

Medway Council
Meeting of Regeneration, Culture and Environment
Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Wednesday, 28 February 2024
6.35pm to 8.25pm

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, Fearn, Filmer, Hamilton, Hyne, Nestorov, Peake and Sands

Substitutes: Councillors:
Howcroft-Scott

In Attendance: Councillor Naushabah Khan, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Property
Mark Breathwick, Assistant Director, Culture and Community
Adam Bryan, Director of Place
Nicola Couchman, Democratic Services Officer
Ruth Du-Lieu, Deputy Director of Place
Rob Dennis, Head of Property and Capital Projects
Michael Edwards, Head of Transport and Parking
Catherine Smith, Head of Planning Policy
Julie Steere, Senior Valuation Surveyor

640 Apologies for absence

Councillor Hubbard had been replaced on the Committee by Councillor Gurung.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Gurung and Councillor Howcroft-Scott attended as a substitute.

641 Record of Meeting

The record of the meeting held on 23 January 2024 was agreed and signed by the Chairperson as a correct record.

642 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

643 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

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Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

There were none.

644 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 Lambourn Way and Knole Road. Mr Walsh, the Lead Petitioner 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 had been an ongoing issue with increasing traffic on Lambourn Way and Knole Road for the last 10 years and over 200 letters and video evidence had been provided to various departments.
- An increase in traffic had resulted in increased noise levels and the road had not been resurfaced in over 30 years.
- The restrictions on Lymington Drive had contributed to the increased traffic.
- Officers had not considered the real time video evidence provided and put up their own cameras on one day in the school holidays when traffic volume was lower than usual and had based their decisions on this data.

In response to queries from Members, officers explained that an Automatic Number Plate Recognition camera survey had taken place on one day in the school holidays. Officers reported that data was also collected from a number of Automatic Traffic Counters over a period of a week including school traffic and a seven day average showed 2-3 vehicles per minute using Lambourn Way. Officers informed the Committee that the data showed low levels of traffic however this was increased around school start and finish times.

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Members acknowledged the impact that school traffic could have and explained that the school had not been selected to become a school street as the school did not have any concerns about the safety of children accessing the site.

Members queried the condition of the road surface as this could contribute to noise levels and requested that this be checked by officers.

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 requested at section 5 of the report and the Director of Place's response.
- 1.3. The committee requested that further work was undertaken with St Benedict's School to look to reduce the impacts of the school run on residents on Lambourn Way and Knole Road, and that the transport team reviewed its maintenance programme to check what the road condition was assessed as.

645 Attendance of Portfolio Holder for Housing and Property

The Committee received an overview of progress made on the areas within the scope of the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Property, Councillor Khan, which fell within the remit of this Committee.

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

Residential Homes for Children and Out of Borough Placements - In response to a concern about London Boroughs buying properties in Medway to use as private foster homes the Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that this was not within her remit, but it requires national legislation to rectify the issue.

Medway Development Company (MDC) and Sale of Properties – Members queried how many properties had been sold by MDC. The Committee were informed that numbers for this were not to hand and would be provided outside of the meeting.

Energy Performance Certificates (EPC) – The Committee queried whether all properties had an EPC. Officers reported that every property should have an EPC and they were valid for 10 years. Officers explained there were various grants available to support properties with a low performing EPC and the first point of contact for this should be Housing Officers.

Homelessness – Members asked what measures were being taken to address the increase in homelessness. The Portfolio Holder reported that the Rough Sleepers Initiative had provided funding support in recent years alongside a

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collaborative approach and a review of how the stock available for Temporary Accommodation (TA) could be increased. The purchase of houses due to the rising costs of TA formed part of this approach and had been modelled on a former pilot scheme based on 20 properties.

Mountbatten House Conversion to Housing – Members requested an update on the timeline for completion of this. The Portfolio Holder explained that that was a significant site that played a major role in the strategic regeneration of Chatham and a timeline would be shared with Members when it was available.

