

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

Tuesday, 29 March 2016

6.30pm to 9.00pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Carr (Chairman), Bhutia (Vice-Chairman), Brown-Reckless, Cooper, Griffin, Hicks, Iles, Johnson, Osborne and Tejan

Substitutes: Councillors:
Opara (Substitute for Saroy)
Purdy (Substitute for Etheridge)
Griffiths (Substitute for Stamp)

In Attendance: Richard Hicks, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture
Laura Caiels, Legal Advisor
Tim England, Head of Safer Communities
Matthew Gough, Head of Strategic Housing
Dave Harris, Head of Planning
Anna Marie Lawrence-Lovell, Performance Manager
Andy McGrath, Assistant Director, Front Line Services
Phil Moore, Head of Highways and Parking Services
Michael Turner, Democratic Services Officer
Councillor David Wildey
Councillor Rupert Turpin, Portfolio Holder for Business Management

892 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Etheridge, Saroy and Stamp.

Councillors Purdy, Opara and Griffiths were attending in their place as substitutes.

893 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 28 January 2016 was signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

894 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

895 Declarations of interests and whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other interests

There were none.

896 Petitions

Discussion:

Members considered a report concerning three petitions received by the Council which fell within the remit of this Committee, including a summary of the response sent to the lead petitioners by officers. Two of the petitions were for information but one petition organiser had asked for the response to a petition calling for the removal of double yellow lines from Roosevelt Avenue in Chatham to be reviewed. Mr Ward, the petition organiser for the latter, referred to the information he had submitted to the Committee explaining the reasons behind the petition and why he had asked for the response to be reviewed.

The Head of Highways and Parking responded, noting that some of the signatories on the petition calling for the removal of double yellow lines had also supported the original scheme three years ago. As a way forward he proposed that one of the Council's Parking Engineers meet with Mr Ward and local residents in order to investigate this further and see if a positive solution could be found.

Members commented that this appeared to be a satisfactory way forward.

Decision:

The Committee agreed to:

- a) note the petition responses and appropriate officer actions in paragraphs 3 and 4 of the report
- b) note the Director's comments at paragraph 5 of the report concerning the petition referral request and endorse the proposal outlined at the meeting that a Parking Engineer liaises with local residents to try and find a positive solution.

897 Attendance by the Portfolio Holder for Business Management

Discussion:

Members received an overview of progress made on the areas within the scope of the Portfolio Holder for Business Management which fell within the remit of this Committee:

- Community wardens
- Emergency planning
- Community centres.

The Portfolio Holder for Business Management responded to Members' questions and comments as follows:

Community Wardens

- **Fly tipping** – in response to a question whether the Portfolio Holder had personally attended fly tipping scenes with the team, Councillor Turpin confirmed that he had and that the introduction of two tipper trucks to quickly clear sites had proven to be very effective. Responding to a question as to whether the current supply of trucks was sufficient to cope with what one Member expected to be a large increase in fly tipping as a result of the introduction of a charge for the collection of bulky items, Councillor Turpin replied that he did not think there would be a significant increase as a result of this charge. Much of the fly tipping involved large amounts of rubble etc. being disposed of as opposed to bulky items being fly tipped. A Member asked if information could be provided to show the amount of fly tipping and the costs involved to see if there was any connection as a result of the charge. Officers advised that the information about quantities of fly tipping and what categories of waste was collected was publicly available.

In response to a question about the number of prosecutions for fly tipping, Councillor Turpin undertook to provide this information outside the meeting.

A Member referred to the issue of an increase in bed bugs in recent years and asked if this was taken into account when mattresses were collected at fly tipping sites. Councillor Turpin replied that such waste was broken up rather than recycled back into the community.

Dog fouling – In response to a question whether dog owners who allowed their dogs to foul in public places without clearing up could be found by the DNA testing of dog excrement, Councillor Turpin advised that such a scheme had been introduced by Barking and Dagenham Council on a voluntary basis. This was not something the Council could afford and its voluntary nature meant that many of those who caused this situation would be unlikely to voluntarily participate. Councillor Turpin

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added that the Council was pursuing other measures such as free de-worming tablets and placing non-permanent anti dog fouling messages on pavements where they were more visible. In addition, if any Member had concerns about a particular situation, then the wardens would carry out a site visit to try and gather evidence.

