

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

Thursday, 12 December 2024

6.30pm to 8.45pm

Record of the meeting

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

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

Substitutes: Councillors:
Brake (Substitute for Etheridge)
Hyne (Substitute for Lawrence)
Lammas (Substitute for Fearn)
Mandaracas (Substitute for Animashaun)

In Attendance: Ruth Du-Lieu, Assistant Director, Front Line Services and Deputy Director of Place
Sunny Ee, Assistant Director Regeneration
Vanessa Etheridge, Democratic Services Officer
David Reynolds, Head of Revenue Accounts
Phil Watts, Chief Operating Officer
Rebecca Wilcox, Chief Housing Officer

530 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Animashaun, Etheridge, Fearn and Lawrence.

531 Record of Meeting

The record of the meeting held on 10 October 2024 was agreed and signed by the Chairperson as a correct record.

532 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Other interests

There were none.

533 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.

533a Annual Scrutiny of the Community Safety Partnership including an Update on the Community Safety Plan 2024 to 2027

Discussion:

The Committee received a report on the operation of the Community Safety Partnership, the findings of the strategic assessment and the Community Safety Plan covering the period from 2024 to 2027. The Chair welcomed: Stephen Perez – Community Insights and Partnership Lead, Kent Fire and Rescue Service; Detective Chief Inspector Garry Cook, District Commander for Medway; Councillor Paterson, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement and Chair of the Community Safety Partnership; Steve Chevis – Head of Public Health Programmes; and Chloe Rooke, Deputy Head of Service HM Prison and Probation Service.

The Committee took the opportunity to ask questions, and the discussion included the following:

Anti-social behaviour – In response to questions the Committee were advised that overall figures were down, however, there were still improvements to be made in various areas/wards. Dangerous dog incident figures were up but that was not unexpected given the focus on it and some of the national issues. The neighbourhood policing model was going to continue, with a focus on policing being visible and contactable within wards and town centres, looking where they could make a difference and find solutions. The focus moving forward would be town centres as there was still significant work to do there especially in engaging local businesses and building trust and communication. It was noted that licensing remained the strongest deterrent and enforcement tool for licensed premises.

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Members took the opportunity to request that their thanks be passed to their local police ward officers.

Violence against women and girls – The Committee were advised that there had been significant improvements made, with strong police investigation teams and results, working in schools and with all partners to make a difference and ensuring the right services were available to safeguard victims as well as making arrests. Events had been held in towns centres publicising what was on offer. It was queried whether female genital mutilation, hymenoplasty and virginity testing, was specifically addressed in education settings, the Committee were advised that education and awareness would continue and there was a dedicated child protection scheme assess and if there are crime enforcement will happen. It was requested that it be ensured that this was specifically addressed at education events. The Committee were advised that the education packs would be checked to see if it needed to be added.

It was noted that simple things such as effective lighting helped with making streets feels safer for women. It was noted that proactive measures were being explored to make public spaces feel safer, and in the new year there was some planned work with licensed taxi drivers on their role in creating that feeling of safety around the nighttime economy.

Drugs and alcohol – Continued to be a national and local issue, the police continued to be as robust as possible with significant focus on disrupting County Lines and addressing local drug misuse, whilst acknowledging a holistic approach with partners in education and health were fundamental in tackling this complex issue. From a health point of view there was a collaborative approach to ensuring continuity of care and one continuous treatment journey, with a focus of empowering people to remain off substances. There was also educational work including projects looking at drivers/influencers and how this information might be used to inform safer choices

Probation Service – In response to questions the Committee were advised that there were challenges with early prisoner releases due to capacity issues, and that the recruitment of probation officers remained a concern nationally not just locally. However, there was multi-agency support being provided for early-release individuals.

Funding - In response to a query as to whether the delay in the Police and Crime Commissioner's Police and Crime Plan submission affected action being taken, it was acknowledged that the lack of current clarity was not ideal, but it was not anticipated that funding would change, the ambitions were clear and it should not hinder the work.

Survey - Regarding the low overall response rate to the online survey, it was suggested that other forms of engaging the public in responding to the survey, maybe across more diverse social media platforms.

The Committee suggested it would be helpful to receive the 'Breakdown of Crime Types' by ward.

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Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the findings of the strategic assessment.
- b) The Committee supported the proposed Community Safety Partnership priorities considering the strategic assessment findings and requested that Female genital mutilation (FGM), hymenoplasty and virginity testing be expressly included within the priorities and education and awareness training if not already.
- c) The Committee requested a 'Breakdown of Crime Types' by ward.
- d) The Committee noted the activity of the Community Safety Partnership, over the past year, in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions.

534 Attendance of the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement

Discussion:

The Committee received an overview of progress made on the areas within the scope of the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Highways and Enforcement, Councillor Paterson, which fell within the remit of the Committee.

