

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

Thursday, 13 January 2022

6.30pm to 8.45pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Browne, Curry, Etheridge (Chairman), Fearn (Vice-Chairman), Sylvia Griffin, Andy Stamp and Tranter

Substitutes: Councillor Sylvia Griffin for Councillor Williams

In Attendance: Councillor Howard Doe, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services
Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive
Louise Browne, Acting Head of Highways
Ruth Du-Lieu, Assistant Director, Front Line Services
Sunny Ee, Assistant Director Regeneration
Dee O'Rourke, Assistant Director, Culture & Community
Jon Pitt, Democratic Services Officer

SQW Consultants

Rob Bennett
James Kinnersly

VolkerHighways

Jerry Pert

599 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. Therefore, the apologies given reflects that informal agreement of reduced participants.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carr, Clarke, Hubbard, Mahil, Thompson, Rupert Turpin and Williams, with Councillor Sylvia Griffin substituting.

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600 Record of Meeting

A Member asked when additional information requested at the 2 December 2021 meeting of the Committee in relation to Medway Development Company would be provided to Members. The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive said that there were some sensitivities relating to this information and that it would be provided once this had been resolved.

The records of the meetings held on 14 October 2021 and 2 December 2021 were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

601 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

602 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 Curry declared an other interest in agenda item number 4 (Attendance of the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services) as he is the Chair of Medway Urban Greenspaces Forum. Councillor Curry remained in the room during discussion and consideration of the item.

603 Attendance of the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community 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 Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe, as set out below:

- Archives
- Armed Forces Covenant
- Events and Festivals
- Greenspaces
- Heritage

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- Leisure Services
- Sporting Legacy
- Theatres and Arts
- Tourism

The Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services, Councillor Doe responded to Members' questions and comments as follows:

- **Great Lines Heritage Park** – It was questioned what improvements could be expected at Great Lines Heritage Park in view of the investment in it, how this would be funded going forward and how the park would be used for events. The Portfolio Holder said that significant work had been undertaken to achieve Green Flag standards. It was anticipated that the park would be used for further events in the future, although the needs of neighbouring residents would need to be recognised.
- **Splashes Sports Centre** – Assurance was sought that the redevelopment of Splashes Sports Centre would not be funded by S106 contributions from developments that were not within the areas in the Splashes user catchment areas. A Member expressed concern that the Splashes redevelopment was not progressing to the timetable previously set out. Splashes had closed in Summer 2020 and should have opened again in January 2022 had work progressed to timetable. In July 2021, it had been stated that Splashes would reopen at the end of 2022 or in early 2023. The Member questioned why the report said work was progressing to timetable when this did not appear to be the case and said that the condition that Splashes had been found to be in raised questions about the condition of other Council owned leisure facilities.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Splashes redevelopment would predominantly be funded from capital expenditure, but that should other suitable sources of funding become available, they would be welcome. The Council was committed to the redevelopment. Available S106 contributions could be used to fund developments that would benefit the residents of a particular area. For Splashes, the user catchment area would be quite large. Architects had been commissioned who would ensure that the best value possible could be achieved from the investment.

In relation to the timescale for the redevelopment of Splashes, the Portfolio Holder said that it was difficult to be specific and that it was important to ensure that developments were of high quality and represented value for money. Consideration had been given as to whether the existing Splashes Leisure Centre could have been renovated but it had been concluded that this was not viable.

The Portfolio Holder advised that the Portfolio Holder for Resources reviewed condition surveys undertaken in relation to Council owned

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property and that no concerns had been identified in relation to other Council owned facilities. The expected lifespan of the former Splashes Leisure Centre had been 30 years.

The redevelopment was broadly proceeding to timetable. However, the timetable had needed to be revised as UK Power Networks had insisted on the removal of a sub-station at the site. There had been delays in this being removed and the Council had not felt the removal to be necessary, although this was not currently affecting the overall redevelopment timetable. It was challenging to be able to provide an accurate timetable, but work was being progressed as quickly as possible.

A Committee Member said that they had understood that consideration was going to be given to the provision of the health and wellbeing offer and that public engagement would be undertaken, but that this was not referenced in the Portfolio Holder's report. The Member also requested that the planned exhibition to inform the public about the new development should take place in Twydall as well as in Rainham. The Portfolio Holder agreed that the consultation exhibition could also take place in Twydall.

In response to a further Committee Member question, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Splashes redevelopment would be considered by the Planning Committee and that major public works would be channelled through the planning process.

