

Medway Council
Meeting of Regeneration, Culture and Environment
Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Thursday, 14 December 2023
6.33pm to 9.25pm

Record of the meeting

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

Present: Councillors: Paterson (Chairperson), Field (Vice-Chairperson), Bowen, Cook, Doe, Etheridge, Filmer, Hamilton, Hubbard, Hyne and Peake

Substitutes: Councillors:
Jones
Pearce
Williams

In Attendance: Councillor Tristan Osborne, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Enforcement
Councillor Chris Spalding
Mark Breathwick, Assistant Director, Culture and Community
Adam Bryan, Director of Place
Nicola Couchman, Democratic Services Officer
Ruth Du-Lieu, Deputy Director of Place
Sunny Ee, Assistant Director Regeneration
Aeilish Geldenhuys, Head of Public Health Programmes
Ian Gilmore, Head of Regulatory and Environmental Services
Trevor Jenner, Chief Inspector, Kent Police
Andy McNally-Johnson, Head of Corporate Accounts
Graham Porter, Kent Fire and Rescue Service
David Reynolds, Head of Revenue Accounts

457 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Fearn, Nestorov and Sands.

458 Record of Meeting

The record of the meeting held on 15 November 2023 was agreed and signed by the Chairperson as a correct record.

459 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

460 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 Cook declared an interest as her child attends Walderslade Girls School and the school was referenced as having received funding in section 7.8 of the report on the Annual Scrutiny of the Community Safety Partnership.

461 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 Traffic calming measures along the length of the Ratcliffe Highway from Fenn Corner to the Parish boundary with Allhallows.

Councillor Spalding as Ward Member was invited to speak to explain why the Council's response to the petition had been referred to the Committee. The following points were made:

- There have been a number of accidents at Fenn Corner and Shakespeare Corner involving the emergency services, damage to vehicles and power lines.
- The Ratcliffe Highway does not feel a safe walking route even in high visibility clothing.
- There should not need to be a fatality before road safety is improved.

Members acknowledged that there had already been some improvements in this area, that it had been difficult to reduce the speed of traffic and that they would welcome any measures which would assist with reducing speed further.

In response to queries from Members, officers explained that there had not been any speed surveys on this stretch of road, and it had been assessed as a low priority for traffic calming as there had been no clusters or patterns of collisions.

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The Committee discussed the use of a speed survey in this area and Members supported this to assist with assessing the level of speeding in the area which can then be referred to the Police for enforcement if issues were identified.

Decision:

- 1.1. The Committee noted the petition responses and appropriate officer actions in paragraph 4.1 of the report.
- 1.2. The Committee considered the petition referral request in section 5 of the report and the Director of Place's response.
- 1.3. The Committee recommended that officers undertake a speed survey on the Ratcliffe Highway (where they consider it to be most appropriate) and report the findings back to Councillor Spalding and the Committee.

462 Annual Scrutiny of Community Safety Partnership

The Chairperson welcomed the partners of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to the meeting.

The Committee discussed the following topics:

Residents concerns about drug related crime – Members recognised the identification of drug related crime by residents as a major concern. In response partners explained that there was a commitment to reduce drug crime with investment in the neighbourhood policing model and targeting drug use via the dedicated neighbourhood task force.

Perception of Crime – Members queried whether the perception of crime reflected reality and in response Kent Police reported that violent crime and violence against women and girls would be a high priority for the Police but this was not always seen by the public.

Anti-Social Behaviour – Partners informed the Committee of the work undertaken by the Combatting Drugs Partnership and the lower drug crime figures in Medway compared to Kent. Members were informed that a new wraparound service for drug and alcohol addiction had been introduced and was focused on accessible recovery orientated services. The number of anti-social behaviour cases reported and how these were dealt with was also discussed and Members were informed of the named contact approach that would be adopted in future.

Youth Services - The importance of youth services was recognised by Members and a range of measures including engagement events, the dedicated youth offending team and outreach work with schools were discussed.

