

**Medway Council**  
**Meeting of Regeneration, Culture and Environment**  
**Overview and Scrutiny Committee**  
**Thursday, 10 October 2024**  
**6.32pm to 10.18pm**  
**Record of the meeting**

**Present:** Councillors: Field (Chairperson), Cook (Vice-Chairperson), Campbell, Etheridge, Fearn, Filmer, Jackson, Lawrence and Peake

**Substitutes:** Councillors:  
Gilbourne  
Jones  
Osborne  
Pearce

**In Attendance:** Councillor Simon Curry, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration  
Adam Bryan, Director of Place  
Mark Breathwick, Assistant Director, Culture and Community  
Nicola Couchman, Democratic Services Officer  
Ruth Du-Lieu, Assistant Director, Front Line Services and Deputy Director of Place  
Noel Filmer, Head of Valuation and Asset Management  
Ian Gilmore, Head of Regulatory and Environmental Services  
Rochelle Roberts, Environmental Protection Technician  
Rebecca Wilcox, Chief Housing Officer

**325 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Animashaun, Doe, Myton and Williams.

**326 Record of Meeting**

The record of the meeting held on 15 August 2024 was agreed and signed by the Chairperson as a correct record

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

There were none.

**328 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.

**329 Attendance of Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration**

**Discussion:**

The Committee received an overview of progress made on the areas within the scope of the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change and Strategic Regeneration, Councillor Curry, which fell within the remit of this Committee.

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

**Rights of Access and Public Footpath at Maritime School** – The Committee were informed by the Portfolio Holder that the Local Access Forum now meets regularly so there was an opportunity to raise the issue of the footpath at Maritime School and report back on this query. The ambition for walking routes was also discussed as was the use of volunteers to assist with this.

**Timetable for Local Plan and Costs** – Members queried when the Local Plan would be presented to the Committee and the costs involved. The Portfolio Holder reported that the target date was for the adoption of the Local Plan in 2026, that the Regulation 19 stage would be submitted by June 2025 and would be presented to the Committee before it was submitted. The Portfolio Holder committed to provide the costs of the Local Plan outside the meeting and recognised the hidden costs of not having a Local Plan in place.

**Bird Mitigation Spending** – The Committee were informed by the Portfolio Holder that spending was managed through the SAMMS Project and was based on raising awareness, education and conservation work. The Portfolio Holder would provide details of the exact spending outside of the meeting.

**Improvements to Front Line Services** – The Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that the Waste Strategy was underway, new vehicles were being introduced and there had been a focus on partnership working with Medway Norse Ltd.

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**Public Transport & Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)** – The Committee were informed that there were currently 7.5m trips per year on the Medway Bus network and the target was to increase this to 9m trips per year by 2028. It was reported that Arriva had introduced more Euro 6 Buses, and a Bus Workshop had taken place to strengthen partnership working. The Committee were informed that bus routes would be reviewed as part of the Local Transport Plan and BSIP.

**Bus Franchising** – The Portfolio Holder informed the Committee that the council had responded to the government consultation to support bus franchising and that the new Bus Bill next year is expected to provide more detail on how this could work in practice.

**Climate Change Resilience** – Members queried how the reliance of the infrastructure for climate change was going to be improved. The Portfolio Holder reported that the climate change strategy had been refreshed and the team focused on 5 key areas – knowledge and engagement, energy reduction, sustainable transport, resource efficiency and green and resilient Medway however resilience presented a number of challenges. Electric Vehicle charging points were also discussed and the Committee were informed that the strategy was limited as it was dependent on funding, grants and private sector engagement.

**Trees in Hoo** – Members queried whether the trees in Hoo at risk of being felled could be protected. The Portfolio Holder explained that whilst he was not happy about trees being felled, their protection could not be guaranteed as this may need to go back to Planning Committee for a decision due to some complications regarding root growth and the impact on nearby houses. The Portfolio Holder would follow this issue up outside the meeting and provide further information.

**S106 Funding** – The process and trigger points were discussed and the Portfolio Holder confirmed that the use of S106 funding was reported to the Committee on an annual basis as part of the Annual Infrastructure Funding report.

**Salt Bins** – Members requested an audit of salt bins and that a number did not comply with the policy. The Portfolio Holder reported that this now sits within the remit of the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement but would raise the issue with the correct Portfolio Holder.

