

Medway Council
Meeting of Regeneration, Culture and Environment
Overview And Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday, 17 January 2017

6.30pm to 9.02pm

Record of the meeting

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

- Present:** Councillors: Clarke (Chairman), Bhutia (Vice-Chairman), Carr, Craven, Etheridge, Griffin, Hicks, Stamp and Tejan
- Substitutes:** Councillors:
Maple (Substitute for Osborne)
Franklin (Substitute for Saroy)
Shaw (Substitute for Gilry)
- In Attendance:** Richard Hicks, Director of Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation
Mark Breathwick, Medway Homechoice and Allocations Team Manager
Laura Caiels, Legal Advisor
Councillor Rodney Chambers, OBE, Portfolio Holder for Inward Investment, Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships
Bob Dimond, Head of Sport Leisure and Tourism
Councillor Howard Doe, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services
Ruth Du-Lieu, Assistant Director, Front Line Services
Dave Harris, Head of Planning
Tomasz Kozlowski, Assistant Director, Physical and Cultural Regeneration
Carl Madjitey, Head of Festivals Arts Theatres and Events
Ellen Wright, Democratic Services Officer

595 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gilry, Osborne and Saroy.

596 Record of Meeting

The record of the meeting held on 8 December 2016 was approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

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597 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

598 Declaration of interest and whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other interests

Councillor Maple advised the Committee that members of his family work at the Central and Brook Theatres should there be any discussion on these venues when the Deputy Leader and Portfolio for Housing and Community Services was held to account.

599 Attendance by the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services

Discussion:

Members received an overview of progress made on the areas within the scope of the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services which fell within the remit of this Committee as set out below:

- **Battle of Medway**

In response to a request for an update on plans to commemorate the 350th anniversary of the Battle of Medway, the Portfolio Holder outlined a number of planned events to take place over a 9 day period including:

- Attendance by naval assets from both Countries
- A visit by 200 day boats from Holland
- Exhibitions at the Dockyard and Upnor Castle
- A 'Fire to Friendship' Commemorative Service at Rochester Cathedral
- A major tourist attraction 'Medway in Flames'
- Other traditional river events.

- **The likely impact of reduced expenditure on the Council's leisure and tourism offer**

A Member sought information as to the likely impact upon the Council's leisure and tourism offer as a result of the proposed £295,000 budget reduction in this area in 2017/18.

In response, the Portfolio Holder advised that savings could only be achieved by continued efficiencies and increasing income. He gave an assurance that there were no plans to reduce the levels of staffing at leisure centres nor were there plans to close any facilities in 2017/18.

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He advised that plans were underway to increase the level of tourism in Medway as a means of increasing income and consideration would be given to opportunities for improving the offer at the Visitor Information Centre.

Furthermore, many different sporting packages were now on offer encouraging participation in a number of different sporting activities, thus increasing income.

- **Outsourcing of the Corn Exchange**

A Member referred to the Guildhall Museum and the successful marketing of the Museum for weddings and questioned why the Corn Exchange could not remain as an in-house facility and marketed on similar lines to the Museum.

In response, the Portfolio Holder advised that the Guildhall Museum was a very successful museum and a valuable part of Medway's heritage, therefore use of the Museum as a wedding venue was ancillary to its main purpose. However, the Corn Exchange was a large building which had capacity when not used for events. For this reason, it was considered appropriate to investigate whether there was scope for the private sector to take on this venue. However, the Portfolio Holder gave an assurance that a pre-agreed number of days would be set aside for Council use, and there was no intention for the Council to part with the freehold of the building.

- **Fuse Festival**

A Member sought clarification as to why the Fuse Festival had not taken place in 2016 and whether this event would take place in 2017.

The Portfolio Holder explained that as the Fuse Festival was a community event, the Arts Council considered that it should not be organised by Medway Council. The Arts Council had therefore offered to organise the event in 2016 but unfortunately, the event had not taken place. He explained that regrettably, it was not possible for the Council to divert resources to staging the Fuse Festival if the Arts Council could not stage this event in 2017.

