

**Medway Council**  
**Meeting of Business Support**  
**Overview and Scrutiny Committee**  
**Thursday, 21 October 2021**  
**6.30pm to 11.40pm**

**Record of the meeting**

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

- Present:** Councillors: Buckwell (Chairman), Etheridge, Johnson, Khan, Murray, Opara, Andy Stamp, Tejan (Vice-Chairman), Rupert Turpin and Wildey
- Substitutes:** Councillors:  
Osborne (Substitute for Maple)  
Thorne (Substitute for Clarke)
- In Attendance:** Jane Howard, CEO of Medway Voluntary Action  
Dan McDonald, CEO of Citizens Advice Medway  
Martyn Reeves, Independent Chair of the VCS Leaders Network and Chief Executive of Wisdom Hospice  
Eithne Rynne, Chief Executive of Kent Association for the Blind  
Mark Breathwick, Head of Strategic Housing  
Scott Elliott, Head of Health and Wellbeing Services  
Vicki Emrit, Climate Response Officer  
Bhupinder Gill, Assistant Director, Legal and Governance  
Councillor Adrian Gulvin, Portfolio Holder for Resources  
Su Irving, Head of Adult Partnership Commissioning and the Better Care Fund  
Lucy Kirk, Climate Response and Environmental Protection Manager  
Sarah Valdus, Head of Climate Response and Environmental Services  
Phil Watts, Chief Finance Officer

**396 Councillor Bowler and Sir David Amess MP**

The Committee paid tribute to Councillor Bowler and David Amess MP, who had sadly passed away recently.

Councillor Murray gave thanks for all the tributes that had been made to Councillor Bowler and spoke of the 20 years that they had worked together as Councillors with shared values. She stated that Councillor Bowler had done all he could to get well and that he would be greatly missed by all.

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The Chairman spoke in tribute of Councillor Bowler and also of David Amess MP with reference to his ability to make time for all, across the political aisles.

Members and officers present held a moment of reflection in memory of Councillor Bowler and David Amess MP.

### **397 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Clarke, Maple and Williams.

### **398 Record of meeting**

The record of the meeting of the Committee held on 19 August 2021 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

### **399 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances**

There were none.

### **400 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping**

#### Disclosable pecuniary interests

Councillor Opara declared a DPI in item 8, Council Plan Performance Monitoring and Risk Register Review, Quarter 1 2021/22, as her business had participated in the kick start retention scheme and had received business grants. She advised that, should there be a specific discussion on these issues, she would leave the meeting for the duration of the discussion.

#### Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

#### Other interests

Councillor Johnson declared an interest in item 5, Voluntary Sector Task Group, as he was Chair of Medway Asthma Self-Help. Councillor Buckwell declared an interest in item 5 as Treasurer of the Policy Centre for African Peoples.

### **401 Voluntary Sector Task Group**

#### **Discussion:**

Following Cabinet's approval of a number of recommendations relating to the sustainability and future relationship of the voluntary sector in Medway, on 15

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December 2020, the Committee considered a report that provided an update against the actions.

The Committee heard from Jane Howard (CEO of Medway Voluntary Action), Martyn Reeves (Independent Chair of the VCS Leaders Network and Chief Executive of Wisdom Hospice), Dan McDonald (CEO of Citizens Advice Medway) and Eithne Rynne (Chief Executive of Kent Association for the Blind), who made the following points:

- The work of the voluntary sector had been invaluable during the pandemic when a partnership approach had led to very good working relationships which remained in place.
- The sector had supported the delivery of Council services by filling some of the gaps in service provision caused by the pandemic.
- The sector needed support to aid its recovery from the pandemic. Many small voluntary organisations had not recovered, whilst others had merged with larger organisations.
- Organisations which had not been able to visit clients' homes had adapted the services they provided in order to continue to maintain contact with clients who may be suffering from low self-esteem and isolation.
- MVA was consolidating its partnership work into 3 strands:
  - A transformation academy with an emphasis on key members of the sector coming together to look at doing things differently to build resilience. This would then be rippled out to other organisations.
  - A formalised alliance to enable smaller organisations to access support functions at a cheaper rate than currently.
  - Work in partnership with Nottingham Trent University to identify the needs of the sector and develop a knowledge transfer.
- The memorandum of understanding (MOU) was a good opportunity to formalise relationships with the CCG and statutory sector. However, this statement of intent needed to be followed by action.
- The voluntary sector was focused on achieving good health outcomes and was looking to the CCG to come forward with support as the Council was doing.
- The Community Lottery programme had been slow to take off and more work was needed to increase its visibility.
- Developing a business case for a single point of contact was welcomed and the close working relationship with officers from Public Health was being consolidated.

