

Medway Council
Meeting of Business Support Overview and Scrutiny
Committee

Thursday, 4 August 2011

6.33pm to 9.40pm

Record of the meeting

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

- Present:** Councillors: Avey, Bright, Carr (Chairman), Pat Gulvin (Vice-Chairman), Harriott, Juby, Maple, Osborne, Royle, Tolhurst and Watson
- Substitutes:** Councillor Christine Godwin
Adrian Gulvin for Councillor Irvine
- In Attendance:** Councillor Rupert Turpin
Peter Penn

246 Record of meeting

The record of the meeting held on 9 June 2011 were agreed and signed as correct by the Chairman.

247 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bowler and Irvine.

248 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were no urgent items but the Chairman announced that he would vary the order of the agenda to take agenda item 5 (Work Programme) as the last item for consideration.

Due to this amendment, Members agreed to allow Councillor Turpin and Peter Penn to address the committee, at this point of the meeting, on a topic to be discussed under Appendix 4 of the Work Programme report. The issues raised by them have been incorporated into the Work Programme minutes (minute 246 below.)

249 Declarations of interest

Councillor Adrian Gulvin declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 5 (Work Programme) Appendix 2c to any reference to the Kent Fire and Rescue Service as he is a council appointed Member. He also declared a personal interest in agenda item 6 (End of year performance report 2010/2011) to any reference to the Youth Offending Team as his brother manages the team.

250 End of year Council Plan monitoring report 2010/2011

Discussion:

The Assistant Director, Communications, Performance and Partnerships, introduced the report advising that this was the last time that the performance report would be presented in the old format, showing an exceptions report on measures and actions rated as red or amber, as well narrative summary.

The committee was advised of the areas that had presented a challenge to the council such as mental health, the 'personalisation' agenda for adult social care, increased workloads in children's social care and the public's perception of the condition of the roads.

Members voiced their concern on the following topics:

- consistent underperformance of 'personalisation' target
- mental health services
- raising achievement at Key Stage 2
- huge workload of the children's care teams and children's social services – difficult balance of not overspending the budget and continued child safety
- domestic abuse – use of the 'Sanctuary' team
- level of local bus and light rail passenger usage
- recycling service (continued provision of clear bags)
- Government proposal to withdraw the ability to fine people who put rubbish out early
- Flytipping on private land
- alley gates and adequacy of funding
- children in care – high cost of independent fostering agencies
- the number of young people in bed and breakfast accommodation
- expensive and specialised out of area child placements – value for money
- Traffic Commissioner's Inquiry – bus services running on time.

Members also recognised the areas performing well, especially the results of the residents survey for performance in litter, detritus, graffiti and flyposting. Also the committee praised the 90% level of satisfaction with the refuse collection service and the continued work of the Child Protection team in the face of an ever-increasing workload. The committee agreed to recognise this by nominating the team for a Medway Council Recognition Award.

The committee asked for further information on the following areas:

- (page 52 of the agenda – value for money)
the phrase "fewer children with special educational needs (SEN) were placed out of area - how many children did this refer to, how many had this reduced from and what were the actual savings?"

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- (page 76 of the agenda - NI 178(i) bus services running on time)
Members requested the outcome of the Traffic Commissioner's Inquiry.

Officers undertook to send the committee the information that had been requested.

Decision:

Members agreed to:

- (a) note the outcomes achieved against priorities and requested further information, as set out in full above;
- (b) nominate the Children's Referral Assessment and Support Teams (CRAST) and Safeguarding teams together with the Chairs of Child Protection Conferences (Independent Reviewing Officers [IRO]) for a Recognition award, to acknowledge the hard work and effort put in by the team in the face of ever-increasing workloads and pressures.

251 First Quarter Council Plan monitoring 2011/2012

Discussion:

The Assistant Director, Communications, Performance and Partnerships, introduced the report notifying the committee of the new, streamlined Council Plan for 2011/2012 onwards. The changes are in response to Government relaxation of national performance reporting frameworks.

The committee was advised that the measures of success underpinning the new Council Plan placed more emphasis on a rounded picture of resident satisfaction, efficiency and effectiveness of the Council's ways of working and, where possible, would also try to quantify the difference the service was making for Medway residents.

