

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

**Tuesday, 21 January 2020**

**6.30pm to 8.35pm**

**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), Osborne, Paterson, Andy Stamp, Tranter and Williams
- Substitutes:** Councillors:  
Ahmed (Substitute for Carr)  
Mrs Diane Chambers (Substitute for Sylvia Griffin)  
Hackwell (Substitute for Fearn)
- In Attendance:** Richard Hicks, Director Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive  
Michael Edwards, Head of Integrated Transport  
Councillor Stephen Hubbard  
Kyle Rogers, Lawyer  
Ellen Wright, Democratic Services Officer
- Mr Bonney – Lead petitioner

**584 Apologies for absence**

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

**585 Record of Meeting**

The record of the meeting held on 5 December 2019 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

**586 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances**

There were none.

**587 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping**

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

Councillor Curry referred to Item 6 (Attendance of the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services) and informed the Committee that he was Chairman of the Medway Urban Greenspaces Forum.

**588 Petitions**

**Discussion:**

The Committee received a report setting out a summary of petitions received by the Council which fell within the remit of this Committee.

Paragraph 3.1 of the report set out a summary of the responses to petitions that had been accepted by the petition organisers.

In accordance with the Council's petitions scheme, one petition had been referred for discussion by the Committee and the lead petitioner was in attendance and invited to address the Committee. The lead petitioner was supported by Councillor Hubbard at the meeting.

The Committee welcomed Mr Bonney to the meeting and he set out set out his reasons for requesting a review of the petition and the concerns of petitioners summarised as follows:

- Residents are asking for the introduction of a 20mph speed limit (or preferably a 10mph limit) in the area of Strood identified by the petition.
- Roads within the area identified and, in particular, Weston Road are being used as a 'rat run' when there is traffic congestion in central Strood and whilst road works have been ongoing. This is causing problems of congestion in residential streets and damage to residents' vehicles and has led to confrontation when drivers are faced with oncoming traffic in narrow roads.
- Whilst the current works in Strood are welcome and making improvements to the area, residents are fearful that that as drivers have become used to using residential streets as a short cut to avoid congestion, once the works in central Strood are complete, they will continue to use these alternative routes for their journeys.

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- There are three local schools within the area which generate a number of movements twice a day for the school run. In addition, from a recent assessment of movements along Weston Road, a number of vehicles were transit vans and the times of these journeys aligned to the closure times of businesses on the Medway City Estate.
- Vehicles frequently drive at excessive speed to get through the area as quickly as possible and to intimidate oncoming drivers.
- Vehicles reversing quickly into a parking space to make way for a car to pass often results in damage to parked cars. Such damage tends to be minor and therefore does not get reported and logged as an incident.
- Whilst speed humps were installed in Weston Road 25 years ago, car design has progressed and these are now largely ignored by drivers.

In support of Mr Bonney and the petitioners, Councillor Hubbard addressed the Committee as Ward Councillor and endorsed the points raised by Mr Bonney. In addition, he referred to the proposed expansion of schools in Strood which would exacerbate the problem.

The Committee discussed the points raised and noted that there were other areas in Medway with similar issues where a 20mph zone had been requested. However, it was acknowledged that even if an area was designated a 20mph zone, this would only be effective if enforced. It was suggested that other alternative measures may be more appropriate for Weston Road such as making the road one way or closing the road at one end so as to prevent it being used as a short cut.

The Committee noted that the Director's response to the petition had indicated that there was currently no traffic survey data available to determine the extent to which traffic levels had increased in the area.

The Head of Integrated Transport confirmed that whilst the road works in central Strood were nearing completion, some works had yet to be undertaken before the project was complete. Once the works had finished, it was considered that this would improve journey times and address any impact on nearby residential streets.

He confirmed that before the introduction of a 20mph zone could be considered, it would be necessary to establish an evidence base to justify any reduction in speed limit.

In response to questions concerning progress on the Committee's outstanding request for a report on 20's Plenty and the possibility of introducing one or more pilot areas in Medway, the Head of Integrated Transport informed the Committee that work on this was currently ongoing and a report would be submitted to the Committee once completed. It was noted that a number of other local authorities that had introduced 20's Plenty schemes had experienced variable results and therefore the report would address the pros and cons of such schemes, based upon evidence gathered from existing projects for consideration.

