbers of passengers and recognition in the Tourism South East awards. More than 4,100 passengers took the tour, which ran over Easter and then throughout the summer school holiday. Its success resulted in a Beautiful South bronze award at the Tourism South East annual awards ceremony.

Rochester train station

The tourism team has been working closely with Network Rail and Southeastern to ensure visitor opportunities arising from the opening of the new Rochester station are maximised. Plans include new orientation maps and improved signage, together with performance space in and around the station to coincide with major festivals and events. The official opening of the station is due to take place in February.

Battle of Medway

2017 marks the 350th anniversary of the Battle of Medway, commemorating the occasion when the Dutch fleet attacked the British while they were moored, resulting in the burning of a number of key Naval ships. Working closely with partners, including principally the Historic Dockyard, a programme of activity is being developed to attract national and international visitors.

Culture, Design and Tourism Awards

Medway's biennial Culture, Design and Tourism awards attracted a record number of entries, with 120 nominations across the 14 categories. The award culminated in a highly successful ceremony held at Mid-Kent College in October with winners including:

Literature – Wordsmithery

Fashion and Design – Sian Bostwick

Music - The James Taylor Quartet

Heritage - The LV21 Lightship.

2.5 Sport and Leisure

Sporting Legacy

Medway's Sporting Legacy strategy will be refreshed to highlight plans for the next four years. A major focus is on non-traditional activities in non-traditional settings, in line with national government policy for boosting grassroots participation levels, outlined in the new strategy Sporting Future published in December 2015. Our flagship ParkSport programme will be expanded to bring informal, recreational sport to parks and open spaces across Medway. We will also develop innovative new events such as Deangate Uncut in our traditional sports centre settings. We will also continue to engage with priority groups including women and girls, seniors and Medway's BME communities to ensure we are providing the right projects in the right places to grow participation rates. Disability sport will also remain a priority, building further on our established programme of developing and showcasing disability sport from grassroots to international level.

Strood Sports Centre

A £1.9m facelift of Strood Sports Centre was completed in the summer. Improvements include a much larger gym, new fitness studios, new health suite, improved café, a new reception and meeting rooms, and an improved wetside changing area.

The Strand

Improvements continue to be undertaken to make the Strand more welcoming for visitors. Over the summer the entrance to the swimming pool was modernised, and the next few months will see the installation of a major new piece of play equipment (based on a shipwreck), and an adult gym installed. Working in partnership with the Greenspaces team work has begun on developing a strategic Strand Masterplan, with the first identified priority being to improve the Promenade.

ParkSport

ParkSport is Medway Sport's flagship community sport project. Launched in summer 2014, ParkSport offers an exciting range of activities in our local parks and open spaces, encouraging people of all ages and abilities to get active, try a new sport, improve their health and fitness and have some active outdoor fun. Activities have included archery tag, netball, tennis, softball, rounders, running groups, ultimate frisbee, flag football and much more. Some 1,800 people have taken part in a ParkSport session since the launch in 2014.

Sport England has now granted Medway Sport £157,000 from its Community Sport Activation Fund to develop this programme over the next three years. The money will be used to bring multi-sport sessions to a range of new park and open space settings in some of Medway's most deprived areas. The target is to engage almost 3,000 participants over those three years, steering them towards existing community sports clubs or forming permanent new clubs themselves through the creation of community champions groups. Medway Sport also works closely with the Street Games charity to set up Doorstep Sport Clubs in partnership with the Medway Youth Service.

Mini Youth Games

Since its launch in 1999, the Games series has grown from small inter-school competitions involving fewer than 10 schools to large-scale sports competitions featuring more than 40 schools and more than 400 primary school children per event.

Thousands of young people each year get to enjoy the thrill of friendly, competitive sport during 10 events staged throughout the academic year in a range of sports including rugby, football, hockey, netball and athletics. The top eight schools from each individual competition qualify for a Medway Night of Champions event, held during the summer Festival of Sport. Mini Youth Games events are linked to a leading local sports club, creating a pathway for children to continue playing sport. The Mini Youth Games programme also includes the Disability Youth Games programme. There are two stand-alone events each year – a winter skiing competition and a multi-sport summer games. More than 50 children from four schools took part in the summer games in 2015. In total 3,500 children took part in the 10 events in 2014/15, and more than 150 volunteers and 10 clubs supported the series in 2014/15.

Big Splash

More than 1,000 participants enjoyed this year's Big Splash, with a range of activities across the weekend of January 16/17 at Medway Park, Strood, Splashes and Hoo sports centres. Events ranged from a

sports taster sessions including synchronised swimming, scuba and sub-aqua to a mass swim challenge, team competition and pool parties. Participants were joined by two Olympians who supported the event. As a result of the success of the Big Splash, new diving and rookie lifeguard classes are being established.