He confirmed that the Fuse Festival had been the subject of discussion at a meeting of the Cultural Partnership and would be raised again in an attempt to encourage greater involvement by the groups on the Partnership.

- **Availability of local produce in the Visitor Information Centre**

A Member requested whether the Portfolio Holder was willing to promote the use of Medway and Kent produce in the Visitor Information Centre. The Portfolio Holder agreed to pursue this.

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- **Castle Concerts**

In response to comments on the 2016 Castle Concerts, the Portfolio Holder stated that the level of security at these events was provided in line with the advice of the Police.

He referred to the cancellation of one of the concerts and stated that this was regrettable but unavoidable owing to the health of one of the band members. The cancellation of the concert had been communicated as widely as possible, given the limited notice received.

- **Medway Local Plan**

A Member sought an assurance that relevant partners involved in events, sports and leisure had an opportunity to feed into the Local Plan process. In response, the Director of Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation confirmed that 'Placemaking' was an important element of the Medway Local Plan.

- **Eastgate House**

A Member congratulated the Portfolio Holder on the extensive cultural and leisure offer in Medway and asked him to comment on any area that he considered had been a disappointment over the past year. In response, the Portfolio Holder advised that he had been disappointed that the works at Eastgate House could not be delivered within budget, the reasons for which had previously been explained.

- **Provision of parking at the Will Adams Festival and the English Festival**

A Member suggested that a section of Gillingham Park be set aside for car parking in an aim to increase attendance at the Will Adams Festival and that a nominal parking fee be implemented at the English Festival to increase income.

The Portfolio Holder stressed that as Gillingham Park was currently in the process of applying to re-gain Green Flag status, it would not be appropriate to allow vehicles to be parked on the grassed area. It was recognised that whilst a popular event, the Will Adams Festival was of a specialist nature and therefore did not appeal to everyone. He did not consider that it would be appropriate to relocate this festival to another site as it was currently staged in close proximity to the Will Adams Memorial.

In response to the suggestion that a parking fee be implemented for the English Festival, this would be given consideration.

Decision:

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder for attending the meeting and answering Members' questions and:

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- a) noted that the Portfolio Holder will investigate the promotion of Medway and Kent produce in the Visitor Information Centre.
- b) noted that the Portfolio Holder will raise the issue of staging the Fuse Festival at the next meeting of the Cultural Partnership and will ensure that the Chairman, Vice Chairman and Opposition Spokesperson are advised of the outcome of that discussion.

600 Attendance by the Portfolio Holder for Inward investment, Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships

Discussion:

Members received an overview of progress made on the areas within the scope of the Portfolio Holder for Inward Investment, Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships which fell within the remit of this Committee as set out below:

- **Inward Investment**

A Member referred to the decision of the Council to increase its level of financial support for inward investment to £210,000 in order to raise its profile as a desirable location for businesses and sought clarification as to how Medway could ensure that businesses relocated in Medway.

In response, the Portfolio Holder advised that the Council was working in partnership with Kent County Council (KCC) to procure new inward investment with a contract worth £3 million over a three year period. He confirmed that KCC had contributed a significant level of funding to the contract and the balance had come from European funding.

The Portfolio Holder advised the Committee that Medway had an excellent working relationship with KCC and both local authorities had equal status on the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership.

He referred in particular to a visit to Medway in November 2016 by the Chairman of Locate in Kent on a guided tour of major commercial sites in Medway, thus allowing him an opportunity to understand Medway's investment priorities and economic and strategic position.

- **Watermill Wharf**

In response to a question as to the level of interest in units at Watermill Wharf, the Portfolio Holder advised that there had been significant interest in the business units and storage units to date. In addition, it was confirmed that there had been a high level of interest in business accommodation at the Rochester Airport Technology Park.

- **Opportunities for future European Funding**

A Member sought clarification as to whether there would continue to be opportunities for Medway to benefit from European funding in the future. In response, the Portfolio Holder advised that with the exception of any

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European Funding bids already being progressed, local authorities were not being encouraged to submit bids beyond 2019.