Refuse and identity theft – A Member asked if the operation conducted in Gillingham highlighting the issue of identity theft from refuse put out for collection too early could be rolled out across Medway as “bin raiding” was an increasing problem in some wards. Councillor Turpin responded that, if successful, it would be rolled out but the proliferation of “bin raiding” in some areas seemed to be more about people looking for metals etc. to sell, rather than motivated by identity theft.

Emergency Planning

- **Medway Tunnel** – in response to a query why there was no reference to the tunnel in the report, officers advised that the tunnel had its own emergency plan in place and this had been updated following an exercise last summer. There was also an emergency recovery plan to get the tunnel operational again after an incident.
- **Bronze Command** – the Portfolio Holder confirmed that Bronze Command still existed.
- **Member notification** – in response to a question about whether Members would be notified in the event of an incident, the Committee was advised that it was standard practice for Ward Members to be informed of emergencies by the Council as they arose.
- **Trigger Levels** – Councillor Turpin advised that the trigger levels had been met on three occasions and this was due to hot and cold weather events.
- **Isle of Grain False Alarm** – A Member queried why this false alarm had happened and asked for an assurance it would not happen again. Councillor Turpin commented that this had been unfortunate and had happened in error. He was confident lessons had been learned and it would not happen again.

Community Centres

- **Costs** – A Member asked for a breakdown of the costs to run the four community centres and their locations. Councillor Turpin stated that they were located in Chattenden, Strood, White Road and Hook Meadow. All cost about £50,000 per annum to run. One had lower fees than the others which may be addressed next year as part of the budget process. However, he was not looking to increase fees significantly.

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Decision:

The Committee agreed to:

- a) thank the Portfolio Holder for Business Management for attending the meeting and answering questions;
- b) ask for information on the number of prosecutions for fly tipping to be provided, and;
- c) ask for reports on the amount of fly tipping collected in Medway to examine if there is a link with the charge for the collection of bulky waste.

898 Housing (Demand, Affordability and Supply) Task Group

Discussion:

The Director, Regeneration, Community and Culture introduced this report which asked Members to consider the final report of the in-depth review into the demand, supply and affordability of housing in Medway. The Committee was recommended to consider the findings and recommendations of the Task Group and forward any comments to the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Director thanked the Members of the Task Group for the report and the positive way the Group had worked on a cross party basis to deliver recommendations which would have a significant impact on communities in Medway. The issues the Task Group had raised showed that the housing problems in Medway were also very much a feature in the region and nationally.

A Member of the Task Group commended the report and the recommendations to the Committee and noted the positive, collegiate way in which the Group had worked in analysing the issues and evidence and formulating workable recommendations, which had been agreed unanimously by the Task Group. He thanked his fellow Task Group Members, the witnesses who had given up their time to speak to the Task Group and the support provided from the officers involved.

The Chairman of the Task Group was invited to speak and also commended the report to the Committee and thanked the Members and officers involved.

Members welcomed the report and made the following comments:

Recommendation 2 - In response to a question about the likelihood of the Government agreeing to a local tax on undeveloped (land banked) land, officers advised that it was not possible to say at this point whether this proposal would be accepted by the Government.

Recommendation 3 - Officers clarified that effectively the Task Group were recommending that the ability for developers to commission services such as ecology studies at the pre-application stage in order to allow schemes to start on

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site without further delay should happen more often given its effectiveness when it had been used to date.

Recommendation 6 - A Member asked how the reluctance of some landlords to accept Home bonds could be overcome and queried why the Task Group had not spoken to a lettings agency. Officers replied that Home bonds worked for some people and the intention was to review the scheme. One possibility was to combine training for tenants in personal finance etc. with the scheme. The Group had met with the National Landlords Association whose membership included both lettings agents and landlords.

A Member asked to what extent the Group had spoken to the voluntary sector. In reply, a Member commented that the Group had spoken to Citizens Advice Medway and had also invited Shelter but had been unable to secure a representative.