Medway Mile

Unfortunately the 2015 Medway Mile had to be cancelled after a week of poor weather up to and including the day of the event. However, preparations are already underway for this year's Mile and participants have begun asking to register even though registration doesn't officially open until April.

Big Ride

The Medway Big Ride returned for its second year and successfully grew in popularity with more than 1,600 participants. Activities included the sportive for more serious riders which had more than 500 participants, together with a range of family-based activities at Medway Park and culminating in the mass participation ride which attracted 1,000 participants. The 2016 Big Ride will take place in June as part of this year's Festival of Sport.

Wheelchair Rugby League European Championships

In September 2015 Medway Park hosted the inaugural Wheelchair Rugby League European Championships. More than 2,000 spectators attended throughout the tournament, which was won by England, who defeated world champions France in extra-time. 900 Medway school children from 25 different schools took the opportunity to come along and were inspired by such performances. A spokesman for the RFL said 'The European Wheelchair Rugby League Championships at Medway provided a wonderful spectacle and a superb advertisement for the sport.

European Veterans Fencing Championships

International sport will return to Medway in May, when Medway Park stages the European Veterans Fencing Championships. It is the first time since 2000 the event has been hosted in this country and only the third time in its history.

Tennis Festival

We are working in partnership with Kings School and the Lawn Tennis Association to deliver the Medway Tennis Festival to be held at three venues across Medway in July 2016. The week-long competition will be staged across three venues - the Strand, Kings Sports Centre and Frindsbury Club.

Physical Activity, Health and Wellbeing

Medway Sport recognises the vital role sport and physical activity plays in improving the health of the people of Medway. More than 42,000 people participated in school events, community activity sessions, major events or coach-led projects delivery by the Medway Sport team in 2014/15. This was an increase of 46 per cent on 2013/14. That figure included 27,000 participants in projects using Public Health

funding and targeting hard-to-reach groups including seniors, women and girls, and Medway's minority ethnic groups in both community and sports centre settings.

2.6 Festivals, Arts, Theatres and Events

Medway has one of the largest free events and festival programmes in the country and highlights from the last year have been:

English Festival

Traditional activities and iconic figures combining with the more ironic aspects of Englishness. Feedback has been very good indeed.

Sweeps

Well attended (72,000), the festival further enhanced its reputation as one of the top 'May Festivals' in the calendar with 5 outdoor folk stages complementing the traditional Morris dancing, (the event brings together more Morris sides than any other similar event in the country). With artisan produce, folk art stalls, family maypole dancing, and storytelling for youngsters this event was very well received.

Summer Dickens

Top class entertainment on offer with the highlight being some excellent street theatre from talented local creative companies. The parades were very well received.

River Festival

This was a good event, with a 98% satisfaction rate. The river based activities were complimented by some excellent entertainment on the waterfront, including music, street performers and children's activities

Dickensian Christmas

The event already has an international reputation and the crowds were unprecedented in recent years. The overall feedback is that it was one of the best events Rochester has seen and was certainly a bonanza for local traders.

Armed Forces Day

The event, which receives sponsorship from the MOD and BAE systems and is managed in association with 1 RSME Brompton, is now recognised as the leading Armed Forces day event in the region. A special aspect of the 2015 event was the inclusion and delivery of the New Waterloo Dispatch – to commemorate the 200th anniversary of the announcement of victory at Waterloo – by Post chaise.

Castle Concerts

The very popular line-up of Status Quo and Steve Harley & Cockney Rebel on Wednesday, Peter Andre and Blue on Thursday, Billy Ocean and Bucks Fizz on Friday and The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, supported by Graffiti Classics and Johnathan Antoine on the Saturday, proved to be a very successful and exciting combination, which produced the most revenue generated from ticket sales, since the series began. The unfortunate illness of Rik Parfitt meant that the

Status Quo concert had to be cancelled and arrangements have been made for the concert to be rescheduled as part of the 2016 Castle Concerts.

2.7 Theatres

Central Theatre

The Central Theatre continues to attract internationally famous artistes, delivering very popular and successful shows including one of the most successful Pantomimes in the region – selling just under 25,500 tickets, which yielded over £420,000. Alan Carr sold out in 45 minutes. Other popular shows included: Al Murray, Lee Nelson, Jasper Carrot, Tim Vine, The Stylistics and Dave Gorman, who all sold out.

The Brook Theatre

The Brook Theatre is now established as the 'Creative Factory for Medway' and the four professional creative resident companies all continue to thrive. We now have Medway's prime amateur dramatic companies (Gillingham Dramatic Society, Kentish Players and Three Towns) all operating in Medway and putting their main annual production on at either the Brook or the Central. Six dance and drama schools have decided in recent times to leave Maidstone, Gravesend and Dartford and bring their annual productions to Chatham.

Appendices: None

Background Papers

None

Lead officer contact

Richard Hicks, Director

Regeneration, Community and Culture

Tel: (01634) 332764 Email: richard.hicks@medway.gov.uk