Members and the representatives of the voluntary sector discussed the need for expertise around funding bids and the need for shared support services and succession planning to ensure organisations continued to be well led. It was recognised that the availability of suitable premises was one of the biggest

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issues that charities in Medway faced. Use of Council buildings for a peppercorn rent was suggested as one possible solution.

It was noted that many younger people had come forward to volunteer during the pandemic and it was suggested that the sector reach out to educational establishments to advertise opportunities for careers in the voluntary sector. It was suggested that the academy work to develop a resource for recruiting volunteers. Being open minded and inclusive in the recruitment of volunteers was also beneficial as many good volunteers came from the probation service or were care leavers.

The difficulties faced by charities that had to bid to renew contracts every two years was identified as an area that needed to be recognised and addressed as this had a detrimental impact on service users.

Members were advised that the issue of how social prescribing was benefitting residents was due to be reported to the Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee early in 2022.

Members thanked the representatives of the voluntary sector for attending the meeting, and for the hard work of the sector during the pandemic.

### **Decision:**

The Committee noted the report and the progress made against the Task Group's recommendations.

## **402 Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Resources**

### **Discussion:**

Members received an overview of activities and progress made on work areas within the Resources Portfolio, which fell within the remit of the Committee. These were as follows:

- Transformation and Digital Services
- Council Plan and Service Improvement
- Business and Administration Support Service
- Complaints Policy and Management
- HR
- ICT
- Legal
- Category Management/Procurement
- Travellers

Councillor Gulvin, Portfolio Holder for Resources attended the meeting and responded to Members' questions and comments as follows:

**Transformation and Digital Services**

- **Is information on Smart Energy shared with MDC and relevant Council services?**

The Portfolio Holder said that information was shared with the Cabinet and officers worked closely with MDC.

- **How was the name for the Eden House Assessment Unit chosen? How was the refurbishment funded, and who were Five Rivers?**

The Portfolio Holder advised that the name was chosen by the Medway Children in Care Council and the refurbishment was funded as a capital project. Five Rivers were responsible for the day to day running of the facility following consideration of bids by the Procurement Board.

- **What was the Smart Parking levy?**

The Portfolio Holder said that there was a charge on each transaction that paid for the Ringo service. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that this was set at 9 pence.

- **What progress had been made towards introducing an online system for applying for residents' parking permits?**

The Portfolio Holder said that he would make enquiries so that an answer could be provided outside the meeting.

- **Will the data reports from the Smart Road Surface Monitoring Pilot be made available?**

The Portfolio Holder said that the quality of the data captured by the high-definition cameras was very high and it was hoped that this could be shared with the Regeneration Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

- **Will Smart Winter Gritting result in less gritting?**

The Portfolio Holder explained that there would be more targeted gritting with the sensors stopping the gritting operation when they detected warm areas; gritting would restart when cold areas were detected.

- **Within the reduced Gun Wharf footprint, there needed to be suitable meeting space with good acoustics.**

The Portfolio Holder stressed that the leasing of space at Gun Wharf to the Ministry of Justice would enable the Family Court to stay in Medway. Following the end of its lease of Anchorage House, the original plan was for it to move to Maidstone, but the Council's legal team had put together a strong case to the Ministry of Justice for its retention in Medway.

### **Complaints Policy and Management**

- **More could be done to make it easier for residents to complain, by reducing both the number of dropped calls and the number of different reporting forms.**

The Portfolio Holder said that this was still predominantly a paper-based system and improvements were being considered to ensure that complaints were viewed as a learning opportunity to help the Council to improve its services.

### **HR**

- **What was the latest situation regarding the funding that had been given to MCG (now Kyndi) for the recruitment of locum social workers?**

The Portfolio Holder said that the Council had been spending a lot of money on recruitment agencies and having a team at Kyndi had reduced this cost. However, at present Kyndi were seeking to recruit to its recruitment team to develop this service.

- **What could be done to help employees who felt overwhelmed working from home? For what reasons were staff leaving the Council?**

The Portfolio Holder referred to the two extensive staff surveys which had shown that 85% of staff were happy with the hybrid model of working. Whilst some staff preferred to be in the office because their role was more suited to this, others would find it beneficial to work from home more often. He stressed that whichever model was applied, it was important that outputs were monitored.

