

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

Thursday, 14 October 2021

6.30pm to 9.35pm

Record of the meeting

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

- Present:** Councillors: Carr, Curry, Etheridge (Chairman), Fearn (Vice-Chairman), Hubbard, Andy Stamp, Thompson, Rupert Turpin and Williams
- Substitutes:** Councillors:
Sylvia Griffin (Substitute for Tranter)
Adeoye (Substitute for Browne)
Chrissy Stamp (Substitute for Mahil)
- In Attendance:** Councillor Jane Chitty, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation
Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive
Ruth Du-Lieu, Assistant Director, Front Line Services
Janet Davies, Head of HIF and Regeneration
Sunny Ee, Assistant Director Regeneration
Dave Harris, Head of Planning
Anna Marie Lawrence, Corporate Head of Performance and Business Intelligence
Dee O'Rourke, Assistant Director, Culture & Community
Vicky Nutley, Assistant Head of Legal Services
Melanie Tong, Contracts Manager Medway Norse
Sarah Valdus, Head of Climate Response and Environmental Services
Ellen Wright, Democratic Services Officer

384 Councillor Bowler

The Committee paid tribute to Councillor Bowler who had sadly passed away on Tuesday 12 October 2021.

Councillor Curry stated that Bowler had been a friend, colleague and Ward Councillor and his sad loss would be felt across the whole Council and within the community that he served. This view was echoed by the Chairman.

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The Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation also paid tribute to Councillor Nick Bowler and his valuable contribution to the work of the Development Plans Advisory Group.

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

385 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Browne, Clarke, Mahil and Tranter.

386 Record of Meeting

The record of the meeting held on 12 August 2021 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

387 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

The Chairman drew attention to the change of membership of the Committee.

388 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 the Annual Review of Waste Contracts: Contract Year October 2020 – September 2021 and informed the Committee that he worked for the Environment Agency. However, he was not involved in any sites in Medway therefore he was not precluded from taking part in the discussion on this item.

389 Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation

Discussion:

Members received an overview of progress made on the areas within the scope of Councillor Chitty, Portfolio Holder for Planning, Economic Growth and Regulation which fell within the remit of this Committee as set out below:

- Economic Development

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- Employment
- High Streets
- Local Plan
- Markets
- Planning Policy
- Regulation – Environmental Health/Trading Standards/Enforcement and Licensing (executive functions only)
- Social Regeneration
- South Thames Gateway Building Control Partnership

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

- **Medway Local Plan** – In response to a question as to why the draft Medway Local Plan had been deferred from consideration at the Council meeting on 7 October 2021, the Portfolio Holder advised that the draft Local Plan was an important document which would affect everyone in Medway and whilst it had originally been hoped that the outstanding supporting documents would be available in time to be considered on 7 October, this had not been the case and therefore a decision had been taken not to consider the Local Plan that evening.

In response to a question, the Committee was advised that the following had yet to be finalised and it was anticipated that they would be complete in November:

- Sustainability Appraisal
- Habitat Regulations Assessment

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that to assist the Council in preparing technical supporting documents, the Council had engaged Consultants and other technical experts to draw on their knowledge and expertise. She agreed to inform the Committee outside of the meeting as to details of the Consultants/experts and the costs involved.

Concern was expressed that the need to obtain expert assistance indicated that the Planning team was insufficiently resourced and the Portfolio Holder replied that the production of a Local Plan was a very complex matter, evidenced by the fact that many Local Authorities' Local Plans had been rejected. In addition, during the draft Local Plan process, the Government had made various changes and this had increased the pressure on getting the Plan right. It had therefore been decided to enlist the help and support of experts where considered necessary, on compiling Medway's draft Local Plan.

When challenged as to whether she should consider her position as a Portfolio Holder with responsibility for the production of the Local Plan, the Portfolio Holder re-iterated that the Local Plan was a very important document for Medway and its journey through to completion had been

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made more difficult by the changes introduced by the Government. She was satisfied that she had many years' experience as Portfolio Holder in this area and reminded the Committee that during her time as Portfolio Holder, she had instigated the Development Plans Advisory Group. This was a cross-party group that had been actively involved in monitoring, influencing and shaping the draft Local Plan. Members of the Group had access to all reports, attended presentations and had direct access to officers on Local Plan issues and they had been encouraged to share information within their political groups.

