

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

Tuesday, 21 March 2023

6.30pm to 8.35pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Etheridge (Chairman), Browne, Clarke, Curry, Edwards, Hubbard, Lammas, Sands, Andy Stamp, Tejan, Rupert Turpin and Williams

Substitutes: Councillors: Tejan and Rupert Turpin

In Attendance: Ruth Du-Lieu, Assistant Director, Front Line Services
Sunny Ee, Assistant Director Regeneration
Michael Edwards, Head of Transport and Parking
Jon Pitt, Democratic Services Officer
Dee O'Rourke, Assistant Director, Culture & Community

693 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Carr, Fearn and Tranter.

694 Record of Meeting

In relation to equipment at Twydall play areas, which had been discussed during the Attendance of the Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Community Services (Minute No. 524 refers), a Member said that they had written to the Portfolio Holder to ask for an update on the play areas in their Ward and also for clarification around the sum of £500,000 quoted as having been spent on The Hub. The Member requested that this be recorded in the meeting minutes.

The Democratic Services Officer advised that the minutes of the January 2023 meeting reflected the discussion that had taken place and that they could not be amended to include anything that had happened since. However, this update could be noted in the minutes of the Record of Meeting agenda item for the March 2023 meeting.

The record of the meeting held on 17 January 2023 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

695 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

696 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

Councillor Tejan declared an interest in relation to references to Kyndi within agenda item no.10 (Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report and Strategic Risk Summary Quarter 3 2022/23) because he is a Director of Kyndi. Councillor Tejan did not leave the room as there was no discussion of this agenda item.

Councillor Rupert Turpin declared an interest in relation to references to Kyndi within agenda item no.10 (Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report and Strategic Risk Summary Quarter 3 2022/23) because he is the Council's Kyndi Shareholder representative. Councillor Turpin did not leave the room as there was no discussion of this agenda item.

Other interests

There were none.

697 Petitions

Discussion:

Members considered a report which advised the Committee of petitions received by the Council which fell within the remit of the Committee, including a summary of the responses sent to the petition organisers by officers.

One petition had been referred to the Committee for consideration. This related to Speeding and Safety Hazards on the A230 Maidstone Road, Chatham between the Ridgeway and A229 Junction. It was requested that Medway Council and Kent Police take urgent action to reduce speeding and traffic accident frequency.

The lead petitioner was invited to speak to explain why the Council's response to the petition had been referred to the Committee and made the following points:

- The stretch of road was dangerous with cars overtaking in the hatched area along the middle of the road and the 30mph speed limit was ignored by drivers.

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 21 March 2023

- Pedestrians were unable to cross the road safely due to vehicle speed, traffic volumes and the approximate 10 metre road width.
- Other nearby roads had traffic islands to enhance road safety but there were no islands on this section of the Maidstone Road. Road markings were also worn and the petitioner considered the road condition to be sub-standard for an 'A' class road.
- Kent Police and Medway Council had completed multiple speed surveys in recent months, which demonstrated an underlying concern.
- Every resident the petitioner had contacted had signed his petition and there was strong local concern.
- The initial response from Medway Council had been that there would be no physical alterations to the road as there had only been one accident involving injury in the area. The petitioner welcomed that the Council was planning a scheme to extend and renew the road hatch markings.
- Installation of a traffic island was needed as a matter of urgency to promote pedestrian safety. This would stop pedestrians needing to stand in the road as they crossed it. There were significant numbers of pedestrians in the area.
- The petitioner had personal experience of a road traffic accident in the area when a car had left the road and caused extensive damage to his property. It had been due to luck that none of his family had been injured.
- The petitioner had been advised that there had not been enough incidents resulting in injury at the location to warrant installation of a speed camera.
- In conclusion, it was requested that a traffic island be installed at the location to facilitate safe crossing of the road.

The Head of Transport and Parking said that the road was part of a major route into Chatham. The Council had a statutory duty under the Road Safety Act to investigate road accidents and to take appropriate measures to prevent them. There had been one accident at the location which had resulted in a slight injury. There had been no other crashes resulting in injury on this section of the road. A traffic island had been installed to assist pedestrians crossing the road close to nearby Horsted Park and there was ongoing design work to consider replacing the island with a signal-controlled crossing.

Speed surveys undertaken close to the area covered by the petition had shown an 85th percentile speed of 32mph with 37% of vehicles exceeding the speed limit. It was acknowledged that speeds to the north of this were likely to be slightly higher and that there was currently a lack of facilities to help pedestrians cross the road. The issues raised would be further investigated. It

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 21 March 2023

was noted that there was a need to better understand demand and physical constraints in providing facilities, such as access to driveways.

In discussing the petition, the following responses were made to questions from Members:

Speed indicator devices – The Council operated mobile speed indicator devices to make drivers aware of their speed. These could be used at the petition location as an interim measure.