The Portfolio Holder said that the Council offered good staff development and recognised that some staff may then be attracted by higher salaries in London. However, some then returned to the Council with greater experience which was positive.

### **ICT**

- **IT equipment issued to Members and officers during the pandemic**

The Portfolio Holder was asked if laptops not being used by Members could be upcycled. He responded that he had been impressed with how Members had adapted during the pandemic, and he would be surprised if they were not using their laptops.

### **Category Management/Procurement**

- **Support for Medway SMEs in reducing red tape**

The Portfolio Holder suggested that the Meet the Buyer events that had previously been held to give help and guidance on the bidding process, needed to be reintroduced. Alternatively, online training might be considered.

### **Travellers**

- **Identification of Traveller sites, including temporary sites in the Local Plan**

The Portfolio Holder said that he was not aware of any temporary sites being turned down when their permission was due for renewal. He was confident that the Local Plan would include an adequate supply of sites that would satisfy the Planning Inspectorate.

On behalf of the Committee, the Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for Resources for his attendance and for his detailed responses.

## **403 Climate Change Action Plan and Medway Net Zero Carbon Baseline Report**

### **Discussion:**

The Committee considered a report that provided an update on the Council's response to the declaration of a Climate Change Emergency and presented the Climate Change Action Plan. The report also gave an overview of the Medway Net Zero Carbon – Baseline and Pathway Report which provided the evidence base which underpinned the Action Plan.

Members thanked officers for the recent Member Briefing on Climate Change. It was suggested that a good topic for a future Task Group would be to explore electric vehicles for transportation, particularly the taxi fleet. This might include incentives for operators using electric vehicles such as a longer licensed life and exclusive use of charging points. Officers agreed to consult the Licensing team to explore ideas. Other suggestions included the provision of e-bikes and an app for reporting polluting vehicles.

It was suggested that the target of net zero by 2050 was not ambitious enough and that the £170K allocated in the core budget was inadequate to tackle the climate emergency and deliver the Action Plan quickly enough. The view was expressed that air quality in particular needed to be improved by the introduction of taxi and bus fleets of ultra-low emission vehicles and that the 34 new charging points at three locations was insufficient to drive the change from petrol to electric vehicles. The location of charging points was questioned, particularly those that were not rapid charge, in car parks where users would have to pay to park or might be concerned about leaving their cars overnight.

It was also considered that the development in Hoo should be zero carbon from the outset and officers were asked to clarify the responsibility for the

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maintenance and replacement of trees planted as part of the Urban Tree Challenge.

In response, officers advised that the trees would be planted around Christmas and would be maintained by Medway Norse and the various volunteer park friends' groups. Discussions were being held with the developers in Hoo to push the climate change agenda to the forefront. The Sustainable Transport Team was developing an Electric Vehicle strategy which would include the need for charging points and their locations. The Action Plan was a five-year rolling plan, and the team were constantly reviewing priorities. At present the highest omissions were in relation to domestic use, followed by transport. The team constantly sought funding opportunities and it was hoped that some funding opportunities would arise from COP26. DEFRA funding for air quality had been applied for and the outcome would be known by February/March 2022. A Member suggested the formation of an expert bidding team in conjunction with Kent County Council.

The Chief Finance Officer advised that there were a number of schemes within capital programmes, such as street lighting, in addition to the £175,000 in the core budget. Only 1.4% of emissions in Medway were generated by the Council so achieving carbon neutral would require the private sector to take steps to reduce their carbon footprint. The Council would act as a facilitator, helping them to bid for funding.

In relation to making Medway's housing stock more energy efficient, Members were advised that the approach nationally was fabric first, for example, insulation, windows etc. The aim was for all Council properties to achieve an EPC level C rating by 2030 and be carbon neutral by 2050.

With regard to the potential for a landlord licensing system to encourage a move towards more energy efficient buildings, officers said that a blend of options were required alongside licensing, including education, support and access to funding, as well as enforcement.

In stressing how the effects of the climate emergency were already being felt, and the catastrophic implications of not achieving climate change, a Member emphasised the need for strong leadership and a sense of urgency.

In response to a question on how to stop drivers keeping their stationary cars running, officers explained that, if the bid which had been submitted for the DEFRA air quality funding stream was successful, this would allow the Council to undertake work in conjunction with the University of Kent on a behaviour change campaign, initially in Rainham, using targeted signage.

Officers confirmed that an executive summary of the Climate Change Action Plan had been produced and published.

