

**Medway Council**  
**Meeting of Business Support Overview and Scrutiny**  
**Committee**

**Tuesday, 22 March 2011**

**6.34pm to 8.15pm**

**Record of the meeting**

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

- Present:** Councillors: Avey, Bright, Gulvin (Vice-Chairman, in the Chair), Griffiths, Harriott, Jones, Juby and Royle
- Substitutes:** Councillor Bhutia substituting for Councillor Carr  
Councillor Etheridge substituting for Councillor Kenneth Bamber  
Councillor Hicks substituting for Councillor Andrews
- In Attendance:** Councillor Rodney Chambers, Leader of the Council  
Peter Bown, Accounting Manager  
Stephanie Goad, Assistant Director Communications  
Performance and Partnerships  
Richard Hicks, Assistant Director, Customer First, Leisure,  
Culture, Democracy and Governance  
Joy Kirby, Quality Assurance and Client Manager  
Jim Mack, Interim Head of Building and Design Services  
Caroline Salisbury, Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator  
Deborah Upton, Assistant Director, Housing and Corporate  
Services/Monitoring Officer

**897 To approve the record of the following meeting:**

The record of the meeting held on 27 January 2011 was agreed and signed by the Chairman as correct.

**898 To receive apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Andrews, Kenneth Bamber (Chairman), Carr and Stamp.

**899 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances**

There were none.

**900 Declarations of interest**

Councillor Griffiths declared a personal interest in any reference to NHS Medway and Medway Community Healthcare as he is a non-executive director of both trusts.

**901 Attendance of the Leader of the Council**

**Discussion:**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Rodney Chambers, addressed the committee outlining the main achievements within areas of his portfolio for democracy and governance:

- Local elections in May 2011 with a combined poll for a national referendum on the AV system for General Elections taking place at the same time
- There had been a successful annual audit of the register of electors with a 90% response rate which compared favourably with other Unitary Authorities. There was a legal requirement to register and the Council had taken action over those habitually not registering
- Members allowances had been reduced at the recent budget meeting in February 2011 and the Independent Remuneration Panel would be considering where such reductions could be made
- The Democratic Services team was being reduced by one post and there would be a revised timetable of meetings with a reduced number of Overview and Scrutiny, Cabinet and Council meetings
- The Council was awaiting the outcome of the Localism Bill which would provide the option of moving back to the Committee system
- There was a new requirement for the Council to have a Health and Well Being Board. This would be a statutory Committee of the Council with a membership of GPs, Public Health and others.

Members asked the Leader about:

- the different ballot papers at the elections in May 2011 and whether they would be placed in the same ballot box? Councillor Chambers responded that they would be and that the ballot paper for each election (local election and referendum on the AV system) would be a different colour
- the 10% of households not registered on the electoral register and what could be done to encourage more people to register, especially tenants in social housing and university students. Members suggested that a registration form was given to anyone taking up a new social housing tenancy and issued with university registration forms to all students applying for a place at a university in Medway
- areas within Medway covered by the personal canvass
- cross-reference between residents paying council tax but not appearing on the electoral register.

**Decision:**

The Committee thanked the Leader of the Council for attending the meeting and the information and answers he had provided.

**902 Work programme**

**Discussion:**

The Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator introduced the report and advised that there were no new items on the Cabinet Forward Plan within the remit of this committee.

**Decision:**

The report was noted.

**903 Quarter 3 Council Plan monitoring 2010/2011**

**Discussion:**

The Assistant Director of Communications, Performance and Partnerships introduced the report, advising that it reported on an 'exceptions' basis, therefore only showing performance against objectives for only those indicators currently on an amber or red rating.

The Committee was advised that the Council was working hard to remedy the areas identified as not being on target. These included:

- Timeliness of child protection assessments. However, a new structure came into effect in January 2011 to address the increase in demand and the results of the national Munro review of child protection in England were awaited
- Continued challenges for the adult social care team with the number of personal budgets put in place unlikely to meet target.
- Carer Assessments remained below target but a contract for enabling a trusted assessor to undertake carers assessments had been commenced
- The number of people with a learning disability in employment. The performance for this indicator had decreased slightly from last quarter and the Council was currently undertaking a census to understand the issues and support needed to enable people with a learning disability to access employment.

Councillors expressed their concern at a target being set for the number of people with personal budgets. Members were supportive of people being offered them but considered that they should not be mandatory, or pushed onto people in order to reach a percentage target. The indicator also showed the number of people who had chosen to accept responsibility for organising their own budget but did not show how many people had been offered this overall.

A Member commented on the 'tackling congestion' indicator being shown as green which held no meaning to Councillors and the public when there had been delays across many areas in Medway, not least Chatham town centre, for several months.

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With relation to roadworks, another Member requested that the Council considered implementing more stringent criteria for statutory undertakers (gas, electric, television, TV companies etc.) to gain access to the highways in Medway for repair works.

The Committee asked how much funding the Council received from the EU (European Union) and whether it was spent on specific projects. The Assistant Director of Communications, Performance and Partnerships responded that she would notify Members by e-mail of the full amount of funding received but that she could confirm that it had to be spent on specific projects and that there was another two years of EU funding to be delivered.

