

## **COUNCIL**

**25 NOVEMBER 2010**

### **CITY STATUS**

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Rodney Chambers, Leader of the Council

Report from Richard Hicks, Assistant Director Customer First, Leisure, Culture, Democracy and Governance

#### **Summary**

This report seeks Council's support for a bid for City Status for Medway once the competition is announced as part of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee celebrations in 2012.

#### **1. Budget and Policy Framework**

- 1.1 Securing City Status for Medway would contribute towards the achievement of many of the stated aims and objectives within the Sustainable Communities Strategy, Medway's Cultural Strategy and the Economic Development Strategy.
- 1.2 Cabinet has referred this matter to Council, given the potentially significant impact on the area.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1 Medway submitted bids for City Status in 2000 as part of the Millennium Celebrations (Brighton and Hove, Wolverhampton and Inverness were granted City Status in that year) and in 2002 in celebration of the Queen's Golden Jubilee (Preston and Newport were accorded City Status). Both Medway bids attracted cross-party support, but were ultimately unsuccessful.
- 2.2 Rochester acquired City Status in the early part of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century and following local government reorganisation in 1974 the Queen permitted the historic city to continue to style itself as the City of Rochester through Special Letters Patent. The Queen was petitioned for Rochester's City Status to be extended to Rochester Upon Medway and this was granted in 1982, but Rochester Upon Medway City Council ceased to exist as an area of local government on 1 April 1998. The Policy and Resources Committee of that Council decided in January 1998 (minute 1197 refers) not to appoint Charter Trustees, a necessary step to retain City Status for Rochester. This meant, as confirmed by the (then) Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Lord Chancellor's Department that Rochester's official City Status was "extinguished". They also made it clear that a retrospective application could not be made by Medway Council on behalf of the former City Council to appoint Charter Trustees.

- 2.3 In 2012 the Queen will be celebrating her Diamond Jubilee, 60 years as Britain's ruling monarch. A "nationwide celebration" will be held to mark the occasion and the celebrations will start at the end of May 2012 as the Olympic torch makes its way through Britain before the opening of the Olympic Games in London on 27 July.
- 2.4 The previous Government announced that as part of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations, applications could be made by local authorities on behalf of towns to become a city in 2012. The Coalition Government has confirmed that the competition is expected to be launched at the end of 2010.
- 2.5 The Council held a high profile Conference in March, The Making of Medway. The Conference celebrated the transformation of Medway since the closure of the Naval Dockyard in 1984 and a range of guest speakers encouraged Medway to seek City Status, not least Sir Terry Farrell, International Architect, whose speech was entitled Medway - 21<sup>st</sup> century city, which built upon the themes of his earlier work "5 towns make a City".
- 2.6 Medway's Cultural Strategy 2009 -14 had already identified 2012 as a year of celebrations for Medway, given the Queen's Diamond Jubilee; the Olympics, with Medway Park, our regional centre of sporting excellence, providing a training camp facility and hosting the British Transplant Games; 2012 being the year when the bid for World Heritage Site status for the Dockyard and its defences is submitted, should it be successful in securing the UK nomination; the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Royal Engineers' establishment in Medway and Dickens's bicentenary.
- 2.7 Taken in the round, Medway has a compelling case for city status, and given the significant advances that have been made over the last decade, would be considered a strong contender by any objective analysis.

### **3. Medway's Case**

- 3.1 Medway's bid for city status is being progressed under the banner City of Medway – rich heritage, great future. This recognises the area's outstanding heritage:
- the second oldest cathedral in the country
  - the tallest and finest Norman castle in the UK
  - the world's best preserved Dockyard and defences dating from the age of sail, exemplifying Chatham's place at the forefront of British naval history for centuries (2012 will also be 250 years since the naming of Nelson's flagship HMS Victory, built at Chatham Dockyard)
  - the Textus Roffensis, described by the British Library as "one of the country's national treasures"
- and the area's vibrant future:
- 2012 marks a decade since the Queen inaugurated the Universities at Medway – Medway currently has 10,000 students studying at the four universities, with that number set to grow to around 15,000 over the next three to five years
  - the £86m Mid Kent College campus has recently opened
  - Medway has a burgeoning reputation as a host for major sporting events – the Modern Pentathlon World Cup this year and the Modern Pentathlon European Championships next year
  - a league football team

- an impressive array of festivals (over 20 days of free festivals each year) and an aspiration to be seen as the cultural city of the region
- Medway is the largest urban area in the South East outside London, is strategically positioned mid-way between the capital and the continent, and with the advent of HS1, the journey time to the capital is 34 minutes from Strood station (HS1 calls at all five Medway train stations)
- Medway is uniquely placed as a gateway between Britain and the Continent and is already a partner in a number of trans-European bids and projects. Medway is the ideal launch pad for Britain's economic recovery.
- Medway's regeneration continues apace, and a recent Evening Standard (full page) article extolled the virtues of Medway as "Fast trains and waterfront living".

