

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

Thursday, 15 August 2024

6.30pm to 9.47pm

Record of the meeting

Present: Councillors: Field (Vice-Chairperson), Doe, Filmer, Jackson, Lawrence, Peake and Williams

Substitutes: Councillors:
Barrett
Gulvin
Jones
Mandaracas
McDonald
Osborne

In Attendance: Adam Bryan, Director of Place
Mark Breathwick, Assistant Director, Culture and Community
Andrew Bull, Principal Planner
Nicola Couchman, Democratic Services Officer
David England, Head of Valuation and Asset Management
Dave Harris, Chief Planning Officer
David Reynolds, Head of Revenue Accounts
Karen Tamsett, Highway Management Engineer

214 Election of Chairperson

The Committee elected Councillor Field as Chairperson and Councillor Cook as Vice-Chairperson for the remainder of the municipal year.

215 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Animashaun, Campbell, Cook, Etheridge, Fearn and Myton.

216 Record of Meeting

The record of the meeting held on 13 June 2024 was agreed and signed by the Chairperson as a correct record

217 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

218 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

Councillor Mandaracas declared that she was a secure council tenant in relation to the Draft Tenancy Strategy. As the Draft Tenancy Strategy did not propose any changes to existing secure tenants it was agreed that Councillor Mandaracas could still participate in the discussion and decision for the Draft Tenancy Strategy.

Other interests

There were none.

219 Draft Tenancy Strategy 2024

Discussion:

Officers informed the Committee that the material change to the Tenancy Strategy was that Medway Housing Tenants would receive a secure tenancy in the majority of circumstances as opposed to flexible tenancies in the previous strategy.

Members requested that the Diversity Impact Assessment be updated as some of the officer names were out of date.

Members raised various queries which officers responded to:

Difference between Family Intervention Tenancy and Demoted Tenancy –

Officers agreed to seek clarification and respond outside of the meeting.

93.5% of council owned properties meeting Decent Homes Standard –

Officers explained that the figure was always lower at the start of the year, some homes would get new bathrooms and kitchens throughout the year and some tenants did not want work done although all steps were taken to try and complete required works.

Number of Anti-Social Behaviour complaints and how these were dealt with

– Officers agreed to provide Members with data on this.

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Number of households receiving benefits – Officers committed to providing a briefing note showing how many households were claiming benefits and measures taken to assist them back into the workplace.

Tenancies for Key Workers – Officers explained that social housing cannot be provided for key workers but other options were being explored.

Cap on the cost of adaptations for vulnerable tenants – Officers explained that the same general principles for the Disabled Facilities Grant were applied to the cost of adaptations in social housing with an upper limit of £30,000, however decisions were made on a case by case basis.

Decision:

- a) The Committee agreed that the Draft Tenancy Strategy 2024 proceeded to Cabinet with a view to approval in October 2024. The Draft Strategy was attached as appendix 1.

220 Medway Local Plan Regulation 18 Consultation

Discussion:

The Chief Planning Officer gave a presentation to the Committee and explained that the Regulation 18 Consultation sets out three broad options for growth. The Committee were informed that the consultation started on 15 July 2024 and would conclude on 8 September 2024. Members thanked officers for their hard work in progressing the plan to this stage.

The Committee provided the following feedback in response to the consultation:

- Multiple concerns were expressed regarding the infrastructure that would be required alongside growth, how this could be provided in creative ways including utilising the River, how it would be funded and when it would be provided.
- Members expressed concern about the urbanisation of green spaces and how this would work cross border.
- The importance of building the right type of houses was raised as Members wanted to ensure that enough family homes were being built so that families would be able to remain in Medway.
- Retail areas – Members queried whether Medway would consider using some of these spaces differently including the creation of community spaces.
- Concerns were expressed regarding the impact of the 50% social housing requirement for Greenbelt on the viability of schemes for developers.
- It was requested that sustainable drainage needed to be considered to prevent future flooding of residential properties.