The Committee also discussed the “Love Medway” campaign and asked whether notices could be produced, stating for example, “that clearing up dog mess cost X amount and the clearing up of general litter cost X amount, where would you (the public) prefer this money to be spent?” Officers at the meeting undertook to take this suggestion back to the relevant officers running that campaign.

Other matters discussed by the Committee included: the website for the reduction in substance misuse allowing public feedback and tip-offs; the reasons for the increase in the number of children being referred for assessment; and Members congratulated The Old Vicarage Children’s Home for the “outstanding” performance rating it received.

Members also requested that the following successes were added to the report in the future: increase in allotment facilities; walking buses; and partnership work with the Police to dramatically reduce the number of prostitutes in New Road, Chatham which had been achieved by helping them to stop their reliance on drugs and assisting them to find another occupation. Members also wished to receive further details of the drop in number of young people going swimming before the re-introduction of the free-swimming initiative. Officers agreed to provide the information outside of the meeting.

### **Decision:**

The Committee agreed to:

- (a) note the performance for Quarter 3 2010/2011 and the outcomes achieved against priorities;
- (b) request officers to respond to points raised during the discussion.

## **904 6 month review of the Council's corporate business risk register**

### **Discussion:**

The Quality Assurance and Client Manager gave a brief introduction advising of two recommendations following an update of the register by the risk owners, as follows:

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- SR21 Procurement – to be downgraded from A2 to C2 as most of the mitigating actions had been implemented
- SR23 Improvement Plan for Housing Service (HRA) – to be downgraded from C1 to E2 to reflect that the majority of actions identified in an inspection had been completed.

Members were advised that if SR23 was downgraded to an E2 category it would be below the tolerance line and therefore not appear on the risk register. However it would continue to be reviewed every six months until it was no longer considered to be a risk and then be removed completely.

Some Members advised that they did not think SR21 should be downgraded, stating that the recent procurement problems at Woodlands School highlighted the reason why this should not happen.

### **Decision:**

The Committee noted the Management Team's recommendations on amendments to the Council's Risk Register.

## **905 Housing Asset Management Strategy and Business Plan**

### **Discussion:**

The Assistant Director of Housing and Corporate Services introduced the report advising that it was part of the Business Plan for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and that Members would have the opportunity to consider it again when the Business Plan was reported later in the year.

The total sum of money set aside for this service was set as part of the annual budget setting process and the Asset Management Strategy defined how the money would be spent to ensure for long-term planning that provided the best value for money and demonstrated the way the service was heading.

The Committee was advised that although it looked as though the current budget was insufficient to cover all the works required, in reality the works were continually being re-evaluated and re-assessed and the financial situation fluctuated as and when properties were inspected, as some components lasted longer than their recommended life, and some works did not need completing.

Members requested the following amendments to the strategy:

- Page 92 of the report (page 9 of the strategy) fifth paragraph – To be amended from "Residents expect a good service ....." to "Residents have a right to a good service ....."
- Page 131 of the report (page 48 of the strategy) –

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“Stakeholders included in the Group are: ....”  
to include a representative from each political group on the Council

- Page 164 of the agenda (Terms of reference of the Housing Asset Management Group) –  
The wording to be reviewed, as the Committee considered that it was entirely reasonable for the Council to act on the aspirations of the political group in overall control and that Councillors should have a say in what should be done with regard to estate improvements
- Page 113 – 115 of the report (pages 30 – 32 of the strategy) Cyclical and planned maintenance -  
this was an area where Councillors received the most complaints from tenants who did not understand what the Council was trying to achieve. Members requested further communication with tenants in order to give as much information as possible.

The Committee also asked:

- whether the Kent Fire and Rescue Service could be used to fit fire alarms in council-owned property as it was a free service
- for future work on managing the housing stock – that it would be better to concentrate on the whole housing stock with strategic objectives set out in an open and transparent way rather than dealing with individual properties in isolation
- for further information and clarification on the budget for single-glazed windows as to whether they were replaced with double-glazing or not, as it seemed that there was no budget for double-glazing.

### **Decision:**

The Committee:

- (a) considered the Housing Asset Management Strategy and noted the progress to date in the development of the Business Plan;
- (b) requested that the Business Plan is reported to this Committee for consideration once it had been finalised, together with a review of the Housing Asset Management Strategy;
- (c) asked officers to take on board the comments set out above, particularly the involvement of a representative of each political group on the Council being given a place on the Housing Asset Management Board.

## **906 Housing Services Tenants Incentive Reward Scheme**

### **Discussion:**

The Assistant Director, Housing and Corporate Services introduced the report giving examples of different schemes in operation elsewhere and the criteria

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that was applied. One suggestion from tenants was for a handyman service to be available as part of the reward scheme. Members welcomed the intent of a reward scheme and felt that good tenants should be recognised.

The Committee discussed whether it was appropriate to pay taxi fares for residents attending a meeting and asked the Assistant Director, Housing and Corporate Services to ensure that this was in exceptional circumstances only.

### **Decision:**

The Committee noted the report and requested officers to draft a Tenants Reward Scheme in consultation with the Tenants Scrutiny Panel and residents.

**Chairman**

**Date:**

**Caroline Salisbury, Overview and Scrutiny Co-ordinator**

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