Costs, timescales and temporary measures – In response to a question asking what the cost of the work requested by the petitioners would be, the Head of Transport and Parking said that this had not yet been assessed and would be dependent on a number of factors. This would be assessed as part of the feasibility study work that was due to take place. It was anticipated that this work would take three to four months to complete. Installation of a temporary crossing was not considered advisable, but use of mobile speed indicators could be made as a temporary measure.

Difficulty Crossing Road and speed indicator signs – A Member said that the width of the road made it difficult for pedestrians to cross and asked what works were being considered regarding the installation of pedestrian crossings in this area. She suggested that a temporary crossing should be considered. It was also suggested that mobile speed indicators signs were useful while they were deployed but that speeds tended to increase again when they were taken away.

In discussing the lead petitioner's statement, a number of Members supported the view that road safety was an issue at this location and it was requested that the design of a traffic island and the associated feasibility study should be treated as a priority. It was also requested that mobile speed indicator signs be deployed at the petition location as soon as possible.

Decision:

The Committee noted the petition responses and referral request and the appropriate officer actions, as set out in the report, and as highlighted during the meeting.

698 Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Inward Investment, Strategic Regeneration and Partnerships

Discussion:

The Committee received an overview of progress made on the areas within the scope of the Portfolio Holder for Strategic Investment, Regeneration and Partnerships which fell within the remit of this Committee.

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 21 March 2023

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

River Strategy – In a response to a question about when this would be published, the Portfolio Holder said he understood that the River Strategy was due for consultation.

Pentagon Healthy Living Centre (HLC) – In response to a question about when it was expected that the HLC within the Pentagon Shopping Centre would open, the Portfolio Holder clarified that he was responsible for securing funding and spending of funding allocated but not for scheme delivery. The Assistant Director, Regeneration said that work was ongoing with the NHS and the Integrated Care Board to deliver the HLC at the Pentagon. Design work was taking place and it was anticipated that the centre would open in mid-2024.

The Paddock – In response to a question about the timescales for the Paddock public realm work it was explained that a contractor was due to be appointed in April 2023. In relation to design changes made to the Paddock public realm proposals due to the impact of inflation, it was asked what the changes were and whether there was any information available regarding the cost of maintaining the fountain. The Assistant Director said that the changes had focused on material quality while ensuring that they were fit for purpose and that there would also be a reduction in artistic elements. The ecology element had not been reduced. A cost figure was not currently available for the fountain, but it was confirmed that the fountain would be maintained.

Former Debenhams site – A Member asked why the former Debenhams building had been acquired by the Council given that its sale was now being considered. The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Debenhams site had been acquired by the Council to secure the usability of the site and give the Council control over its future use. Market testing was now being undertaken to explore future options for the site. He added that the building had not initially been part of the Future High Street Fund proposals as the Debenhams store had still been open at that point. The Assistant Director said that future uses may be divided separately between the ground and first floors of the building or there could be a single bid covering use of both floors. March 2025 was the drop-dead date for the ground floor to be operational.

Brook Theatre - In relation to the Brook Theatre, the Portfolio Holder explained that the holistic approach referred to in the report was about joining up work using funding that had been secured from the Future High Street Fund and from the Levelling Up fund. This funding would be used to improve the creative digital offer and to better utilise the space. There was also a need to make the building fit for purpose. In response to a further Member question about remedial work needed at the Brook Theatre, the Assistant Director said that a survey had showed there to be no immediate danger. Remedial work required would be further identified once the building was temporarily closed.

Levelling Up Fund – A Member highlighted that it appeared that local authorities that had received Levelling Up Funding during Round 1 were

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 21 March 2023

disadvantaged during Round 2 and might not have had any chance of securing funding. Given that the Council had spent £140,000 on its bid, it was asked whether any feedback had been received on the Council's bid.

The Portfolio Holder understood that the Government had received bids with a total value that was vastly in excess of the funding available. There had been no communication in advance of the Council submitting its Round 2 bid that it would be unlikely to receive funding due to it having secured Round 1 funding. The Portfolio Holder said that bids submitted had been strong and that all relevant criteria had been met. The Government had announced that there would be a Round 3 of bidding for which guidance was awaited. Clarification was being sought on whether the Council would be able to resubmit its unsuccessful Round 2 bid. The Assistant Director said the relevant Government department had provided limited feedback and had offered to provide more detailed feedback when the details of Round 3 were announced.

A Member asked if feedback could be provided in writing and requested that this be provided to the Committee. He said that if the Council was unable to resubmit its Round 2 bids as part of Round 3, it should be looking to recover its costs. It was requested that the Committee be provided a briefing note to set out feedback received from the Government and details of the Round 3 arrangements.