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My Community Voice – Partners informed the Committee of My Community Voice and the role it plays as a key communication tool for residents to speak to their local Police Officer and raise and report concerns.

Sexual offences and violence against women and girls – Members highlighted the statistics which indicated this should be a higher priority than drug related crime and asked what action was being taken to tackle this. Partners acknowledged that this was a priority of central and local government and reported that Kent Police were focusing on proactive policing, targeted operations and targeting prolific offenders. Partners informed the Committee that there was a series of talk and walk events in Rochester, and alarms and other equipment had been provided to residents and the importance of education in schools was recognised. Partners reported that training courses were being delivered in schools on various topics and bystander training had been delivered.

Probation Service – Members queried what was being done to increase the staffing rate of 77% and when the next HMIP inspection would take place. The Chairperson of the CSP offered to take this back to the Probation Service and request a written response as they were not in attendance.

Rapid Deployment Cameras (RDC's) – Members acknowledged the success of RDC's in Hoo in reducing crime and queried how these were deployed. The Committee were informed that the deployment of RDC's was based on substantive evidence, and they were normally deployed for 12 weeks to establish whether there was a need for permanent CCTV in an area.

Members also discussed fire safety visits and extreme stickering and graffiti in Medway and how these issues were responded to.

Decision:

- 1.1 The Committee noted the findings of the strategic assessment.
- 1.2. The Committee agreed to support the proposed CSP priorities in light of the strategic assessment findings.
- 1.3. The Committee scrutinised the activity of the Community Safety Partnership, over the past year, in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions.
- 1.4 The Committee requested a written response from the Probation Service regarding actions taken in response to staffing rates and when the next HMIP inspection is expected.

463 Attendance of Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Enforcement

Discussion:

The Committee received an overview of progress made on the areas within the scope of the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Enforcement, Councillor Osborne, which fell within the remit of this Committee.

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

Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) – In response to a question about progress the Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that the PSPO would be introduced by the end of March 2024 and would incorporate best practice from other boroughs.

Sale and use of Vapes – Members raised concerns about the number of young people vaping and asked what action was being taken against sellers and users of vapes. The Portfolio Holder explained that any premises selling vapes to underage customers should be reported and that illegal vapes were seized if they had not met the legal requirements. The Portfolio Holder also recognised the need for education of young people regarding vaping and alcohol consumption.

Anti-Social Behaviour in Town Centres – Members expressed concerns about anti-social behaviour and street drinking in town centres, particularly in Strood and the impact this had on local businesses. The Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that there was CCTV in Strood which is regularly monitored, and alcohol control zones were being consulted on to address such issues. It was acknowledged that many individuals have other substance misuse and mental health issues and the Community Safety Partnership aimed to deliver wrap around services to support these needs.

Unauthorised encampments – In response to a query about an unauthorised encampment on Maidstone Road the Committee were informed that the occupants had been permitted to occupy the site for 3 months under a duty of care however after this time they had refused to leave so court action was currently being pursued. The Portfolio Holder also explained that there had been a commitment to deliver a policy on unauthorised encampments and a proposed policy would be developed in the coming months.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report and the need for continued action against the sale of vapes illegally to underage residents and to continued action to reduce the harmful effects of public drinking and drug consumption in Town Centres.

464 Capital Budget Monitoring Round 2 2023/24

Discussion:

The report was presented to the Committee and members were made aware of an error on page 99 of the report where the total scheme variance was reported as zero but should be a £60k underspend.