In response to a question as to whether Section 106 funding obtained from developers involved in developments on the Peninsula would be directed to provision of a new leisure facility to replace Splashes in Rainham, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that there were plans to provide a new leisure facility on the Peninsula.

In response to a question, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that the supporting Local Plan documents on the Sustainable Transport Assessment and Gypsy and Traveller Assessment had been completed. The Committee expressed concern as to whether other supporting documents had yet to be finalised and particular reference was made to cross border strategic matters and the Four Elms Hill Air Quality Management Action Plan.

During discussion, reference was made to the requirement for Medway to provide 27,000 homes within the Local Plan period up to 2037 and it was noted that only 17,000 homes had been referred to within the draft Local Plan documents published for the Council meeting on 7 October 2021. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the remaining 10,000 had been accounted for and she agreed to supply information as to the location of these homes outside of the meeting.

The Portfolio Holder was questioned as to the future plans for Chatham Docks, taking into account the information referred to within the draft Local Plan document published for the Council meeting on 7 October 2021. In response, the Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that Chatham Docks was owned by Peel Ports, a private company and that Peel Ports had declared in 2016 its plans to close Chatham Docks as it was no longer considered financially viable. She confirmed that this decision was outside of the control of the Council and the Council did not have the ability to acquire the Docks.

Concern was expressed that the closure of Chatham Docks would result in the direct loss of 800 jobs and impact 1,300 other jobs that were reliant on businesses based there and it was suggested that the land should be retained as employment land in the draft Local Plan. The Head of Planning informed the Committee that this was a complex matter and moving forward, subject to the completion of the evidence base, it was possible that the site could have a mixed-use designation for employment and residential.

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- **Strood Town Centre Forum** – In response to a question concerning the reinstatement of meetings of the Forum, the Portfolio Holder advised although Strood Town Centre was flourishing, since the previous Chairman of the Forum had passed away, there was a lack of commitment from businesses to participate in the Forum.

Members representing Strood Wards considered that this differed from their experience, and it was suggested that both the Portfolio Holder and Ward Councillors from Strood share their respective information with the Assistant Director Regeneration and this could then be shared via a Briefing Note.

- **Gillingham Town Centre** – Reference was made to the lack of recent investment in Gillingham Town Centre and the Committee questioned whether Gillingham was likely to benefit from either the 'Welcome Back Fund' or the 'Future High Streets Fund'.

The Portfolio Holder agreed that Gillingham Town Centre could benefit from an uplift and she reminded the Committee that development work was currently progressing at Britton Farm Mall which would enhance that area of the town centre. She confirmed that if funding streams became available, every opportunity would be taken to bid for monies to invest in Gillingham Town Centre.

The Committee requested that a briefing note be supplied on the Welcome Back Fund and Future High Street Fund and any future opportunities to bid.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) noted that the Portfolio Holder has offered to provide information as to the Consultants/experts that are assisting the Council with the documents required for the draft Local Plan and the costs involved.
- b) noted that the Portfolio will supply information as to the location of the 10,000 homes which were not included in the draft Local Plan document submitted to Council on 7 October 2021.
- c) noted that the Portfolio Holder and ward Councillors from Strood will share their respective information on the responses from businesses in Strood concerning the re-instatement of the Strood Town Centre Forum with the Assistant Director Regeneration so that this can then be shared via a Briefing Note.
- d) requested that a briefing note be supplied on the Welcome Back Fund and the Future High Street Fund and any future opportunities to bid.

**390 Annual Review of Waste Contracts, Contract Year October 2020 -
September 2021**

Discussion:

The Committee received a report setting out a summary of performance on the following Medway waste contracts for the contract year October 2020 to September 2021:

- Veolia Environmental Services – providing waste disposal services for residual and recycling waste.
- Medway Norse – providing waste collection, street cleaning services and management of Medway’s Household Waste Recycling Centres (HWRC)

The following was discussed:

- **Waste Collections** – The Committee congratulated Medway Norse on the continuation of the waste kerbside collections over the past 18 months throughout the Covid-19 pandemic but questioned whether any additional measures were being put in place to combat the continued problem of flytipping.

In response, the Head of Climate Response and Environmental Services thanked the Committee for its praise of the weekly waste collection service and advised that both officers and Norse were extremely proud of the service provided. She informed the Committee that officers and Medway Norse were in regular contact with the Council’s Enforcement Team and further work was planned for the future now that things were returning to normal after the Covid-19 pandemic. Joint partnership working continued particularly if there were known hotspots and she suggested that if any Member had an area in their Ward that was known to be a flytipping hotspot, they should report this to officers for investigation.

