

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 17 April 2018 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber - Council Offices.

Present: Councillor D Saunders (Chairman); Councillors G Coleman-Cooke, Ashbee, Campbell, Connor, Curran, Dennis, Dexter, Dixon, Falcon, Martin, Parsons, L Potts and R Potts

In Attendance: Councillors K Coleman-Cooke and M Saunders

160. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies received at the meeting.

161. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

162. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Campbell proposed, Councillor Glenn Coleman-Cooke seconded and Members agreed the minutes as a correct record of the meeting that was held on 13 February 2018.

163. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATION

Councillor Taylor-Smith gave a presentation on the current waste and recycling arrangements after which she responded to questions from Panel members. During her presentation she highlighted the following:

- a) The first priority of the Corporate Plan for 2015-19 was a 'Welcoming and Clean Environment;'
- b) Councillor Bayford Leader of Council had highlighted tackling litter in the district as one of the key priorities for the new administration;
- c) The portfolio holder appreciated the contributions of various community groups in working with the Council to address the issue of litter in their local areas;
- d) The Council budget allocation for keeping the district as a clean and welcoming environment was evidence for how importantly the Council viewed this issue and the current service being offered;
- e) The aim was to meet and exceed the national standards for cleanliness. The national standards for litter as defined by the National Environmental Protection Act 1990 Code of Practice. This has Grade A (no litter or refuse); Grade B(predominantly free of litter/refuse); Grade C(littered); Grade D(heavily littered);
- f) During the peak summer period the service would recruit additional staff to assist with the cleaning of public spaces;
- g) Collection costs of household waste was about 53 pence per week per household;
- h) Performance of the service was improving significantly;
- i) All staff report to the depot in the morning and they are then transported to where they are needed most and then back to wherever else they would normally be working. This new way of working was aimed at addressing areas that faced significant littering problems;
- j) The new mechanical sweepers were helping meet the performance targets;
- k) The 2 minute beach cleaning was a good approach and was effective;

- l) The Service would soon be issuing woven litter bags for the beaches. These could be re-used;
- m) There were 34 prosecution cases in February and March 2018. This was in addition to the cases reported in the slide presentation;
- n) The use of seagull proof bins was currently under review;
- o) The Service was working smarter using new technology to deliver an effective service;
- p) Some community groups (like in Ramsgate) had adopted a street to keep clean. This was an important contribution by residents;
- q) The Council would be encouraging campaigns to keep Thanet clean;

Future Options

- a) Council would continue to use 'men with brooms' working alongside the mechanical sweepers;
- b) Additional bins in public spaces would be installed in various places around the district;
- c) On 14 June 2018 Cabinet would be recommended to formally adopt the government's prescribed cleanliness standards for litter. That would mean Council would have clear and prescribed levels of cleanliness in response times across the district;
- d) Council would continue to work on new approaches for effective delivery of the street cleansing and litter collection in the district.

In response to the presentation, the made comments and asked questions as follows:

- a) One of the challenges faced by the Council was to address the issue of perception regarding the how street cleansing and litter in the district were being tackled by TDC;
- b) Councillors were encouraged to share the information from the slides with residents to help shape the correct perception;
- c) Could the street cleansing and litter picking have additional resources allocated to problem areas like Ramsgate town centre during visitor peak periods as visitors also generated significant amounts of litter in summer;
- d) Some dog waste bins have either been destroyed or removed from their position and there was nowhere to deposit such waste by dog owners during walks in the public spaces. Could replacement bins be installed?
- e) The recycling bin lids for clothes in St Mildred's car park were sometimes left open when overfilled, leading to litter being strewn about the place during windy days. Could there be collection intervals that ensure collections are done regularly;
- f) Could there be a single telephone number that councillors can use to report littering incidents?
- g) Could extra bins be installed in the Barnes car park where was one tiny bin?
- h) It was good news that the Council was considering introducing night time waste collection;
- i) In the last few weeks, Westgate lost a road sweeper due to changes in deployment of staff. As a result the pavements in the main trading area were looking grotty;
- j) There was a need to come up with a strategy for enforcement that tackled nuisance caused by individuals who dropped cigarette butts on the streets;
- k) Were dog waste bins really necessary? Why not just have waste bins instead as dog waste could be deposited into these bins as well;
- l) Could town/parish councils pay for extra street cleansing in their respective areas?

- m) Was the new administration going to implement ideas that had been developed by the previous administration or develop new ones altogether?
- n) Were there any plans this year to remove seaweed particularly along the beaches where visitors frequent?
- o) Although there were two litter bins at the Montefiore Woods along Dumpton Drive, there was nothing all the way down to the Garden Centre. Could a bin be installed near the Garden Centre?
- p) What were the current covert operations under the RIPA Policy and such operations be extended to other problem areas like Elmwood Avenue leading to Joss Bay?

