

COUNCIL

15 APRIL 2010

REPORT ON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTIVITY

Report from: Neil Davies, Chief Executive

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Summary

This report provides a summary of the work of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees since the last report to Council on 4 March 2010.

1. Policy and Budget Framework

1.1 The Council's constitution allows for reports on overview and scrutiny (O&S) activity to be reported to Council meetings.

2. Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2.1 16 March 2010

2.1.1. Attendance of the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council addressed the Committee on the following:

- The by-election held in Luton and Wayfield
- Feedback from elected Members about the services provided by Members' Services team – high levels of satisfaction
- Details of completed in-depth scrutiny reviews
- The first Youth Question Time in Medway during Local Democracy Week
- The successful introduction of scrutiny of the Community Safety Partnership
- Planning arrangements for the General Election
- Proposals for the Annual Council meeting and Council Dedication Service
- New executive arrangements.

Members questioned him about:

- The electoral register
- Support for Members
- The forthcoming General Election
- Youth Question Time during Local Democracy Week
- Ensuring that information contained on the Council's website was robust and up to date
- The number of people prosecuted for not registering onto the electoral register.

2.1.2. Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Finance

The Portfolio Holder for Finance addressed the Committee on the following:

- The procurement process
- Levels of enforcement and prosecutions and additional funding for the child protection process
- Revenue and Benefits team processing claims in under 30 days
- The Communications Team campaigns and media enquiries
- Risk management and risk monitoring
- Disposal of property and capital receipts
- The achievement of a balanced budget and focus on service delivery.

Members asked questions about:

- The procurement process in relation to the forthcoming waste contract
- Empty properties
- Progress made with claims and enquiries by the Revenues and Benefits section
- Costs of subsidising bus transportation
- Introduction of new staff in child protection and reduction of administrative work for social workers which increased their ability to protect vulnerable children
- The Council's forthcoming new website and the need to keep information up to date and ensure it supports current and future innovations in social media
- The renewed bid for City status in 2012
- Whether the Council, when disposing of land, should sell it with planning permission already attached.

2.1.3. Six monthly review of the Council's Corporate Business Risk Register

During consideration of the six month review of the Council's Corporate Business Risk Register the Committee asked that the risk of a potential legal challenge to the waste contract be incorporated into the risk register. They also requested that in future there be more detailed

narrative contained within the report to explain the justification for increasing a risk's rating.

2.1.4. Quarter Three Council Plan Monitoring and LAA Update

Members were advised of performance for the third quarter of 2009-2010 and noted that since the last round of reports on LAA targets, regulations had come into effect giving all Overview and Scrutiny Committees power to obtain information from LAA partners. Each Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been assigned a number of LAA targets to keep under review.

Members commented on the following areas:

- The work of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) project planning group
- The success of the Council's apprenticeship programme
- Indicator NI 8 (Adult participation in sport)
- The Council securing two significant EU grants to target carbon emissions
- Crime results showing that people in Medway are feeling safer
- Key stage 2 results
- The positive results of the Future Jobs Fund
- The reduction in teenage pregnancy rates.

2.1.5. Medway Draft Sustainable Community Strategy 2010-2026

The Committee were advised of key consultation events that had been held, including two meetings of the LSP plenary with each meeting being attended by over 100 organisations.

Local people had also had an opportunity to give their views on the future of Medway as part of a series of neighbourhood "Community Futures Workshops" focusing on the most deprived wards.

The draft Sustainable Community Strategy 2010-2026 was recommended for approval by Cabinet, the LSP Board and Council.

The Assistant Director, Communications, Performance and Partnerships was requested to provide the Committee with a briefing note on the establishment of Partners and Communities Together (PACT) panels within wards.

3. Children and Adults Overview and Scrutiny Committee

3.1. 25 March 2010

3.1.1. Work programme

The Committee agreed:-

- That a meeting with health partners on the Care Quality Commission and annual health check results was no longer required
- That a Briefing note giving an update on progress with the Child and Adult Mental Health Services (CAMHS) should be provided to all Members of the Committee.

3.1.2. Foster Care Capacity Planning Audit

The Committee was advised that Medway performed well compared to similar authorities and had a good placement record. The Audit Committee had forwarded this matter to the Committee due to concerns about the high percentage of foster carers nationally being over 50. It was explained that the reason older people were attracted to foster caring was that they had the spare room and necessary time, once their own children had grown up.

After a question and answer session, the Committee requested a briefing note detailing what aspects of the good practice within the foster care service could be linked to special educational needs (SEN) provision.

3.1.3. Implications of Council decisions on school budgets

The report detailed further developments since discussion of a Member's Item at the previous meeting. Members acknowledged the increased pressure on school budgets in the future and asked about value for money implications for schools and their Governing Bodies.

3.1.4. Council Plan Monitoring – third quarter

Concern was expressed that the data on teenage conception rates was over a year old. Officers advised that this was the latest accurate data that was compiled by the health service and related to conceptions rather than births. A meeting was requested between the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and spokespersons of the Committee and the Teenage Pregnancy Board to discuss the work it carried out and the data it received.