- **Litter bin clearance and street cleansing** – Attention was drawn to issues concerning litter bin clearance and street cleansing and it was questioned as to whether this was down to lack of funding or staffing levels.

Melanie Tong from Medway Norse advised that unfortunately, along with many other businesses nationwide, staffing levels at Norse had been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic and the need for staff to self isolate and, in addition, Norse had been experiencing driver shortages. Whilst Norse aimed to retain a small pool of drivers that could be called upon in times of emergency, a shortage of 15 HGV drivers had impacted the service. To help keep services operational, Managers and Supervisors

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had been out driving vehicles. She advised that although Norse undertook regular induction sessions in an attempt to increase HGV staff, few resulted in posts being filled.

She confirmed that any underspend on salaries was currently being absorbed by the requirement to pay overtime to staff for additional hours/days.

It was confirmed that litter bin clearance had been a challenge during the pandemic as dog ownership had increased and more people were at home and using local facilities for recreation. Whilst it had not been possible to increase the frequency of litter bin clearance, the possible introduction of additional or larger bins at popular sites was being considered.

The Committee noted that Medway Norse continued to support High Street cleansing and Medway events.

- **Recycling of plastics** – In response to a question as to why there was no receptacle for plastic recycling at Hoath Way HWRC, the Head of Climate Response and Environmental Services advised that a few years ago, unfortunately the plastic recycling market for these types of materials had ceased. However, a new outlet has recently been introduced which was able to recycle certain types of plastics and was currently being trialled at Capstone HWRC. Once the system had completed its trial it would be rolled out to other HWRCs.
- **Confusion over Medway Norse bags and general refuse** – Attention was drawn to an issue whereby on occasion, Medway Norse bin bags were left for collection at the end of the day, or sometimes on a Friday for collection on Monday and this led to confusion for residents who thought that the weekly refuse collection had not yet been picked up and then added their own bags to the pile. It was suggested that Medway Norse consider changing the colour of their bin bags so as to differentiate between Norse bags and general refuse.

In response Melanie Tong confirmed that Norse had just placed a large order for bin bags to cover the next year. Sadly, it was not possible for Norse to obtain different colour bags as black bags with Norse name printed in green text were the cheapest available on the market. She accepted that this did occasionally create confusion for the public but confirmed that this problem had also arisen when Veolia used grey bags. However, she agreed to investigate the possibility of ensuring an earlier collection time on a Friday so that the bags were not left in situ into the evening or over the weekend.

- **Street cleansing in flatted areas** – It was suggested that Norse increase street cleansing in those areas where there was a high density of residential accommodation and a subsequent accumulation of litter in the streets.

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It was also suggested that the street cleansing team not be restricted to cleansing pavements when it was clear that there was litter in close proximity e.g. alleyways.

In response, the Head of Climate Response and Environmental Services advised that the benefit of moving all services to Norse enabled joined up working of teams. Due to the pandemic, plans to progress joined up working had been delayed but work was now underway to investigate improvements and better ways of working.

- **Wait times for bulky waste collection** – Melanie Tong confirmed that there was currently a 2 – 3 week wait for a bulky waste collection.
- **Locations for leaving refuse collection for pick up** – Melanie Tong advised that the usual place for refuse to be left for collection would be at the front door of a property or at the boundary nearest the highway. She noted the concern raised at the meeting about refuse having been left uncollected at a particular location and requested that information be supplied as to the specific address. If this related to refuse left on collection day and not flytipping, this could be investigated.
- **Litter and refuse at Watling Street shops** – Melanie Tong agreed to investigate concern that litter and refuse was not being cleared from around Watling Street shops.
- **Recycling of organic waste** – The Head of Climate Response and Environmental Services confirmed that all organic waste was processed and specially treated before being used as a soil conditioner on farmers' land. She confirmed that the service had collected an exceptionally high level of garden waste during the past year and had not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels.
- **Booking slots at HWRCs** – The Committee questioned whether it would soon be possible to book slots at HWRCs for the same day if there were vacant time slots available.

The Head of Climate Response and Environmental Services advised that if the pre-booking system was retained, the possibility of booking on the same day would be investigated.