- **Rochester Riverside and the future of the existing coach park**
In response to concerns that the development proposals for Rochester Riverside would result in the loss of the existing coach park, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that discussions were already in hand for the provision of a replacement coach park. However, given the number of coaches that use the car park on non-event days it was unlikely that the replacement coach park would be as large as that currently provided. It was unlikely that the existing coach park would cease to be available until late 2018.
- **Medway Ambassadors**
A Member asked how the number of Medway Ambassadors compared with other similar sized local authorities.

In response, the Portfolio Holder advised that the Ambassador Scheme had originally begun as Regeneration Ambassadors but had since been expanded and relaunched in June 2016. The format of the Ambassadors scheme was currently being revised.

Decision:

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder for attending the meeting and answering questions and requested that information be supplied to Members on the number of Medway Ambassadors in comparison with those at similar sized local authorities.

601 Housing (Demand, Supply and Affordability) Progress Report

Discussion:

The Committee was reminded that in May 2016 the Housing (Demand, Supply and Affordability) Task Group had made a number of recommendations to help manage demand and improve the supply and affordability of housing in Medway.

The Committee received a report and action plan summarising progress against each of the recommendations of the Task Group. The Head of Planning outlined the progress against each of the recommendations and advised that those shaded grey fell within the remit of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

A Member suggested that it would be helpful for future update reports to include information on the benefits to local people of increased house building programmes from employment opportunities.

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In response to a question as to the benefits in increasing the level of communication with developers, the Head of Planning outlined the various liaison events that currently took place between the Council and developers.

He drew attention to the benefits of the developer planning presentation to Members at the pre-application stage, which enabled developers to hear views of their proposed applications and in some cases enabled them to adapt applications prior to submission to the Planning Committee. Developers had confirmed that they were appreciative of Medway's system as this was not offered by all local authorities.

The Head of Planning also drew attention to work being undertaken to assist small and medium sized enterprise (SME) builders to enter the housebuilding market in Medway through the pre-application and planning processes to make it easier, smoother and quicker for applicants.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) noted the progress made against the Task Group recommendations.
- b) noted that future reports will include information as to the benefits of housebuilding programmes for local employment opportunities and the assistance given to small and medium sized enterprises (SME) builders to enter the housebuilding market in Medway.

602 Member's Item - Splashes Leisure Pool

Discussion:

The Committee received a report setting out a response to a number of issues raised by Councillor Stamp relating to Splashes Leisure Pool.

The Head of Sport, Leisure, Tourism and Heritage advised that the Public Health England (PHE) report into the investigation into the recent outbreak of the Norovirus at Splashes Leisure Pool was still awaited. Officers were in discussion with PHE and the guideline was for reports to be made available within 3 months after a norovirus outbreak. As PHE did not conclude surveys of those affected until the end of November, it was anticipated that the report would be available towards the end of February.

The Director of Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation advised the Committee that PHE were currently investigating a number of cases of norovirus elsewhere across the country and therefore, this increased volume of work may affect PHE timelines in producing investigation reports.

The Head of Sport, Leisure, Tourism and Heritage advised the Committee that in the meantime he had provided an answer to a number of the issues raised by Councillor Stamp in his initial Member's item submitted to the Committee on 8 December 2016.

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In particular, the Head of Sport, Leisure, Tourism and Heritage drew attention to two issues that required correction as they were factually incorrect. The first related to the statement that there were no receptionists at Medway Park. The Head of Sport, Leisure, Tourism and Heritage confirmed that there were currently 7 receptionists at Medway Park and there were no plans to change this.

The second issue related to there being no trained external instructors for classes. The Head of Sport, Leisure, Tourism and Heritage confirmed that all classes were led by trained instructors and approximately two thirds were run by trained external instructors. He confirmed that the Council had a policy of upskilling its staff and all employees were actively encouraged to attain the necessary qualifications to enable them to run classes. However, this was not at the expense of using external instructors.

Councillor Stamp thanked the Head of Sport, Leisure, Tourism and Heritage for this clarification.

