

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 27 October 2020 at 5.30 pm via Online Viewing Only.

Present: Councillor Robert W Bayford (Chairman); Councillors Campbell, Boyd, Coleman-Cooke, Hopkinson, Huxley, Keen, Moore, L Piper, Rattigan, Roper and Scott

In Attendance: Councillors Albon, Ashbee, Gregory and Helen Whitehead

256. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Rusiecki.

257. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

258. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Campbell proposed, Councillor Coleman-Cooke seconded and Members agreed the minutes as a correct record of the Panel meeting held on 27 August 2020.

259. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATION - THE MANAGEMENT OF THANET BEACHES DURING 2020 SUMMER

During the cabinet member presentation, Councillor Albon, Cabinet Member for Operational Services made following comments:

- This was a different summer from the normal summers that are usually experienced in Thanet. There was great weather and the country was coming out of national lockdown that had been imposed as a measure to manage the global covid-19 pandemic;
- The government encouraged the public to go to the beaches in July, as going abroad was not an option, Thanet experienced an unusually large number of visitors to the local beaches;
- Very little social distancing was observed. There were some incidents of anti social behaviour that included littering and dangerous parking;
- The Council met with a number of agencies and came up with a Beach Management Plan to manage visitors on Thanet beaches;
- There were weekly operational orders shared with other agencies. There was a beach supervisor who picked up on any issues that were quickly arising and liaising on the appropriate agency that would deal with such matters;
- There was greater cooperation between the council's security and enforcement officers and CCTV personnel in tackling any incident that arose at the beaches. The council staff did their work quite well;
- New signage was introduced and electronic boards were put up to advise the public on the status of visitor numbers at beaches;
- TDC linked up with London Boroughs to share the information on Thanet beaches to reach out to as wide an audience as was possible;
- The Cabinet Member and Leader of Council conducted a number of broadcasts to share key messages;
- Coastal signage was refreshed. A summary poster of TDC bye-laws was produced for the public and businesses;
- Moving forward, a communications plan would be devised and a review of operational presence at beaches would be conducted;

- Operational works would be done to put barriers at beaches to prevent some of the anti-social behaviour;
- Meetings with the business community would be conducted to the visitor environment during summer period;
- Council was working with a community group (Rise Up, Clean Up) to provide litter bag dispensers at the beaches.

Councillor Albon praised the Council staff and other agencies for the hard work during this summer gone.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- Ramsgate Town Council was included in the consultation between all the stakeholders on the management of Ramsgate Main Sands;
- Members thanks TDC for coordinating this stakeholder consultation in very difficult circumstances and creating an enjoyable environment for the visitors during the summer period;
- Seaweed was a problem at some beaches. It might help to put messages went out first when the seaweed problem started;
- Were smart bins in place for summer?
- Can the council do something more proactive about shellfish harvesting by the public?
- What was the cost of the extra resources that were allocated to the beach management by the council?
- Was the council going to be compensated by the government for incurring that extra cost to their budget, considering that the government encouraged the public to visit the seaside areas (at a time when travelling abroad was not possible)?
- Was the council planning to provide a similar budget for 2021/21?
- Security officers have so few powers regarding managing behaviour on the beaches. Was there anything the council could do about the issue of controlling alcohol on the beaches?
- Were there plans to put out temporary toilets again next summer?
- Could the council make an arrangement with the business premises like pubs and restaurants to let the public use the business premises toilet facilities?

Responding to Member questions and comments, Councillor Albon and Gavin Waite, Director of Communities said the following:

- Seaweed was an issue for some areas particularly in Birchington and Westgate on Sea. The council would look into this issue and see if there could be a better way of managing that issue. The problem that the council faced was how to remove the seaweed without damaging the protected chalk area;
- There were a limited number of smart bins, because these were expensive. Each bin costs about £4,000 as opposed to the £300 per bin that the council pays for the current bins being used. However sensors have been installed on some of the larger bins;
- Floor stickers and some signage for cycling on the promenades had been put up. The council was now bidding for money to fund cycling lanes;
- Collection of shellfish at local beaches by family groups was permissible within limits, however commercial harvesting was not. It was important to make sure that guidelines for shellfish harvesting were followed;
- As part of budget setting additional funding was set aside as part of covid-19. The council was allocated an additional £1million for across the board council expenditure. The council had gone back to the government requesting additional resources. Cost of the security at the beaches to manage the issue of social distancing was an additional cost;
- The council had established a good working relationship with partner agencies. This collaborative working would be pursued again next year;

- A PSPO (Public Spaces Protection Order) regarding dog restrictions was out to public consultation. In order to make enforcement easier, the council would start turning bye-laws into PSPOs. This was a significant piece of work;
- Once some of the bye-laws were changed to PSPOs then fixed penalty charges could be imposed for offending behaviour. This will be considered as part of the main review leading to a refreshed Beach Management Plan;
- Council officers had been in discussions with various business premises to arrange for the use of their toilets by the public;
- Council was still reviewing its own public toilet facilities.