- **Electric vehicles and IT systems** – The Head of Environmental Services confirmed that the introduction of electric vehicles was being investigated along with the power services that would be required and it was likely that one vehicle would be trialled before Christmas.

She also advised that the current 'in cab system' had been upgraded this week following an 18 month delay due to the pandemic and this would now permit improved communications.

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- **Recycling of mattresses** – The Head of Climate Response and Environmental Services informed the Committee that the mattress recycling contract continued and mattresses were separated from waste at HWRCs and all elements of a mattress were individually recycled.
- **A289 – Water basin** – It was suggested that this was a hot spot area for the flytipping of builders waste that that this should be investigated.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) noted the report and appendices 1 and 2 and expressed appreciation to officers, Veolia and Medway Norse for the services provided.
- b) requested that information be provided as to those locations where the possible provision of additional or larger litter bins are being considered.

391 Housing Infrastructure Fund: New Routes to Good Growth

The Committee received a detailed report setting out an update to the Housing Infrastructure Fund: New Routes to Good Growth (HIF) project.

The following was discussed:

- **Outcome of consultation** – In response to a question, the Assistant Director Regeneration advised that work was currently being undertaken on assessing responses to the recent consultation and further information would be available in November.

He further advised that owing to the extensive feedback from the consultation, in consultation with Homes England, it had been agreed that an additional year be added to the scheme to ensure the quality of the delivery of the HIF scheme.

- **Acquisitions Policy** - It was confirmed that the Acquisition Policy had recently been to Cabinet and approved.

The Assistant Director Regeneration advised that there was an element of overlap with the HIF scheme and the Local Plan as the process of the Local Plan pre-empted significant development

- **The role of Capita** – Information was sought as to the involvement of Capita, why this was considered necessary and the costs for this service. In response the Assistant Director Regeneration advised that due to the complexity of the HIF scheme and the environmental impact assessments and planning process, Capita had been engaged to support officers.

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- **Strategic Transport Assessment** – It was noted that the Strategic Transport Assessment for the Local Plan had identified the need for a wider integrated transport service to accommodate the full scale of residential and employment growth planned on the Hoo Peninsula and information was requested as to when the Area-Wide Travel Plan would be available. The Assistant Director Regeneration informed the Committee that work on the Area Wide Travel Plan would be ongoing alongside work on the Local Plan. He advised that whilst HIF funding would unlock the provision of homes, other infrastructure was also required.
- **Funding target** – The Head of HIF and Regeneration confirmed that the current spend from the HIF budget was on target and funding had been used to undertake preliminary work on design and environmental assessments. The Assistant Director Regeneration confirmed that work on the HIF scheme was being value engineered throughout to ensure work remained within the budget available.
- **Local Plan Regulation 19** – The Assistant Director Regeneration confirmed that whilst the HIF team was a consultee on the Local Plan, no HIF funding was being used for Regulation 19 work on the Local Plan. However, progress on both were interlinked.
- **Phasing of works** – In response to a question as to the phasing of works on the HIF scheme, the Assistant Director Regeneration confirmed that officers were currently in the process of considering the phasing of the works. Whilst it was inevitable that there would be some disruption, officers were working with the Highways Authority to ensure that disruption was kept to a minimum. At this stage, it was too early to confirm the phasing of the various works.
- **Canal Road Rochester** – It was suggested that as a means of alleviating congestion, consideration be given to opening Canal Road, Rochester if only for a couple of hours each day.
- **Rail link** – The Assistant Director Regeneration confirmed that it was too early to provide information as to whether the rail link would be diesel or electric.

The Committee thanked officers for the update and in particular the way in which they had engaged with Ward Councillors on the HIF Scheme.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

392 Medway City Status Bid

Discussion:

The Committee received a report setting out information concerning Medway's intention to gain City Status recognition and setting out proposals to enter the Civic Competition launched to celebrate Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee in 2022.

The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive referred to the recent announcement that Medway had not been successful in being shortlisted for designation as City of Culture, but advised that multiple partners had since contacted the Council and given encouragement for the journey to continue and build on the cultural relationships that had been developed through the City of Culture bid process.

He outlined the timeline for the City Status bidding process and confirmed that a report would be submitted to Cabinet in November.

During discussion, it was suggested that officers undertake an assessment of the City of Culture bid with a view to identifying why the bid had been unsuccessful.

