

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

**Thursday, 13 August 2020**

**6.30pm to 7.55pm**

**Record of the meeting**

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

**Present:** Councillors: Bhutia (Vice-Chairman), Browne, Etheridge (Chairman), Fearn, Sylvia Griffin, Hubbard, Mahil and Williams

**In Attendance:** Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive  
James Brown, Head of Regulatory Services  
Kyle Rogers, Lawyer  
Councillor Rupert Turpin, Portfolio Holder for Business Management  
Ellen Wright, Democratic Services Officer

**173 Apologies for absence**

During this period, due to the Coronavirus pandemic, it was informally agreed between the two political groups to run Medway Council meetings with a reduced number of participants. This was to reduce risk, comply with Government guidance and enable more efficient meetings. Therefore, the apologies given reflects that informal agreement of reduced participants.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carr, Curry, Andy Stamp, Thompson and Tranter.

**174 Record of Meeting**

**Decision:**

The record of the meeting held on 11 June 2020 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

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

There were none.

**176 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.

**177 Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Business Management**

**Discussion:**

Members received an overview of progress on the areas within the terms of reference of this Committee covered by Councillor Turpin, Portfolio Holder for Business Management as set out below:

- Bereavement
- Community Wardens
- Emergency Planning
- Registration

Councillor Turpin responded to Members' questions as follows:

**Bereavement** - In response to a question as to whether those members of staff who had been redeployed at the crematorium were still fulfilling their redeployed roles, the Portfolio Holder expressed his appreciation to those staff who had retrained to help out at the crematorium and confirmed that they had now returned to their former roles.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that whilst there had been an increase in the number of cremations at the Crematorium in recent months, this was not solely down to deaths in Medway as the Crematorium had provided cremation services to support other areas that were under pressure. He confirmed that the number of cremations had now returned to normal levels.

**Community Wardens** - The Committee discussed the Community Warden Service and in particular, the Frontline Services Structure Review which had resulted in a change in the way that services would be delivered to reflect the changing needs of the local community and the modern local government agenda.

## Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 13 August 2020

The Portfolio Holder explained that within the new structure, the Community Warden Service (12 posts) would be split into specialist functions comprising Waste and Contract Monitoring, Engagement, Enforcement (merging with the existing Street Scene Enforcement Team) and Animal Wardens.

In response to concerns that Members had yet to be supplied with a new structure chart detailing information as to the names and contact numbers for officers appointed to the various warden posts, the Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that he had requested that this be communicated to Members as a priority and he apologised that this had not yet been done. The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive gave an assurance that this would be circulated to Members by close of play on Monday 17 August 2020.

The Portfolio Holder also commented that following the restructure, it was important for the routes of communication for the public to be actively advertised and he encouraged Members to direct the public to reporting incidents online wherever possible.

In response to a concern that Members were unaware of the name and contact details of the Community Wardens working in individual Wards, the Portfolio Holder explained that the allocation of Community Wardens across Wards had ceased some time ago. Community Wardens were no longer allocated on a Ward by Ward basis but in specialist teams, and Members were therefore encouraged to contact the relevant team dependent upon the issue.

The Committee requested that their congratulations be extended to the Community Warden Team for receiving the Gold Footprint Award by the RSPCA for the sixth consecutive year in recognition of their excellent stray dog policies and procedures. The Portfolio Holder agreed to pass on the Committee's congratulations.

### **Emergency Planning:**

- **Exercise Combine** – Referring to Exercise Combine in 2019 at which the External Emergency Plans for Grain's Upper Tier Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH) sites had been tested, concern was expressed that following a debrief in August 2019, the rewrite of the Plan was still taking place. In response, the Portfolio Holder advised that staff within the Emergency Planning Team had been actively engaged on the coronavirus pandemic for several months and it was possible that this may have led to a delay in completing this work. He agreed to follow this up with the Emergency Planning Manager.

The Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that he was very proud of the Council's Emergency Planning Team and the way in which they had responded to the coronavirus pandemic working alongside Public Health England. He advised that the Team were continuing this work as the country moved forward into the new recovery phase.

## Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 13 August 2020

- **SS Richard Montgomery** - The Committee discussed the existence of SS Richard Montgomery in the Thames Estuary. In response, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive advised that the SS Richard Montgomery, a US Liberty Ship went aground in the Thames Estuary in August 1944 whilst carrying a cargo of munitions. This was a long standing issue involving a number of agencies and regular surveys of the wreck were undertaken by the Ministry of Defence in order to provide information on its condition, to identify any changes or deterioration and to inform future management strategy. The wreck was currently considered to be stable if left undisturbed.
- **Heatwave Emergency Plan** – The Committee noted that a Heatwave Emergency Plan had been written to cover the period 1 June – 15 September 2019, and referring to the recent heatwave requested that a briefing note be produced in October/November on the implementation of the Plan in 2020.

### Registration:

- **“Tell Us Once”** – In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that since its adoption in 2019, the “Tell Us Once” service was working well. This service allowed an individual to inform central and local government services of the death of an individual at one time rather than having to write, telephone or attend each service individually. He requested that officers provide a briefing note on the use of the “Tell Us Once” since its introduction.
- **Registration of Births** – The Committee noted that due to the coronavirus pandemic, the registration of births had ceased on 27 March 2020. This service had re-commenced on 1 June 2020 once the government had relaxed restrictions on services provided by Registrar Generals. However, by this time there were 1200 babies to be registered in Medway. It was explained that by law a birth could only be registered via a face to face interview and therefore an online booking system had been introduced to book appointments to register a birth. It was anticipated that the outstanding backlog of registered births would be cleared by November 2020.

### Decision:

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder for Business Management for attending the meeting and:

- a) noted that information on the new Community Warden Structure will be circulated to all Members by close of play on Monday 17 August 2020 along with contact information for the public.
- b) noted that the Portfolio Holder will follow up with the Emergency Planning Manager the completion of the re-write of the External

## Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 13 August 2020

Emergency Plans for Grain's Upper Tier Control of Major Accident Hazards (COMAH).

- c) noted the current position with regard to the SS Richard Montgomery and that discussions are ongoing with Emergency Planning, MPs and the Ministry of Defence.
- d) agreed that a briefing note will be circulated in October/November of the implementation of the Heatwave and Emergency Plan covering June – September 2020.
- e) agreed that a briefing note will be circulated on the take up of the "Tell Us Once" service.

### 178 Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report and Risk Register Quarter 4 and End of Year 2019/20

#### Discussion:

The Committee received a report setting out performance for Quarter 4 against the Council's two priorities insofar as they fell within the remit of this Committee.

In addition, rather than the planned Quarter 4 review of the Corporate Risk Register, the report set out how the Council's response to Covid-19 had been controlled using the principles and tools of the Risk Management Strategy.

The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive drew attention to the following performance measures which had shown a downward trend in Quarter 4:

**GH6 CP – Satisfaction with parks and green spaces** - He advised that this was the first time in 5 years that this performance indicator had fallen below target. He stated that he was very proud of the greenspace provision in Medway and its 7 Green Flags and expressed appreciation to all the Greenspace volunteers and Friends Groups for the work that they undertake. He was confident that this performance indicator would recover in the next quarter.

**NI154 – Net additional homes provided** - He advised that this performance indicator was set one year in arrears and advised that the recent Housing Delivery Test Action Plan update reported to Cabinet indicated that performance over the past year had been very strong. This would be reflected in future performance monitoring reports although there would be some element of impact arising from the Coronavirus pandemic.

In addition, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive informed the Committee that the Council and Homes England had now signed the Grant Determination Agreement (GDA), for Medway's Housing Infrastructure Fund Bid setting out plans for the multi-million pound infrastructure programme to

## Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 13 August 2020

significantly improve road and rail connections in and around the peninsula, in addition to creating accessible open space. This demonstrated a commitment to Medway's residents to ensure that the necessary transport and environmental infrastructure was in place before finalising plans for thousands of potential new homes on the Hoo Peninsula.

The following was discussed:

**Citizens' Panel** – In response to a question as to the number of individuals involved in the Citizens' Panel and whether there were plans to refresh and recruit to the Panel, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Citizens' Panel originally comprised 1500 individuals and responses were weighted using a formula to ensure it was representative. He confirmed that there were plans to refresh the Citizens' Panel and move increasingly towards online responses. It was pointed out that the Citizens' Panel was only one method used to measure satisfaction.