In response to a Member question about further rounds of Future High Street Funding, the Assistant Director said that it was not expected that there would be any further rounds as this had been superseded by the Levelling Up Fund.

Innovation Hub Medway Feasibility Study – In response to a question asking whether there was a potential tenant to run the Hub and whether it might be possible for the Council to run it, the Assistant Director said that it was not considered viable for the Council and that this had gone out to the procurement. It was anticipated that the Hub would be attractive to digital and startup businesses. Engagement was taking place through the Medway Forum of local businesses, but this was at an early stage. Members would be welcome to provide any suitable contacts.

Station approach road – In response to a question about the Strood Station access road and the access to the station forecourt, the Assistant Director said this was being finalised and that it required a licence agreement with Network Rail, which was being negotiated.

Staff resources – A Member asked whether there were sufficient staff resources available to deliver the multiple regeneration projects that were being progressed. The Assistant Director said that while additional resource would always be welcomed, the resource available was manageable. Recruiting suitable staff was a significant challenge and work was taking place to ensure the Council would be an attractive place to work.

Strood Riverside development – It was asked whether there were concerns about the viability of development at Strood Riverside, whether it would be viable for Medway Development Company (MDC) to take a lead role if no grant

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 21 March 2023

funding was available and whether the decision to demolish the former Civic Centre had been wrong. It was also requested that a Member visit be arranged for Members to be able to walk around the site and provide feedback.

The Assistant Director said that the aim was to deliver the development through MDC and that were financial advantages to the Council of doing so. The viability would be increased in the event of grant funding being secured from One Public Estate. The Portfolio Holder said that demolition of the former Civic Centre building had been necessary to maximise return on investment in view of the small footprint of the site.

Locate in Kent Funding – Responding to a question about Locate in Kent funding, the Portfolio Holder did not consider that reduced funding would have a significant impact on its effectiveness in attracting inward investment. It was considered that Locate in Kent offered good value for money.

A vote of thanks was given to the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Rodney Chambers OBE, for his fifty years of service in Local Government.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) Noted the report.
- b) Requested that the Committee be provided a Briefing Note to set out feedback received from the Government in relation to Levelling Up funding and details of the Round 3 arrangements.
- c) In the event that the Levelling Up funding Briefing Note demonstrated that the Council was unable to resubmit its Levelling Up Round 2 funding bid during Round 3, the Committee requested that a letter be sent to the Government requesting reimbursement of the costs associated with the Council's Round 2 bid.

699 Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Business Management

Discussion:

The Committee received an overview of progress made on the areas within the scope of the Portfolio Holder for Business Management which fell within the remit of this Committee.

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

Waste services – A Committee Member asked for a breakdown by ward of the locations of Waste Warden visits, details of the standards for Waste Warden inspections and details of on street litter bin locations in Princes Park, including the 20 locations that had been deemed not suitable. The Member also asked when the QR data collected from a project, that aimed to improve the public

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 21 March 2023

reporting of overflowing bins, would be available. In relation to stickers used by a volunteer group to help identify overflowing bins and to promote the work of the group, it was suggested that the Council should provide these stickers.

The Portfolio Holder agreed to provide details of Waste Warden visits. He advised that the inspection standards were nationally set. Some bins had been removed due to safety issues or them being duplicates. One example was dog bins close to a dual purpose bin. This was unnecessary as there was no longer a requirement for separate dog bins to be provided. The Portfolio Holder said that a list of locations that bins had been removed from in Princes Park would be provided. He suggested that Norse bin liners could be left next to full bins rather than stickers and said that consideration could be given to putting messages on the bags in relation to the local volunteer group.

St Margaret's Cemetery – A Member highlighted signs installed at St Margaret's Cemetery to promote responsible behaviour by dog owners. These had been paid for by Member ward improvement funding.

Streetscene, bin locations and dog fouling - Members of the Committee offered their thanks to the Streetscene Team. The issue of persistent flytipping and the work to address this with ward Councillors was highlighted. A Member asked whether bins identified as being in an unsuitable location were relocated elsewhere and requested that ward Councillors be involved in the identification of locations. The Member also asked if anything further could be done to address dog fouling.

The Portfolio Holder agreed that the Streetscene Team did an excellent job and said that some team restructuring had been undertaken to assist with staff retention. He said that although the provision of bins did not fall under his Portfolio remit, the number of bins would be specified in the Norse contract. Signs and pavement stencils were used to address dog fouling and it was requested that details of specific issues identified by Members be passed to Council officers.

Stray dogs – in relation to stray dogs, which were taken to Battersea Cats and Dogs Home to be rehomed if they had not been reclaimed within 7 days, the Assistant Director, Frontline Services, understood that there was no financial cost to the Council. This would be confirmed. In response to a Member concern that 7 days might not give adequate time for a dog to be reclaimed, the Assistant Director said that this was a national standard and that the owner would be able to contact the Battersea Home directly to reclaim their dog.