Members voiced their concern on the following topics:

- personalised services for disabled people and adult services – families who were unable to manage their own budgets
- concessionary fares for young people – requested specialist consultants scoping report
- City Status bid – possible use of budget for entertainment purposes – clarification required
- Partner organisations not attending child protection case conferences and reviews
- Safer Communities team – poor resident satisfaction results and possible drafting of officers to other duties in town centres for a third of their working day and therefore not able to cover their own wards properly
- poor resident satisfaction with road maintenance
- Luton and Wayfield Strategic Partnership – poor community attendance at some recent events

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- Potential for improved usage levels of Deangate Ridge running track by schools and young people
- Better for Less project – potential to use this to improve access to services for rural communities – bearing in mind poor broadband/internet services experienced there.

With reference to page 105 of the agenda (Priority 4: Everybody travelling easily around Medway) Members asked for further information about the work with Network Rail to improve Rochester Train Station, as they had been unaware of this project. Officers undertook to send details to the committee.

Decision:

Members noted the outcomes achieved to date against priorities in the Council Plan 2011/2012.

252 First Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2011/2012

Discussion:

The Chief Finance Officer introduced the report using Table 1 to explain the revenue budget position for April – June 2011/2012. He advised that historically this was the most negative forecast of the year with managers advising that they would spend all of their budgets and also forecasting possible risks that might occur during the forthcoming year. The first quarter returns forecasted a potential overspend of £4 million (for non-Designated Schools Grant services.)

The committee was advised that matters of concern included:

- the large increase in the number of looked after children which was already at the total number predicted for 2012
- Special Educational Needs (SEN) transport – forecasting the number of children due to use the service and the implications on the budget
- waste services – the projected contractual inflation was budgeted at 2%. However, the contract is linked to the RPI (retail price index) which rose by 5%.

Members made comments on the report including the following:

- the projected £500,000 for the provision of recycling bags was a considerable amount of money for this service, if it continued
- levies to bodies such as the Kent and East Coast Fisheries and Lower Medway Drainage Board – as there is a freeze on council tax charges, there should also be a freeze on the levies paid to these bodies
- concern in the shortfall of schools buying back services and how this would be affected in the future with the Academy programme
- there should be more information in this report in the future detailing the action being taken on the overspends

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- concern that the £167,000 housing solutions pressure came from the sale of Trafalgar House. Members requested information on who had made that decision and what were the plans for its future?
- public conveniences; £122,000 pressure in respect of cleaning and maintenance – officers to provide further details
- the predicted overspend in the Children and Adults Directorate could potentially become worse when ‘Universal Credit’ is implemented
- the rationalisation of the transport depot at Civic Centre, Strood - when was this due to happen?

Officers undertook to respond to the requests above.

Decision:

The committee:

- (a) agreed to note the forecast outturn position for 2011/2012;
- (b) requested that officers write to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, requesting that levies paid to public boards, such as the Lower Medway Drainage Board, should be frozen in line with council tax charging.
- (c) requested information from officers on who made the decision to close Trafalgar House and what were the plans for its future;
- (d) requested information from officers on the £122,000 pressure in respect of cleaning and maintenance of public conveniences;
- (e) requested information from officers of when the rationalisation of the transport depot at the Civic Centre in Strood was due to happen.

253 First Quarter Capital Budget Monitoring 2011/2012

Discussion:

The Chief Finance Officer summarised the current spend and forecast to date (April to June) of the capital budget for 2011/2012. He advised that out of a total of 186 schemes, with an approved total of £329 million, five of these gave cause for concern. These related to HCA (Homes and Communities Agency) funded schemes and a final payment from the HCA to the council of £1.5 million was anticipated at any moment.

Members discussed the projected overspend of the bus facility in Chatham town centre and the surrounding project in The Brook and that these two projects accounted for a large proportion of the projected overspend. The committee asked for a clear position from officers about monies due from the HCA and notification of when any final monies had been received. Members acknowledged that it had been their decision to move the position of the bus

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station, which had resulted in re-design costs of £900,000 but these costs were questioned as being unreasonably high.

Members also requested further information on the Members Priority Scheme and the transparency of this scheme. Officers were asked to provide information on the number of requests for funding that had been refused by this scheme.

