

COUNCIL

25 NOVEMBER 2010

REPORT ON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ACTIVITY

Report from: Neil Davies, Chief Executive

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Summary

This report provides a summary of the work of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees since the last report to Council on 14 October 2010.

1. Policy and Budget Framework

1.1 The Council's constitution allows for reports on overview and scrutiny (O&S) activity to be reported to Council meetings.

2. Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2.1 4 November 2010

2.1.1 Work Programme

Members' attention was drawn to the fact that Adult Learning had been added to the Assistant Director, Organisational Service's remit and as such was now within the terms of reference of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

It was noted that the committee would be briefed on this new area of responsibility before holding the Portfolio Holder to account.

2.1.2 Annual review of risk management strategy and 6 monthly review of the Council's Corporate Business Risk Register

It was reported that the Council's Management Team had reviewed the risks and updated them. Members were concerned that SR 14, delivering radical innovation, was being given insufficient priority and that the council should be looking at its ability to affect change and the consequences for the council of not doing that.

Members requested assurances that the contract register was being properly assessed, and officers agreed to bring a report to the next meeting on the contract register and the forward procurement plan.

2.1.3 Treasury Management Strategy mid-year review report 2010/2011

The committee heard that the council aimed to achieve the optimum return on investments and in the current economic climate it had been considered appropriate to keep investments short term and only invest in highly credit rated financial institutions.

Officers reported that interest earned on investments is currently around 0.88%, however, the budget was predicated on earning 2%. This had inevitably led to a shortfall in income, however, if necessary at year end, money could be set aside in a rate equalisation account to mitigate the shortfall.

Members expressed concern in any investment in the Spanish bank Santander, given the economic problems Spain was facing. Reassurance was given that the council had invested in Santander UK, which was a separate company within the Santander Group and that Santander only had about 17% of its interests in Spain. It was noted that Sector, the council's investment advisors, rated Santander UK as a UK bank as had the previous government.

3. Children and Adults Overview and Scrutiny Committee

3.1 20 October 2010

3.1.1 Work Programme

The attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services scheduled for the April 2011 meeting was removed from the work programme, as adult learning was now within the remit of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

3.1.2. Child Development Centre – update on future location

Members were updated on progress being made in relocating the Child Development Centre. Members considered two sites and supported the former school site, although raised concerns in relation to transport, increased rent prices, the need for ongoing consultation and the need for adaptations to ensure the suitability of the building. The Cabinet were recommended to approve the use of the former school site in Strood for the Child Development Centre service and recommended officers to work with Arriva to ensure bus routes, frequencies of service and vehicles used would be suitable for users of the Centre.

3.1.3. Transition between years 6 and 7

Members commented on the issues and best practice examples in transition between years 6 and 7, and the Chairman of the 21st Century Schools Partnership Group explained that Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) visited feeder primary schools to meet with staff and pupils to work towards a smooth transition for pupils.

3.1.4. Barnsole schools – location of new school buildings

Members considered the options for the future location of the school buildings and supported the suggestion of an increase in published admission numbers to 90 pupils. Members also discussed various road safety measures that could be considered.

Option A, which included the relocation of both entrances to Sturdee Avenue was recommended to the Procurement Board to recommend to Cabinet. It was requested that emphasis be placed on road safety and that measures should include a controlled crossing and barriers on the pavement. The committee requested briefing notes updating them on progress.

3.1.5. Medway Academy Programme Update

The Director of Children and Adults and the Head of School Organisation and Student Services gave a presentation, which provided the committee with further information about converter academies and free schools. Officers then responded to Members' queries in relation to:

- standards at converter academies and free schools
- budget challenges
- special educational need provision and admission procedures
- accountability to the Young People Learning Alliance and
- work with academies in providing independent advice on 14-19 education.

A briefing note was requested providing information on the White Paper concerning new ways of working and the reform of school systems, once it is published. It was requested that, when officers bring reports on admission arrangements in future, these reports include information about academies proposing changes to their admission criteria and the impact of such changes. Officers were requested to evaluate the potential impact of the change in school hours, which some academies were adopting, on the Council's School Transport Policy, and if necessary report to Cabinet on any revisions needed.