Leaves – A Member said that they had received a number of complaints about leaves in gutters. The Portfolio Holder said that vehicles were sent out to collect leaves every couple of weeks and Waste Wardens would report any issues identified to Medway Norse.

Waste and trade waste flytipping – A Member considered there was a need for action taken in relation to flytipping to be highlighted as residents were often not aware of such action. The Portfolio Holder said communication tools were

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 21 March 2023

used but he agreed that more could be done. This could include an article in Medway Matters.

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) Noted the report.
- b) Noted that the Portfolio Holder had agreed to look at increasing publicity of enforcement action taken in relation to flytipping and the QR code scheme that aimed to address overflowing bins.
- c) Requested that the following information be provided:
 - i) A breakdown of Waste Warden visits by ward.
 - ii) A map and location of bins audited in Q2 2022/23 for removal or replacement, broken down by ward.
- d) Requested a commitment to discuss arrangements for ongoing support for volunteer groups.

700 Shared Prosperity Fund Investment Plan Submission

Discussion:

This report set out what been achieved so far in 2022-23 in relation to the Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) and Multiply programme. It also set out the 2023-24 programme of spend for the SPF and Multiply.

A Member asked when the SPF and Multiply programme would be open for applications and the process for this. The Assistant Director, Regeneration said that staff recruitment was currently taking place with one person having been recruited so far. It was anticipated that the launch of the SPF would take place in the first quarter of 2023/24. The Multiply Programme was a specific investment plan that involved the local authority procuring services.

In response to a question that asked what criteria were in place to meet the Multiply Programme objective of improving numeracy skills of adults aged 19+ who did not currently have a level 2 qualification in maths, the Assistant Director was confident that ways of measuring this were in place and undertook to provide details to the Committee.

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 21 March 2023

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) Noted progress in relation to the Shared Prosperity Fund and the Multiply Programme and noted the Year 1 outcomes.
- b) Requested that an update report be provided to the Committee in six months' time.

701 Innovation Park Medway

Discussion:

This report provided an update to Committee Members and outlined progress made on the Innovation Park Medway (IPM) project.

A Member asked whether any occupiers had yet signed up to locate at IPM and what the impact of the unsuccessful Levelling Up Round 2 bid would be. The Member questioned the effectiveness of marketing of IPM and expressed concern that it would be difficult to find businesses to locate at the site, which could expose the Council to additional risks.

The Assistant Director, Regeneration said that the Business Case was being reviewed following the Council's unsuccessful Levelling Up Round 2 bid and that there was a need to wait to see what opportunity was presented by Round 3. Marketing work was being undertaken with Locate in Kent. This included marketing the site in London and using a national property consultant. Heads of Terms had been agreed with an occupier for the southern site and it was expected that this would be finalised within the next two months. The Local Development Order (LDO) aimed to streamline the process for businesses that might locate at IPM, for example, by removing the need for individual planning applications. The LDO required refreshing due to new ways of working and changing sector needs. Work was taking place with three potential occupiers on the Northern site.

A Member asked how many meetings had taken place of the IPM Steering Group and who was on the Steering Group. The Member was concerned about resource capacity to deliver IPM.

The Assistant Director said that the Steering Group met quarterly at Member level. Assistant Director level meetings took place once a month and the project team and service met bi-weekly as well as holding a number of ad-hoc meetings.

A Member requested that his thanks to Tracey Crouch MP be placed on record as she was understood to be moving her office to Innovation Park Medway.

It was asked what market analysis work had been done and whether there were concerns about what impact new ways of working had on demand. The

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 21 March 2023

Assistant Director said that there were no concerns as evidence was that there was demand for space. There had been nine serious offers by potential occupiers but these had not been appropriate for the site. There was a need to ensure that the offer was fit for purpose whether this was potential occupiers developing land themselves or the Council developing suitable premises. It was considered that once the first occupiers had been secured, IPM would become more attractive to others.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report setting out progress in relation to Innovation Park Medway and wished for successful marketing of the site.

702 Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report and Strategic Risk Summary Quarter 3 2022/23

Background:

The Committee received a report setting out performance for Quarter 3 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.

Decision:

The Committee noted the Q3 2022/23 performance against the measures used to monitor progress against the Council's priorities and considered the Strategic Risk Summary as set out in Appendix 3.

703 Work programme

Background:

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

Decision:

The Committee:

- a) Requested that the documents that form the Local Plan evidence base be provided to the Committee at the June 2023 meeting.
- b) Noted the proposed work programme, set out at Appendix A to the report.

**Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 21
March 2023**

Chairman

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