Taken together, by any yardstick, Medway is a city in all but name, and 2012 presents an outstanding opportunity for Medway to receive that honour.

#### **4. The Benefits of City Status**

- 4.1 There can be no guarantees around the benefits of City Status, but others have seen significant economic impact. Since securing City Status Wolverhampton has benefited from £2bn of inward investment, Newport has secured 2,000 new jobs, Sunderland has seen Nike, Nissan and Barclays locate there and Brighton and Hove's tourism spend has increased from around £400m to £700m. Clearly, the country is currently experiencing a different economic climate, and there can be no guarantees that Medway would receive benefits of this order, but without doubt there would be economic benefits to be gained, evidenced by the significant backing the Council has received from the business community.
- 4.2 There are also intangible benefits to be gained from City Status. City Status presents a unifying opportunity for the five towns, villages and rural areas to come together under the auspices of the City of Medway. Medway's identity has been defined by this patchwork of communities and the bid presents an opportunity to celebrate this, making it unique amongst our competitors.
- 4.3 A bid for City Status would certainly raise Medway's profile, enhancing its reputation and ensuring it is a place that is recognised, helping to put Medway on the map.

#### **5. The Competitors for City Status**

- 5.1 Those that have declared as bidding for City Status in 2012 are:

Ballymena, County Antrim  
 Blackpool  
 Bolton  
 Colchester  
 Croydon  
 Gateshead, Tyne and Wear  
 Ipswich  
 Luton  
 Middlesbrough  
 Milton Keynes

Perth  
Reading  
Wrexham.

## **6. Support for Medway's Bid for City Status**

- 6.1 As part of the campaign for City Status, flags and pennants have been produced for people to fly the flag for Medway and sign up to the bid. These have been made available to primary schools through the "Our Medway" project and at events over the summer period.
- 6.2 Survey work undertaken to gauge views on City Status has resulted in a finding of 67% support, 19% undecided, 10% against and 4% with no opinion.
- 6.3 The KM Group is backing Medway's bid, as are the following businesses, to name but some:  
BAE Systems  
MHS Homes  
Asda  
Sainsburys  
Christian Salvesen  
Swain Haulage  
Hochiki Europe  
Peel Ports  
Nordic  
Ward Homes  
Arriva.
- 6.4 The bid is also being supported by the Lord Lieutenant of Kent, the University for the Creative Arts, the University of Greenwich, the University of Kent, Canterbury Christchurch University, Locate in Kent, Thames Gateway Kent Partnership, Thames Gateway Chamber of Commerce, Kent County Council and a number of neighbouring district councils.
- 6.5 Presentations have been given to a wide range of community groups and organisations and have been well received, resulting in grass roots support for the bid.
- 6.6 Celebrity endorsements have also been secured from Status Quo, Will Young, The Saturdays and Diversity.

## **7. Cabinet – 9 November 2010**

- 7.1 The Cabinet considered this report on 9 November 2010 and:
- Endorsed the bid for City Status for Medway and approved the approach set out within the report and;
  - Recommended the report to Council, seeking cross-party support for a bid for City Status for Medway once the competition is announced.

## **8. Next Steps**

- 8.1 Work will continue to engage Medway's many and diverse communities in the debate about City Status, and community views will be reflected in the bid.

- 8.2 A programme of briefings for staff will take place to share perspectives and to enable staff to be ambassadors for the bid.
- 8.3 Once the competition is announced, Medway's submission will be produced, together with proposals to secure maximum publicity and coverage for it.
- 8.4 Further work will be undertaken to develop Medway's Year of Celebrations in 2012.

## 9. Risk Management

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk
Medway's City Status bid is unsuccessful.	Current high aspiration levels will be dampened, with resultant impacts on communities.	2012 is a Year of Celebration for Medway, and that is the focus of the bid. Should the bid be unsuccessful, there will be a range of events and festivals to sustain community support.
Opportunity cost of management time	The current work on City Status is being progressed by a small group of officers without dedicated support, and is being undertaken in addition to existing responsibilities.	Wherever possible, opportunities to integrate the promotion of Medway's City Status bid alongside existing activities that are taking place for ongoing Council business will be taken.

## 10. Financial and Legal Implications

- 10.1 Already dubbed the "austerity bid", Medway's expenditure on City Status has been low to date, at a cost of £11,100 from a budget for 2010/11 of £25,000. Whilst spend has been kept to minimal levels, there will be further costs in making the submission, albeit these will be kept to a minimum.
- 10.2 Funding will be required for Medway's Year of Celebrations in 2012, but this will be considered as part of the budget setting process for 2012/13.
- 10.3 The decision on the award of City Status is entirely at the discretion of the Queen, and there are no formulaic criteria.

## 11. Recommendation

- 11.1 The Cabinet recommends this report to Council, seeking cross-party support for a bid for City Status for Medway once the competition is announced.

**Lead officer contact**

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**Background papers**

Finance and Performance Management Overview and Scrutiny Committee Report – City Status, 1 September 2004.