Asked what was being done to promote Medway as a location for energy efficient SMEs, officers advised that they had started to work with the Economic Development team to explore opportunities for business development.



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### Decision:

The Committee noted the Climate Change Action Plan.

### 404 Council Plan Performance Monitoring and Risk Register Review Quarter 1 2021/22

### Discussion:

The Committee considered a report summarising performance in Quarter 1 (Q1) 2020/21 on the delivery of the programmes and measures which fell within the remit of the Committee. Given the overarching responsibilities of the Committee to provide guidance and leadership on the development and coordination of the scrutiny function for all overview and scrutiny committees, the report also included a performance summary of all services and a summary of the discussions at the other committees. The report also presented the Q1 review of the Council's Strategic Risk Register.

The Committee discussed the following:

**The relationship between the risk assessment process and emergency planning:** Members were advised that the Emergency Planning manager attended meetings of the Risk Management Group. Officers offered to investigate the possibility of providing a Member briefing on Emergency Planning.

**PH16 - Smoking at the time of delivery:** As this target was continually green, it had been suggested at the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee that the target be reviewed upwards so that it was more challenging. Officers agreed to follow this up.

**Repairs and maintenance contracts:** Referring to Council owned buildings it was requested that information on priorities be provided to Members. The Chief Finance Officer agreed to request this and advised that the repairs and maintenance fund in the General Fund Revenue Budget received a £750k contribution each year. The Assistant Director, Regeneration, had delegated authority to determine how this was used, in consultation with the Corporate Property Board.

**Strood Waterfront regeneration:** Asked to clarify the comment that no further options for the sites would be considered until spring 2022, it was explained that the receipt on offer had not been sufficient to warrant awarding a contract. The Medway Development Company might undertake the development of sites but did not have the capacity at present.

**SR50 - HIF Programme:** Asked if the relationship between the Local Plan and HIF had broken down, or if there were any issues with the HIF, officers agreed to provide a response outside the meeting.

**SR35 – Homelessness:** In response to questions on the impact of the withdrawal of the universal credit uplift and the plans for a winter shelter,

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officers advised that £2.2M grant funding had been allocated for vulnerable families and this could be used for housing support in exceptional circumstances. The Housing and Benefits teams worked closely on the administration of the support fund. A funding bid had been submitted for a winter shelter and details would be provided to Members.

**SR46 – Medway’s Economic Recovery from Covid 19:** It was questioned whether this might increase from BII in light of any increase in Covid during the winter. Officers advised that this was a residual score, after mitigation. It was considered that mitigation was in place to enable this score to be maintained. In the event of a more aggressive mutation, Public Health colleagues would review the risk.

**SR03B – Finances:** Clarification was sought on the term ‘data lake’ and it was explained that this work was being led by the Business Intelligence team and involved pulling together data from different systems, for example housing and benefits, so that it could be matched.

### **Decision:**

The Committee noted the Q1 2021/22 performance against the measures used to monitor progress against the Council’s priorities.

## **405 Capital Budget Monitoring Report Round 1 2021/22**

### **Discussion:**

The Committee considered a report which presented the first round of the Council’s capital budget monitoring process for 2021/22 against a capital programme of over £475M. Members noted that an underspend of £3.372M was forecast, principally against the SEN programme delivering additional school places for children with special needs.

The Committee discussed the following:

**Basic needs capital programme in schools:** Concern was expressed that the sources of finance were still unidentified. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the Council did not receive sufficient capital funding to deliver the basic needs programme, either for mainstream or special needs education. The free schools programme was not progressing at the expected rate which was why the Council had borrowed funds to create bulge classes for mainstream provision.

**Abbey Court underspend:** The Chief Finance Officer advised that the scheme had been funded from borrowing and this represented a charge against the general fund. He questioned whether Section 106 funds would be sufficient to cover school places over the longer term which was why there was a need to lobby the DfE for basic needs provision.

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### Decision:

The Committee noted the results of the first round of capital budget monitoring for 2021/22.

### 406 Revenue Budget Monitoring Round 1 2021/22

#### Discussion:

The Committee considered a report which presented the first round of the Council's revenue budget monitoring process for 2021/22. Members noted that the overspend of £8.5M against the £362M revenue budget could be attributed to the pressure in relation to the number and costs of children in care.

The Committee discussed the following:

**The likelihood of spending freezes:** The Chief Finance Officer reported that services were considering their budgets prior to discussions being held with the Leader and Portfolio Holders. Officers were considering whether the balance between revenue and capital could be managed in a different way to yield a revenue benefit.