### **Decision:**

The Committee noted the report.

### **330 Property Asset Management Strategy and Property Review**

#### **Discussion:**

Officers summarised the background and rationale for the Asset Management Strategy and Property Review for the Committee and explained the methodology for selection of the properties that should be recommended for disposal.

The Committee was informed that this was an early stage of the process and that all properties would be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Director of Place, in consultation with the Council's Corporate Landlord Board (CLB) before being disposed of.

Members raised the following comments and queries:

- The principle of disposing of properties that yield low income, were derelict, of no economic value or require expensive maintenance makes sense.
- Members queried whether the methodology took into account fluctuating interest rates. Officers advised that going forward any decision to dispose of the properties would be made in liaison with the Council's CLB and fluctuating interest rates would be taken into consideration. Members suggested providing Cabinet with different scenarios based on different interest rates and officers responded that these would only be "snapshots" and that it would be preferable for CLB to consider, the current values of properties, current income and interest rates prior to the disposals.
- Officers were asked if there was any way to restrict the future use of properties that were disposed of. Officers responded to explain that there were various ways to address this, but this would be a matter for the CLB when looking at disposal as this could impact on values.
- Members asked whether any property disposal should await until the outcome of the Local Plan as some sites could be needed for infrastructure. Officers confirmed that where appropriate the disposal process would be informed by the Local Plan Process and would involve promoting sites for development where it was beneficial to do so.
- In response to a question about maintenance costs and potential savings, officers confirmed that properties in the non-operational property review were mostly unused or let so there were no large maintenance costs for Medway Council. The savings in future maintenance costs would be identified in the forthcoming review of the Council's operational properties.
- Members questioned why properties had been purchased outside of Medway and were informed that the 10 properties recommended for disposal were the only properties out of areas and that it was unlikely any other properties would be purchased out of area.

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- Assets of Community Value were discussed and how Members could support this. The Committee was informed that some of the sites were already leased to community groups and they would be given the opportunity to purchase the sites which they occupy. Officers clarified that in the operational property review that would follow there could be properties that groups want to list as assets of community value and there would be a process to follow for this.
- Confidence levels of officers for raising approximately £20m from the disposal programme were queried and officers confirmed that they were confident that this could be achieved.
- Officers were asked why a heritage asset, Temple Manor, was included in the list and how its future could be protected. Officers explained that Temple Manor was in the guardianship of central government through English Heritage, was rarely open and no Council services were run directly from it. Officers confirmed that whilst English Heritage had no objection to the sale of the property they would like the public to be able to visit the property still and would work with any new owners to achieve this.
- Members questioned whether planning applications should be made prior to disposal to increase the value of some sites. The Committee were informed that CLB would consider whether applying for a change of use or planning permission for some sites would be beneficial in terms of value and each site would be looked at on a case-by-case basis as part of the disposal process. Officers also stated that some sites had limited scope for this.
- Members questioned whether additional staff to deliver the programme would be required for longer than 3 years and whether they would be specialists. In response officers explained that staffing was currently being progressed with the Head of Property and opportunities for secondment or interim staff were being explored.
- With regards to the Capstone Farm site, Members queried whether any of the let site was being retained. Officers confirmed the site which was recommended for disposal was the full extent of the let site and the tenancy length would be provided outside of the meeting. (The lease of this site expires on 17 September 2030.)
- Members queried how many other properties the Council owned, and how many were not recommended for disposal as part of this review and officers confirmed that they were happy to provide information outside of the meeting.
- Officers confirmed that tenants in let properties had been contacted and that they would have the opportunity to purchase the properties which they occupy and that any existing leases would have to be honoured by new owners.

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### Decision:

The Committee made and submitted comments on the proposals set out in the report to the Cabinet, as set out above, and noted that the Cabinet will be asked to approve the following recommendations on 29 October 2024:

