

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

Thursday, 17 October 2019

6.30pm to 10.12pm

Record of the meeting

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

- Present:** Councillors: Bhutia (Vice-Chairman), Browne, Curry, Etheridge (Chairman), Fearn, Osborne, Paterson, Andy Stamp, Thompson, Tranter and Williams
- Substitutes:** Councillors:
Opara (Substitute for Sylvia Griffin)
Purdy (Substitute for Carr)
- In Attendance:** Councillor Jane Chitty, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation
Councillor Adrian Gulvin, Portfolio Holder for Resources
Richard Hicks, Director Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive
Dawn Hudd, Assistant Director, Physical and Cultural Regeneration
James Brown, Head of Regulatory Services
Michael Edwards, Head of Integrated Transport
Anna Marie Lawrence, Head of Business Intelligence
Kyle Rogers, Lawyer
Christopher White, Interim Chief Executive Medway Commercial Group
Ellen Wright, Democratic Services Officer

373 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carr and Sylvia Griffin.

374 Record of Meeting

The record of the meeting held on 17 October 2019 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

375 Chairman's announcements

The Chairman informed the Committee that he intended to change the order of the agenda and item 8 (Member's item – Speeding Restrictions for Luton Road, Chatham) would be considered prior to item 7.

376 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

377 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

There were none.

378 Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation

Discussion:

Members received an overview of progress made on the areas within the scope of Councillor Chitty, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation which fell within the remit of this Committee as set out below:

- Economic Development
- Employment
- High Streets
- Local Plan
- Markets
- Planning Policy
- Regulation – Environmental Health/Trading Standards/Enforcement and Licensing (executive functions only)
- Social Regeneration
- South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership

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

**Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 17
October 2019**

- **Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) bid** – A Member requested an update on the Council's HIF bid and in response, the Portfolio Holder advised that the outcome of the HIF bid was currently awaited. She advised that if the Council's bid was unsuccessful, this would have implications for the delivery of the Local Plan.

She advised that the Local Plan was not solely concerned with the provision of housing but also covered other factors including employment, transport and health and leisure facilities. However, the success of the HIF bid would be essential to provide the infrastructure to support the Government's declared level of housing provision required in Medway in future years.

- **Apprenticeship awards** – The Portfolio Holder noted the Committee's appreciation for the Consumer Challenge Quiz hosted by Bradfields Academy and the two trophies named after Andy McGrath and Councillor Mike O'Brien.
- **Vacancy rates in town centres and the future closure of Debenhams** – A Member referred to vacant premises in town centres and, in particular, the closure of Debenhams store in Chatham and he sought information as to action taken by the Portfolio Holder and the Council to prevent the store from closure.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that discussions had been ongoing with both Debenhams and their agent concerning the retention of the Chatham store. During discussions, it had been made clear that the Council was willing to take action within its powers to prevent the store from closure but unfortunately Debenhams had made an economic decision to close stores in Chatham, Canterbury, Ashford and Folkestone.

The Portfolio Holder stated that all department stores were currently facing a difficult financial climate as they were often located in large rented premises and retail shopping was increasingly moving online. This was having a detrimental effect upon the future of traditional shopping centres and High Streets.

She acknowledged the need for the Council to re-assess its aspirations for Chatham High Street and, if necessary, to encourage a reduction in the length of the retail element of the High Street. In addition, she reminded the Committee that the Council had invested in the future of the Pentagon Centre.

The Portfolio Holder referred to the Chatham Town Centre Forum and advised that the Forum was very positive about future opportunities and would be actively involved in influencing future investment.

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 17 October 2019

In addition, the publication of Medway 1 promoting Chatham City Centre would encourage businesses to consider the opportunities that exist for investment.

- **South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership (STG)** – In response to a question as to the risk of potential claims, the Portfolio Holder provided an assurance that the STG Partnership was fully insured.

