

REGENERATION, CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

28 MARCH 2017

ATTENDANCE OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Report from: Portfolio Holder for Business Management Councillor
Turpin

Summary

This report sets out progress made within the areas covered by the Portfolio Holder for Business Management 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 Portfolio Holder for Business Management are:

- Community Centres
- Community Officers
- Emergency Planning
- Bereavement and Registration Services

1.2 Achievements are detailed by services area below.

2. Community Centres

2.1 The Council owns the freehold of four Community Centres at Chattenden, the White Road Estate, Hook Meadow and Woodside in Strood. Medway Norse manage the day to day running of the centres and take bookings. Reactive maintenance, staffing and cleaning are funded by Medway Norse through their Service Level Agreement. The Council retains budgets for payment of other running costs. The management of those budgets now sits with the Property and Capital Projects team within the Chief Legal Officer's responsibility.

- 2.2 As the Portfolio Member for Business Management I have been working with officers in the Property and Capital Projects team to regularise the fee structure for the centres to bring in additional income. This will come into place during the financial year 17/18.
- 2.3 I have also been reviewing with the Property and Capital Projects team how other cost savings can be made across the four centres and have identified some potential areas that are now being investigated.
- 2.4 In addition, active consideration is being given to the possibility to re-develop the White Road and Hook Meadow sites for housing and new community facilities. Public consultation events have been held with users and stakeholders and feasibility appraisals are now being prepared for consideration.
- 2.5 Medway Council has secured revenue funding in respect of the One Public Estate government initiative which seeks to make better use of public sector assets to provide housing, jobs and revenue savings. Part of the Council's allocated funding is being used to produce the feasibility study for redevelopment of the White Road Community Centre site with consideration of the provision of residential units and re-provision of the community facility.

3. Community Wardens

- 3.1 The Community Wardens attended 36 PACT meetings. From these meetings they resolved 135 issues of concern to residents by direct action. A further 56 issues were passed onto other departments within the council.
- 3.2 65 Community Engagement events were attended, including healthy walks, student engagements, library forums, PCSO meetings, Police surgeries, town centre forums, residents associations, neighbourhood panels and community fun days.
- 3.3 As well as this, Community Wardens organised three free pet health check events in conjunction with the PDSA.
- 3.4 The Community Wardens organised a number of Community Clean-ups and litter picks, encouraging the local community to take ownership of the problem and do something about it.
- 3.5 In one example at Cornwallis Avenue Field, 35 members of a local church group turned out to help, clearing over 30 sacks of litter.
- 3.6 In another at Green Street, Gillingham, three tipper loads of rubbish was cleared from an alleyway.
- 3.7 Community Wardens maintain a programme of educational visits to schools throughout the year. These presentations target year 6 pupils and focus on messages concerning personal safety, responsible dog ownership and littering.
- 3.8 Wardens patrol known hotspots every morning to remove particularly offensive or hazardous litter. To date they have removed 176 items of drug related litter including needles and 115 items of sex-related litter.
- 3.9 This intelligence is reported to the Police, who use it to target their resources appropriately.

- 3.10 Wardens removed 135 abandoned vehicles from the streets of Medway this year. A further three vehicles were surrendered to the council.
- 3.11 By providing intelligence to the DVLA, Community Wardens secured the clamping of 857 untaxed vehicles, many of which were subsequently removed.
- 3.12 During the winter months, Wardens engaged with a number of rough sleepers, signposting them to support agencies.
- 3.13 Working in partnership with their colleagues in Environmental Enforcement, Community Wardens took part in a project targeting the area of Luton Road between the arches and Castle Road. Two officers were dedicated to this area for an extensive period of time. This has proved extremely successful in dealing with issues such as refuse out early which has been an inherent problem in Luton for many years. However, this has been all but eliminated by intensive community engagement.
- 3.14 The team has also instigated a project to improve the look of the street scene around Luton Arches by re painting the pedestrian guard rail, including the foot bridge.
- 3.15 This will be done at zero cost to the council as the materials will be paid for by a local community group and the labour will be provided by students from Mid Kent College under the supervision of their tutors.
- 3.16 A new contract was procured and awarded this year for the kennelling of stray dogs. This contract gives us more room to house dogs for longer, enabling us to re home them successfully.
- 3.17 To date, the wardens have dealt with 327 stray dogs. 136 were taken to the kennels and 191 were scanned for microchips on street and returned directly to their owners.
- 3.18 In one case, a box was found in a field in Strood containing six puppies. The box had been sealed and had no air holes. This case received significant media attention and was featured on BBC TV news. Because of the extensive network of users of our stray dogs Facebook page, we were able to trace the people that had abandoned them and a case is now being prepared for prosecution.
- 3.19 Of the dogs taken to kennels, 100 were either rehomed or reunited with their owners and eight went to foster care until permanent homes are found for them.
- 3.20 44 Dogs received veterinary treatment. Unfortunately it was necessary to have two dogs put to sleep.
- 3.21 During a visit to the traveller site at Cuxton, officers noticed two malnourished dogs. The RSPCA were called and they seized one of the dogs. They were going to serve a notice on the owner to get veterinary treatment for the other dog, but fearing that it would be abandoned, officers persuaded the owner to relinquish ownership to the council. The dog has since responded to treatment and is currently in the care of a volunteer from our fostering network.
- 3.22 Community Wardens microchipped 247 dogs in their own homes free of charge.

- 3.23 In one case of interest, a Community Warden scanned a stray Chihuahua and located the registered owner in London, from whom the dog had been stolen three years previously.
- 3.24 When stray dogs are returned to their owners, they are sent an invoice so as to contribute towards the costs of running the service. There is a statutory provision enabling the council to do this.
- 3.25 However, payment rates are very low, and ideas are being considered that may encourage payment. This could include holding the dog until payment is received.
- 3.26 The Community Warden Team was awarded a Gold Footprint Award by the RSPCA in recognition of their excellent stray dogs policies and procedures for the third consecutive year.

