

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

Thursday, 15 October 2020

6.30pm to 8.26pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Curry, Etheridge (Chairman), Fearn, Sylvia Griffin, Mahil, Andy Stamp, Thompson and Williams

In Attendance: Councillor Rodney Chambers, OBE, Portfolio Holder for Inward Investment, Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships
Councillor Phil Filmer, Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services
Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive
Peter Appleton, Interim Assistant Director Culture and Community
James Brown, Head of Regulatory Services
Ruth Du-Lieu, Assistant Director, Front Line Services
Dawn Hudd, Assistant Director, Regeneration
Anna Marie Lawrence, Head of Business Intelligence
Kyle Rogers, Lawyer
Ellen Wright, Democratic Services Officer

342 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 the Vice Chairman, Councillor Bhutia and Councillors Browne, Carr, Hubbard and Tranter.

343 Record of Meeting

Decision:

The record of the meeting held on 13 August 2020 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

344 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

345 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 Andy Stamp referred to Item 7 on the agenda (Attendance by the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services) and informed the Committee that he worked for the Environment Agency. However, he was not involved in any sites in Medway and therefore he was not precluded from taking part in the debate on this item.

346 Petitions

Discussion:

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

The Committee noted that one petition had been referred by the lead petitioner for consideration by the Committee relating to the reinstatement of the vehicular access way between 71- 73 Sunnymead Avenue, Gillingham.

In line with the Council's remote meetings protocol, the petition organiser had been invited to either provide a further written representation in support of their petition or to take part in the meeting remotely. The lead petitioner had chosen the first option and their statement had been reproduced at paragraph 4.7 of the report.

The Committee discussed the petition and, in the absence of the Ward Councillor who had been involved with this issue, a brief outline of the background to the gating of the vehicular access, and the subsequent petition was explained more fully.

The Head of Regulatory Services informed the Committee that the gate to the vehicular access had now been restored to its original specification and consultation was underway with affected residents as to how these gates can fulfil their purpose to the benefit of all residents. The gates were now of a

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design that when opened, no height barrier remained in place. The Head of Regulatory Services agreed to communicate this to the relevant Ward Councillor.

He also informed the Committee that it was intended that a review be undertaken of all gated alleyways in Medway and that revised governance had been put in place so that, in future, decisions upon gating and changes to gating would involve more than one person.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) noted the petition response and appropriate officer action set out in paragraph 3 of the report.
- b) noted the latest position concerning the gating of the vehicular access between 71 and 73 Sunnymead Avenue and that the Head of Regulatory Services will communicate this to the relevant Ward Councillor.
- c) noted that it was intended that a review be undertaken of all gated alleyways in Medway and that revised governance had been put in place so that, in future, decisions upon gating and changes to gating would involve more than one person.

347 Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Inward Investment, Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships

Discussion:

Members received an overview of progress on the areas of work within the terms of reference of this Committee and covered by the Portfolio Holder for Inward Investment, Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships, Councillor Rodney Chambers, OBE as set out below:

- External funding including local growth fund
- Heritage Champion
- Inward Investment
- Medway the Place
- Strategic Partnerships
- Strategic Regeneration and Planning

The Portfolio Holder for Inward Investment, Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships, Councillor Rodney Chambers, OBE informed the Committee that, ordinarily, his report would have been presented to the Committee in March 2020. However, this had not been possible due to the cancellation of the March meeting as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown.

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The Portfolio Holder drew attention to the Government's Getting Building Fund, created specifically in response to the Covid pandemic aimed at kickstarting delayed schemes and providing opportunities to involve skills training and employability. Medway's bid to the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) for £1.99m under this scheme for the development of Britton Farm Mall, referred to in paragraph 2.9 of the report, had been successful and the project was required to be delivered by March 2022.

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

- **Locate in Kent** – The Committee discussed the proposed extension of the inward investment contract with Locate in Kent at a cost of £70,000 per annum and discussed how this contract benefited Medway. In particular, reference was made to the need to encourage and attract those businesses which, due to the changes in the way services were delivered during the Covid lockdown, may now be considering possible relocation outside of London whilst adapting to increased use of technology and the ability of staff to work from home.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that due to its proximity to London, Medway was always an attractive alternative for businesses interested in relocating away from the City and enquiries were already being received. He suggested that the Committee may wish to invite Locate in Kent to undertake a presentation to a future meeting to enable the Committee to gain a better understanding of the work that Locate in Kent undertake on Medway's behalf.

