

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

Thursday, 10 June 2021

6.30pm to 9.25pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Browne, Carr, Curry, Fearn, Sylvia Griffin, Hubbard, Thompson and Tranter

In Attendance: Councillor Clive Johnson
Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive
Laura Caiels, Principal Lawyer - Place Team
Anna Marie Lawrence, Corporate Head of Performance and Business Intelligence
Dee O'Rourke, Assistant Director, Culture & Community
Ellen Wright, Democratic Services Officer

57 Election of Chairman

Decision:

Councillor Etheridge was elected Chairman for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

58 Election of Vice Chairman

Decision:

Councillor Fearn was elected Vice Chairman for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice Chairman chaired this meeting.

59 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 Bhutia, Etheridge, Mahil, Andy Stamp and Williams.

60 Record of Meeting

The record of the meeting on 23 March 2021 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record with the following correction:

Minute 831 – Update on the Housing Infrastructure Fund Programme - In the bullet point headed - Implications of the removal of the Medway Curve from the HIF programme, the word ‘Council’ in the second sentence was corrected to read ‘industry’.

Referring to minute 829 (Attendance by the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services), the Committee requested an update as to whether consideration had been given to the possible extension of the opening hours of the strand swimming pool in 2021. The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that this was imminent.

The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive referred to minute 831 – (Update on the Housing Infrastructure Fund Programme) and advised that since the meeting on 23 March 2021, Kelly Tolhurst MP had questioned reference in the committee report to there being 2 letters of support for the housing infrastructure fund bid. He clarified that whilst the Council had receipt of a signed letter dated September 2017 supporting the initial HIF expression of interest, the second letter drafted in January 2018 had not been signed by the MP. Therefore, the information previously reported required correction to refer to a single signed letter. In response to a question, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive agreed to provide a copy of the signed letter to the Committee.

61 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

Discussion:

The Chairman informed the Committee that in accordance with Chapter 4, part 5, paragraph 15.3 of the Constitution with regard to decisions, Cabinet decisions 56/2021, 57/2021 and 58/2021 had been called-in to this Committee by seven Members (Labour and Co-operative Group) of the Council.

He confirmed that he had agreed to add this item to the agenda so it could be considered at this meeting as a matter of urgency as permitted under section 100B of the Local Government Act 1972. This would enable the Committee to consider the call in of the Cabinet’s decisions earlier this week (which was after the publication of the main agenda for this meeting) at the earliest opportunity, noting that the next scheduled meeting of this Committee would not take place until 12 August 2021 and noting that the decisions taken by the Cabinet on Splashes could not be implemented whilst the consideration of the call-in remained outstanding.

**Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 10
June 2021**

The Chairman advised that he would amend the order of business to enable this urgent item to be considered after the Member's item from Councillor Johnson.

62 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.

63 Member's item - Closure of the University for the Creative Arts

Discussion:

In accordance with Medway Constitution Overview and Scrutiny rules (Chapter 4, Part 5 Paragraph 9.1) Councillor Johnson had requested that this item be included on the agenda concerning the recent announcement of the University for the Creative Arts (UCA) to leave its Rochester campus and to cease Further Education provision in Medway.

He requested that the Committee consider the potential impact of the loss of the UCA and asked what work had been undertaken with the UCA both before and after this announcement with a view to retaining provision in Medway.

In introducing his item, he outlined the benefits of having the UCA campus based in Medway not only for the provision of a unique prospectus for the creative arts but also the benefits to the students themselves and the future economy.

In response, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive outlined the Council's excellent working relationship with all Universities in Medway and confirmed that the UCA had been actively involved with the Council in chairing Medway's Cultural Partnership for a number of years. The UCA had also led the production of the Medway Cultural Strategy between 2014 – 2019.

He confirmed that the Council had maintained a strong and positive working relationship with colleagues at the UCA over the years and since the announcement was made by the UCA, a number of discussions had taken place with the Vice Chancellor. In addition, a wide range of partners had also made representations to the UCA, all with a view to seeking to maintain a UCA presence in Medway.

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 10 June 2021

He reminded the Committee that the University received funding from Central Government, not Local Government and was also largely dependent upon income from student fees, research income and grants. Like all Universities, the UCA operated in a commercial and competitive market. He informed the Committee that in declaring its decision to leave Medway, the UCA had referred to the condition of its existing building at the Medway Campus which, due to its condition required an extensive injection of funding.