The Portfolio Holder responded to Members' questions and comments which included the following:

The Committee were advised that there was a process for prioritising road improvement works as well as budget constraints, but he would pass on the requests voiced at the meeting to officers, to consider. Some income was derived from the issuing of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) around schools, and he was keen to see if that could be reinvested into the goals of the school street scheme primarily for the safety of children travelling to and from schools. Due to budget constraints not all requests for school crossing services could be met, but officers could look at other measures to improve road safety in those areas.

He was keen to find and use where possible, opportunities AI might bring to improving roads, traffic flow and road surfaces especially considering Medway 2.0 aspirations. Regarding the effectiveness of red routes, he did not have data to hand on specific areas but at a recent workshop with bus companies, they had highlighted the changes as advantageous and had singled out the one in Rainham as of particular benefit, so anecdotal evidence was that they were useful. He was also happy to consider other areas where red routes might benefit street flow and ease congestion and confirmed that he worked with his fellow Portfolio Holders on cross cutting issues such as: encampments; EV charging infrastructure with a commitment to improving reliability and availability of charging points; and a focus on innovative placement strategies to accommodate community needs.

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There was no easy fix for fly tipping, with continued use of mobile cameras and community reporting to address hotspots. The 'wall of shame' initiative continued to seek public assistance in identifying offenders, aimed at fostering a collective effort to reduce littering and fly-tipping. Significant numbers of fines had been issued, with offenders taken to court for non-payment, resulting in higher penalties. Members were encouraged to report recurring hotspots for targeted actions, including redesigning problem areas to deter fly-tipping.

Decision:

- a) The Committee requested data requested data to assess the impact of red routes on traffic flow, business efficiency, and safety, and suggested exploring additional areas for red route implementation based on traffic patterns.
- b) The Committee noted the report.

(The meeting was adjourned for a brief comfort break for the convenience of Members and Officers at 8.12pm. The meeting reconvened at 8.20pm)

535 Council Plan Performance Monitoring Report and Strategic Risk Summary - Quarters 1 and 2 2024/25

Discussion:

The Committee considered the report which summarised the Council's performance in Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 2024/25 on the delivery of the priorities detailed in the One Medway Council Plan 2024-28. The report also presented the Quarters 1 and 2, 2024/25 review of strategic risks which fell under the remit of the Committee.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the Quarter 1 and Quarter 2 2024/25 progress of the performance indicators used to monitor progress of the Council's priorities, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
- b) The Committee noted the Strategic Risk Summary as set out in Appendix 2 to the report.

536 Capital Budget Monitoring - Round 2 2024/25

Discussion:

The Committee were presented with the results of the second round of the Council's capital budget monitoring process for 2024/25.

It was queried whether the underspend on highways and green spaces was due to strategic or deliberate delays, especially considering the timing prior to the last general election. The Committee were advised that it was more a question of how the figures were presented as they included future and

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previous year allocations. It was agreed that this should be clarified by a detailed briefing note circulated outside of the meeting.

Decision:

- a) The Committee requested a detailed briefing note on the highways and green spaces underspends, to be circulated outside of the meeting.
- b) The Committee noted the results of the second round of capital budget monitoring for 2024/25.

537 Revenue Budget Monitoring - Round 2 2024/25

Discussion:

The Committee were presented with the results of the second round of the Council's revenue budget monitoring process for 2024/25. The Council's summary position is presented in section 4, with sections 5-7 providing the detail for the service areas within the remit of the Committee.

Decision:

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

538 Draft Capital and Revenue Budget 2025/26

Discussion:

The Committee considered the Draft Capital and Revenue Budgets for 2025/26. It was noted that in accordance with the Constitution, the Cabinet was required to develop 'initial budget proposals' approximately three months before finalising the budget and setting Council Tax levels at the end of February 2025. The Draft Budget was based on the principles set out in the Medium-Term Financial Outlook 2024-2029 (MTFO) considered by the Cabinet on 27 August 2024.

In response to a request for more granularity of the highways budget, it was noted that the Committee had previously agreed not to receive these reports in such detail, however a briefing note could be produced.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted that Cabinet had instructed officers to continue to work with Portfolio Holders in formulating robust proposals to reduce the budget deficit for 2025/26 and to continue to liaise with the Ministry of

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Housing, Communities and Local Government to secure support through the Exceptional Financial Support scheme.

- b) The Committee requested a detailed briefing note to be circulated outside of the meeting, with a more detailed breakdown of the highways budget.
- c) The Committee noted the proposals outlined in the Draft Capital and Revenue Budgets 2025/26 in so far as they related to the services within the remit of the Committee and noted that this would be fed this back to the Business Support and Digital Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January.

539 Petitions Report

Discussion:

The Committee considered a report which advised on the number 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.

540 Work programme

Discussion:

The Committee considered the Committee's work programme.

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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