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### Decision:

The Committee:

- a) noted the petition responses and appropriate officer action in paragraph 3 of the report.
- b) thanked Mr Bonney and Councillor Hubbard for attending the meeting and addressing the Committee on the petition and noted that the Director of Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive will arrange for officers to work with Mr Bonney to gather evidence concerning the number and speed of vehicles using Weston Road in Strood so that consideration can be given to the appropriate way forward.

### 589 Attendance of the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services

#### Discussion:

Members received an overview of progress on the areas of work within the terms of reference of this Committee and covered by the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe as set out below:

- Archives
- Armed Forces Covenant
- Events and Festivals
- Greenspaces
- Heritage
- Leisure Services
- Sporting Legacy
- Theatres and Arts
- Tourism

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe responded to Members' questions and comments as follows:

- **Benchmarking the Council's events programme** – In response to a question as to whether Medway benchmarked its events programme with other Local Authorities, the Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that whilst no formal benchmarking was undertaken, it was clear from information gathered that events in Medway attracted tourism into Medway. In addition, Medway's events programme received the support of the Arts Council. Early indicators were that the Arts Council were supportive of the Cultural Compact which would act as a catalyst to invigorate the creative arts scene in Medway, with the support of the Universities, thus increasing employment in the creative sector.

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- **Geographical coverage of events across Medway** - In response to a question concerning the location of events in Medway, the Portfolio Holder commented that whilst many events took place in Rochester due to the rich heritage of the town, there were a number of successful and popular events held at other locations in Medway such as the English Festival at Riverside Country Park and the Will Adams Festival in Gillingham Park. He confirmed that in 2020 the Will Adams Festival would include a service at St Mary Magdalene Church, Gillingham to commemorate 400 years since the death of Will Adams.
- **Corn Exchange Business Plan** - The Portfolio Holder advised that following the sale of the Conservancy Building to Nucleus Arts, the building had been transformed and now complemented the creative offer in Rochester. Funds from the sale of the Conservancy Building would enable the Corn Exchange to be developed into a facility that would be offered for hire on a commercial basis and could be adapted to suit a client's needs. He confirmed the recent receipt of a detailed Business Plan for the Corn Exchange, which had yet to be assessed before it could be shared more widely.
- **Investment at the Guildhall Museum** – The Portfolio Holder advised that work was underway on a new permanent exhibition at the Guildhall to commemorate Dickens 150.
- **Numbers of visitors attending events** – Referring to paragraph 4.11 of the report, it was suggested that it would be helpful for future reports to include attendance figures for events in previous years to aid comparison.

It was also suggested that it would be helpful if each event could include performance statistics as to whether they generated an underspend or overspend and the impact of the event on the local economy.

In response, the Portfolio Holder advised that each event had a set budget which was closely monitored by officers and there was no reason why this information could not be shared. He confirmed that if the popularity of an event was shown to have declined, consideration would be given as to whether the event should continue in future years. However, generally there was very little fluctuation in attendances at most events. Referring to the financial losses arising from the Castle Concerts, the Portfolio Holder stated that whilst these concerts had proved popular in past years and were enjoyed by many people, the recent financial losses clearly indicated that it was no longer viable for the Council to run the event in its existing format.

In response to concerns over the financial loss from the Castle Concerts in 2019, the Portfolio Holder stated that having secured top-named artists, it had been hoped that the event would prove viable in 2019 but

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unfortunately Jess Glynn had pulled out of her sold-out concert at very short notice. Whilst the promoter secured an alternative artist as a replacement, this had not generated the same level of ticket sales. In addition, another popular band on the 2019 Castle Concert programme subsequently decided to hold a concert within Kent. As this was in a larger venue, ticket prices had been available at a lower cost than at the Castle, and this had affected ticket sales for their concert in Rochester.

