

Medway Council
Meeting of Business Support Overview and Scrutiny
Committee

Thursday, 8 July 2010

6.30pm to 7.55pm

Record of the meeting

- Present:** Councillors: Andrews, Avey, Kenneth Bamber (Chairman), Bright, Tony Goulden, Gulvin (Vice-Chairman), Griffiths, Harriott, Stephen Kearney and Royle
- Substitutes:** Councillors:
Ruparel (Substitute for Juby)
- In Attendance:** Rosie Gunstone, Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator
Mick Hayward, Chief Finance Officer
Jane Ringham, Head of Elections and Member Services
Deborah Upton, Assistant Director, Housing and Corporate Services

141 Record of meetings

The record of the Joint Meeting of all Committees held on 19 May 2010 and the meeting held on 25 May 2010 were agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

142 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carr and Juby.

143 Chairman's announcement

The Chairman announced that he intended to vary the order of business to take items 8 (Report on performance indicators) and 9 (Temporary accommodation) after item 6 (Response to petitions – sheltered accommodation).

144 Declarations of interest

Councillor Griffiths declared a personal interest in any reference to NHS Medway (formerly Medway PCT) on the grounds that he is a non-executive director of the trust.

145 Work Programme

Discussion:

The Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator introduced the report setting out the current work programme and drew to Members' attention the two items on the forward plan not currently scheduled to come to the committee.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report and noted the work undertaken by all overview and scrutiny committees in the last cycle and to be considered at the next cycle of meetings set out in appendices 2 and 3 to the report.

146 Response to petitions - Sheltered accommodation

Discussion:

The Assistant Director, Housing and Corporate Services, detailed visits she had undertaken to a number of sheltered schemes and expressed the view that, with the exception of two of the schemes, most residents did not hold strong views about the proposal to rotate scheme managers bi-annually. She advised that she still had two schemes to visit and would want to ensure that the views from these schemes were similarly taken into account before any decision was made.

Following her visit to the first scheme, the main concern of residents appeared to be that they would not know any new scheme manager, and therefore a compromise proposal was discussed with residents where the four scheme managers from Rainham would rotate around their schemes, and the four from Gillingham would do the same. The current system of 'buddying' would be extended to ensure that residents would know the scheme manager that would be taking over.

A number of residents of sheltered accommodation attended the meeting and Mr Shearman, from Marlborough House, Rainham, who is the chairman of the newly established sheltered housing forum, spoke out against the proposal and said that the strong views of residents had not been taken into account.

Members debated the policy proposal and concluded that there did not appear to be sufficiently robust reasons to change the current policy. They felt that scheme managers would be unlikely to change their habits from one home to another and with the offer of adequate training it should be possible to ensure good practice overall. The view was also expressed that the very detailed expertise gained by scheme managers about the residents would be lost if the scheme manager rotated bi-annually. In view of this the Assistant Director, Housing and Corporate Services, was asked to continue her visits and to report back to the Committee in due course.

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Decision:

That the Assistant Director (Housing and Corporate Services) should take note of the committee's comments, complete her visits to the remaining sheltered homes and report back to this Committee on her findings.

147 Report on performance indicators

Discussion:

The Assistant Director (Housing and Corporate Services) introduced a report, requested at the last meeting, giving further information on three performance indicators H5, H8 and NI 156 and responded to members' questions.

Members requested further information, in the form of a briefing note, on the following matters:

- On chart 1 page 49 what is the reasoning for the large difference in percentages on the penultimate line from 95% in April to 43% in May?
- The same chart appears to show downward arrows where performance has improved and upward arrows when it has declined which seemed to be the opposite of what they should be
- On Appendix 1 page 53 the last line of the chart refers to Brennan House – what is the reason for such a high level of void days (189)

Decision:

The Assistant Director, Housing and Corporate Services, undertook to provide further information on the questions asked at the meeting by means of a briefing note.

148 Temporary accommodation

Discussion:

Members were updated on the outcome of a feasibility study undertaken on the viability of producing an assessment centre for people requiring temporary accommodation in Medway. The Assistant Director, Housing and Corporate Services, explained that she would be having discussions with Southampton City Council with regard to changes in the housing benefit situation to assess how this affected their current temporary assessment centre provision and whether their financial situation had now changed.

She agreed to provide a briefing note to respond to a query about unit costs referred to in the feasibility study to explain why the unit cost/night for a single male parent was less than for a single female parent.

Decision:

- (a) the report was noted;

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- (b) the Assistant Director, Housing and Corporate Services, was requested to provide a briefing note in relation to the unit cost query on page 92 of the feasibility study as set out above.

149 Electoral Registration

Discussion:

The Head of Elections and Member Services introduced a report requested by Audit Committee to be considered by this committee in relation to data, which the Council can share in order to improve the accuracy of the register of electors and responded to members' questions.

Further explanation was given of the original member request from Audit Committee where it was felt that more information was needed about the legalities of matching data within the Council. Members did not feel that the report completely answered the original queries. The view was expressed that the aim should be to use to the full extent the sharing of data, which was legally possible.

The Chairman paid tribute to the election staff that had processed some 96,000 forms from 184,000 electors and only made 42 clerical errors.

Decision:

A briefing note was requested from the Head of Elections and Member Services, following consultation with officers in legal and finance, giving greater clarity on data matching within the Council.

150 Housing Revenue Account Reform Prospectus

Discussion:

The Chief Finance Officer referred to a supplementary agenda, which had been tabled at the meeting, which set out the final response sent by the Council to the Communities and Local Government on 6 July in relation to the housing revenue account reform prospectus. He explained the minor changes, which had been made to the original suggested response, considered by the Cabinet.

He explained to members the reasoning behind requesting a waiver of the right of call in on the item in view of the timescale to undertake the necessary surveys. He then set out the risks and rewards in moving to a self-financing system.

Decision:

The report and supplementary agenda were noted.

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Chairman

Date:

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