- **Medway Events** – In response to a question about how events would evolve, the Portfolio Holder said this was a constant process and that tourism was recovering quite fast. New festivals were being considered, for example a food and drink festival. Events such as the Dickens Festival brought a significant number of people into the area and work to revive tourism was succeeding. The Sweeps Festival was becoming increasingly important at national and even international level. Work was ongoing to enhance the tourism offer and to bring events to a wider audience.

A Committee Member expressed concern that events taking place were all Rochester or Chatham-centric and that there was nothing taking place in the Twydall area. The Member felt local events were important as some people were not able to travel and she asked that consideration be given to events being held in other parts of Medway. The Member also raised concern about Levelling Up funding being used for projects that people would have to pay to attend. In response, the Portfolio Holder said that Medway had been recognised as an area of special interest by Arts Council England and that events were being run on a more collaborative basis. The £14.5 million of Levelling Up funding would go towards initiatives such as the Docking Station, which would be situated in the former Police Section House in Chatham Historic Dockyard. Money invested in the Brook Theatre was not all being used for activities that people would have to pay for, for example it was

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helping to develop small groups who met at the theatre and contributed to the wider creative effort, while the work being undertaken with the Arts Council would benefit the general public. In relation to the hosting of events, Rochester was a natural stage, but local events were being encouraged. A street party kit would be produced to make it easier for people looking to organise such events. The Council also already subsidised a number of activities, such as free swimming.

A Committee Member asked whether events such as the Sweeps Festival, Queen's Jubilee, Dickens Festival and street parties would be all be run as a single event. It was also requested that the Committee's thanks be offered to the various teams involved in supporting the work of the Portfolio Holder.

The Portfolio Holder said that the Jubilee would be a theme running through the other events. Falklands anniversary celebrations would also fall within this period. The Jubilee aspect would be highlighted wherever possible.

- **Archives** – In response to a question about how the pandemic would be reflected in the Medway Archives, the Portfolio Holder confirmed that this was being captured and that oral history projects were being considered.
- **Veterans Hub** – The Portfolio Holder said that the Veterans' Hub, which had been launched in November 2021, had seen the number of people involved increasing, with the Portfolio Holder having recently attended a Hub meeting at Fort Amherst. Feedback had been good from both the Army and from veterans.
- **Greenspaces** – While acknowledging the work of the Medway Norse team to make Medway's greenspaces welcoming, a Member highlighted that there were still a number of issues around the management of parks and a lack of funding. Assurance was sought that the Council's budget would take proper account of the needs of parks and greenspaces. The maintenance and management of trees was highlighted as an issue with this currently being reliant on volunteers. In response, the Portfolio Holder acknowledged budgetary constraints and said that there was an opportunity to look at the management of parks. He considered that there was a sound ecologically based plan being developed for the 2022/23 year and that this would be communicated to the public. Resources would be directed to ensure that work undertaken was done well but it was acknowledged that better results could be achieved with more resources.
- **The Queen's Platinum Jubilee and the summer Dickens Festival** - In response to a Member who raised concern about a date clash between summer Dickens Festival and celebrations to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, the Portfolio Holder said that the Festival would take place on 4 and 5 June 2022 as planned but that it would have a jubilee twist. The development of the Jubilee celebrations was currently a work in

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progress, including the installation of a large screen to broadcast events taking place in London.

- **Recovery of the Tourist Sector** – In response to a question about the recovery of tourism in Medway following the pandemic, the Portfolio Holder said that tourism was recovering well. The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive added that a yearly report was produced by Visit Kent and the Council also had its own figures for specific events, for example there had been an increase of 50,000 in attendance at the Medway Christmas Market for 2021. It was agreed that figures would be circulated to the Committee outside the meeting.

In response to a question about the impact of tourism on Medway and the need for it to be sustainable, the Portfolio Holder acknowledged that need. He said that the Council needed to make the best use of its assets without letting them deteriorate. In relation to events in country parks, if it was considered that if they were being overused then other ways of running events would be considered.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) Thanked the Portfolio Holder for his attendance at the Committee.
- b) Requested that Visit Kent and Medway's own tourist visitor figures be circulated to the Committee.
- c) Noted that the Portfolio Holder had agreed that the Splashes consultation exhibition due to be held in Rainham would also be held in Twydall.

604 Highway Infrastructure Contract - Annual Review

Discussion:

This report presented the annual review of the Highway Infrastructure Contract between Medway Council and VolkerHighways. This covered the period from August 2020 to July 2021. The contract had commenced in 2017 for a period of five years, with the possibility of five single year extensions, depending on performance. VolkerHighways had achieved the level required for a third year extension which meant that the contract was currently scheduled to end on 31 July 2024.