Referring to the private rental sector, a Member asked whether the Council was looking at mechanisms to maintain the quality of homes in the sector including improving the exterior of properties where necessary. Whether selective licensing would be introduced was also queried. Officers replied that the Council had previously looked at selective licensing for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), which were much more prevalent in other areas compared to Medway. Those larger properties which were HMOs but did not need to be licensed were risk assessed and inspected. At present it was not felt that selective licensing would add anything to the measures currently employed by the Council. There were proposals about further regulation and licencing in respect of private sector accommodation in the Housing and Planning Bill which officers would be monitoring. The standards the Council enforced against in the private rented sector were set down in legislation and related to the impact of accommodation on a person's health. The aesthetic appearance of a property was not a matter for the Council under its housing powers and a property which looked poorly maintained from the exterior did not necessarily mean that the interior standards were below the acceptable levels set down. Recommendation 11 recognised the importance of these issues.

A Member referred to the issue of the affordability of starter homes and asked if the Council was proposing to increase the density of these in urban areas. Officers responded that starter homes would be dealt with as part of the Local Plan and starter homes would be required in all significant developments, including in rural areas. In addition, the Council was looking to increase the density of starter homes, where appropriate, through the Local Plan.

A Member noted the suggestion from the Group that a briefing for Members on the Housing and Planning Bill be provided and asked if this could be arranged.

A Member asked if there were any plans for a register of rogue landlords. Officers responded that the Housing and Planning Bill proposed such a register and officers would monitor its progression and bring forward proposals as required.

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Decision:

The Committee agreed to:

- a) endorse the report from the Housing Task Group and commend it to the Business Support O&S Committee for approval
- b) ask that a briefing for Members on the Housing and Planning Bill be arranged

899 Presentation on Highways

Discussion:

Members considered a report and received a presentation from the Head of Highways and Parking on how highways were managed in Medway, with a view to understanding the technical process involved in selecting a work programme for the year and whether Medway was in a position to look further ahead in its programming. The presentation explained how officers arrived at a programme of works to meet the Council's objectives.

A Member welcomed the data-led approach to determining the programme of highways schemes and asked for confirmation that requests from individual Members did not undermine this approach. The Head of Highways and Parking commented that all schemes were technically appraised and then prioritised and gave an assurance that Members' requests, whilst welcome, had not in the previous 6 years led to the schedule of works being amended.

On liaison with utility companies, officers responded that work by utilities impacted on public satisfaction with the road network. Once a scheme had been signed off, the Council served notice on the utilities that they had 3-4 months to finalise any works after which the Council would prevent them from carrying out works on the highway unless it was an emergency situation.

On the Department for Transport's (DfT) self assessment on asset management, which was linked to future funding, the Council had self assessed as being in Band 2 but officers were confident that for the next assessment in January 2017 Band 3 (the highest band) would be achieved. The Head of Highways and Parking replied that the Council had taken part in this self assessment as part of a pilot but had not received any feedback from the Department for Transport. He was confident that in reality the Council was at Band 3 at present, but had erred on the side of caution in the self assessment.

A Member asked for details of what funds were needed for the highways network to maintain its current levels of technical performance.

A Member asked what the annual budget was for Medway Tunnel, how this compared to the situation before the Council took on responsibility for the

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tunnel and what percentage this represented in terms of the overall highways budget. In response, the Council was spending about the same each year on the tunnel as the previous operator - £600-800,000 pa. The DfT had given the Council £5m to operate the tunnel, which had been ring fenced.

Regarding the levels of finance needed to be invested in the highways network in order to maintain current levels of technical performance, officers responded that the Council's budget modelling systems allowed this information to be made readily available.

In response to a question about whether the Council would be adopting the road network at Medway Gates, the Committee was advised that this would not be considered at present due to concerns about the soundness of the roads both structurally and financially.

A Member asked what the possible impact might be on the network as a result of the second Thames crossing. Officers responded that most of the resulting additional traffic would be on Kent County Council's network. Part of the Council's response to the consultation on the crossing was that whichever option was chosen, there should be additional funding from the Government to reflect any increase in traffic on the network in Medway.

Decision:

The Committee agreed to:

- a) note the report and the presentation
- b) thank Mr Phil Moore, the Head of Highways and Parking, for his huge contribution to the Council and wish him well for the future.
- c) ask for details of what levels of finance is needed to be invested in the highways network in order to maintain current levels of technical performance.