- i) To agree the updated Property Asset Management Strategy (PAMS), as set out in Appendix 1 to this report.
- ii) To agree to declare the following non-operational properties surplus, and to delegate authority to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Corporate Landlord Board (CLB) to agree the method of disposal for each property and to dispose of the properties in order to obtain the best price reasonably obtainable:
  - Land to the South- east of the end of Northdane Way Lordswood.
  - Land at 126-150 Chatham Hill.
  - Warren Wood Social Club, Rochester.
  - Rainham District Shopping Centre.
  - Industrial Estate - Railway Street, Gillingham.
  - Indoor Bowls Club, Prince Arthur Road, Gillingham.
  - Gillingham Business Park.
  - Northbank House, Sir Thomas Longley Road, Rochester.
  - Ground Floor Shop 23-25 High Street Brompton.
  - Britton Farm Shopping Centre, High Street, Gillingham.
  - Former Fire Station and Public Toilets Arches, New Cut, Chatham.
  - Unit 1 Court Farm Industrial Estate, Cwmbran, Gwent Wales.
  - Unit 1 Cherry Trees Court, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire.
  - Vantage Point, Holborough Road, Snodland, Kent.
  - Eldon Road, Aycliffe Industrial Estate, Newton Aycliffe.
  - Saxon Business Park, Bromsgrove, Worcestershire.
  - Suffolk Business Park, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk.
  - Unit 5 Deans Industrial Estate, Livingstone, Scotland.
  - 19 Lords Fold, Rainford, Merseyside.
  - Unit A1 Boothroyds Way, Pontefract, West Yorkshire.
  - Viking Park, Whitehill, Bordon, Hampshire.
  - Temple Manor, Knight Road, Strood, Rochester.
  - Site of 121-129 The Brook, Chatham.
  - Capstone Farm, Capstone Road, Farmland adjacent to Capstone Farm Country Park, Chatham.
  - Eastcourt & Mariners Fields Farmland adjacent to Riverside Country Park, Gillingham.
  - Land and building rear of 70 Maidstone Road, Rochester.
  - Stirling Sports Centre, Maidstone Road, Rochester.
  - Eastgate Cottage, High Street, Rochester.

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- Land at Abbots Court Farm, Bredhurst, Gillingham.
  - Gillingham Golf Club, Woodlands Road, Gillingham.
- iii) Plans of the above properties which are in Medway are attached to this report in Appendix 3 and further details of all of the properties are set out in Exempt Appendix 1 to this report.
- iv) To recommend that the Chief Executive, using urgency provisions, approves an addition to the Capital Programme for a budget of up to £400,000pa for up to 3 years to fund the cost of additional staff, which will be required to dispose of the surplus properties, this expenditure is to be funded from the resultant capital receipts, under flexibilities granted by the Government.

### 331 Draft Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to 2030

#### Discussion:

Officers informed the Committee of the partnership working required to deliver the Strategy and the lived experience that had been used to influence the document.

Members discussed the differences from the last Strategy, the purpose of the lettings agency proposed and the impact of changes to the market regarding the availability of private rented property.

Officers explained that the proposed letting agency would provide a service that was not available on the High Street with regards to guaranteed rent and would assist with relationships with landlords and households allowing earlier intervention and better outcomes.

Future supply of properties was discussed, and officers explained how they were working with providers to progress this. In response to a query from Members regarding members of the Armed Forces, officers confirmed this was already a priority in the allocations criteria and we did not have any Armed Forces rough sleepers when the last count took place.

Members expressed concern about the impact of dispersals from Home Office funded accommodation and officers confirmed they were aware of this and work closely with the Home Office and South East Migration Partnership.

Members were keen to see the use of modular homes explored as well as the greater use of data to aid earlier intervention.

#### Decision:

The Committee recommended to Cabinet to approve the Draft Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy to 2030, as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.

### **332 Public Space Protection Order - Dog Control**

#### **Discussion:**

Officers summarised the measures included in the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for dog control, explained that public consultation had been carried out and that this would be an enforcement tool for officers.

Members discussed the challenges of enforcement and what this would add in terms of enforcement. Concerns were expressed about the resources available to support enforcement and the impact on dog walking business owners who Members felt the council should continue to work with.

Officers informed the Committee that enforcement was challenging but this would be a tool to assist with enforcement and would also help to advise and educate residents.

#### **Decision:**

The Committee recommended Cabinet to recommend Full Council to introduce a Medway wide Dog Management PSPO, in accordance with s59 of the Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014.

### **333 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:**

The Committee noted the petition responses and appropriate officer actions in paragraph 4.1 of the report

### **334 Work programme**

#### **Discussion:**

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

In response to a query regarding where Section 106 contributions were used, it was confirmed that this was included in the Annual Infrastructure Funding Report presented to the Committee.

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**Decision:**

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

**Chairperson**

**Date:**

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