Decision:

- 1.1. The Committee noted the results of the second round of capital budget monitoring for 2023/24.
- 1.2. The Committee noted the changes made to the capital programme as set out in 9.1 to 11.2 to the report.
- 1.4. The Committee noted that Cabinet on 21 November 2023 requested to recommend to Council the removal of the following budgets relating to schemes that are either complete or no longer required:
 - Motorway Signage, £60,000 funded from Capital Receipts.
 - World Heritage Site & GLHP, £31,000 funded from Capital Grants.
 - Civic Centre Decant, £24,000 funded from Reserves.
 - Mountbatten House Purchase, £92,000 funded from Borrowing.
 - MDC Queen Street, £20,000 funded from Borrowing.
 - MP St Marys Amateur Boxing Club, £40,000 funded from Capital Receipts.

465 Revenue Budget Monitoring Round 2 2023/24

Discussion:

The report was presented to the Committee. A forecast overspend of £816,000 was reported for Round 2 for the budgets within the remit of the Committee which was an improvement from the Round 1 position.

Decision:

- 1.1. The Committee noted the results of the second round of revenue budget monitoring for 2023/24.
- 1.2. The Committee noted that the Cabinet instructed the Corporate Management Team to implement urgent actions to bring expenditure back within the budget agreed by Full Council.

466 Draft Capital and Revenue Budget 2024/25

Discussion:

The Committee were informed that the report outlines the new approach to balancing the budget for 2024/25. There was a current budget gap of 35.85m with Directorates continuing to work on saving proposals to address the gap.

Decision:

- 1.1. The Committee noted that Cabinet has instructed officers to continue to work with Portfolio Holders in formulating robust proposals to balance the budget for 2024/25.
- 1.2. The Committee did not make any comment on the proposals outlined in the Draft Capital and Revenue Budgets in so far as they relate to the services within the remit of this Committee.
- 1.3. The Committee noted that the Cabinet agreed to recommend to Full Council that in February 2024 when setting the Council Tax, the following changes are applied to Council Tax premia in line with the Rating (Property in Common Occupation) and Council Tax (Empty Dwellings) Act 2018, as set out in paragraph 8.18 of the report:
 - the 100% premium for long-term empty properties may be brought forward so that it can commence after being empty for one year rather than two with effect from 1 April 2024; and
 - a 100% premium may be charged for properties that are unoccupied but furnished (known as second homes) with effect from 1 April 2025.
- 1.4. The Committee noted that the Cabinet agreed to recommend to Full Council that in February 2024 when setting the Council Tax, the following changes are applied to the Council Tax discretionary discounts, as set out in paragraph 8.18 of the report:
 - reduce the discount in respect of class C to 0% from the day on which a property becomes vacant, and
 - reduce the discount in respect of class D to 0%.

467 Council Plan Monitoring and Risk Register Review 2023/24 Quarter 2

Discussion:

The performance measures in the remit of the Committee were summarised for the Committee.

Members expressed concerns about the green status of the measure for Improved Street and environmental cleanliness when they reported heavily littered streets in some wards and the increased number of households in temporary accommodation.

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Officers informed the Committee that preventing households from entering temporary accommodation, moving them on and how temporary accommodation was provided continued to present a significant challenge. Members were informed that that number of approaches for assistance had increased and officers would be bringing forward proposals to address the demand for temporary accommodation.

In response to a query about the performance measures for jobs and skills and red status for retention (page 189 of the agenda pack) the national and local context was discussed, and officers committed to explore outside of the meeting whether this was a seasonal issue or long-term trend.

Decision:

- 1.1. The Committee considered the Q2 2023/24 performance against the measures used to monitor progress against the Council's priorities (Appendices 1 and 2 to the report).
- 1.2. The Committee noted the Q2 2023/24 Strategic Risk Summary (Appendix 3 to the report).

468 Work Programme

Discussion:

Members considered a report regarding the Committee's work programme.

In response to a query regarding the Future Hoo Housing Infrastructure Fund and reclaiming expenditure the Committee were advised that an update would be available after January 2024.

Decision:

- 1.1 The Committee noted the report and agreed the work programme as set out at Appendix A to the report.
- 1.2 The Committee noted the action log as set out at Appendix B to the report.

Chairperson

Date:

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