900 Council Plan Monitoring 2015/16 - Quarter 3

Discussion:

The Performance and Intelligence Manager introduced this report which summarised performance in Quarter 3 2015/16 against the two priorities relevant to the Committee which were:

- Safe, clean and green Medway and
- Everyone benefitting from the area's regeneration.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

Automatic Number Plate Recognition camera on the A2 London Road corridor

In response to a question about whether this camera had been fixed, officers confirmed that this camera was not working at present. The Council had sent requests for it be fixed to the police, who controlled the camera.

Rochester Christmas Market

A Member referred to the traffic problems that had been experienced when the market had been held. The Director replied that high numbers of people had attended and some respondents to the satisfaction survey had referred to issues around crowding and traffic management. He added that whilst lessons were always learned after all festivals, in many ways the Christmas Market was a victim of its own success and traffic problems would be an ongoing issue if it continued to attract such large numbers of visitors.

Review of On Street Parking

In response to a query about what Member involvement there would be in this review, officers replied that Ward Councillors and residents would be consulted in order to understand what communities wanted so that the outcomes of the review improved the quality of people's lives. Formal consultation would then follow when draft traffic regulation orders etc. were drawn up.

Stood Town Centre Key Project

A Member asked for more detail about the three options that had been put forward for consideration. Officers replied that this was a significant project and consultants had produced outline plans which the Council had asked them to revisit with a view to focusing more on traffic issues. Once the plans had been further developed, the options would be shared with Ward Councillors and could also be reported to the Committee if Members wished.

Satisfaction with Road Maintenance

A Member queried the appropriateness of the 50% target for this measure and wondered why user satisfaction rates were not higher given the evidence reported to the Committee about improvements in road conditions. Officers responded by pointing out that the Medway road network was relatively small and many road users would be using other networks on a particular journey and this could mean they were judging the network in Medway based on their experiences elsewhere. Confusion between the Council and utility companies was also a factor as many people would attribute fault to the Council as a result of work on the highways by utilities. Nevertheless, the Council was not complacent about this issue and was trying to understand more about why satisfaction rates were at the level they were, including discussions about the survey results with user groups, residents and professional drivers. In response, a Member commented that whilst it was often clear that the network in Medway was in a better condition than neighbouring areas, the Council should accept that

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negative perceptions about the road network could well be valid and many people's journeys would only be on the Medway network.

Target NI 154 – Net Additional Homes Provided

A Member expressed disappointment, particularly given the need to build more homes as evidenced from the report from the Housing Task Group, that this target was being reduced from 1,000 a year to 600 on the basis that the revised target was achievable. He suggested that Cabinet should reconsider this target as the answer was not to lower the target but to recognise there was a problem and consider how best to increase the number of homes provided. The Director replied that this was a one year target and had been put forward as it was more realistic and also reflected that success was outside the control of the Council. Members supported the request that Cabinet be asked to reconsider the target.

Clean for the Queen Campaign

A Member asked if the clean up events which were part of this campaign had been evaluated and whether similar events were likely to be rolled out in the near future given the positive impacts on communities. The Committee were advised that the Council already operated a programme of community clear ups in any event during the year. The Council would not operate on private land but would help volunteers in terms of the disposal of rubbish collected. The Council was willing to consider helping with any particular site that a Member had in mind for a clean up.

Decision:

The Committee agreed to:

- a) note the Q3 2015/16 performance against the Key Measures of Success used to monitor progress against the Council Plan 2015/16
- b) forward the comments outlined above on the Council Plan to the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- c) recommend to Cabinet that, particularly in the light of the conclusions from the Housing Task Group about the need for more homes to be built, it reconsiders Target NI 154 (Net Additional Homes Provided) for 2017/18.

901 Work programme

Discussion:

The Democratic Services Officer reported on the Committee's current work programme.

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A suggestion that the item in the unallocated section of the work programme on plans for expansion of markets be dealt with as a briefing note instead of a report to the Committee was agreed.

Decision:

The Committee agreed to:

- a) note the current work programme, and;
- b) agree that information on the Kent and Medway Growth Deal and also plans for expansion of markets be circulated as briefing notes and these items be removed from the list of outstanding reports on the work programme.

Chairman

Date:

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