- **Staffing capacity to oversee regeneration projects** – Concern was expressed as to whether the Council had sufficient capacity in its Regeneration team to oversee and deliver the number of regeneration projects being undertaken in Medway, whilst ensuring value for money.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that he was satisfied that existing regeneration projects in Medway would be completed on time and meet the deadlines for utilising grant funding. A number of schemes had been granted a 6 month extension on completion and delivery due to the Covid pandemic.

The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive informed the Committee that there had recently been a restructure within his Directorate in response to the successful bid for funding through the Housing Infrastructure Fund which had generated £170m funding.

In response to a question concerning the preference for use of consultants as opposed to employing full time staff, the Portfolio Holder advised that any decision on this would depend upon the work that they were being engaged for. If the project was short term, then consultants would be more appropriate.

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- **Enterprise Zone Status** – In response to a question as to whether it would be possible to extend the Enterprise Zone status for Innovation Park Medway, the Portfolio Holder advised that discussions were already taking place to seek an extension from the Government.

The Assistant Director - Regeneration confirmed that the Thames Gateway Kent Partnership working with the Local Enterprise Partnerships' network had submitted a request to Government to have the Enterprise Zone status extended for a period of 5 years until 2027. An update would be provided when available.

- **Innovation Park Medway (IPM)** - During discussions on Innovation Park Medway, the Portfolio Holder advised that he had received confirmation that many of those businesses that had expressed an interest in relocating to IPM prior to the Covid pandemic, remained interested.
- **Strategic Regeneration and Planning** - Referring to the successful award of £170m of infrastructure funding from the Government's Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF), clarification was sought as to whether there was a £400,000 interest payment required in respect of this funding. The Portfolio Holder advised that he was not aware that there was any interest to be paid.
- **Impact on the delivery of regeneration projects as a result of the Local Plan** - In response to concerns that the delay in the production of the Local Plan could affect delivery of regeneration projects, the Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that the delay at Innovation Park Medway had resulted from an issue raised by Highways England and, as a result, it had not yet been possible to confirm the Local Development Order. It was considered that the issues may soon be resolved and a report would be submitted to Cabinet in December 2020.

The Portfolio Holder also confirmed that works were progressing on the Riverside site at Strood Waterfront. It was suggested that should there be any delays at the Strood Riverside site, consideration be given to grassing the site along similar lines to the Rochester Riverside site to improve its visual appearance.

- **Construction Industry Training Board** - It was noted that funding had been secured from the Construction Industry Training Board for an employability and scaffolding training programme with guaranteed job outcomes for those completing the programme. Unfortunately this had been delayed due to Covid-19 and a start date was not yet available.
- **Medway Skills Partnership Boards** - In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Medway Skills Partnership Boards continued to drive forward the skills agenda for Medway. Consisting of an Officers' Board, a Members' Board and a newly-formed Skills

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Stakeholder Board, the structure was in place to ensure the delivery of the Skills and Employability Plan for Medway.

Work was in hand to identify the skills required to enable small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) and Microbusinesses to grow and to improve the delivery of skills advice in secondary schools. This work would be carried out by an Enterprise Co-ordinator.

- **Kent and Medway Employment Taskforce** – The Committee was informed that Medway was contributing to a Kent and Medway Employment Taskforce designed to respond to the employment need post Covid-19, and the Portfolio Holder advised that as a starting point, the Taskforce would be looking at skills advice currently available in Kent and Medway with a view to co-ordinating this service, possibly through the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce.

Decision:

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder for Inward Investment Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships for attending the meeting and answering questions and agreed that Locate in Kent be invited to attend a future meeting of this Committee to undertake a presentation on its work.

