

Medway Council
Meeting of Regeneration, Culture and Environment
Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Wednesday, 26 February 2025
6.00pm to 9.01pm
Record of the meeting

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

Substitutes: Councillors Brake and Jones

In Attendance: Councillor Nina Gurung, Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Culture and Leisure
Alex Constantinides, Strategic Lead Front Line Services
Nicola Couchman, Democratic Services Officer
Paul Cowell, Head of Culture and Libraries
Johanna Dickson, Environmental Services Manager
Bob Dimond, Head of Sport, Leisure, Tourism & Heritage
Ruth Du-Lieu, Assistant Director, Front Line Services and Deputy Director of Place
Sunny Ee, Assistant Director Regeneration
David England, Head of Valuation and Asset Management
Andy Mann, Operations Director, Medway Norse
Amy Mason, Environmental Contracts Manager
Natasha Spencer-Jones, Waste Disposal Manager

713 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Animashaun and Filmer.

714 Record of Meeting

The record of the meeting held on 21 January 2025 was agreed and signed by the Chairperson as a correct record.

715 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

716 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.

717 Waste Contracts Annual Review - October 2023 to September 2024

Discussion:

Officers explained that the report summarised performance of the waste contracts for October 2023 to September 2024 and focused on the contracts with Medway Norse and Veolia Environmental Services.

Some of the key achievements were highlighted for the Committee including the vehicle replacement programme, 100% diversion rate, 64% recycling rate, low number of missed collections at 0.03% and the successful Christmas waste collection service.

Officers recognised the hard work of over 300 front line staff that deliver waste services in Medway.

Members thanked officers for the comprehensive report, recognised the high standard of waste services provided in Medway and thanked staff for their hard work.

Members asked the following questions:

The reasons for recycling tonnage not increasing – Officers were not sure of the reasons for the tonnage not increasing but would continue to try to improve the amount of waste recycled and noted Members comments about using social media to encourage residents to recycle.

The spend v cost for the second brown bin service – Officers explained this service was still being commissioned and that the capital costs of the extra bin were included in Year 1 but would not be in Year 2 for ongoing subscribers.

HWRC Booking system and whether casual visits could also be reinstated – Officers reported that the booking system had helped manage queues at HWRCs and improved health and safety.

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QR codes on street litter bins – The Committee was informed that 1,400 litter bins were emptied at least weekly, and some were emptied 3 times a week with high street bins continually cleansed 364 days a year. QR codes were used to enable residents to report full or overflowing bins but did not yet automatically provide the location of the bin due to technical limitations.

Climate Change Implications – Officers explained it was challenging to reduce the carbon footprint as some waste had to travel some distance due to the lack of local facilities.

Types of complaints – Members acknowledged the high number of compliments and asked what type of complaints were received. Officers agreed to provide data on this outside of the meeting.

Reasons for missed collections – Members recognised the low number of missed collections and queried the reasons for missed collections that do occur. Officers informed the Committee that this could be due to a crew being unfamiliar with a route, urgent road closures or parked vehicles which restrict access and said that repeat missed bins were very rare.

Number of complaints regarding Christmas was collections – Officers reported that there had been no stage 1 complaints relating to Christmas 2024.

Decision:

The Committee noted the content of the report including Annual Service Reports and other briefings set out in Appendices 1- 5 to the report.

718 Attendance of Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Culture and Leisure

Discussion:

The Committee received an overview of progress made on the areas within the scope of the Portfolio Holder for Heritage, Culture and Leisure, Councillor Gurung, which fell within the remit of this Committee.

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

Plans to celebrate VE Day – The Portfolio Holder reported that there were exciting plans being developed for VE Day involving the Cathedral, Royal Engineers, Chatham Dockyard and Veterans. The Committee was informed that street parties were being explored but officers were waiting for the funding to be declared.

Libraries and Community Hubs – The Committee was informed that visitor levels were nearing pre-Covid levels. Officers would circulate footfall figures to the Committee and Members commented that it would be good if this included

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information on the demographics of visitors. The Portfolio Holder explained that libraries would be looked at alongside the Local Plan.

Christmas Dickens Festival – The Committee was informed that there were no plans to withdraw this festival from the calendar of events and ideas for spreading the event over 3 weekends would be discussed at an upcoming planning meeting.