It was noted that the maintenance of the highway and its assets was a statutory duty and that the current value of the highways assets was just over £2 billion with the land being valued at just under £3 billion. The intention was for the next annual update to be reported to the Committee in January 2023.

The following was discussed:

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- **Highways Funding** – A Committee Member expressed concern that highways funding provided by the Department for Transport was reducing year on year and that there was a shortfall in Medway. The Acting Head of Highways responded that there was reduced funding available nationally. Covid-19 had been a factor and it was not yet clear how funding would recover. She advised that there had been no reduction in the revenue or capital budget available until the current year. The maintenance of infrastructure would be a challenge in view of the funding constraints. Funding was prioritised to ensure highways were kept in a safe condition, which was a statutory duty. Remaining funding would be targeted to achieve the best outcomes possible. Over the last few years, investment had been targeted at the unclassified network. This had ensured that the national average had been met for classification. Although 17% of unclassified roads still needed maintenance, improvements had been made by using available resources effectively. The amount of funding required nationally was so large it was not clear how it would be resolved in the long term. The funding deficit for maintenance had reduced from around £41 million to £32 million.
- **Designated design life** – It was confirmed that there was not a list of designated design life for every carriageway and it was not known when every carriageway had been built. A rolling programme of condition surveys was undertaken for the full road network and the structural condition of every road was monitored. There was awareness of the maintenance backlog but securing the funding required was challenging.
- **Electric Vehicle Fleet** – A Member asked when 100% of the vehicle fleet would be electric. The Acting Head of Highways said that there were currently three electric vehicles in the fleet and that alternative fuel sources were being considered. The VolkerHighways representative added that battery technology and vehicle range was not yet good enough for use in larger vehicles. Vehicles were being trialled on an ongoing basis.
- **Medway Tunnel** – In relation to the Medway Tunnel and Road Infrastructure Scheme, it was asked how the £4.9 million of funding was broken down. The Acting Head of Highways said that the final programme was currently being put together ready to go out to tender. Much of the funding would be used within the tunnel but there would also be a retaining wall in Pier Road and the road linkages to the tunnel would be improved. A breakdown of the expenditure would be circulated to the Committee following the meeting. In response to a further question, it was confirmed that Challenge Fund money had to be spent by 2024 and plans were currently on track to meet this, although there were a number of challenges, such as sourcing materials. A Life Cycle Plan would be run in relation to the Medway Tunnel so that the impact of the money invested could be ascertained.

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- **Highways Infrastructure Funding (HIF)** – in relation to the HIF for the Hoo Peninsula, the new roads would need maintaining and new housing would require the construction of further roads. The Member requested the undertaking of a Sustainability Appraisal for the HIF and questioned how the maintenance costs of these extra roads would be funded. In response, the Acting Head of Highways said that HIF was not delivered out of highways funding. She said that roads were only adopted once they met certain criteria, which ensured that good quality assets were adopted. The Department for Transport Funding formula was based upon road length, but new roads would not attract much extra funding as they represented a small percentage of the overall network. There was a need to maximise the use of existing resources and bid for any new resources available.

The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive added that as regeneration progressed there would be additional roads requiring maintenance but quality was assessed prior to the adoption of the roads. HIF would see £86 million of expenditure on roads and the Council would want to ensure that roads were built to a high quality to ensure longevity. Funding from the DFT for the existing road network needed to be considered as well as developer Section 106 contributions. The Council's Asset Management approach would be adopted. This was ongoing work and while there would not be enough funding to do everything, the approach was about maximising use of resources and opportunities for funding, ensuring that all work undertaken was to a high standard to ensure longevity. The Assistant Director, Regeneration added that everything would be built to a suitable standard for adoption.

- **Flooding and Drainage** – A Member asked for an update about the ongoing flooding issue and the resulting congestion near to the Asda store in Pier Road. The Acting Head of Highways considered that headway was being made with Southern Water in addressing the issue but that it required significant expenditure. There was now a better understanding of the issue. Highways were engaging with Southern Water but work to address the issue was not understood to be imminent. A further update would be provided to the Committee outside the meeting.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) Noted the contents of the report and the Annual Review for Year 4 of the HIC, as set out in Appendix 1.
- b) Requested that a breakdown of the £4.9 million of Department for Transport Challenge Funding be provided to the Committee, with particular reference to the amount to be spent on the Medway Tunnel improvements.

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- c) Requested that an update be provided to the Committee in relation to the addressing of flooding and drainage issues in the vicinity of the Asda store in Pier Road, Gillingham.

