
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO COUNCIL

To: **Council – 03 December 2015**

By: **Cllr D. Saunders, Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Ward: **Thanet Wide**

Summary: **The purpose of the report is to highlight some of the key activities that have been planned for by the Overview & Scrutiny Panel during the course of this municipal year 2015/16 and progress to date regarding implementation of the Panel's work programme.**

For Information

1.0 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Members agreed at the Full Council meeting on 2 October 2014 that 'at each of its ordinary meetings, Council will receive a written report introduced by the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel on the work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel since the last Council meeting. Such a report will be subject to comment or debate in the usual way.'
- 1.2 The report will therefore provide the basis for debate by Members on on-going scrutiny activities and hopefully lead to sharing of views and ideas to enhance the scrutiny function at Thanet District Council.

2.0 Community Safety Partnership Working Party

- 2.1 This sub-group has not met since the last Full Council meeting.

3.0 Corporate Performance Review Working Party

- 3.1 The working party has not met since the last Full Council meeting.

4.0 Electoral Registration Process Review Task & Finish Group

- 4.1 The sub-group met on 8 October 2015. Members received a report on 'Increasing public awareness of registration under Individual Electoral Registration (IER).' Members noted that Council is still facing a significant challenge in persuading residents to register their details on the electoral role with particular difficulties in encouraging residents to use electronic means such as texting on line and telephone services.
- 4.2 Instead some residents still preferred the traditional method of filling in a paper form and posting it or handing it in. Fears about data theft, is clearly a

factor here and this could undermine the Government's stated aim of attempting to move more residents to electronic registration means.

- 4.3 Residents' response to the canvassing exercise has seen some improvement in the return rate of registration forms. The current rate stands at 67%, with the lowest ward response at 30% and the highest at 70%.
- 4.4 Members were advised that officers were still working on strategies for improving voter registration. Members also came up with suggestions for officers to consider. These included placing restrictions on 'access to library facilities' as an incentive to residents to update their details on the electoral roll.
- 4.5 Given the uncertainties around the future of the annual canvass process the sub group agreed that representations be made to the Cabinet Office, to ensure the Government continues to adequately fund the IER process and so ensure there is effective promotion. I am hopeful therefore that officers will be writing to the Cabinet Office on that issue.
- 4.6 The sub group also received an officer report on 'Review of printing and postal voting arrangements for the May 2015 Election.' The May Elections posed some significant electoral administration challenges due to the requirement to manage for the first time Parliamentary, District and Parish/Town Councils elections being held on the same day. This was in addition to the recent major changes brought about by the introduction of the new Individual Electoral Registration system.
- 4.7 The audit report provided some advice on the way forward which if adopted by the Electoral Services Department would go a long way in addressing the number of concerns that were noted during this audit review.
- 4.8 Members gave credit to the Electoral Services Team for a job well done in successfully managing the May Election considering the significant challenges that the department faced during this election.

OTHER KEY ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED BY THE PANEL

5.0 Review of the QEQM Hospital A & E Services

- 5.3 It might be worth noting that at its meeting on 22 October 2015, Cabinet agreed to set up a QEQM Hospital Cabinet Advisory Group to consider the issues raised by the petitioners. Cabinet also set out the terms of reference for the CAG which are as follows:
 - a. Study at the proposed re-organisation of the QEQM Hospital's Accidents & Emergency Services;
 - b. In the event that East Kent Hospitals University Foundation Trust (EKHUFT) conducts a public consultation, prepare a draft Thanet District Council response to the consultation;
 - c. Produce a final report for consideration by Cabinet.
- 5.4 Again it looks like the work of this new CAG will obviously depend on how soon EKHUFT puts information on a possible public consultation of the

proposed review of A&E Services. The Panel will therefore continue to maintain a watching brief on the issue.

6.0 Review of the TDC Artefacts Management

6.1 Cabinet considered a report with recommendations from the Panel on 22 October 2015 and agreed the following:

That delegation is given to the Director of Community Services to make an application for external funding through the Heritage Lottery Fund for the total cost of the professional archivist post be pursued as a matter of priority.

6.2 I do hope that officers will now move with the necessary speed to submit the application for funding and get the resources required to support the on-going documentation project at the Margate Museum.

7.0 Call-In of Cabinet Decisions

7.1 As the Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel I called-in a Cabinet decision 'Manston Airport' in order to debate the issue further before Cabinet could finalise the decision. A number of Panel members came forward to me and asked that I call-in the decision because for review as they felt that the Panel ought to make recommendations for further consideration by Cabinet.

7.2 At the extraordinary Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting on 17 November, Members debated at length the issues related to the Cabinet decision. Divergent views were shared and the Panel resolved to take no further action, making the executive decision implementable forthwith.

8.0 Cabinet Presentations at OSP Meetings

8.1 The Panel invited Councillor Brimm, Cabinet Member for Operational Services to the 20 October Panel meeting to make a presentation on "Our Vision for the Future of our Parks, Gardens & Playgrounds."

8.2 Unfortunately the Portfolio Holder was unable to make it to the meeting due to other pressing matters and offered her apologies to the meeting. The presentation was deferred to the next scheduled meeting of the Panel.

9.0 Corporate Implications

9.1 Financial and VAT

9.1.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

9.2 Legal

9.2.1 There are no significant legal implications arising directly from this report. A presentation of the OSP Chairman's report to Full Council enables the Chairman to fulfil their duty as is required by the Council's Constitution.

9.3 Equity and Equalities

9.3.1 There are no equity and equalities implications arising directly from this report.

10.0 Recommendation

10.1 Members are invited to discuss and note the report.

11.0 Decision Making Process

11.1 The Council Constitution allows the Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel to present a report at each scheduled Council meeting for Members' information.

Contact Officer:	Charles Hungwe, Senior Democratic Services Officer, Ext 7186
Reporting to:	Nick Hughes, Committee Services Manager, Ext 7108

Annex List

None	N/A
------	-----

Background Papers

Title	Details of where to access copy
None	N/A

Corporate Consultation Undertaken

Finance	Nicola Walker, Head of Financial services
Legal	Tim Howes, Director of Corporate Governance
Communications	Hannah Thorpe, Head of Communications