During discussion on statistics for attendances at events, concern was expressed that different statistics appeared in press reports to those that were stated within the Committee report. In response, the Portfolio Holder advised that whilst it was possible to account for attendances at ticketed events, this was not possible with events that were held in open areas where there was no paid entry point. Under such circumstances, attendance figures could only be an estimate.

- **Budget pressures on Sports and Leisure Centres and whether income targets are realistic** – In response to a question as to the budget pressures upon sports and leisure centres and whether the Council sets realistic income targets, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that Council-run sports facilities and, in particular, gyms had in recent years been subjected to competitive challenges from a rise in the provision of privately operated gyms. In addition, he confirmed that swimming pools did not generate high income levels. He advised that independent assessments had been undertaken as to alternative models of delivery of sports and leisure facilities but none had been suitable. However, he was always open to suggestions.

Unfortunately, it was necessary for some services to be provided at a cost and therefore officers continued to review income targets for these facilities.

- **Management of volunteer and Greenspace Friends Groups** - Reference was made to the level of community engagement on Greenspaces and in particular the increased involvement in Friends Groups and a question was asked as to whether the Council could provide resources to manage and support these volunteers. In response, the Portfolio Holder advised that whilst the Council was extremely appreciative and grateful for the support provided by volunteers, unfortunately the Council was not in a financial position to provide the level of management and support along the lines suggested.
- **Housing on greenspace land at Sturry Way, Twydall, Gillingham** – In response to concerns about the development of housing on greenspace land at Sturry Way, Twydall, the Portfolio Holder stated that as there was substantial greenspace available in this part of Gillingham, he considered that loss of a section of greenspace to provide for a bungalow development at Sturry Way would be of low impact. The development would enable people to downsize, which would then release larger properties for those on the housing waiting list. Whilst

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there could not be a guarantee that there would be no further development in Twydall, there were no such plans in the near future and the next areas of major housing investment would be at the St Albans Estate, opposite The Strand.

During discussion, the Portfolio Holder was asked whether it was possible to supply information as to the percentage of greenspace land in Twydall that had been used for housing. In response, the Portfolio Holder suggested that it may be possible for this to be obtained through the Local Plan.

- **The beneficial impact of greenspaces in reducing future expenditure on health and wellbeing** – The Portfolio Holder acknowledged the beneficial impact of greenspace provision in helping both the Local Authority and the Health Authority in reducing future expenditure on the health and wellbeing of individuals.
- **Public relations for events – Pig banner on Rochester Castle** – The Committee discussed public relations for events and asked why there was a banner of a pig on Rochester Castle in 2019. In response, the Portfolio Holder advised that he did not have responsibility for signing off all publicity for Medway's events and was therefore unaware of the specific reason as to why there was a banner depicting a pig on Rochester Castle, but he was aware that images of a pig had been used for a campaign in 2019.

The Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that the Council's public relations campaign for events was considered to be very successful.

- **Cancellation of Firework Display** - A question was asked as to what the Council had done with the fireworks following the cancellation of the 2019 firework display.

The Director Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive informed the Committee that it was unfortunate that the 2019 firework display had been cancelled for safety reasons due to high winds and that this had resulted in the cancellation of a number of events planned for that weekend across the whole of the South East. He advised the Committee that the Council had a contract with a company for the provision of the firework display and following the cancellation of the event, the Council had incurred cancellation costs. The Council was not storing unused fireworks following cancellation of the event.

The Director Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive stated that the annual firework display was usually very well attended and helped to promote public safety, as people attended the Council's event rather than holding private firework parties at home.

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The Portfolio Holder commented that due to safety regulations, it was unlikely that the annual firework display would include a bonfire in the future.

- **City of Culture Bid** – In response to a question as to the Council's involvement in the City of Culture bid, the Portfolio Holder referred to the Cultural Compact and advised that the Council was working with key players in Medway's arts scene to develop grass roots events and encouraging participation and the creation of employment in the creative sector.

The Portfolio Holder referred to the Docking Station established at the former Police Section House in Chatham Historic Dockyard and the work being undertaken to develop creative skills and promotion of how to use creative skills as a commercial venture.

