

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

Tuesday, 26 March 2024

6.32pm to 8.38pm

Record of the meeting

Present: Councillors: Paterson (Chairperson), Field (Vice-Chairperson), Bowen, Cook, Etheridge, Fearn, Filmer, Hyne, Nestorov and Peake

Substitutes: Councillors:
Crozer (for Councillor Sands)
Jones (for Councillor Gurung)
Tejan (for Councillor Doe)

In Attendance: Councillor Lauren Edwards, Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment
Adam Bryan, Director of Place
Mark Breathwick, Assistant Director, Culture and Community
Nicola Couchman, Democratic Services Officer
Michael Edwards, Head of Transport and Parking
Sunny Ee, Assistant Director Regeneration
Andy McNally-Johnson, Head of Corporate Accounts
Jerry Pert, Operations Director, VolkerHighways
David Reynolds, Head of Revenue Accounts
Kerrie Richardson, Senior Engineer (Highway Operations)

701 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Doe, Gurung, Hamilton and Sands.

702 Record of Meeting

The record of the meeting held on 28 February 2024 was agreed and signed by the Chairperson as a correct record.

703 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

704 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

There were none.

705 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 free child swimming in Council pools. Mr Bourne, 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 issues were raised:

- Whilst the challenging financial situation was acknowledged, concern was expressed that ceasing the provision of free child swimming could result in a financial loss due to the paying adults that attended with children.
- Free swimming passes were used 10,420 times (according to a Freedom of Information Request) representing a saving of £54,000 however if 40% no longer attend, with a full paying adult, there could be a potential loss of £74,000.
- A query was raised as to whether the analysis officers had undertaken included a loss of income from paying adults accompanying children using free swimming passes.
- The importance of water-based events and safety for children living near water in Medway was stressed to the Committee.

Members queried the analysis undertaken and asked to see the supporting data and asked if this could be broken down by each pool. Officers committed to providing further information on the budget assumptions used and informed

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the Committee that not every child attending free swimming was accompanied by a full paying adult.

Members discussed the role of Schools and the National Curriculum in teaching children to swim and whether data was available to show this. Officers confirmed that the Leisure Team could be asked which schools access Medway pools to give an indication of how many schools were teaching children to swim.

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 further information regarding the number of schools accessing swimming pools in Medway.
- 1.4. The Committee requested that additional information requested by the Lead Petitioner regarding the budget assumptions used was to be provided by officers.

706 Attendance of Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment

Discussion:

The Committee received an overview of progress made on the areas within the scope of the Portfolio Holder for Economic and Social Regeneration and Inward Investment, Councillor Edwards, which fell within the remit of this Committee.

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

Medway Development Company (MDC) progress – Members queried whether there had been any delays with the progress made by MDC. The Portfolio Holder reported that the initial Cabinet Sub-Committee for MDC had taken place and that she was not aware of any concerns regarding delays with MDC's work or the market.

Parades of shops – The Committee were informed that the importance of parades of shops were recognised and whilst the initial priorities for regeneration were focused on Town Centres, parades of shops would also be focused on.

Inward investment – The Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that the Inward Investment Strategy was a top priority and there would be some funding

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available from the demise of the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) to enable the Strategy to be resourced.

Support provided to Small Businesses – The Committee were informed of the good relationship with the Kent Federation of Small Businesses (FSB), the named contacts available for small businesses, a forthcoming summit with Kent FSB and support to access loans and grants.

Markets Policy and Street Trading – Members queried how promoting Strood Market reconciled with closing car parks and whether there would be an increase in stall fees. The Portfolio Holder reported that a Markets Policy was being produced and officers were looking at re-establishing Strood Market. Options including markets outside of car parks were being looked at to ensure financial stability as loss of income from car parks made them less financially viable. An increase in fees had not been discussed as the strategic focus had been on minimum standards and growth for markets. It was reported that officers were also working on policies for street trading and pavement licensing.

Section 106 funding – Members queried where the Section 106 funding to replant and maintain large planters at Friary Place and ground works for a Christmas tree pit in a new location in Friary Place had come from. Officers committed to respond outside of the meeting.

Loss of Banking facilities in Town Centres – Members expressed concern about the loss of banking facilities particularly in Strood Town Centre. The Committee were informed that a Link Banking Hub was being explored to try and address residents concerns about the loss of banking facilities.

Decision:

The Committee noted the report.

707 Highways Infrastructure Contract - Annual Review

Discussion:

The Committee were presented with a report providing an overview of the collaborative partnership with Volker Highways and achievements in the contract year until July 2023.

Members raised the following queries:

The use of Warm Mix Asphalt (WMA) – Officers reported that WMA had environmental advantages and there was no indication that it would require more repairs than Hot Mix Asphalt.

Capital funding from the Department for Transport – Officers reported that Medway were due to receive approximately £3.5m for 2024/25. Officers

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committed to provide further information on the other funding streams for the budget.

Pothole scoring and prioritisation – Officers explained that the resilient network and main routes were prioritised following scoring provided by visual inspections and scanner data.

Funding for Safer and Healthier Streets – Officers committed to provide further information on the budget and funding source for Safer and Healthier Streets outside the meeting.

Decision:

- 1.1. The Committee noted the contents of this report and the Annual Review for Year 6 of the Highways Infrastructure Contract as set out in Appendix 1.
- 1.2. The committee requested future activity focuses on the protection of green spaces from vehicular access.

708 Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report and Strategic Risk Register Summary Quarter 3 2023/24

Discussion:

In response to a query about the number of jobs created, officers explained that the way in which this was recorded for next year was being looked at alongside the Inward Investment Strategy.

Officers informed the Committee that there was a presentation issue with target for the number of private sector properties improved as a result of council intervention. Officers explained that the performance indicator was broadly on track to meet the target despite increasing demand.

Members expressed concern about the levels of litter reported by residents and requested a greater understanding of the metrics for the indicator and reassurance that all sites across Medway were included. Officers committed to respond to this outside the meeting.

The Committee discussed the target for NI 154 Net additional homes provided and the methodology for the indicator. Officers explained that this was a national performance indicator and that the new council plan would also reflect what was being done to encourage growth rather than just reporting on the performance indicator.

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Decision:

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

709 Capital Budget Monitoring Round 3 2023/24

Discussion:

The Committee were informed that the report had been considered by Cabinet on 13 February 2024 and that of the projected total underspend (£32.957m), £32.54m fell within the remit of this Committee. This was mainly attributed to the Innovation Park Medway as the scheme had been paused.

Decision:

- 1.1. The Committee noted the results of the third 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 9.3 of the report.

710 Revenue Budget Monitoring Round 3 2023/24

Discussion:

The Committee were informed that the report had been considered by Cabinet on 13 February 2024 and the Directorate forecast was an overspend of £480,000.

Decision:

- 1.1. The committee noted the results of the third round of revenue budget monitoring for 2023/24.
- 1.2. The committee noted that Cabinet instructed the Corporate Management Team to implement further urgent actions to bring expenditure back within the budget agreed by Full Council.
- 1.3. The committee noted that Council, at its meeting on 29 February 2024, agreed to declassify the following amounts currently held in earmarked reserves and transfer them to general reserves;
 - £4million held in the South Medway Development Reserve,
 - £1million held in the Transformation Reserve, and
 - £727,000 held in the Mosaic Forms Reserve.

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711 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.
- 1.2 The Committee noted the action log as set out at Appendix B to the report.

Chairperson

Date:

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