

COUNCIL

13 JANUARY 2011

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 25 November 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 15 December 2010

2.1.1. Work programme

Members noted the work undertaken by all overview and scrutiny committees in the last cycle and to be considered at the next cycle of meetings.

2.1.2. Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Customer First and Corporate Services

The Committee noted that Councillor Janice Bamber was unable to attend the meeting to be held to account due to personal circumstances.

2.1.3. Licensing Act 2003 Review of Council Statement of Licensing Policy

The Assistant Director of Housing and Corporate Services advised Members that the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill had been published on 14 December, which could mean that the Statement of Licensing Policy would have to be revised again to take into account any new requirements within the legislation.

The Cabinet was asked to recommend the proposed changes to the Licensing Policy, as set out in the report, to Council as part of the council's policy framework.

2.1.4. Introduction to the Adult Learning Service

The Service Manager gave a presentation on the courses on offer at MACLS and advised the Committee that the adult learning service was breaking even financially with £2.5 million each year received in grants from the government and other income generated to provide the services.

2.1.5. Contract Register and the Forward Procurement Plan

The Assistant Director of Housing and Corporate Services gave an overview of the importance of the Council's Forward Procurement Plan and Contracts register and how its uptake and use could ensure the achievement of effective contract monitoring.

Members were advised that the register would now list every contract over £15,000 value. Members asked about schedules for each specific project as they wished them to contain clear start and finish dates and other indicators to ensure successful monitoring of progress of the contract.

2.1.6. Quarter 2 Council Plan Monitoring

The Committee noted the performance for Quarter 2 Council Plan Monitoring 2010/2011 and the proposed process for developing the Council Plan 2011-2014.

The Chief Finance Officer responded to Members' questions which included a request that officers re-consider the decision-making process to re-house someone on the basis that it was suggested some people may be claiming they suffer from domestic abuse in order to gain priority for re-housing.

In relation to NI 67 (Timeliness of child protection reviews) the Committee raised concern about the reductions in agency attendance at conferences and less availability of documentation, which was impacting on risk assessments. Members, therefore, referred this issue to the Medway Children's Trust to request agencies to address this issue.

2.1.7. Capital Budget Monitoring 2010/2011

The Committee noted the spending and funding forecasts summarised in the report. Members requested that officers investigate the possibility of early exit from contracts for maintaining the three Local Management Agreement properties, which the council managed on behalf of English Heritage (Rochester Castle, Upnor Castle and Temple Manor) and the consequences for those buildings and the council should this go ahead.

Officers undertook to investigate a query regarding the “Twydall Accessibility Scheme” to confirm whether this showed £30,000 of funds remaining.

2.1.8. Revenue Budget Monitoring 2010/2011

The Chief Finance Officer advised that at present there was a forecast shortfall for the 2010/2011 revenue budget of £339,000. The council was committed to funding the shortfall and he was optimistic of achieving a balanced budget by the end of March 2011.

The Chief Finance Officer emphasised that children’s social care continued to be a large financial pressure for the council, as the number of referrals continued to increase. Another area of concern was unsubsidised accommodation for particularly vulnerable young people. This was because the council was restricted in the amount of money it could recover from the government for individuals living in this type of accommodation and claiming benefit in Medway. Work had started to investigate and challenge these claims.

The forecast outturn position for 2010/2011 and proposed management action to reduce the potential deficit was noted.

2.1.9. Capital and Revenue Budget 2011/2012

The Chief Finance Officer explained that the council’s financial settlement had been announced on 13 December and officers were working through the document to identify whether existing grants remained, had been deleted or subsumed into the general budget.

He explained that the formula grant from the government had been predicted to be £90 million but this had been announced as £86 million so the council would receive £4 million less than indicated in the report.

Members recognised they would have to wait for the full details to emerge once officers had gone through the settlement document. Some Members felt that officers should consider removing the Members’ discretionary funds (£156,000) used for ward improvements and it was agreed that this would be considered at the next meeting.

The report on the draft capital and revenue budget position for 2011/2012 was noted and the programme forwarded to individual overview and scrutiny committees.

3. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

3.1 14 December 2010

3.1.1. Work programme

A presentation on the government's education white paper, 'the importance of teaching' will be made at the 20 January 2011 meeting and a report on proposed School Admission Arrangements for 2012 will also be considered.

The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Monitoring Group was disbanded with the committee agreed to receive updates in future.

A countering bullying task group was set up, with objectives agreed at the meeting, to carry out some preparatory work ahead of a themed meeting on 1 March 2011.

A briefing note was requested on facilities and provision at Rivermead School to be circulated before the next meeting.