She confirmed that developers had a choice as to whether to use a private Building Control company or a service provided via a local authority. Since the fire at Grenfell Tower, a number of Building Control Inspectors were struggling to obtain insurance and, as a result there had been an increase in work for local authority Building Control services in inspecting and issuing paperwork. Staff at STG were receiving the required support and training and had the technology and equipment to cope with this additional workload.

Canterbury had recently joined the STG Partnership and other local authorities were expressing an interest in joining.

- **Trading standards** - A Member praised the work of the Trading Standards team following a recent incident in Rochester and asked whether there was an opportunity to expand the team. In response, the Portfolio Holder stated that the Trading Standards team worked closely with other agencies and therefore it was not necessary to increase the size of the team. She commented that the incident referred to had been an excellent example of the Police and Local Authority working together in the community.
- **Start up Grants** - A Member requested further information on the types of businesses benefitting from the £500 start up grants and whether on-going support would be provided.

The Portfolio Holder agreed to provide this information outside of the meeting.

- **Independent Market Review** – In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that the independent market review was currently awaited and details would be provided to the Member concerned when received.
- **Flytipping** – A Member referred to the level of reported fly tips and the statement that all had been attended, searched and cleared within one working day. He commented that this was not the experience in Princes Park Ward when at least two reported fly tips had stayed for longer than one week.

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 17 October 2019

The Portfolio Holder agreed to check further on this outside of the meeting.

- **Retention of students in Medway** – A Member sought information as to action taken to encourage students to remain in Medway once they graduated from one of the four Universities in Medway.

The Portfolio Holder advised that there were a number of apprenticeship schemes available in Medway which could lead to full time employment and also opportunities for graduates to work in Medway on outreach work. Opportunities were also available at the Innovation Park Medway for workspace and hot-desking to help kick-start businesses.

- **Statistics within the report** – A Member referred to various statistics detailed within the report and, in particular, employment statistics (paragraph 2.1), the level of take up of the Innovation Studios Medway (paragraph 2.5.1), vacancy rates in town centres (paragraph 2.7.1) and flytipping (paragraphs 6.6.13 and 6.6.14) and expressed concern that these statistics in isolation had little meaning without being put into context.

The Portfolio Holder thanked the Member for his observations and noted that there was an overarching theme to the points that he raised. She agreed to take this on board for future reports. In the meantime, she would endeavour to provide the Member concerned with the information requested outside of the meeting.

- **Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) Programme** – A Member referred to the Council's bid for £1.6 million from the Heritage Action Zone programme and questioned the area that would benefit from this funding.

In response, the Director Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the success of the bid was dependent upon completion of the bidding process and the funding would be directed towards the area of Chatham/Rochester from Sun Pier to Star Hill.

- **Provision of a free to use ATM in Rochester** – A Member reminded the Portfolio Holder that when she last attended the Committee in March 2019, she had agreed to pursue the provision of a free to use ATM in Rochester. The provision of this facility would be beneficial when events and markets were held in the town, and he requested an update.

The Portfolio Holder reported that since March 2019, she had actively pursued the provision of a free to use ATM in Rochester both with banks and in shops but unfortunately had not been successful.

The Member referred to the fact that 'free to use' ATM's levied a higher charge than those such as Link Machines where there was a fee and he

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 17 October 2019

suggested that consideration be given to approaching retailers who currently offered a fee paying ATM to assess whether there was a way forward where the fee could be removed. He agreed to speak to the Portfolio Holder outside of the meeting.

- **Sale of inappropriate items at Rochester Christmas Market** – A Member commended the action taken by Trading Standards at the 2018 Rochester Christmas Market and sought an assurance that action would be taken prior to the 2019 market to ensure that inappropriate items were not available for sale.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that contact would be made with the 2018 traders so as to avoid a repeat of incidents in 2018 and Trading Standards would also visit each stall once they were set up to check stock.

- **Trading Standards – Freedom of Fear** – A Member sought information as to whether Trading Standards were promoting steps to support workers under the Freedom of Fear Campaign.