In response to a concern that Medway had a number of Universities with multiple campus sites and could benefit from its own designated 'Medway University', the Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive confirmed that the Vice Chancellors of the various Universities were extremely supportive of Medway and the City of Culture bid.

It was also suggested that within the City Status bid, there should be recognition that Medway encompasses five towns, each with its own unique identity.

The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive commented that many of the greatest cities were made up of a patchwork of individual communities and he confirmed that the City Status bid would be centred on the five towns of Medway, the Peninsula with its villages and communities across the breadth of Medway.

It was suggested that the City Status bid should include reference to Medway's Green Flag sites, Medway's history of both its woodland area and its Dockyard, other historic information and recognition of the excellent sporting and leisure facilities on offer in Medway including The Strand, the Ski Centre, Gillingham Ice Rink, Gillingham Football Club and Rochester Rugby Club.

Decision:

The Committee supported Medway's City Status bid and agreed to share Medway's story/narrative with residents and across networks to garner additional support for Medway's bid.

**393 Council Plan Performance Monitoring and Risk Register Review 2021/22
Quarter 1**

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, along with a review of the Council's Risk Register.

The following issues were discussed:

- **Green Flag Applications** – It was suggested that when mentioning the eight sites which were the subject of Green Flag applications, in addition to praising the work of Greenspaces and Medway Norse, the volunteers and various Friends Groups should also be recognised.
- **Climate Change Member Advisory Group** – It was noted that the Climate Change Member Advisory Group had not met for a while. The Assistant Director Front Line Services advised that a forward plan of meeting dates for the next year was in the process of being drawn up and she agreed to inform the Member concerned as to the date of the next meeting.

In addition, she informed the Committee that a Member Briefing on Climate Change was scheduled for 6.30pm on Wednesday 20 October 2021 commencing at 6.30pm.

- **Air Quality** – Concern was expressed as to the air quality in parts of Medway and in particular around schools with the emissions from buses.

In response, the Assistant Director Front Line Services informed the Committee that a report on the National Bus Strategy, Enhanced Partnerships and Bus Service Improvement Plans (BSIP) would be considered by Cabinet on 19 October 2021. If approved there would be enhanced partnership working with bus operators which would involve close monitoring of performance. In addition, there would be opportunities to bid for funding streams for improvements to the fleet to make the vehicles more environmentally friendly in line with the Council's Climate Change agenda.

The Committee was also informed that discussions were taking place concerning bus concessions. This was in response to concerns raised around elderly residents in rural communities getting to hospital appointments.

Decision:

The Committee:

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- a) noted the Quarter 1 2021/22 performance against the measures used to monitor progress against the Council's priorities.
- b) noted that the Assistant Director Front Line Services will inform the Member concerned as to the date of the next meeting of the Climate Change Advisory Member Group.

394 Petitions

Discussion:

The Committee received a report setting out petitions received by the Council which fell within the remit of this Committee including a summary of the response sent to the petition organiser by officers.

The Committee was informed that there had been one petition referral relating to the request for traffic calming measures in Marlborough Road and the petition organiser would be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) noted the petition responses and appropriate officer action in paragraphs 3 and 4 of the report.
- b) noted that there had been one petition referral relating to the request for traffic calming measures in Marlborough Road and the petition organiser would be invited to attend the next meeting of the Committee.

395 Work programme

Discussion:

The Committee received and discussed its current work programme.

It was suggested that due to the slippage in the timetable for the Medway Local Plan, this item be removed from the January 2022 list of items and placed on the 'dates to be determined' section of the Work Programme and that the Medway 2037 – Economic Development Strategy in Medway be added to the January agenda.

The Committee noted that at the agenda planning meeting on 16 September 2021, it had been suggested that the Lifecycle Report on the Highways Investment Network be removed from the Committee's Work Programme on the basis that this information was soon to be circulated by way of a briefing note.

Decision:

The Committee:

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- a) noted its current work programme and agreed that the Medway Local Plan be removed from the agenda for January 2022 and added to the list of reports where dates had yet to be determined.
- b) agreed that the report on Medway 2037 – Economic Development Strategy in Medway be added to the January agenda.
- c) agreed to the removal of the Lifecycle Report on the Highways Investment Network from the Committee’s Work Programme on the basis that this information had been circulated by way of a briefing note.
- d) noted that indicative dates were currently being obtained for the reports listed on the ‘dates to be determined’ section of the work programme.

Chairman

Date:

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