

Medway Council
Meeting of Business Support Overview and Scrutiny
Committee

Thursday, 9 June 2011

7.00pm to 7.50pm

Record of the meeting

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

- Present:** Councillors: Avey, Bowler, Bright, Carr (Chairman), Pat Gulvin (Vice-Chairman), Irvine, Juby, Maple, Osborne, Royle, Tolhurst and Watson
- Substitutes:** Councillors:
Griffiths (Substitute for Harriott)
- In Attendance:** Mick Hayward, Chief Finance Officer
Julie Keith, Head of Democratic Services
Anthony Law, Democratic Services Officer
Matthew Gough, Head of Strategic Housing
Deborah Upton, Assistant Director, Housing and Corporate Services/Monitoring Officer

63 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 22 March 2011 and of the Joint Meeting of All Committees held on 25 May 2011 were agreed and signed as correct by the Chairman.

64 Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Harriott.

65 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

66 Declarations of interest

Councillor Griffiths declared a personal interest in any reference to Medway Community Healthcare as he is a non-executive director of the trust.

67 Interim Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2011- 2012

Discussion:

The Head of Strategic Housing introduced a report on the Interim Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2011-2012.

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It was explained that the council had produced a 30-year business plan in 2005. The interim plan acted as a strategic update and brought together information from a number of documents. It provided up-to-date information on the nature and condition of the housing stock, recent management performance and targets for improving the service in the future. It was noted that due to the current uncertainty of the policy environment, the Business Plan has been developed as an interim plan on a planning horizon of 1 year.

Members discussed the interim plan in detail and during the discussion officers set out the background to the council's current HRA stock. This included details of:

- the housing stock options appraisal undertaken in 2005 and the recommendation from the stakeholder forum for the council to retain ownership of the stock
- the implications of the government's new self-financing scheme for council housing and building new homes
- recent analysis on the future need for older people's accommodation undertaken in partnership with Oxford Brookes University.

It was also noted that a housing briefing session had been included as part of the 2011 Member Development Programme and officers undertook to notify Committee Members as to the details of this session.

In response to specific questions the Committee was advised that:

- the Interim Business Plan included a review of the Council Sheltered Housing units, many of which were becoming difficult to let. This would judge their suitability and effectiveness and, making use of the Housing Quality Indicators, would include consideration of alternative uses, such as redevelopment or conversion, demand and the proximity to transport links and shops etc.
- the reported increase in applicants joining the council's Housing Register was likely to be a reflection of the wider economic situation and also increased awareness.
- work was underway to improve the energy efficiency of homes, such as cavity wall insulation, and officers undertook to explore the possibility of widening the offer in areas of mixed use and communal areas.
- the budgetary process for the Major Repairs Allowance had been revised since 2010/11.

The Committee also discussed the role of the Housing Improvement Board, which formed part of the new resident involvement structure contained within the interim plan, and considered the role of councillors in this process. Members were reminded that the Committee had agreed in January 2011 that the chairman of the Housing Improvement Board be invited on an annual basis to the committee to provide a review of the board's work and that the involvement of Members in the work of the board could be considered then.

In relation to the development of a Community Involvement Strategy, listed as an action for tenant involvement and empowerment, it was requested that officers report back to the Committee on the delivery of the 'projects and actions for 2011/12' cited within the plan.

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In light of the proportion of the HRA projected capital expenditure attributed to 'planned maintenance' officers agreed to include as an annex to the interim plan a breakdown of planned maintenance.

During the discussion of this item Members identified a number of typographical errors that should be addressed prior to submission of the Interim Plan to Cabinet.

A Diversity Impact Assessment screening form had been completed and was attached to the report. It was noted that a full diversity impact assessment was not required.

Decision:

- a) The Committee endorsed the Interim HRA Business Plan 2011/12 and recommended its adoption to the Cabinet, subject to the inclusion of an appendix providing details of the capital expenditure on planned maintenance.
- b) The Committee agreed that officers report back to the Committee on the delivery of projects and actions for 2011/12 arising from the Community Involvement Strategy.

68 Work Programme

Discussion:

This report presented the Committee's work programme, together with the Cabinet's Forward Plan and, recognising the co-ordinating role of the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the work programmes of the other three overview and scrutiny committees.

The Head of Democratic Services advised the Committee of a number of proposed revisions to the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny work programme:

1. moving the revenue and capital monitoring reports scheduled for 20 September 2011 to 4 August 2011
2. the addition of a report on the Medium Term Financial Plan to 20 September
3. the addition of a report on the Housing Strategy (2011-14) to 4 August.

Details of the process by which the programme of in-depth scrutiny review work would be prioritised for 2011/12 were also set out in the report. This followed the decision by Council on 14 April 2011 to reduce the level of in-depth scrutiny work. Members discussed the timetable for agreeing reviews and also the practicalities of undertaking them within the remaining municipal year. It was requested that as part of this process officers consider the 2012/2013 timetable and also provide examples of good practice from other councils; including

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examples that would cut across the specific terms of reference of Medway's Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

Decision:

The Committee agreed to:

- (a) the following revisions to the Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme:
 - i. move the revenue and capital budget monitoring items from 20 September to 4 August.
 - ii. add "Medium Term Financial Plan" to 20 September
 - iii. add "Housing Strategy (2011-14)" to 4 August.
- (b) note the work undertaken by all overview and scrutiny committees (as set out in appendices 2 and 3 to the report) and acknowledge that the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be considering 2 petitions at the meeting on 16 June 2011.
- (c) approve the process and timetable for the selection of this year's in-depth reviews as set out in paragraph 6.5 of the report and request that officers include as part of this process consideration of the 2012/13 municipal year and examples of good practice from other councils.

Chairman

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