The Portfolio Holder stated that the safety of shop workers was paramount and many retailers had introduced CCTV at their premises for this reason. She confirmed that many traders were in contact with each other to report specific problems and could also report direct to the Police.

- **Street scene enforcement** - A Member sought further information on the enforcement of litter fines by a private company.

In response, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that there would be no change to current litter enforcement as strict protocols were in place to ensure that enforcement was carried out fairly.

She noted the concerns expressed as to the level of enforcement activity outlined in the report and the number of prosecutions and offered to pick this up in a separate briefing session for Members.

- **Strood Town Centre Forum** – A Member asked whether there were plans for the Strood Town Centre Forum to be resurrected and the Portfolio Holder agreed to ask officers to pursue this.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) thanked the Portfolio Holder for attending the meeting and answering Members' questions.

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 17 October 2019

- b) noted that there will be an informal Member Briefing on Environmental Enforcement.
- c) noted that the Portfolio Holder will let the Member concerned know when the independent market review is received.
- d) noted that the Portfolio Holder will let the Member concerned know the types of businesses which have been awarded start up grants and whether ongoing support would be provided.
- e) noted that the flytip figures stated in paragraph 6.6.13 of the report will be clarified.
- f) noted that the Portfolio Holder will revisit the statistics identified by the Member concerned in the various paragraphs of the report and will respond to the Member direct.
- g) noted that action will be taken prior to the 2019 Rochester Christmas market to ensure that inappropriate items are not offered for sale.

379 Medway Commercial Group Ltd Further Scrutiny

Discussion:

The Committee received a report outlining plans for further scrutiny of Medway Commercial Group Ltd.

The Chairman welcomed Chris White, Interim Chief Executive of MCG to the meeting to answer any outstanding questions.

The Committee discussed the following:

- **The level of funding paid to MCG Ltd by the Council** – A Member sought clarification as to why the level of funding paid to MCG by the Council had remained the same in 2019/20, despite the significant reduction in the number of CCTV cameras provided across Medway following a review of the service over the past year.

The Interim Chief Executive of MCG advised that funding received from the Council met the cost of staffing the CCTV monitoring service. This included CCTV cameras located at other Council sites in addition to street cameras and involved approximately 400 cameras in total. Therefore, although there had been a reduction in the number of street CCTV cameras across Medway, this had not been sufficient to result in a reduction in the number of operatives monitoring the service.

The Member then referred to the acquisition of new cameras in the past year and suggested that as this new stock would likely require less maintenance the level of funding from the Council should have been reduced.

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 17 October 2019

- **Other partners within the CCTV partnership** – A Member asked for information as to who was involved in the CCTV partnership. The Interim Chief Executive advised that Medway Council was the lead partner in the CCTV partnership along with Gravesham, Swale and Maidstone Councils. MCG provided the camera monitoring service to the Partnership.

He advised that both Swale and Maidstone Councils would be leaving the Partnership on 31 March 2020 to set up their own CCTV operations and the loss of these partners and their income would be challenging for the Council and for MCG.

MCG provided a range of services other than CCTV such as Telecare, education services etc. MCG's Business Plan would be considered by its Board in the near future and this would then be reported to the Council's Business Support O&S Committee and subsequently Cabinet in November. MCG also had a number of smaller CCTV contracts with a school, a healthy living centre, Rochester Riverside Development, civic amenity sites and the Innovation Park Medway.

- **Consultation with Ward Councillors on the removal of CCTV cameras** – A Member sought an assurance that Ward Councillors would be consulted upon proposals to remove CCTV cameras in their Wards in the future.

The Interim Chief Executive explained that under its contract, MCG fulfilled instructions from the Council as to the locations of specific cameras.

The Head of Regulatory Services informed the Committee that the placement and removal of CCTV cameras would be determined by the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) as being a multi-agency partnership, best placed to determine suitable locations for CCTV cameras.

He also confirmed that those areas where cameras were removed would continue to be monitored and 2 new rapid deployment cameras had been acquired which could assist in determining whether permanent cameras were required.

