

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2015 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor David Saunders (Chairman); Councillors G Coleman-Cooke, Bambridge, Campbell, Connor, Curran, Dennis, Dexter, Dixon, Elenor, Falcon, Jaye-Jones, Parsons and Potts

In Attendance: Councillors: Ashbee, Brimm, J Fairbrass, L Fairbrass, M Saunders and Taylor-Smith

30. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies received at the meeting.

31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Dixon declared a disclosable pecuniary interest regarding agenda Item 7 (Selective Licensing in Cliftonville West and Margate Central).

32. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS SCHEDULED MEETING

Councillor Campbell proposed, Councillor G. Coleman-Cooke seconded and Members agreed the minutes as a correct record of the ordinary Panel meeting held on 20 October 2015.

33. MINUTES OF EXTRAORDINARY MEETING - 17 NOVEMBER 2015

Councillor Campbell proposed, Councillor Potts seconded and Members agreed the minutes as a correct record of the extraordinary Panel meeting held on 17 November 2015.

34. MINUTES OF EXTRAORDINARY MEETING - 26 NOVEMBER 2015

Councillor Campbell proposed, Councillor Potts seconded and Members agreed the minutes as a correct record of the extraordinary Panel meeting held on 26 November 2015.

35. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATION BY COUNCILLOR BRIMM, PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR OPERATIONAL SERVICES

In her presentation to the Panel Councillor Brimm reported that currently staff working in the parks, grounds and playgrounds were carrying out the following key activities:

- Grass cutting of parks and other grounds owned by the Council;
- Sports ground maintenance through the Your Leisure Partnership;
- Management of shrubs, beds and hedges in parks and other grounds owned by TDC;
- Tree Management including East Kent Housing;
- Provision of Allotments;
- Development, maintenance and safety inspections of Play Areas and Skate Parks including East Kent Housing;
- Grounds maintenance for East Kent Housing through a Service Level Agreement;
- Grave digging and maintenance of Cemeteries;

- Weed control to all parks, open spaces and foreshores (typically three times per annum);
- Minor works including planned and reactive works in parks, open spaces, toilets, car parks and the installation of parking meters.

Current Service Statistics	Figures
Area maintained	Approx. 1,000,000 m ²
Number of parks and open spaces maintained	110
Number of vehicles	20
Sports Grounds	14
Tennis Courts	18
Cemeteries	9
No. of burials per year	300
Play Areas	44
Skate Parks	3
Flower Beds, excluding shrub areas	63

The portfolio holder said that not all the staff employed within the service were focussed on planned maintenance. To put this into perspective, in 2010 the Operational Services employed 63 full time staff and last year this had been reduced to 40 full time equivalents, a reduction of 37%. Furthermore, staff do not work on weekends.

Although there had been a significant reduction in the number of staff, the Service had worked hard to maintain service levels. Understandably, there had been reductions in the frequencies of most operations with most routine operations (grass cutting, hedges, shrub and flower bed maintenance) being affected. Council was no longer carrying out in-house high level tree care as was previously the case.

Over the last 5 years, the public, visitors and members' expectations had remained high. In relation unfortunately, Council no longer had the resources to fulfil these expectations. However Members should note that there were only 10 formal complaints received in 2014/15.

Councillor Brimm explained that Council parks and open spaces were important to the people who live and visit Thanet and were therefore priority for the current Cabinet administration, as demonstrated in the corporate priority one statement which aims to 'creating a welcoming environment'. Cabinet was working on an Open Spaces and Parks Strategy for the next 20 years. Councillors and residents would be fully engaged during this process in order to inform the strategy, but it is likely that some hard choices would need to be made around the number of parks and open spaces that the Council can support as funding would clearly be limited.

Councillor Brimm said that the Strategy would need to decide on such options as, 'does the Council maintain all current parks and flower beds to the same standard or a smaller number but to a higher quality.' Given the significant works required to produce this strategy, delivery is not anticipated until late 2016 / early 2017. Currently, the team was working with over twenty voluntary organisations and the intention was to develop the relationships between Council and community groups to the benefit of the local communities that were served by Council.

The current support activities being offered to volunteer groups by Council including the following;

- Enabling volunteers, user groups and other stakeholders to take ownership and help maintain open spaces;
- Train volunteers in horticultural techniques to make them more effective;
- Develop and enhance volunteer networks across the District;
- Ensure Health and Safety compliance;

- Liaising with groups to ensure tasks and output delivered at optimal times for maximum benefit;
- Develop formal agreements to ensure work is undertaken to a required frequency and standard.

In conclusion Councillor Brimm said that the staff Operational Service remained committed to delivering the best service within the existing budgets and would continue to look at all opportunities where possible to improve and enhance the service they provide to the public.

The Chairman then opened the discussion to all Panel Members and Councillor Brimm responded to Member questions. It was pointed out by Panel members that Thanet attracted the more mature visitors whose high points for visiting the area would include the site of beautiful and well maintained and blooming flowers in the area. They noted with concern the procurement problems for flower plants that had been experienced in the past for Albion Road in Ramsgate and other parts of Broadstairs. Trimming of plants was not carried out until after major events (like the Dickens Week) had taken place in the district.