With reference to Strood Academy (paragraph 4.2.5 of the report), the committee praised the apprenticeship scheme developed in partnership with Mid-Kent College, acknowledging that this was an excellent addition within the contract and the way forward for similar contracts in the future.

Councillors Bright and Pat Gulvin, speaking as ward Members (Princes Park), voiced their concern at the abandonment of the project for North Dane Way (as set out in paragraph 4.5.1 of the report). They advised that they had been involved at the start of the project but had not been notified that it was no longer going ahead and asked that officers ensured that Members were kept informed of information like this.

The committee also asked that in future all capital monitoring reports contained the original, project budget forecast, so that Members could monitor the 'project outturn' against the original forecast in order to assess the accuracy of information when projects were first put forward for agreement. The Chief Finance Officer explained that it was not uncommon for additional resources to be allocated to projects during their life, which made such a comparison meaningless as an outturn measure. However, he advised that the 'New Approvals' column in Appendix 2 of the report and the council process for approval were a means of tracking such changes.

Members also discussed the replacement of legal Section 106 agreements with the new Community Infrastructure Levy and asked that a briefing note was circulated to all Members of the Council on the operation of the new levy.

Decision:

The committee agreed to:

- (a) note the spending and funding forecasts summarised at Tables 1 and 3;
- (b) request that officers provide details of schemes which had been rejected from the Members Priority Fund scheme;
- (c) request that officers notify Members of the committee when the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) have paid over the outstanding sums;
- (d) to request a Briefing Note for all Councillors on the operation of the new Community Infrastructure Levy.

254 Work programme

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Discussion:

Councillor Turpin and an ex-offender recently released from prison, Peter Penn, addressed the committee about the cost and quality of supported housing provision from the provider 'Lifeline'. Mr Penn advised that although he had asked to go elsewhere, the Probation Service had told him that he had to go to 'Lifeline' for accommodation or be sent back to prison. He had been given a room but he had only stayed there one night, as it was so appalling. It had been rat-infested, damp with no bedding available and drug-dealing was widespread. Key workers were assigned to each ex-offender but were never seen.

Mr Penn advised that the large amount of this type of provision in Medway was drawing in people from all over Kent and had resulted in Medway having a high number of heroin addicts who received no help. Mr Penn asked the committee to investigate this issue in order that ex-offenders could be provided with decent living accommodation and the possibility of changing their lives.

The committee thanked Mr Penn and Councillor Turpin for raising this issue and advised that it hoped this matter would be chosen as an in-depth review for the forthcoming year. If, however, it was not chosen for a review Members asked for it to be kept on the work programme in order to investigate it at a future meeting.

The Democratic Services Officer introduced the work programme report to Members highlighting the three new items on the Cabinet's Forward Plan within the remit of this committee.

Members discussed various topics that they might wish to see coming forward as reports in the future and requested that a copy of the Terms of Reference of the committee was included in the next work programme report. It was requested that a report on properties owned by the council and the backlog of maintenance repairs was added to the work programme. Officers advised that a condition survey was currently on-going and that a report should be able to come forward in early 2012.

The committee discussed the three suggested topics put forward for in-depth review by the Chairman and opposition spokespersons, as set out in appendix 4 of the report, and agreed that these should all be put forward to join the other topics from other committees that would be discussed at the next meeting. Members requested that the final list of topics from all committees was made available to them as soon as practicably possible.

Members discussed the follow-up to a previous review on Temporary Accommodation and officers undertook to come back with further information.

Decision:

The committee agreed to:

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- (a) add the following items to the work programme:
- (i) Annual review of Risk Management Strategy and six monthly review of Corporate Risk register – 20 September 2011
 - (ii) Treasury Management Strategy mid-year review – 20 September 2011
 - (iii) 2012/2013 Capital and Revenue Budgets and Business Plans – initial proposals – date to be confirmed
 - (iv) a report detailing the properties owned by the council and the backlog of maintenance repairs – early 2012
 - (v) a report/themed meeting on Supported Accommodation for ex-offenders – date to be confirmed (if this is not chosen as a topic for in-depth review);
- (b) that the long-list of topics being put forward by all overview and scrutiny committees for in-depth review is made available to Members as soon as possible;
- (c) that officers provide the committee with a follow-up of a previous review into Temporary Accommodation.

Chairman

Date:

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