Reviewing Assets for Disposal – Members queried the criteria for a non-core asset when reviewing assets for disposal. The Committee were informed that the property portfolio was wide ranging and there had been a lack of investment for a number of years. The property portfolio was being reviewed, including rationalisation and each property would be looked at on a case-by-case basis considering the cost to retain, the longer-term future and the value.

Armed Forces and Operation Fortitude – Members asked whether Medway was signed up to Operation Fortitude which was a referral service into housing for veterans. The Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that Armed Forces personnel were given an automatic priority for housing and there was a commitment to support the Armed Forces Covenant. Medway were not currently signed up to Operation Fortitude however the Portfolio Holder would look at this further outside of the meeting.

Selective and Additional Licensing Schemes – The Portfolio Holder reported that Selective and Additional Licensing Schemes were being progressed to help drive up standards in the private rented sector and work continued to set out what the schemes would look like.

Anti-Social Behaviour Reporting App – The Committee queried whether there was scope to share the new App with Housing Associations we worked in partnership with. The Committee were informed that the App was currently being tested and rolled out and that it could be discussed with Housing Associations to see how it could be used to support other areas.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

646 Draft Housing Strategy to 2030

Discussion:

The Committee were presented with the draft Housing Strategy to 2030.

The Committee queried how widely publicised energy efficiency schemes were and how residents could apply to them. In response officers reported that they were published on the website but that other opportunities to make residents

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aware of them could be explored including the use of social media or the one minute Medway broadcasts.

The collaborative approach with social care services was discussed and Members queried how Housing Associations could be encouraged to look at smaller developments in Medway.

Officers reported that conversations with Housing Associations were ongoing regarding smaller sites however this was challenging as Housing Associations were unable to access grants from Homes England on Section 106 sites. Members requested an update on progress regarding smaller sites at an appropriate point in the future.

Decision:

The Committee concurred with Regeneration, Culture and Environment Departmental Management Team (DMT) and Children and Adults DMT that the Draft Housing Strategy to 2030 (attached as Appendix 1 to the report) proceeds to Cabinet with a view to approval in March 2024.

647 Corporate Building Survey Results

Discussion:

The report presented to the Committee outlined the required budgets for Building Repairs and Maintenance Fund (BRMF) for the next 5 year cycle (2023-2028).

Members expressed concerns regarding the gap between the £700k-£800k budget allocation and the funding required to fully maintain the corporate portfolio and how this position had arisen. Members were also concerned at the lack of investment in maintenance in previous years and the lack of oversight and scrutiny.

Officers explained that there had always been a large gap between the budget allocation and the funding required due to financial pressures despite requests for additional funding but that this was no longer sustainable.

The Committee were informed that all options were being looked at with the Transformation Team including whether it would be more financially viable to dispose of some sites.

Members were keen to ensure that the deficit would be more closely monitored in future alongside robust action planning to address the shortfall and its impact.

Decision:

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1. The Committee noted the need for the increased investment to the BRMF to ensure the corporate estate portfolio remains safe, warm and dry and a valuable set of assets.
2. The Committee recommended to Cabinet that they ask officers to review their asset management strategy and provide an update and action plan at a future Committee.

648 Infrastructure Funding Statement

Discussion:

The Committee considered a report on the Annual Infrastructure Funding Statement and Section 106 (S106) legal agreements.

Members queried how often agreed S106 agreements were changed, whether this was consulted on and if it could be challenged. Officers explained that S106 agreements were frequently changed and that further information on the types of circumstances when they were changed and why this happened could be provided outside the meeting as well further information on the challenge element of the query.

In response to a query about any S106 contributions that were unspent the Committee were informed that S106 contributions may appear as unspent as only part of it had been spent in the reported period. Officers reassured the Committee that S106 contributions were always spent and contributions had never had to be returned as the allocations, spend profile and deadlines were closely monitored.

Officers informed the Committee that the Development Contribution Guide which determines how contributions were allocated was being reviewed as part of the Local Plan and this would allow for wider scrutiny and input from Members.

Decision:

The Committee noted the content of the report.

649 Work programme

Discussion:

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

Decision:

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

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- 1.2 The Committee noted the action log as set out at Appendix B to the report.

Chairperson

Date:

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