3.1.2. Quarter 2 – Council Plan Monitoring

The committee noted the report on the update on performance against indicators and actions agreed in the Council Plan for quarter two (July to September 2010).

Further information was requested on the independent review into vocational education, when published and for a briefing note regarding work carried out by Young Inspectors and Young Commissioners.

3.1.3. Children's Services Assessment

The Assistant Director, Commissioning and Strategy explained that the judgement for Medway by Ofsted, which was 'performing well' was an improvement on the previous year where the service had been judged as adequate. She highlighted areas where progress had been made and areas still requiring improvement and explained that action plans would be developed to address those areas.

Members thanked the Director of Children and Adults and her staff for achieving the improved Ofsted judgement and raised concerns about future provision of Sure Start centres, childminding, performance in English and Mathematics and sports provision.

The Director of Children and Adults responded to these concerns and explained the actions taken by the Council to mitigate them.

4. Health and Adult Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee

4.1. 16 December 2010

4.1.1. Attendance of Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care

The Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care gave a presentation and answered questions on

- The annual performance assessment for adult social care
- Adult social care budget
- Personalisation and self directed support
- Carers support
- Equipment and adaptations for people with a disability
- Delayed discharges
- Mental health
- The Joint Strategy for Older People
- New dementia services
- Extra care housing
- Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- A number of public health campaigns
- General Practitioner health checks
- The Public Health White Paper

4.1.2. Annual Performance Assessment – Adult Social Care

Members were advised that as a result of the annual review of performance of adult social care the Council had achieved a rating of 'performing well'.

Officers responded to Members' questions and explained the changes to the performance regime which meant that in future, although adult social care would still be regulated by the Care Quality Commission, there would no longer be an Annual Performance Assessment.

4.1.3. Medway's Strategy for Voluntary and Community Sector

The Committee, having put forward a wide range of questions to the Director of Children and Adults forwarded the Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy to the Cabinet for approval. A briefing note was requested in response to the questions asked at the meeting along with a glossary of terms used in the Strategy. Members also welcomed an offer by the Acting Chief Executive of NHS Medway to investigate the possibility of offering the use of Healthy Living Centres in the day or evening for the voluntary and community sector as meeting venues.

4.1.3. Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults

Members noted progress with regards to the appointment of a consultant to deliver an independent performance review of safeguarding vulnerable adults in Medway. They were advised that the safeguarding

vulnerable adults task group will meet in the New Year to discuss with the consultant and officers a proposed action plan.

4.1.4. Quarter 2 Council Plan Monitoring

The Committee noted the performance for Quarter 2 and the areas identified for remedial action along with the proposed process for developing the Council Plan 2011-2014.

4.1.5. Work programme

Members were informed that there would be a report to the 25 January 2011 meeting on the Public Health White Paper. Further Department of Health documents and the vision for adult social care would be the subject of an evening briefing early in the New Year.

A guide to scrutinising the joint commissioning of health and social care services was noted along with a letter from NHS Medway relating to managing demand and notes of a visit to the Disablement Centre in Medway.

Each Medway NHS trust will be invited in turn to attend the Committee to discuss the outcome of their registration process with the Care Quality Commission.

Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee

5.1 21 December 2010

5.1.1. At the commencement of the meeting the Leader of the Labour group requested an update from the Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture in relation to future funding of the Chatham bus facility to be communicated to him by email.

5.1.2. Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services

The Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services addressed the committee outlining the main achievements within his portfolio under the following headings:

- Medway Park
- Leisure
- Castles
- Guildhall Museum
- Eastgate House
- Theatres
- Festivals and events
- Greenspaces

Members questioned him on:

- Sponsorship for the forthcoming modern Pentathlon at Medway Park
- Teams signed up to use the facilities at Medway Park during the Olympics in 2012
- Rochester Christmas market
- The Strand
- Disabled facilities in Medway for a Paralympic team
- Financial outcome of castle concerts
- Upkeep and maintenance of the Brook Theatre

5.1.3. Capital and Revenue budget 2011/2012

The Corporate Accountant introduced the report asking the committee to consider the initial capital and revenue budgets and to identify any further opportunities for savings.

Members requested that in the light of the current national financial debate the timing of budget meetings should be revisited for the future. The committee requested Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider this matter on 27 January 2011.

5.1.4. Quarter 2 Council Plan Monitoring

The committee noted the performance for Quarter 2 Council Plan monitoring 2010/2011 and the outcomes achieved against priorities. Members requested that they are notified on the process to deliver the development of the Council Plan 2011-2014 with details of timing of future overview and scrutiny consideration.

5.1.5. Work programme

Members noted the current workload and deferred the principle of holding a themed meeting until the next municipal year.

Background papers

None

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