3.1.6. Redesignation of Rivermead School – Outcome of Consultation

Members were informed that, since the report had been published, five further responses had been received, four in support of the proposals and one against, although the latter appeared to be due to a misunderstanding of the proposal. The committee recommended the

Cabinet to change the designation of Rivermead School from a maintained special school with a designation as a hospital school to a community special school by means of a prescribed alteration.

3.1.7. Sure Start Children's Centres

The Strategy Manager for Early Years gave a presentation to the Committee on the progress and impact of the Sure Start Programme. A Member of the committee made a request that GPs should be encouraged to inform patients of the service and provision available at Sure Start. The Chairman was asked to write to all the Sure Start Children's Centres in Medway to state the committee's recognition and appreciation for the work they do.

4. Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

4.1 11 November 2010

4.1.1 Supporting Carers

The committee considered progress on support for carers since the last themed meeting on the subject held on 23 March 2010. Officers responded to questions and a number of carers present participated in the meeting and shared their experiences/concerns. It was agreed that communication still needed to be improved to enable carers to take advantage of what was already on offer in terms of support.

A one-off task group was set up by the committee to meet early in the New Year to consider the issues raised at the meeting (together with some issues raised in writing by carers) and to look at performance issues relating to those organisations commissioned to provide services to carers.

A number of briefing notes were requested to respond to the issues raised at the meeting. The Director of Children and Adults undertook to investigate a request that Members of the committee should attend future meetings of the Carers' Partnership Board (in small numbers).

Medway NHS Foundation Trust would be requested to consider advertising the fact that concessions on car parking at the hospital were available to carers in certain circumstances.

The Carer's Partnership Board will be recommended to prioritise the actions to be undertaken on carers' support and to provide a new timeline for the committee.

5. Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee

5.1 16 November 2010

5.1.1 Petitions

A petition was referred to the committee for consideration asking the council to ensure the owner of a tall hedge is made to reduce its height in accordance with obligations stated in the anti-social behaviour legislation (Part 8) and to maintain it in the future. At the meeting petitioners also requested that, as there were so many people wishing to make a formal complaint about the hedge, the committee considers this case as a special circumstance and asks officers to waive the full fee for each property when making the formal application.

After hearing from the lead petitioner and ward councillor, together with information on the relevant legislation, the committee agreed to request the Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture to reduce the fees for these applications to £420 for the first application and £20 for each subsequent application relating to the hedge, due to the special circumstances of this case.

5.1.2 Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services

The Portfolio Holder gave a presentation and answered questions on:

- Road safety
- Integrated transport
- Waste services
- Highways and highways winter services
- Medway Tunnel
- Residents' parking schemes
- Planned road maintenance.

5.1.3 Highway Winter Service – Task Group review

The committee considered a task group report accompanied by a draft policy document and plan on the future provision of gritting and snow clearance services in Medway, together with improved communication with the public about the proposed services. The Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture was recommended to implement the policy and plan 2010 – 2017 as set out in the report under his delegated authority.

5.1.4 The effectiveness and future of Partners and Communities Together (PACTs) in Medway – task group review

The Member task group introduced the review with a presentation setting out the main points of evidence, findings and recommendations.

Actions that had already been identified to secure the future development of PACTs were set out alongside additional recommendations from the task group. The main conclusions drawn by the task group were that PACTs were one of many existing and evolving methods being used by the Police and other agencies to achieve community engagement. Overall, the task group believed that PACTs were a good way of bringing residents together to develop priorities and action plans at neighbourhood level.

The review document will be reported to Cabinet on 30 November with a set of recommendations for onward referral to the Kent Police Authority and the Community Safety Partnership.

5.1.5 Work Programme

Members were advised that a report on the Local Transport Plan 3 would now be considered at the meeting on 10 February 2011.

Background papers

None

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