4. Emergency Planning

- 4.1 Heatwave and Cold Weather Emergency Plans were written to cover seasons from 1 June– 15 September 2016 and 1 November 2016 – 31 March 2017. These plans are refreshed each season to reflect the arrangements set out in NHS National Emergency Plans.
- 4.2 The Emergency Planning team continues to monitor the warnings and alert service, jointly run by the Met Office and NHS, and advises Council services and voluntary organisations when trigger levels are met. To date this has been necessary on 3 occasions.
- 4.3 Medway Council and Kent County Council have a joint Mass Fatality Emergency Plan; a significant element of this is a contract for the provision of temporary mortuary facilities. Kent Coroners' Service led on this aspect, the Emergency Planning Team have been working with KCC colleagues to ensure Medway Council responsibilities are included.
- 4.4 A live test was conducted on the alerting systems that would be used in the event of an external emergency associated with an emergency at the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) site on the Isle of Grain. This test is carried out on an annual basis.
- 4.5 The two External Emergency Plans for BP Oil and Grain LNG COMAH (Control of Major Accident Hazard) Sites were published in November 2015. Exercise Combine 2016, which tested those plans, took place in two phases:
- Live alerting exercise – 14 April 2016
 - Multi-agency table top exercise – 28 April 2016
- 4.6 Lessons learned from that exercise have been identified and incorporated into the multi-agency lessons learned process and the plans were updated re published in November 2016.
- 4.7 The Emergency Planning Team has arranged for senior officers from across the Council to attend the following multi-agency events:
- Emergencies on Trial – June 2016
 - Mass Fatalities – June 2016
 - Public Safety at Festivals – July 2016

- National Structured Debrief – October 2016
 - Oil Pollution SCAT (Shoreline Cleanup and Assessment Technique) training – October 2016
 - Incident Liaison Officer – November 2016
 - Multi Agency Bronze – December 2016
 - Multi Agency Joint Incident Command (MAJIC) – 27 Feb – 02 Mar 2017
- 4.8. The Emergency Planning team, in addition to above has provided internal training and represented Medway Council at the following Exercises:
- Initial Coordinator – July 2016
 - MCG Control Centre – August and December 2016
 - Rest Centre staff training December 2016
 - Medway Council Events table top exercise
 - 3 x Exercise Cygnus (national flu planning) Workshops
 - Exercise Cygnus (National Flu Exercise) – October 2016
 - Exercise Surge (county-wide coastal flood exercise) response and recovery September 2016
- 4.9 The Emergency Planning Team contributed to the planning and response for six multi-agency operations
- 4.10 The Emergency Planning team has represented the Council on 13 separate standing Kent Resilience Forum groups and task and finish groups, which are established as and when necessary to undertake specific projects.
- 4.11 Throughout the year the Emergency Planning Team has responded to a number of severe weather and flood alerts, a white powder incident, and a number of fires. There have also been incidents involving schools holding volatile substances, which has resulted in military disposal actions, avian flu response and a potential full evacuation of a block of flats (Melville Court) to Gun Wharf on New Year's Day. The latest incident, in January 2017, resulted in a full stand up of Medway Council's Command & Control structures for a potential east coast flood surge.
- 4.12 The Team has contributed to the following emergency plans:
- Kent & Medway Hazardous Pipeline Plan
 - KRF Severe Weather Plan
 - Kent & Medway Oil Pollution Plan

5. Bereavement and Registration services

- 5.1 2,602 cremations were undertaken (against 2918 in 2015) and 270 interments (against 369 in 2015).
- 5.2 The crematorium project has made progress and a small project team has been assembled supported by contractors and consultants experienced in the installation of cremators.
- 5.3 A cremator manufacturer, Facultative Technologies Ltd (FT), a Dutch based company with manufacturing capacity in the UK, have been

selected to remove and install 3 new cremators and abatement equipment. FT has more than 80% of the UK market and enjoys a good reputation. The budget has been approved for the completion of this project. There will be a lot of work involved to remove the existing plant, undertake enabling works for the new cremators to be installed, back-of-house improvements and completion of snagging items left by the previous contractor. This will take some time to arrange and the project is expected to last somewhere around a year to complete. As before, it is anticipated that closures of the service will be minimised.

- 5.4 Two sections have been established in Chatham and Woodlands cemeteries for the specific use of Muslim shroud burials.
- 5.5 There were 4,216 birth registrations with 98% being registered within 42 days of birth. 3,526 deaths were registered with 90% being registered within 5 days of death; 328 deaths involving post mortems were registered and of these 80% were registered within 7 days of death. 1,745 notices of marriage were taken, 740 marriage ceremonies and 11 Citizen Ceremonies performed.
- 5.6 The Guildhall has been set up as an annex to the Register Office for marriages on a Saturday and this has proved popular.
- 5.7 The service must submit an annual performance report to Her Majesty's Passport Office, General Register Office. The feedback for this years submission was:
 - The level of service was high
 - Customer service was high as demonstrated by the low waiting times for death registrations and notices, and public satisfaction surveys
 - We were able to provide a good level of reassurance around safeguarding data to the Registrar General
 - There was a high level of compliance against the statutory and operational standards
 - There was a slight improvement in registering deaths within the legal timeframe (compared to the previous year) however, the priority given to death informants had affected the time between birth and registration which had dropped slightly
 - Overall, it was also noted that the Registration service operated efficiently maintaining a cost neutral status

Appendices

None

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Background documents

None