The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive offered to arrange an informal meeting with the Vice Chancellor of the UCA for Members so that they could discuss their concerns with the UCA direct. Following discussion, it was suggested that after that meeting has taken place next steps can be determined.

Decision:

The Committee noted the Director's comments in response to the Member's item and that he will pursue the possibility of arranging an informal meeting between Members of the Council and the Vice Chancellor of the University of the Creative Arts.

64 Call-in - Splashes Leisure Centre

Discussion:

Councillor Curry introduced the report, explaining the reasons behind the call-in of Cabinet decisions 56/2021, 57/2021 and 58/2021, as set out in the report. He expressed his appreciation for being able to bring this item to the Committee as an urgent item and expressed concern that this issue had been considered by Cabinet without an opportunity for Members to discuss the proposed demolition of the building or provision of a replacement facility.

He sought information as to the projected timeline for the provision of a replacement facility in Rainham and expressed concern that if Splashes Leisure Centre required such extensive works, whether there were similar problems at other Council-owned leisure facilities.

He informed the Committee that whilst all three Cabinet decisions had been called in to this Committee for discussion, he was not opposed to decisions 56/2021 or 57/2021 as he supported the demolition of the existing building but referring to decision 58/2021 requested that that a community representative and a representative from the Labour and Co-operative Group be involved in any future plans discussed by the Splashes Working Group/Board.

In response, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive and Assistant Director Culture and Community provided assurances that the problems encountered at Splashes Leisure Centre were isolated and largely down to the age of the building and its use over the years. They confirmed that all other Council owned leisure facilities were the subject of ongoing maintenance and

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 10 June 2021

regular inspections and had benefitted from refurbishment programmes in recent years. Whilst it was unfortunate that the works required to bring the Splashes Leisure Centre back into use had, upon inspection, been found to be more extensive than originally considered, the proposals would provide an opportunity to build a new, updated facility in Rainham. Works were already in hand to undertake a detailed analysis along with figures and options for the specification.

The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive referring to Cabinet decision 58/2021 reminded the Committee that this decision related to changing the name of the existing Splashes scheme from 'Splashes Refurbishment 2020/21' to 'Splashes Replacement'.

The Committee discussed the report noting the assurances provided by the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services at the Cabinet meeting on 8 June 2021 concerning the provision of a replacement leisure facility to replace Splashes Leisure Centre as soon as possible and the further assurances provided by officers at this meeting.

Decision:

The Committee accepted the Cabinet decisions 56/2021, 57/2021 and 58/2021 and agreed to take no further action.

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

65 Council Plan Performance Monitoring and Risk Register Review Quarter 4 2020/21

Discussion:

The Committee received a report setting out performance for Quarter 4 against the Council's two priorities Place and Growth insofar as they fell within the remit of this Committee, along with a review of the Council's Risk Register.

The Corporate Head of Performance and Business Intelligence introduced the report and drew attention to a new risk SR50 relating to the Housing Investment Fund Project.

- **Future High Street Fund** - The Committee noted that in December 2020, Medway had been awarded £9.5 million from the Government's Future High Street Fund for investment in Chatham Town Centre. The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive agreed to circulate a briefing note detailing the projects/works to benefit from this funding.
- **Placing objects on the highway** - In response to a question, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the current permit scheme for placing objects on the highway in Chatham High Street was still operational.