Members thanked Councillor Albon and noted the report.

260. FOY HOUSE UPDATE

Councillor Whitehead, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community Services made the following opening remarks:

- Housing is more than just accommodation. Making accommodation homely was an important part of providing housing to Thanet residents in need. The plan for Foy House was to provide flexible accommodation;
- The project would provide a good mix of households. It would provide energy efficiency, with solar panels installed on the building. There would be court yard access for the families;
- A planning application would be submitted before the project was implemented. It was anticipated that the project would start in April 2021, with a completion date of early 2022;
- This project was another important step for the work towards making a strong centralised housing service managed by the council.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- What would be the criteria used for selecting households/families to access this accommodation;
- Will this accommodation not turn into permanent accommodation for those individuals who would fail to get more permanent housing?
- With covid-19 creating more homelessness, was the council considering extending this project by getting more facilities similar to Foy House?
- Did the three year residency rule apply when consideration is given to temporary accommodation?
- Were visitors allowed at Foy House as there were staff on site and office?

In response Councillor Whitehead and Ashley Jackson, Housing Strategy and Projects Manager said the following:

- The usual temporary accommodation policy would be applied;
- There was no limit to how long a family or individual would be in that accommodation. It would be until they permanent accommodation;
- The size of the accommodation dictated who could be accommodated in this facility;
- The duration of stays could last from a few weeks up to a few months;
- At the moment there was no budget for another temporary accommodation project;
- All households eligible for temporary accommodation would be considered;
- Visitors would be allowed but not for overnight visits.

Members noted the report.

261. REVIEW THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2020/21

Councillor Stuart Piper, Chairman of the Memorials Working party gave an update report and made the following comments:

- The Working Party was asked to consider an appropriate response to matters recently raised regarding memorials around the district;
- The task of the working party is to formulate and recommend to the Panel for onward submission to the Executive, "A draft system, process or criteria for reviewing memorials (e.g. statues, plaques, road-names and similar matters), to help to determine whether (if requested) a decision should be taken to either remove them or carry out some other act;"
- The working group held its inaugural meeting on 30 September 2020 and considered the nature of the work set out for them by the Panel;
- The minutes of that meeting have been published which provide information on the next activities of the group;
- It was agreed that this was a difficult and sensitive matter and that it would be helpful to receive representations from groups which represented persons with characteristics which were protected by the Equality Act 2010;
- There were nearly 100 memorials around in the district;
- The working group agreed that the council did not have the resources to review all such memorials and that the council would respond on a reactive rather than a proactive basis;
- Mr Howes contacted the groups and individuals suggested by Cllr Rawf and Cllr Becky Wing, asking them to provide written representations on the process for considering memorials and he also invited them to attend the next meeting of the working party;
- When responses have been received, the working party hold another meeting to consider those contributions and make further progress;
- All requests for a review of a particular memorial would be considered against the Public Sector Equality Duty. However the judgement of the decision maker should be fully informed.

One Councillor requested for the names of the groups that had been contacted by the working party.

In response Councillor Piper indicated that one of the groups that had been suggested was called, "Calling Time On Racism." That group had since suggested additional groups that could be contacted.

With reference to the rest of the work programme, Councillor Campbell requested for support from the Panel to call-in a cabinet decision made at the meeting on 22 October regarding Ramsgate Market.

Mr Nick Hughes explained that the call request had to be sent to Democratic Services by email, detailing the grounds for call-in.

The Panel Chairman proposed that it would be timely for the Panel to review the impact of covid-19 on Thanet communities, particularly in relation to the business and more so for the individuals already in poverty or close to it. Councillor Campbell seconded the suggestion and indicated that this was more so important considering that the number of covid-19 infections was on the rise again. This review would need to take place as the priority topic ahead of other topics already on the review topics in Annex 2.

Councillor Roper suggested that the Panel could consider the impact of Brexit to the local area. Councillor Bayford agreed that it was an important topic which could be considered after the review of the impact of covid-19 on Thanet.

The Panel agreed to the proposal by the Chairman.

Mr Hughes advised the meeting that the council's quarter 1 and quarter 2 corporate performance statistics would be presented to the Panel on 19 January 2021. The Panel would also be considering the proposed new corporate performance reporting format.

The report was noted.

262. FORWARD PLAN & EXEMPT CABINET REPORT LIST

Members noted the report.

Meeting concluded: 6.48 pm