348 Attendance by the Portfolio Holder for Front Line 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 Portfolio Holder for Frontline Services as set out below:

- Highways
- Street Lighting
- Parking
- Public Transport
- Traffic Management
- Transport Strategy
- Travel Safety
- Waste collection/Recycling/Waste Disposal and Street Cleaning

The Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer responded to Members questions and comments as follows:

- **Highway Infrastructure Contract Performance** – Reference was made to the one year contract extension granted to Volker Highways after it achieved good performance targets when judged against Key Performance Indicators for the Highways Contract. Concern was expressed that this extension had been granted despite the company not having attended a meeting of this Committee for scrutiny. The Portfolio

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Holder explained that this was the usual way Highways Contracts operated.

- **Medway Tunnel** – In response to questions concerning the maintenance and future funding of Medway Tunnel, the Portfolio Holder advised that Volker Highways was now the principal contractor responsible for maintenance of the Tunnel. He agreed to ask officers to obtain information as to the annual payment to Volker for maintenance of the Tunnel and supply this outside of the meeting.

He also advised that in March 2020, £4.972m funding had been awarded from the Department for Transport's Challenge Fund Tranche 3a for the Medway Tunnel, associated roads and assets linked to it, along with match-funding from the Council. He confirmed that the Tunnel was a major element of Medway's highway infrastructure and investigations were also being undertaken as to whether further funding could be obtained through Section 106 payments. Concern was expressed about the potential use of Section 106 developer contributions to help fund the ongoing maintenance of the Medway Tunnel.

- **Waste and Recycling Collections** – The Committee expressed its appreciation to Medway Norse for the successful fulfilment of the waste and recycling collection contract not only over the 2019/20 festive period but also during the Covid-19 lockdown.

Reference was made to the slight decrease in kerbside recycling and it was noted that this was a nationwide trend. The Portfolio Holder stated that officers, along with Norse, were currently considering alternative methods of collecting with a view to increasing recycling.

Concern was expressed that when some residents left empty recycling sacks out on the street this encouraged others to do the same and the Portfolio Holder suggested that if the Member concerned advised him which roads were affected, he would ask officers for this to be investigated.

- **Plastic Free Medway** – In response to the suggestion that Medway Norse and Volker Highways sign up as business champions for the Plastic Free Medway Campaign, the Portfolio Holder agreed to discuss this with both companies.
- **Active Travel Fund** – The Portfolio Holder agreed to ask officers to investigate the possible inclusion of Horsted Valley into schemes to benefit from the Department of Transport's Active Travel Fund if Medway's bid is successful.
- **Spring Clean-Ups across Medway** – The Committee expressed appreciation to officers for arranging Spring Clean-Ups across Medway.

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- **Booking systems at Household Waste Sites** – The Committee acknowledged that the pre-booking system introduced at household waste sites due to the Covid-19 pandemic had worked well and asked whether there were plans to continue this into the future post the pandemic. In response, the Portfolio Holder advised that the continuation of the pre-booking system had not been considered but he confirmed that all three sites were now operational.
- **Flytipping** – In recognition that Medway Norse travel throughout the streets of Medway when collecting waste and recycling, it was suggested that Medway Norse be requested take a proactive role in reporting instances of flytipped rubbish. The Portfolio Holder agreed to investigate this.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) noted that the Assistant Director Front Line Services will provide information on the annual maintenance payment to Volker Highways for maintenance of Medway Tunnel.
- b) requested that its appreciation be extended to all staff at Medway Norse for the work undertaken in fulfilling the Waste and Recycling Contract over the festive period and throughout the Covid-19 lockdown.
- c) noted that the Portfolio Holder will ask officers to discuss with both Medway Norse and Volker Highways the possibility of them becoming 'Make Medway Plastic Free' business champions.
- d) noted that the Portfolio Holder will ask officers to investigate the possibility of Horsted Valley being included in the next round of schemes to benefit from the Department of Transport's Active Travel Fund if the Council's bid is successful.
- e) requested that the Committee's thanks be extended to the relevant teams for organising the Spring Clean-Ups across Medway.
- f) noted that the Portfolio Holder will ask officers to investigate the potential for the continuation of the pre-booking system post the Covid pandemic at the household waste sites.
- g) requested that officers discuss with Medway Norse the possibility of their staff taking a proactive role in reporting instances of flytipped rubbish.