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 10 June 2021

- **LRCC4a – Number of jobs created and safeguarded** - The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive advised that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not unexpected that this particular performance measure LRCC4a (number of jobs created and safeguarded) was currently below target.
- **Size and content and presentation of report** – Following concern as to the length, content and format of the Performance Monitoring Report and Risk Register, it was suggested that consideration be given to presenting this information in an easier-to-read format. The Corporate Head of Performance and Business Intelligence advised that where text had been included but struck through, whilst this may appear confusing, this had been included so as to ensure transparency and to appraise the Committee of amendments. She advised that she planned to undertake a review of performance reporting and invited Members to pass on any comments and suggestions that they may feel useful.
- **City of Culture bid** – During discussion on the City of Culture bid, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive referred to the Council's bid for City of Culture and in particular, the level of community engagement. He informed the Committee that the City of Culture bid video had received 15,000 views and extensive social media interest. Favourable support had also been received from a number of external sources.
- **Medway, a Smart City** - In response to questions concerning Medway's Smart City Strategy, the Corporate Head of Performance and Business Intelligence advised that as part of the Smart City agenda, she had undertaken a presentation on the Council's data plans to the cross-party Member User Group on 5 May 2021, and she offered to talk through the data project with the Member concerned, accompanied by the Smart City Project Officer.
- **Cultural events** – In response to questions concerning cultural events, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive advised that Medway's cultural offer was widely available, including non-traditional locations. He also confirmed that Open Space events were a method of engagement.
- **EV charging** - In response to a question as to the methodology of selecting the location of electric vehicle charging points in Medway, the Corporate Head of Performance and Business Intelligence informed the Committee that the specific location of electric vehicle points had been determined following a full consultation process.
- **NI195a Improved street and environmental cleanliness: Litter – alleyways and left bin bags** – The Committee discussed issues concerning litter in alleyways in Strood North.

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 10 June 2021

In addition, concern was expressed that in Strood North Ward, after undertaking street cleansing, Medway Norse were leaving black bin bags in the street for collection but on occasion, these had been mistaken by residents as general refuse that had not yet been collected resulting in general household refuse being added. The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive agreed to refer this matter to the Assistant Director Front Line Services for discussion with the Member concerning the specific locations where this was occurring.

- **Medway Local Plan** – In response to a question, the Assistant Director Culture and Community confirmed that the Medway Local Plan was due to be reported to Cabinet in September 2021.
- **Redevelopment of the former Civic Centre site and Strood Riverside** – It was noted that since the Chief Legal Officer had left Medway Council, the Assistant Director Regeneration had taken on responsibility for overseeing these regeneration projects.
- **NI167 – Average journey time along 5 routes across Medway** – Following questions concerning performance measure NI167, the Corporate Head of Performance and Business Intelligence asked the Democratic Services Officer to re-circulate the Briefing Note previously supplied in 2018.
- **Cycle routes and deterring motorised/off road motorcycles** – Arising from discussion as to the new cycle paths in Darland and Capstone, the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive agreed to ask officers to build into future cycle routes preventative measures to deter use by motorised/off road bikes.
- **Locate in Kent** – It was noted that Locate in Kent would be undertaking a presentation to Members on 29 June 2021.
- **Chatham Docks** – The Committee discussed the potential development of Chatham Docks in relation to the impact this could have upon businesses currently located at this site.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) noted the Quarter 4 2020/21 performance against the measures used to monitor progress against the Council's priorities and the amended risk register set out at appendix 3 to the report.
- b) agreed that a briefing note be circulated setting out the projects/works to benefit from the £9.5 million award from the Future High Street Fund.
- c) requested that the Assistant Director Front Line Services discuss with the Member concerned the issue of litter clearance in alleyways in

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 10 June 2021

Strood North Ward and the issues that he has raised concerning Medway Norse's street cleansing sacks.

- d) noted that the Democratic Services Officer will recirculate the 2018 briefing note outlining the routes used for performance indicator NI167 – average journey times along 5 routes in Medway
- e) noted that the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive will request that officers build into cycle route provision preventative measures to deter use by motorised bikes/off road bikes
- f) noted that the Corporate Head of Performance and Business Intelligence has offered to discuss with the Member concerned the Council's Smart City data plans accompanied by the Smart City Project Officer.

66 Petitions

Discussion:

The Committee received a report advising of those petitions received since the last meeting that were relevant to the work of this Committee.

It was noted that one petition referral had been received referred to at paragraph 4 of the report but that at the request of the petition organiser, consideration of the petition had been deferred until 12 August.

Decision:

The Committee noted the petition responses and appropriate officer action set out at paragraph 3 of the report.

67 Work programme

Discussion:

The Committee received a copy of its current work programme and discussed items for inclusion on the work programme.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) noted the current work programme.
- b) agreed that the following items be included on the work programme:
 - Economic Development Strategy in Medway
 - City Status Competition

**Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview And Scrutiny Committee, 10
June 2021**

Chairman

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