**GH6 New – Satisfaction with parks and green spaces** – In response to a question as to the location of a Scheduled Ancient Monument on Jacksons Recreation Ground which had resulted in proposals to revisit the route of an access path for University students, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive agreed to provide further information to the Member direct.

The Committee noted plans to promote Ranscombe Farm as an eighth site to receive a Green Flag in Medway but that judging in 2020 had been postponed due to COVID 19 restrictions. Concerns were expressed that the environment surrounding the entrance to the site and in particular the public right of way entrance off Albatross Avenue in Strood required attention as this was prone to the accumulation of litter. The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive agreed to follow this up.

**Housing Infrastructure Fund** – In response to a question, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive advised that following the signing of the GDA, setting out plans for the multi-million pound infrastructure programme on the Peninsula, it was now proposed that community engagement would increase and update reports would be scheduled for meetings of this Committee.

**MAE 3 Achievement rate (pass rate) (establishing and supporting Medway Skills Board and all age skills development programme)** – In response to a question, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive advised that the Supported Employment Project and the Scaffolding Training Pilot had both been temporarily delayed due to the Coronavirus pandemic but that this funding was ringfenced and the training would commence when it was safe to do so.

**NI 195a NEW – Improved street and environmental cleanliness: Litter** – The Committee discussed concerns that the information contained in the report on street and environmental cleanliness did not reflect residents' perceptions. It was noted that the performance measures were derived from a visual inspection of 50 metres and whilst it was noted that this had been the subject of

## Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 13 August 2020

discussion at a previous meeting, there was still concern as to how a visual inspection of this length of street could provide a true reflection of litter in an area.

Whilst it was considered that Medway Norse had provided exceptional service during the coronavirus pandemic in maintaining services such as refuse collection, it was now more important than ever to address street and environmental cleanliness and contract monitoring.

Concern was also expressed as to the way in which statistics and descriptive text were being produced in the report and it was suggested that this be reviewed, to make it more meaningful for the Committee to help it perform its scrutiny role.

In response, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive advised that this Committee reviewed the Waste Contract annually and therefore this would be the appropriate route to address the issue of contract monitoring when officers and the contractor were in attendance to answer questions.

Concerning the content of the performance monitoring report, he offered to set up a meeting between the Member concerned and the Head of Business Intelligence so that they could discuss the layout of the report and the way in which statistics were derived.

### **Decision:**

The Committee:

- a) noted the Quarter 4 2019/20 performance against the measures used to monitor progress against the Council's priorities.
- b) noted that the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive will arrange to provide information to the Member direct as to the location of a Scheduled Ancient Monument on Jacksons Recreation Ground which had resulted in proposals to revisit the route of an access path for University students.
- c) noted that the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive will ask officers to investigate the issue of litter accumulation on the public footpath entrance to Ranscombe Farm.
- d) noted that the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive will set up a meeting between the Member concerned and the Head of Business Intelligence to discuss the format and content and statistical element of the Performance Monitoring report.
- e) noted that update reports will be included on the agenda of this Committee informing the Committee of the progress of future development on the Peninsula.

## **Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 13 August 2020**

In accordance with Council rule 12.6, Councillors Browne, Hubbard and Mahil requested that their votes in favour be recorded.

### **179 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.

In accordance with Council rule 12.6, Councillors Hubbard and Mahil requested that their votes in favour be recorded.

### **180 Work programme**

#### **Discussion:**

The Committee received a copy of its work programme.

The Committee noted the recent cancellation of the Cultural Strategy briefing and requested information as to when this would be re-scheduled. The Democratic Services Officer confirmed that this was in the process of being re-arranged by the Head of Culture and Libraries.

#### **Decision:**

The Committee:

- a) noted its current work programme.
- b) agreed that the Cultural Strategy be included on the Committee's agenda for 3 December 2020.

In accordance with Council rule 12.6, Councillors Browne and Hubbard requested that their votes in favour be recorded.

**Chairman**

**Date:**



**Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 13  
August 2020**

**Ellen Wright, Democratic Services Officer**

Telephone: 01634 332012

Email: [democratic.services@medway.gov.uk](mailto:democratic.services@medway.gov.uk)