Responding to Member queries and comments, Gavin Waite, Director of Operational & Commercial Services and Councillor Taylor-Smith gave the following feedback:

- a) Council spent about £200,000 on extra resources for street cleansing litter picking during the peak summer periods annually;
- b) Town centres and beaches were the key priority for the waste collection;
- c) One of the challenges faced by Council was that a number of businesses were disposing of their waste inappropriately;
- d) Council was working with some businesses to help them meet their social and environmental. In addition, the Council was introducing a new commercial waste service that collected waste at business addresses during the night time to try to alleviate this issue.
- e) The Council was looking at introducing new larger bins and reducing the number of smaller ones in some areas. The new bins would have sensors to transmit an alert when full;
- f) Clothes recycling bins in car parks were provided by 3rd parties. Council could look at the issues as reported by Members regarding overfilled recycling bins;
- g) Council was trying to encourage residents to use the My Thanet App to report incidents that required the street cleansing team. The new bins would be installed with GPS to easily locate them each time an issue was reported so that staff could respond more expeditiously. However it should be noted that staff wouldn't necessarily go to the incident straight away as they would be working on other activities in the district;
- h) Operational Services was reviewing the ways of working to ensure improvement in service delivery;
- i) Staff were being re-deployed to other areas because there was a limited number who had to cover a large area of the district;
- j) Some Ramsgate residents had established a community group and adopted a street that they would keep clean. The group had also developed a website for coordinating and sharing their information on their work activities;
- k) The challenge was how to change the behaviour of individuals so that they do not drop litter in public spaces;
- l) The Council was conducting discussions with focus groups on this issue and this included looking at how the Council could stop individuals throwing cigarette butts on streets;
- m) The new administration was implementing decisions that had been made previously as these were already in-train, however it was also coming up with new ideas for moving forward the work of the Service and these ideas would be shared with all Members in due course;
- n) TDC was in currently in dialogue with KCC regarding the delegation of powers to TDC officers so that they could move vehicles in streets where the Council was cleaning using mechanical sweepers. There had been a dramatic decrease in seaweed along Thanet beaches. There was a contractor who transports the weed for landfill;

- o) Currently the council had four small sized mechanical sweepers and one large one;
- p) The Service was reviewing the ways of working by the Parks team and finding ways of incorporating, when necessary, the clearing of litter in or near parks;
- q) The Council was currently deploying mobile cameras to detect problem areas for fly-tipping in the district, using covert surveillance under the Regulations of Investigatory Powers Act, where necessary.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Taylor-Smith and Gavin Waite for the presentation. As there was no further action required, Members noted the presentation.

164. RISK BASED VERIFICATION POLICY FOR HOUSING BENEFIT / COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT

Andrew Stevens, Head of Shared Services introduced the item for discussion and gave a brief background to the issue and indicated that the report before the Panel was to provide some feedback on how the Risk Based Verification Policy was working. Mr Stevens made the following points:

- a) The policy was an integral part of the digitisation of the benefits management (and processing) system;
- b) Whilst previously all applicants had to provide the same level of evidence for processing their claims, under the new system only individuals who were viewed as posing a more significant risk to commit fraud would be required to provide more evidence than individuals viewed as posing a lesser risk;
- c) The computer system profiled individual applicants according to their circumstances;
- d) As a result, most applicants were now required to provide less evidence as they were deemed to be low risk to commit fraud;
- e) Since the system went live, the Revenue & Benefits team had handled 270 cases using the new system and 75% of those claims were done on-line;
- f) It was most likely that two thirds of the claimants in Thanet would fall under the low risk category;
- g) In the best case scenario a claim had been processed and paid in 12 minutes;
- h) This was a better customer experience than had been previously been the case.

One Member made the observation that as the system usage progressed, some individuals may query why they were made to produce additional information than others. In response Mr Stevens said that each application would be handled on its own merits.

There being no further action required, the Panel noted the report.

165. REVIEW OF OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2017/18

A Member pointed out that the meeting dates in Annex 1 to the report were out of date and the Panel agreed that the dates for the two working parties be amended to reflect that the Community Safety Partnership Working Party met on 20 February, 13 March and 10 April and the Corporate Performance Review working Party met on 15 February 2018. These amendments reflect the information in the main body of the report.

The Panel further agreed that an officer report on the current status regarding the annual voter registration exercise ahead of the 2019 May Local Government Elections be presented to the 14 August meeting.

Thereafter Members agreed to note the report.

166. FORWARD PLAN AND EXEMPT CABINET REPORT LIST FOR 11 APRIL 2018 - 30 SEPTEMBER 2018

A Member requested and the Panel agreed that an officer report on 'An amended RIPA Policy & Procedures Guidance Note for 2018/19 and to receive the annual report on the use of RIPA in 2017/18' be presented to the Community Safety Partnership Working Party if the sub group was re-constituted in 2018/19. Members would like to know more about the current Council activities being carried out under the RIPA Policy and purpose for the amendments to the policy.

Members further agreed that there should be a standing Panel rule that whenever an officer report was being presented to the Panel or its sub groups an invitation be extended to the portfolio holder to be in attendance to respond to questions from Members. In response the Panel Chairman advised Members that it was up to the Chairmen of the working parties to ensure that portfolio holders were invited to these meetings as is appropriate.

A Member requested that the Cabinet Member for Housing and Community Safety be invited to a future Panel meeting to make a presentation on 'Whether there is a minimum standard or provision which has to be fulfilled and is checked provided by Letting Agencies for people in temporary accommodation.'

In response Tim Willis, Director of Corporate Resources and S151 Officer said that he would be responding in more detail to that question outside the Panel meeting.

Meeting concluded: 8.00 pm