Members expressed concern that Ward Councillors would not be included in consultations prior to the removal of individual CCTV cameras in their Wards.

The Head of Regulatory Services stated he was willing to notify Ward Councillors when there were proposals affecting CCTV cameras in their Wards but whilst there may be instances when CCTV cameras needed to be relocated, no further reductions were planned.

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 17 October 2019

A Member referred to the Information Commissioner's Guidance on the circumstances under which a CCTV camera should be removed and he questioned whether, as guidance, it had to be rigorously followed. He expressed a view that the existence of CCTV acted as a deterrent and once removed could result in the problems recurring. He requested that further discussions be held as to the application of the guidance and the involvement of Ward Councillors in any decisions to remove CCTV cameras.

In response, the Director Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive reiterated that there was no intention to further reduce the number of CCTV cameras in Medway and that it would be the professional bodies involved in the CSP that would determine any cameras to be removed. However, it was not unreasonable for Ward Councillors to be notified in such instances. He also suggested that officers discuss further with the Member concerned the application of the Information Commissioner's Guidance.

The Director Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive also reminded the Committee that the CSP was due to attend the meeting of this Committee on 5 December 2019 and therefore the Committee could raise these issues with the CSP at that time.

- **Governance of MCG** - The Interim Chief Executive confirmed that MCG was implementing all recommendations from Cabinet on 6 August 2019 and plans were in place for the appointment of new Non-Executive Directors. The Assistant Director was now the Client Representative from the Council, attending MCG Board meetings.

He informed the Committee that MCG employed loyal and motivated staff who worked closely with the Police and in particular helping with real time incidents.

To improve service and to get an external perspective on the service, two external studies had recently been commissioned to review MCG's policies and procedures for managing CCTV and of the Company's technical infrastructure to ensure it could inform the Council about changes, improvements and possible cost savings.

He considered that there was a great opportunity for MCG to contribute to the delivery of public services across Medway.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) noted the report.

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 17 October 2019

- b) requested that Ward Councillors be notified by Council officers before any CCTV cameras are removed.
- c) noted that officers will meet with the Member concerned to discuss the interpretation of the Information Commission Guidance and its relationship with the CSP.

380 Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report and Risk Register Review Quarter 1 2019/20

Discussion:

The Committee received a report setting out performance for the first quarter against the Council's three priorities insofar as they fell within the remit of this Committee. The report also included the Council's Risk Management Strategy for Quarter 1, reviewing the strategic risks pertaining to this Committee.

The Head of RCET Business Intelligence Hub informed the Committee that the paragraph referring to 'Project – Encourage the delivery of homes to meet our targets – Rochester Riverside' on pages 67 – 68 of the agenda should not have been greyed out as it was relevant to the work of this Committee.

The following was discussed:

- **NI 154 Net additional homes provided** – A Member referred to the pending outcome of the Council's Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) bid and sought information as to contingency plans should the bid be unsuccessful.

The Director of Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive advised that HIF funding was required to be spent within a 4 year period. He reminded the Committee that the Council had recently approved funding of £850,000 from reserves to be allocated to complete the planned Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) works within the programme to continue to meet the 2024 spend deadline.

He was in weekly contact with the National Lead for HIF but information was not yet available as to the outcome of the Council's bid. It was hoped that this could be available in early November. It was also confirmed that the Leader of the Council and Medway's MPs were also actively pursuing this.

In the event that the Council's HIF bid was unsuccessful, this would have significant implications for the Medway Local Plan.

- **NI 195a Improved street and environmental cleanliness: Litter** – A Member referred to the accuracy of the assessment of cleanliness via a visual inspection of a 50m stretch of a street.

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 17 October 2019

He expressed concern that the statement in Quarter 1, that 96% of streets (288/300) surveyed were free from litter at the time of inspection did not appear to correlate with the statistics reported on environmental street enforcement in the Portfolio Holder's report earlier on the agenda.

The Head of RCET Business Intelligence Hub advised that NI195a was an indicator that followed guidance from DEFRA and a briefing note had previously been circulated on how streets were selected for inspection.