3.1.5. Home education

Members were concerned at the current lack of monitoring and enforcement for children educated at home and welcomed any recommendations to strengthen the authority's powers to ensure the children were being adequately educated. Discussion took place about these reasons for children being educated at home and officers stated that they would be submitting a report to the Children's Trust to see whether resources within the local authority for home education were sufficient.

4. Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

4.1. 23 March 2010

4.1.1. Supporting Carers

A themed 'Select Committee' style meeting of the Committee was held where Medway carers were invited to attend and participate by sharing their ideas to pass to the Carers Partnership Board. Barry Saunders, a Medway carer, who had recently appeared in a documentary about caring for someone with dementia, spoke about his personal experience.

A Member task group had undertaken some initial research on the support for carers and held informal discussions with groups of carers.

A number of carers attended the meeting and contributed to the debate by sharing their personal experiences.

As a result of the findings of the task group and the views put forward at the meeting, a series of recommendations have been referred to the Carers Partnership Board. Members requested a revised timeline of actions set out in the action plan, which accompanies the Carers Strategy, to be sent to them by the end of May 2010. The Director of Children and Adults was also asked to report back on progress on the actions in October 2010 (the nearest meeting of the Committee will be 11 November 2010).

5. Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee

5.1. 18 March 2010

5.1.1. Attendance of the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council addressed the Committee on the following:

- The Dynamic Bus Station for Chatham
- Road improvements and developments to Union Street, the Brook and the Pentagon Shopping Centre

- The draft masterplan for Gun Wharf and for High Street/Best Street
- Developments at Gillingham Waterfront, including new student accommodation
- Medway park, which would open in April 2010
- Developments to Gillingham station
- Rochester Riverside and the exclusivity agreement with Crest Nicholson to build the first new homes on the site
- Redevelopment of Temple Waterfront
- Developments at Strood, an area which benefitted from retail investment.

He then responded to questions on:

- Timescales and funding for the bus station
- Partnership working with the Pentagon Shopping Centre
- The Strood Regeneration Board and when it would meet
- Use of the section 106 agreement funding from the development of Tesco in Gillingham
- Parking facilities for students at the new student accommodation, Liberty Quays, at Gillingham Waterfront

5.1.2. Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Development and Economic Growth

The Portfolio Holder for Strategic Development and Economic Growth addressed the Committee on the following:

- The South Thames Gateway (STG) Building Control Partnership
- Masterplans for Strood, Gun Wharf and High Street/Best Street, Chatham
- The Conservation Area Review for Rochester, which had received positive responses from stakeholders
- Tourism – increased visits to Medway attractions, but a drop in business tourism, although indications were that this was now rising
- New hotels in Medway
- Performance of the Development Management Service exceeded national and local targets
- Restructure of Planning Enforcement
- “Seeds for Business Growth” – assisting businesses to combat the recession
- Secured EU funding to assist businesses in relation to climate change
- Medway Ambassadors Scheme for Retail has been launched
- Levels of Medway’s workforce with Level 1 qualification exceeded the South East average.

She was then asked about the following:

- The STG Building Control Partnership's management of shortfalls
- Utilisation of the opportunity provided by hosting the modern pentathlon to raise the profile of Medway
- The size of the proposed hotels.

5.1.3. Third quarter performance report 2009/2010

The Committee noted the performance for the third quarter 2009-2010 and questioned officers about the School Travel Plan and how it was monitored.

5.1.4. Petitions

Members considered petitions in relation to Station Road, Rainham and Station Road, Strood. The Head of Capital Projects explained to Members that a feasibility study was underway in relation to Station Road, Rainham. On the Station Road, Strood petition the committee requested officers to consider the provision of adequate flashing vehicle activated warning signs in that road and referred the same site to the Kent and Medway Safety Camera Partnership for a possible speed camera.

5.1.5. Gateway 3 contract award – waste disposal and collection

The Assistant Director for Frontline Services, together with a representative from Eversheds consultants gave a presentation to Members on the process of renewing the contracts for waste collection and disposal services and responded to Members' questions and concerns.

The Committee recommended to Cabinet the award of the contract for disposal of residual waste to Company B as the most economically advantageous tender (MEAT) and the award of the contract for the collection/cleansing to Bidder 1 Variant as the MEAT.

5.1.6. Regeneration Framework 2009 six month progress report

Officers were asked a number of questions about the Regeneration Framework. These related to the replacement of trees, the use and development of the White House building, the Pentagon Shopping Centre, redesign of the Southern Water pumping station and development of the bus station.

5.1.7. Rochester Riverside Management Company

The Committee considered the report, and concern was raised regarding Medway Council's representation on either of the two bodies within the

proposed structure due to possible conflicts of interest where decisions are made that involve both parties. Following consideration of the report the Committee recommended the proposals to Cabinet and Council.

5.1.8. Member's item – Winter Service

Members considered a Member item introduced by Councillor Godwin in relation to gritting and the winter service. A Member task group was set up to consider the matter in more depth.

5.1.9. Work programme

- A report on the Air Quality Management Action Plan (outcome of consultation) will be submitted to the June meeting.
- The Waste Strategy Review was referred to the Waste Contracts Task Group for consideration prior to a decision by Cabinet.
- A report on the Local Development Framework (pre-publication version) will be brought to the June meeting.

Background papers

None

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