Safeguarding internet use in Libraries – The Committee was assured that safety policies and tools were in place for internet use in libraries and the Members asked for a copy of the internet safety policies to be shared with the Committee.

Central Theatre – The success of the theatre was recognised with high quality acts, a high level of ticket sales and a recent feature in the national theatre pages for the Pantomime. The theatre staff were thanked for their hard work.

Distribution of events across Medway and funding streams – Members expressed concerns that some events seemed to be centred around Chatham and Rochester and that there may be an over reliance on funding from the Council. The Portfolio Holder explained that events took place across Medway, were dependent on consortiums and partners approaching the Council for support and they were supported with attracting funding.

Sports and Olympics 2012 legacy – The Committee discussed the sports offer and the success of the Multi Youth Games as well as the Olympics legacy and positive impact it had on facilities in Medway.

Football and community programmes – The Portfolio Holder reported that good relationships existed with both Gillingham football club and Chatham football club and discussions were ongoing regarding trust status, access to soccer camps and competitions and community events.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted the report.
- b) The Committee requested copies of the internet safety policies for Libraries to be shared with the Committee.

719 Property Review: Operational Properties

Discussion:

The Committee was informed that this was the second phase of the Property Review following the report on non-operational properties in October 2024.

The Committee agreed to allow Mr Rana, Director of Sambhana Care and Take Care Ltd to address the Committee.

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Mr Rana informed the Committee that he was representing the tenants of Hopewell Drive Business Centre, where low rents had helped a range of businesses in 20 units across 2 floors survive. Mr Rana recognised the importance of the services provided by the businesses as well as the jobs created and felt that support for local businesses would be more beneficial in the long term as opposed to the short-term fix of disposing of the site.

Members expressed concerns regarding the disposal of Albatross Avenue car park and Lower Stoke car park without undertaking consultation prior to reaching a decision. A briefing note from Stoke Parish Council was distributed to the Committee regarding its concerns about the disposal of Lower Stoke car park.

Officers explained the steps that would be taken when looking at whether a property should be disposed of and said that if a property was declared surplus this could change subject to the consultation, timing, value and costs.

Officers informed Members that they would be happy to consult with Parish Councils and appropriate Village Hall Associations if it was deemed necessary before deciding to bring Albatross Avenue and Lower Stoke car parks to Corporate Landlord Board for a decision.

With regards to Hopewell Drive Business Centre, officers reassured the Committee that if this was disposed of, the new owner would need to honour all the existing leases at the property and that a covenant would be included as part of any disposal process to ensure it that it was not used for residential use and that it remained as employment space.

Clarification was sought from Members regarding Upnor Castle and Cooling Village public toilets as these were not owned by Medway Council. Officers explained that the Council currently managed the Castle under a Local Management Agreement with the Guardians of the Castle (English Heritage) and that the subject to Cabinet's approval, the Council could hand back the management of Upnor Castle to English Heritage. With regard to Cooling Village public toilets, officers were seeking approval to consult on divesting the Council from running them on the basis that the Parish Council or the owners of the toilets would be better placed to run them.

Members expressed concern about the impact that disposing of town centre car parks would have on town centres and whether the wider impact had been considered. Officers explained that correctly pricing properties would be essential, and that the Council would rely on commercial sense in the market and that these issues would be considered when reaching decisions on disposals at Corporate Landlord Board.

Decision:

- a) The Committee noted that Cabinet would be asked to approve the recommendations set out in sections 1.1.1 to 1.1.4 of the report on 11

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March 2025 and requested the following amendments to the report to Cabinet:

- i) Lower Stoke car park & Albatross Avenue car park to both be moved from the disposal list at 1.1.2 into the list of properties at 1.1.3 where it is recommended that consultation is carried out before Cabinet makes a decision.
- ii) Hopewell Drive Business Centre is disposed of subject to:
 - A covenant that restricts it from being used for residential use.
 - The leases to existing occupiers being honoured by the new owner.

b) The Committee noted the information set out in section 1.2 of the report.

720 Attendance of Portfolio Holder for Business Management

Discussion:

Prior to the Committee it was agreed to defer this item to the meeting on 12 June 2025 due to unforeseen circumstances.

721 Work programme

Discussion:

The Committee considered the 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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