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349 Council Plan Performance Monitoring and Risk Register Review Quarter 1 2020/2021

Discussion:

The Committee received a report setting out performance for Quarter 1 against the Council's two priorities Place and Growth insofar as they fell within the remit of this Committee.

In addition, it was reported that during Quarter 1, as the Council had moved from the response to recovery phase of the emergency planning procedures, the Strategic Risk Management Group (SRMG) had resumed monitoring of strategic risks. Therefore, the report included the Quarter 1 2020/21 review of the Council's Strategic Risk Register.

The Committee discussed the following:

- **LRCC4a – Number of jobs created and safeguarded** – The Committee acknowledged that due to the Covid pandemic it was only to be expected that this performance measure would be below target in Quarter 1. The Committee asked whether this was likely to show an improvement by the end of the year and what action was being taken to encourage and attract businesses to relocate or set up in Medway.

In response, the Committee was informed that several groups had been formed under the umbrella of the Kent Resilience Forum, specifically to address the future for businesses post the Covid pandemic and officers were actively involved in these groups.

The Assistant Director – Regeneration advised that as Vice Chairman of the Kent Resilience Forum Covid -19 Recovery Group, she worked closely with Kent County Council and a wide range of external partners on this issue. She confirmed that Medway's Economy and Infrastructure Cell had undertaken an Impact Assessment and produced an Action Plan which was due to be adopted shortly. As the pandemic was continuing, at the current time it was difficult to predict the likely impact on businesses post-Covid but it was anticipated that there would be a further increase in unemployment rates when the Government's furlough scheme ceased at the end of October.

Medway was currently identifying its strengths and how it could build upon these to attract businesses and she confirmed that Innovation Park Medway was continuing to attract interest.

- **NI117 (16-17) – The percentage of 16 – 17 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)** – Although this performance indicator fell within the remit of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in response to a question, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the work of the Officer Skills Board and the Member Skills Board enabled a corporate response.

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- **Corporate Risk: SR32 – Data and Information** – The Committee discussed the benefits of sharing information between different sections of the Council so as to alleviate the need for an individual to send information on several occasions to different services. The Head of Business Intelligence confirmed that this issue was listed for review as part of the Council's Transformation Programme and she advised that the Council had already signed up to the 'Tell Us Once' Service through its Registration Service.
- **Skills shortages** – In response to a question, the Assistant Director – Regeneration advised that Medway had a strong Economic Partnership 'Medway for Business' which was overseeing the delivery of the action plan on economic recovery after Covid. Both the Portfolio Holder for Inward Investment, Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships and the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation served on this body along with representatives from a wide range of partners and the business sector.

Decision:

The Committee noted the Quarter 1 2020/21 performance against the measures used to monitor progress against the Council's priorities and the amended strategic risk register as set out in Appendix 3 of the report.

350 Work programme

Discussion:

The Committee received a copy of its current work programme and was informed of items discussed at the pre agenda meeting on 17 September 2020.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) agreed that in line with the discussion earlier in the meeting, Locate in Kent be invited to undertake a presentation to a future meeting.
- b) agreed that a report be submitted to a future meeting providing an update on the partial cessation of use of herbicides in 2020 along with plans for 2021.
- c) noted that the report on the work of Volker Highways due to be presented to Committee in January 2021, will include key performance indicators.
- d) agreed that a report on Placing Objects on the Highway be retained on the Committee's work programme as 'date to be determined'.

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- e) agreed that the Annual Review of Waste Contracts be programmed to be submitted to this Committee in January 2021.
- f) noted that the Members briefing by the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) is due to take place on 29 October 2020 and agreed that SELEP be invited to a meeting of this Committee for scrutiny when the relevant Portfolio Holder is next held to account in 2021/22.
- g) requested that an update report on progress on the future development on the Peninsula be reported to this Committee in March 2021 and every six months thereafter.
- h) noted that the pre-agenda meeting considered that sufficient briefings and updates on the Council's response to COVID-19 pandemic are supplied to Members through regular Cabinet reports and therefore additional reports are not currently considered necessary for this Committee.

Chairman

Date:

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