- **Availability of sports for the Disabled Community** - In response to a question as to the promotion of sport and leisure facilities for people with disabilities, the Portfolio Holder provided an assurance that the Head of Sport, Leisure, Tourism and Heritage was in close contact with disabled groups but that if anyone knew of any other groups he would be pleased to pass on such information. He provided an assurance that the Council's sports and leisure facilities were inclusive for all.

He also referred to the very successful and high profile Wheelchair Rugby League events staged at Medway Park.

- **Capital receipt from sale of Conservancy Building** – In response to a question about the capital receipt from the sale of the Conservancy Building, the Portfolio Holder advised that all net proceeds from the sale had been or were to be reinvested at the Corn Exchange and the Guildhall Museum, but he agreed to supply details of the capital receipt to the Member direct.
- **Tourism** – During discussion, the Committee noted that Tourism in Medway continued to be very strong with 4.9 million visits per year, worth £333 million per annum to the local economy, supporting 6,500 jobs locally.
- **Veterans Hub** – The Committee noted that the Council had received the Employer Defence Recognition Silver Award for its work to support those in the Armed Forces. In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder provided information as to the proposed Armed Forces Veterans Hub which would provide veterans with an opportunity to socialise with other veterans and access support where required. Negotiations were in advanced stages for the location of the hub.
- **Creative Heritage Quarter** – The Portfolio Holder provided an update on the Creative Heritage Quarter, which linked Chatham to Rochester.

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- **Cultural Strategy** – In response to a question as to progress and timescales for the Cultural Strategy, the Portfolio Holder advised that officers were in the process of drawing up proposals for the Cultural Strategy, but these could not yet be shared.

The Director Regeneration, Culture, Environment and Transformation and Deputy Chief Executive advised that the 10 year strategy was currently at the consultation phase and he outlined the main themes that were emerging including community engagement, economic prosperity and employment opportunities and health and wellbeing to address social isolation and encourage volunteering.

- **Cultural Development Fund** – Reference was made to the £4.3 million funding received by the University of Kent for the Cultural Development Fund and a question was asked as to the level of funding which would be directed to Medway. In response, the Portfolio Holder advised that this funding had been awarded to the University of Kent to deliver a partnership programme and whilst there was no guarantee that all of the funding would be directed towards Medway, a large part would be invested in the Docking Station at Chatham Dockyard.
- **3G pitch in Gillingham** – In response to a question about the possible location of a 3G pitch in Medway, the Portfolio Holder advised that officers were currently considering possible locations at either The Anchorians or on the Hoo Peninsula following the successful HIF bid.
- **Parkour at the Strand** – In response to a question as to usage of the Parkour facility at the Strand, the Portfolio Holder agreed to ask officers for information on usage of this facility.

### Decision:

The Committee thanked the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for attending the meeting and answering questions and agreed that:

- a) officers will attempt to obtain through the Local Plan information on the the percentage level of greenspace land lost to housing in Twydall.
- b) officers will investigate the usage of the Parkour facility at the Strand.
- c) future reports will include attendance statistics for past years so as to enable a comparison.
- d) further information be supplied to Members of the Committee on the use of a banner depicting a pig on Rochester Castle in 2019.

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- e) information be supplied to the Member concerned as to the capital receipt from the sale of the Conservancy Building.
- f) if possible, the Committee receive information as to the level of funding from the University of Kent's Cultural Development Fund that will be spent in Medway.

**590 Work programme**

**Discussion:**

The Committee received a copy of its work programme.

The Democratic Services Officer reported that in response to a request at the pre-agenda meeting for a date to be identified for Volker to be invited to the Committee for scrutiny of the Highways Contract, it was proposed that this be added to the Committee's work programme in January 2021. Whilst this was considered acceptable, it was requested that in the interim, the Committee receive an update on Volker's performance on the contract as part of the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services holding to account report in 2020.

**Decision:**

The Committee:

- a) noted the current work programme;
- b) agreed the suggestions of the pre-agenda meeting set out at paragraph 3.3 in the report.
- c) agreed that scrutiny of Volker's Highways Contract be added to the work programme for January 2021 but in the interim, the Committee receive an update on Volker's performance on the contract as part of the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services holding to account report.

**Chairman**

**Date:**

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