The Committee then discussed the report and the Head of Sport, Leisure, Tourism and Heritage responded to various questions as follows:

- **Staff Training**

All staff were trained in accordance with national guidelines designed to protect health and safety. In the next 2 months, 37 staff were due to attend training courses in line with the Council's desire to upskill its employees. All staff were exceedingly loyal, hardworking and dedicated to their jobs and the Council was committed to offering career opportunities and developments.

All casual staff underwent the same basic training expected of full-time staff.

- **Cleaning responsibilities**

The shared cleaning responsibilities between Medway Norse and Splashes staff followed the previous system when cleaning was 'in-house'.

- **Refurbishment works**

As the building at Splashes was 26 years old, it could benefit from refurbishment but a recent condition survey did not identify any immediate maintenance issues that required attention.

Members advised that in wishing to scrutinise the norovirus outbreak at Splashes Leisure Pool, they were not being critical of staff and requested that it be placed on record that they fully appreciated staff dedication to their work. The Director of Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation stated that officers appreciated that Members were supportive of staff but also had a scrutiny role to fulfil.

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Discussion ensued as to the benefits of having a staff survey as a means of gauging staff morale and the Director of Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation advised that an annual staff survey was undertaken each Summer. Within the Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation Directorate a Focus Group had been set up to analyse the results of the 2016 staff survey and he suggested that rather than undertake a further survey, a member of staff from Leisure be involved in the Focus Group.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) noted that a further report will be submitted to the Committee when the outcome of the Public Health England investigation is known.
- b) noted that the Director of Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation will ensure that a member of staff from Leisure is included in the Directorate's Staff Survey Focus Group to analyse the results of the 2016 staff survey.

603 Cultural Activities

Discussion:

The Committee received a report and presentation on the progress achieved against the Cultural Strategy 2014 – 2019, setting out achievements and ambitions for the following areas:

- Stewardship
- Engagement
- Prosperity
- Wellbeing.

The Committee discussed the presentation and in particular referred to the following:

- Funfairs at the Dickens Festival and Armed Forces Day
- Christmas Markets
- Medway Mile
- Castle Concerts
- Events at Medway Park
- The Brook Theatre
- The 150th anniversary of the death of Charles Dickens
- Sponsorship
- Battle of Medway
- Cultural Partnership.

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Decision:

The Committee:

- a) endorsed the progress made in delivering Medway's Cultural Strategy 2014 – 2019.
- b) requested that officers investigate the introduction of a ride bracelet for use at funfairs at the Dickens Festival and Armed Forces Day.
- c) requested that officers provide a schedule of costs associated with all Council run events and that the schedule be circulated to all Members of the Committee.

604 Petitions

Discussion:

The Committee received a report setting out petitions received by the Council which fell within the remit of this Committee including a summary of the responses sent to petition organisers by officers.

Decision:

The Committee noted the officer responses to the petitions and that the petitioners had not sought a review of the matter by this Committee.

605 Work programme

Discussion:

The Committee received a copy of its work programme.

The Democratic Services Officer provided an update on the latest version of the Forward Plan published on 9 January 2017 insofar as it related to this Committee. In addition she advised that it was likely that a report from the cross-cutting Task Group on how far has Medway gone in becoming a dementia friendly community would be submitted to this Committee on 28 March 2017, subject to the final report being signed off by the Task Group.

The Director of Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation advised the Committee that it was anticipated that a report on the possible introduction of a 20s plenty scheme either as a pilot or Medway-wide would be submitted to the Committee in March or June 2017.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) noted the current work programme.
- b) agreed that the report setting out information on the levels of finance needed to be invested in the highways network in order to maintain

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current levels of technical performance be scheduled for report to the committee in June 2017.

- c) noted that a report of the work of the cross cutting Task Group on how far has Medway gone in becoming a dementia friendly community will be reported to the Committee on 28 March 2017 subject to the final report being signed off by the Task Group.
- d) noted that a report will be submitted to the Committee on the PHE investigation at Splashes Leisure Pool when the PHE report is received.

Chairman

Date:

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