- **Cultural Programme** – A Member referred to move of exhibits from the Guildhall Museum to Eastgate House and expressed disappointment that an entry fee was required for this attraction. Whilst he appreciated that there was an income target, he suggested that consideration be given to introducing free entry to the facility. The Committee discussed this and the following options were suggested:
 - A trial free entry period
 - Free entry on periodic late night openings or on specific days
 - Free entry for under 12s
 - Free entry for Medway residents.

In response, the Director of Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive outlined a number of exciting projects programmed for 2020 to mark the 150th anniversary of Dickens death and in particular the new permanent Dickens exhibition planned at the Guildhall Museum.

He advised that that when applying for funding to refurbish Eastgate House, part of the funding bid involved the identification of an income stream. Whilst he recognised the benefits of increasing footfall should there be an element of free entry, it was also necessary for the facility to meet its income target.

- **Community Payback projects** - A Member referred to the 13 waste removal projects undertaken by Community Payback and questioned whether officers considered this to be a satisfactory number of projects. The Head of RCET Business Intelligence Hub reminded the Committee that these 13 projects only related to Quarter 1 so it equated to approximately 1 project a week. She offered to supply the Member direct with further information on the level of Community Payback projects undertaken in Medway.
- **Street Cleaning and Waste Collection services** - A Member asked for an update as to how the new street cleaning and waste collection contact was progressing.

The Director of Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive advised that the transition of the contract from Veolia to Medway NORSE on 1 October 2019 had been seamless

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 17 October 2019

and he expressed his appreciation to Medway Norse and Veolia for their support in helping with the transition process.

- **City of Culture bid** – A Member asked for further information on the Council's City of Culture bid. In response, the Director of Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive advised that if the bid was successful it would create a City of Culture within the heart of the Thames Estuary.
- **Locate in Kent** – A Member sought further information of the work of Locate in Kent and, in particular, their performance in job creation in Medway.

In response, the Assistant Director Physical and Cultural Regeneration reported upon the work undertaken by Locate in Kent promoting Medway both nationally and internationally. She confirmed that Medway had a seat on the Board she had regular meetings with the organisation. She was satisfied that they provided an excellent service and offered value for money. Locate in Kent had been instrumental in the relocation of Amazon to Medway, would play a crucial role in attracting business to the Innovation Park Medway and were actively involved in business development at the Isle of Grain.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) noted the Quarter 1 2019/20 performance against the measures used to monitor progress against the Council's priorities.
- b) noted that the Committee will receive regular updates on the HIF bid.
- c) noted that officers will consider possible opportunities for the introduction of free sessions at Eastgate House.
- d) noted that the Head of RCET Business Intelligence Hub will provide further information direct to the Member concerned on Community Payback projects.

381 Member's item - Speeding Restrictions for Luton Road, Chatham

Discussion:

The Committee received a report setting out a response to an issue raised by Councillor Osborne concerning speed restrictions for Luton Road, Chatham.

A Member expressed concern as to the number of vehicles parked on double yellow lines in Luton Road and suggested that officers investigate the possibility of increasing enforcement in this area.

**Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 17
October 2019**

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) noted the detailed investigation proposed in section 3 of the report and the aspiration to improve road safety at this location.
- b) requested that officers investigate the possibility of increasing enforcement to prevent parking on double yellow lines in Luton Road.

382 Petitions

Discussion:

The Committee received a report advising of petitions received by the Council which fall within the remit of this Committee including a summary of the response sent to the petition organisers by officers.

Decision:

The Committee noted the petition response set out in paragraph 3 of the report.

383 Work programme

Discussion:

The Committee received a copy of its work programme.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) noted the current work programme;
- b) agreed the suggestion of the pre-agenda meeting set out at paragraph 3.3 in the report.

Chairman

Date:

Ellen Wright, Democratic Services Officer

**Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 17
October 2019**

Telephone: 01634 332012

Email: democratic.services@medway.gov.uk