Speaking under Council Procedure 24.1, one Member said that street cleansing and waste collection should be done in liaison with flowerbeds clearance. This would offer a holistic approach to keeping the public spaces clean and in a welcoming condition. They suggested that this approach should be included in the proposed twenty year strategy that Cabinet was working on.

Officers were requested to look into the issue regarding grounds at St Johns Church in Margate Central, which appear to have gone for a long time without grounds maintenance except for intermittent volunteers who cut the grass. Gavin Waite agreed to look into the matter. Gavin Waite further explained that the purchase of replacement vehicles for Operational Services had been approved. This was expected to improve the performance of the grounds maintenance team. Members suggested that TDC consults Parish and Town Councils as part of the process of drafting the twenty year Strategy.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Brimm for the presentation.

36. SELECTIVE LICENSING IN CLIFTONVILLE WEST AND MARGATE CENTRAL

Having declared a disclosable pecuniary interest on the agenda item at the beginning of the meeting, Councillor Dixon left the Council Chamber before discussion commenced on 'Selective Licensing in Cliftonville West and Margate Central.'

Richard Hopkins, Housing Regeneration Team Leader led discussion and gave a background to the subject. He highlighted the following that:

- The current selective licensing scheme was a success;
- Privately rented homes are required to be licenced and landlords are required to effectively manage their properties and keep them in a safe condition;
- Enforcement of the current scheme started in 2013 after a judicial review that took two years to resolve;
- About 1000 inspections have been carried out and about 66% of the properties inspected were found to have health hazards or failed to meet other licensing requirements;
- 21 landlords had been prosecuted successfully and had received fines of up to £20,000;
- All fines are retained by the criminal justice system but TDC applies for a contribution to prosecution costs;

- Landlords are required to take reasonable steps to ensure that Anti-Social Behaviour does not emanate from their properties;
- It was observed that anti-social behaviour reported incidents had declined significantly (ie by 28.7% since 2011);
- The current scheme is due to expire on 20 April 2016, five years after coming into force.

It was against this background that a proposal to renew the Selective Licensing Scheme to cover similar parts of Cliftonville West and Margate Central was developed. This proposal would include an additional 150 licensable properties. Richard Hopkins advised Members that a public consultation had been conducted over ten weeks and 72% of the respondents were in favour of renewing the Scheme as opposed to 18% who were against renewal. Public support had significantly increased from the previous consultation in 2010 which recorded 49% in favour and 44% against the Scheme.

Members agreed that the survey information was comprehensive and commended the officer report as being detailed and informative. They said the Scheme was not detrimental to the heritage of the area. In response to further Member questions Richard Hopkins made the following comments:

- The council will be carrying out district wide research in 2016 to ascertain whether any other discrete areas should be considered for selective licensing;
- Enforcement costs were not paid for by the landlord licence fees;
- Licence fees are not annual and only one fee is payable for each licence, which usually lasts for 5 years;
- There are discounts for landlords who applied for renewal at least 6 weeks in advance and for accredited landlords;
- Requirements relating to external decorations will be applied to licences where possible;
- The public consultation had brought up waste problems as a particular issue of concern for residents;
- A condition on waste will be included in the landlord's licence to ensure that they take reasonable steps to prevent waste problems;
- Housing Regeneration Team (HRT) coordinate their enforcement activities with the Margate Task Force;
- Other Council officers outside the HRT would be authorised under selective licensing to increase enforcement activities;

Bob Porter, Interim Head of Housing Services advised the Panel that Council had acquired properties in Margate and had been converting them to good quality family homes, which are being let out to Council tenants This intervention is also helping to regenerate the area..

The Scheme discourages poor landlords from moving into the designated area. Officers reported that anecdotal evidence was suggesting that, in the last six months, there had been encouraging trend of owner occupiers buying properties in the area covered by the Selective Licensing Scheme.

Councillor Coleman-Cooke proposed, Councillor Parsons seconded and the Panel agreed to recommend to Cabinet that a further selective licensing designation is made in respect of certain parts of Cliftonville West and Margate Central as set out in the annexed proposal document.

37. REVIEW OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2015/16

In response a Member query, Madeline Homer, CEx advised the meeting that although Cabinet had set up a QEQM Hospital Cabinet Advisory Group, the group had not yet met

as Council was still awaiting the appointment of a new CEx for the East Kent Hospitals University Foundation Trust.

The Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) together with EKHUFT have set up a Strategic Board and TDC officers would be seeking more information on the terms of reference of the new Board and meet the new EKHUFT CEx.

The report was noted.

38. FORWARD PLAN AND EXEMPT CABINET REPORT LIST FOR THE PERIOD 11 NOVEMBER 2015 - 31 MAY 2016

Members requested that officers in Democratic Services produce and circulate to all councillors forwarding notes that explain the purpose of the Forward Plan. This was in order to provide clarity on how Members can make use of the Plan and its contents.

Members noted the report.

Meeting concluded: 8.15 pm