**Career progression payments in Children's Services:** Members noted that only a small proportion of staff had qualified for this progression and were advised that this funding had been put into the budget as a retention measure for social workers.

**10-year plan in relation to the high needs block and SEND:** Asked if the Council was confident that this could be delivered, the Chief Finance Officer said legislation allowed the Council to put the high needs deficit in a separate reserve and the Government's intention was that it would be managed over three to five years. However, this was not considered possible without more Government funding, so the Council was working to a 10-year plan which was largely predicated on the creation of local schools' provision funded from the general fund. The Chief Finance Officer said that he was confident the plan could be delivered over that timeframe.

**Parking revenue projections:** The Chief Finance Officer said that in Q2, improvements were being seen in parking revenue as well as leisure, and that gave him confidence in making the projections for 2022/23.

**Is the Pentagon Centre delivering the returns expected by Elandi?** The Chief Finance Officer advised that very few units in the Pentagon Centre were currently unoccupied and he considered the long-term outlook to be good. However, income was being impacted in the short-term as there had been a number of new tenants who were benefitting from a rent-free period. In addition, the plans for the first floor would result in periods of vacancy as works were being undertaken.

A Member expressed concern that Virgin Media was leaving the Pentagon Centre and also that a number of units were occupied on a temporary basis.

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**Adult Social Care:** Concern was expressed about the large increase in the cost of mental ill health care and the lack of Government funding. It was asked what pooled funding arrangements were in place for KMPT to assist. In response, the Chief Finance Officer said that this issue was always high on the agenda when the Council held discussions with NHS colleagues. He advised that, of the £13B per annum for three years that the Government had announced for the NHS, only £5.4B in total was for social care. He estimated that Medway would receive around £7M per annum to fund the changes the Government had announced. He considered that the additional funding needed to meet the current pressures would come in the form of a precept.

**Use of consultants:** Noting the reference to the use of consultants in relation to the Local Plan, it was questioned whether consideration was given to recruiting or retraining staff instead. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that this was undertaken as part of the budget setting process. He agreed to establish whether a list of consultants and the cost could be provided to Members.

**The number of children in care:** Clarification was sought as, at the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Members had been advised that there had not been an increase in the number of children in care, but the report indicated that there had been. The Chief Finance Officer advised that the overall number of looked after children had stabilised, but the number of children in costly residential care had increased significantly in the past four years. It was therefore a unit cost pressure rather than a numbers pressure.

### **Decision:**

The Committee:

- a) noted the report; and
- b) requested that Members be provided with information on the use of consultants, specifically the number and cost by service area.

## **407 Financial Outlook 2022/23**

### **Discussion:**

The Committee considered a report which set out the initial assumptions which underpinned the projected financial pressures on the Council alongside projected income streams insofar as they impacted the 2022/23 budget.

The Committee discussed the following:

**Publication of a Medium-Term Financial Statement:** The Chief Finance Officer reported that he was expecting a multi-year settlement and intended to provide medium-term forward forecasts alongside the budget in February 2022.

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**Provision of Children's Services:** In response to a question on a shared service, the Chief Finance Officer advised that he was not aware of any such discussions with Kent County Council.

It was asked if the reference to providing the most appropriate service in the most effective way related to cost savings that would lead to a poorer service. The Chief Finance Officer assured Members that this was not the case, adding that getting the service right for the service user should be the most efficient, resulting in savings. Most of the current cost pressure was due to children being in institutional care; it would be most cost effective for children to be with their families.

**Fair funding review:** Questioned on whether there was any data on the three main cost drivers, these being population, deprivation and sparsity, ready for when the review took place, the Chief Finance Officer confirmed that this data was collated by the Business Intelligence team and would support the view that Medway was underfunded in relation to other authorities. The Council was therefore in a good position to make its representations when the review was undertaken.

### **Decision:**

The Committee noted the report.

## **408 Work programme**

### **Discussion:**

Members considered the Committee's current work programme. It was suggested that a Task Group should undertake a review of electric transport. Officers suggested that the next report include an update on the agreed Task Group programme.

### **Decision:**

The Committee:

- a) agreed the Committee's work programme (Appendix 1 to the report); and
- b) noted the work programmes of the other overview and scrutiny committees (Appendix 2 to the report).

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**Chairman**

**Date:**

**Steve Platt, Democratic Services Officer**

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