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- Members queried whether the number of new homes required in the timeframe was achievable.
- Members asked for consideration of what Medway wants Town Centres to look like and how they could be utilised, including consideration of building upwards.
- Members felt that ongoing communication with health partners would be essential alongside any growth.
- Medway should be aware of the risk presented by other Local Authorities having large increases in their new homes targets and the impact this could have on Medway.
- Members noted that officers would be considering the impact the decision on the Lower Thames Crossing could have on the Local Plan and potential new sites.
- The importance of climate change was recognised and it was requested that the impact on climate change should be considered when formulating plans for growth.

In addition to noting the feedback provided by the Committee, officers welcomed any further comments from Members outside of the meeting in response to the consultation.

Members requested information on how many consultation events had been held, how many were planned, and the costs associated with the Local Plan and officers agreed to provide this outside the meeting. The Committee were informed that not having a Local Plan in place was costly as in the last three years Medway had spent more on legal fees defending planning appeals than other councils in the country.

Decision:

- a) The Committee provided feedback on the proposals in the Medway Local Plan consultation in relation to matters regarding the environment, regeneration and culture.

221 Capital Budget Monitoring Round 1 2024/2025

Discussion:

The Committee were informed of 2 corrections to errors in the report:

- Page 299 Section 5.1 – The forecast was an underspend of £4.665million against the current approved budget and not an overspend.
- Page 309 – The table showing expenditure for 'Regeneration Other' should state Forecast spend 24/25 and not 24/24.

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Members queried the total budget for the Healthy Living Centre and were informed that the total budget was £13.1million. Members also expressed concern regarding the relocation of the WREC Room and officers explained that properties had been identified for this and were under consideration.

The Committee expressed concern regarding ongoing costs at Innovation Park Medway. Officers explained that whilst all general expenses were on hold there was a budget for security in place until a report with future options was likely to be presented to Cabinet in early 2025.

The Committee discussed the funding for the Ascend Project at the Innovation Hub and for the Medway Tunnel. Officers agreed to confirm when the Department for Transport funding for the Medway Tunnel would come to an end outside the meeting.

Members queried the latest position regarding the Temple Marsh Open Space and whether there were any risks associated with this. Officers confirmed that Greenspace were undertaking investigatory work on this but no issues had been raised to date. Members requested an update from Greenspace on the latest position.

Members requested further information from officers regarding the following issues:

- Street Furniture remaining budget of £0 – Members queried how street furniture that falls into disrepair would be funded.
- Pentagon Future Capital Works - the remaining budget of £985,000 and when options for the remaining budget were likely to be resolved.
- Pentagon Centre Transformation – the remaining budget of £561,000 and progress with the pending NHS funding approval and signing of the agreement.
- Healthy Living Centre Pentagon – the latest update with regards to Contractors due to start in Summer 2024.

Officers agreed to consult with the relevant colleagues outside of the meeting and respond to all of the above queries.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the results of the first round of capital budget monitoring for 2024/25.

222 Revenue Budget Monitoring Round 1 2024/2025

Discussion:

The Committee discussed budget pressures regarding homelessness and temporary accommodation. Officers informed the Committee that the cost and

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demand for housing and homelessness support continues to remain challenging, but budget pressures would be reduced or absorbed wherever possible.

Members requested disaggregated figures for income for each of the red route's schemes and officers agreed to check what further information could be provided and to provide this information outside of the meeting.

Members also queried whether Libraries were now fully staffed and were informed that whilst they were not yet fully staffed the recruitment of staff for Libraries was progressing.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the results of the first round of revenue budget monitoring for 2024/25.
- b) The Committee instructed the Corporate Management Team to implement urgent actions to bring expenditure back within the budget agreed by Full Council.

223 Petitions Report

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.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the petition responses and appropriate officer actions in paragraph 4.1 of the report.

224 Work programme

Discussion:

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

In response to queries regarding the number of outstanding actions and the distribution of agenda items it was agreed this would be addressed at the next pre-agenda meeting.

Decision:

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

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

Chairperson

Date:

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