605 Medway 2037 Strategy Refresh

Discussion:

A presentation was given to the Committee by representatives from SQW Consultants in relation to the Medway 2037 Strategy refresh. The key points of the presentation were as follows:

- SQW Consultants had been engaged in the Strategy refresh since October 2021 and had undertaken an initial analysis. The Strategy development was about refreshing the existing core Medway 2035 Strategy rather than starting again.
- Key elements of Medway 2037 would include the Skills and Employability Action Plan, the Innovation Strategy, the Town Centre Strategy and the River Strategy, the latter of which would be a new strategy.
- The Strategy would aim to provide space for projects to evolve whilst providing a framework for the Council to work with partner organisations.
- The aim would be to create a comprehensive suite of strategy documents that were aligned with each other and to co-ordinate action plans. The refresh would be used as an opportunity to embed key themes.
- Climate change would be an important element of the new Strategy with the previous 2018 version having made little reference to the aspiration for net zero carbon emissions.
- Other key themes would include Levelling Up, understanding how Medway can position itself to secure further funding, addressing the impacts of Covid and raising the profile of Medway.
- It was proposed that innovation be removed as a standalone priority as this was a cross-cutting theme that did not sit in isolation.
- In relation to skills and employability, consideration needed to be given in relation to what had worked for Medway in recent years.
- There was a need to look at how to foster innovation and how the Council could work as both a direct deliverer and as a facilitator, including the fostering of relationships with businesses looking to move to Medway and how to help businesses to tap into local expertise, such as the Medway universities.
- Officer teams across the Council were being engaged and feedback would be welcome over the next four to six weeks.

Following the presentation, Committee Members were invited to give their initial views on the development of Medway 2037. The following points were raised:

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River access – Noting that there was not currently a single public access slipway to the river within Medway, a Committee Member asked how this would be addressed. The SQW Consultants noted the suggestion and said that the current process was about listening to ideas rather than making specific commitments.

Outcome and Strategy Development – A Committee Member said that it was important to get the message across about the importance of the Strategy and to be clear about the outcomes that would be achieved and what issues there were that needed to be overcome. It was suggested that it would be helpful for an update report to be presented to the Committee every six months. The Member also noted that the importance of Chatham Docks and of clearing up pollution.

Uniqueness of Medway – A Member said that the Strategy needed to be clear about the uniqueness of Medway, its assets, geography, skills and the importance of the River Medway, including a full analysis of the advantages and opportunities that the river could deliver. Consideration needed to be given to the sectors where Medway had an advantage and how these advantages could be effectively levered. The Member considered that the previous lack of a River Strategy had been an issue. Another Member agreed how important the river was to Medway's past and future and supported the development of the River Strategy.

Key themes – A Member agreed that innovation was a cross-cutting theme and that climate change was an important consideration. Issues such as deprivation, anti-social behaviour, poverty, housing needs and how to address inequality, in order to improve Medway as a whole, also needed to be considered. Town centres and local shopping parades needed to be prioritised and consideration given how to increase footfall and engage communities. The Member was concerned about the implementation and delivery of the Strategy including whether there were adequate human and financial resources available to facilitate this. There was a need to acknowledge local history and heritage and to use this to inform the background to the Strategy. The importance of linking the Strategy to other Council Strategies was also highlighted.

Creation of a new marina - A Member said that Medway needed a new marina and suggested that this could be located at the eastern end of Medway. This would allow larger boats that were bringing goods from continental Europe to land. Such boats could not access the existing marinas in Medway. Enabling these boats to land locally would bring new trade opportunities to Medway. This would also help facilitate the development of supporting industries.

Summary - The Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive said that the discussion had been a useful exercise in policy development, which would help shape the strategies as they were brought forward. Medway Council had a large number of strategies and a list of these would be provided to the Committee. The Director highlighted that the work was about refreshing existing strategies, building upon the success seen so far and making Medway even

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more successful. A theme highlighted by Members had been around respecting the character and nature of the place of Medway. He acknowledged the importance of access onto the river. There was a need to ensure the work undertaken in relation to the Strategy was based on evidence and fact. The Strategy would be brought back to the Committee for further input at a future meeting.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) Requested that a list of key Council strategies be circulated to the Committee.
- b) Noted that Councillor Tranter would provide officers with information he had gathered that would inform development of the Medway 2037 Strategy.
- c) An annual briefing note would be provided to the Committee on the development and implementation of Medway 2037.

606 Work programme

Discussion:

The Committee received a report setting out the current work programme.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) Noted the current work programme.
- b) Agreed the recommendations of the pre-agenda meeting set out at paragraph 3.3 to the report.
- c) Noted that a report in relation to Declaration of Four Elms Hill Air Quality Management Area – Action Plan would be considered by the Committee at its June 2022 meeting.

Chairman

Date:

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