

Public Document Pack

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 July 2023 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor Phil Fellows (Chair); Councillors D Green, Austin, Bright, Britcher, Currie, Davis, Farooki, Kup, Paul Moore, Packman and Wing

In Attendance: Councillors Everitt and Whitehead

455. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the following Members:

Councillor Worrow;
Councillor Pope;
Councillor d'Abbro.

456. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

457. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Members agreed that the minutes be amended to add the wording that the Panel was dissatisfied with the current scrutiny review scoring matrix and that the matrix should be reviewed at an appropriate time.

Subject to the above amendments, Councillor Paul Moore proposed, Councillor Kup seconded and Members agreed the minutes to be a correct record of the Panel meeting held on 30 May 2023.

458. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATION - LEADER'S PRESENTATION ON THE VISION FOR THE COUNCIL

During his presentation on the vision for the Council, Councillor Everitt, Leader of the Council made the following points:

- This was a good time to be in administration;
- There were a number of significant Levelling Up Fund investment projects which would have a lasting benefit for the district;
- The current administration would be carrying forward some of the ideas from the previous Cabinet;
- The Leader was full of optimism about the future for the Council. He said that officers have had to deal with some of the most difficult circumstances the Council has had to go through. However new senior officers were coming to join the Council and that would help deliver on the organisation's work;
- The current Cabinet had the experience to steer the Council through a number of key investment projects;
- Providing affordable housing was a key priority for the Council with plans to increase council housing stock by 400 units over the next four years;
- Full credit should be given to the Housing and Finance teams for putting together the proposals for housing;

- Managing the public realm would be one of the priority areas of focus as this reflects on the Council;
- In pursuit of that aim, additional street cleaners would be employed to be assigned to two teams of four individuals working across all residential areas in the district from Mondays to Fridays;
- A new Head of Cleansing would be joining the council shortly;
- Cabinet was delivering on its promises;
- Cabinet would also be reviewing the process for asset disposal and a new Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer would be looking at this issue, when they join the Council;
- Cabinet would be looking to addressing issues of deprivation and opportunities in Ramsgate and Margate;
- The Leader would work on building good Member/Officer working relationships;
- The Council would need to ensure that climate change issues were factored in its decisions;
- A new Climate Change Cabinet Advisory Group (CAG) had been set up to lead on advising the administration. A lot of work had been carried out by a previous CAG;
- Cabinet would look at opportunities for collaborative work across the region and would work with KCC to lobby on climate emergency issues.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- One Member said that they were concerned about the quality and viability of projects due to inflation;
- Could cross funding of projects be permitted under the Levelling up Funding?
- Could Members be advised of where the RoRo funding accounts were?
- The recruitment of new staff for the Street Cleansing team was good news. Since it was just two teams, residents would need to be patient for their turn to get their streets cleaned. Will the activities of these teams be scheduled across the district?
- There used to be schedules for street cleansing in Ramsgate. It was hoped that this approach would return;
- The update regarding TDC working with other Councils on issue affecting the region was welcome news;
- One Member asked the Leader what he hoped to have happened to poverty in the district in four years' time;
- Another Member asked if there would be dialogue with residents to inform them about street cleansing coming to their communities and could there be any communication about that initiative;
- Was building council houses a better option to buying from developers?
- It was welcome news that Cabinet viewed street cleansing as a priority area of focus. Here was a need for joined up thinking between the Street Cleansing and Street Scene teams;
- Had the Council done any cost benefit analysis regarding the use of portable toilets against refurbishing toilets in Margate?
- One Member said that the Port was small and that Berth 4/5 was still not operational. They also said that Bretts had not put in a planning application for the development of the Port site. They further said that with this in mind, it was worrying that the Council was investing in the Port through the LUF but it would be for little return. There was a need to scrutinise background work done to inform the decision regarding project work at the Port;
- Another Member said that the subject of the youth of Thanet was of great interest to Members. They further asked where issues regarding the local youth lay in the vision of the current Cabinet to ensure opportunities for them;

- Would the Leader give the Panel a commitment that Cabinet would not allow waste to be shipped through the Port under its watch?
- Could Cabinet allocate additional resources to the Enforcement team to increase their capacity on monitoring fly tipping in the district?
- Could the issue regarding toilets being closed too early be looked into?
- Working closely with parish and town councils was a good thing. Could this approach be encouraged among officers including officers responding timeously to correspondence from the parishes?
- When would the report on collaborative working between TDC and parish and town councils be considered by Cabinet?
- Were there any plans for further supporting volunteer groups to continue to maximise output?

Councillor Everitt responded as follows:

- A lot of the questions were outside the context of the presentation
 - Cabinet was confident that an operator for the Port would be identified;
 - Council had invited expressions of and a good number had been received. Member were requested to be patient with the process;
 - The street cleansing in residential areas would prioritise those areas that had been identified as requiring priority attention. Funding would be from the base budget and this was a sustainable approach. It was hoped that residents would see an improvement;
 - Council on its own would not be able to resolve all issues, but the LUF investment would go a long way to tackling some of the deprivation issues;
 - Communities were excited by the proposals that had been put forward by the Council;
 - Street cleansing resources would not be apportioned equally among the 23 wards as some wards required more resources than others;
 - It would be Council's wish to build its own housing units. However, the Council would need to find the land and 40% subsidy. The Council was purchasing housing that the Housing Associations did not want;
 - Toilets were a priority for Cabinet. Condition survey had been conducted on all the toilets and a report was going to be considered at the Cabinet meeting in September;
-
- It was understandable that there was some scepticism among Members on whether the Council would find an operator for the Port. Numerous approaches had been made by a number of organisations to operate the Port and the Cabinet was confident that an operator would be found;
 - Last time around the Council was unable to find an operator because there was not the kind of infrastructure like there was now at the Port;
 - Under new arrangements the risk would be transferred to the operator, unlike before;
 - The introduction of the youth Council was a very good idea and Cabinet was keen to continue with that initiative to be led by Council Heather Keen;
 - Cabinet would ensure that the port would not be used to transport waste;
 - Closure of toilets had to do with the sequencing of the closing schedule which ensures that busiest locations would be closed last;
 - Fly tipping was a major challenge and Cabinet would be reviewing this area;
 - Collaborative working with parishes was the Cabinet's current direction of travel;
 - The Leader was enthusiastic about harnessing volunteer groups but the challenge was who would continue with their work when they stopped.

The Chair thanked the Leader of Council for the presentation and Members noted the report.

459. PURCHASE OF 42 HOMES AT SPITFIRE GREEN FOR AFFORDABLE RENT

Bob Porter, Director of Place introduced the report Councillor Whitehead, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing also made introductory remarks. They made the following points:

- Council had considered the report on proposals for the development of 400 housing units to be delivered over a period of the next four years;
- 40% of the funding for this development would come from the housing subsidy Right to Buy receipts or S106 Agreements;
- The council did not want to compete with housing associations in developing housing in the district but complement them by taking on taking on development that associations considered not viable;
- There were 1,604 households on the housing register, but the number of those who actually need affordable housing was much higher;
- Regeneration without affordable housing would cause displacement;
- The Housing Department had a very good record of delivering. The Council would be using previously unused S106 Agreement funding to deliver 400 units over the next four years;
- TDC was picking up those housing development projects that were considered small by Housing Association;
- 60% of the funding for this development would be from HRA borrowing. This was a sustainable and necessary step;
- Credit should go to the Housing and Finance teams for putting together this proposal.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- This was an important issue for the district. How many of the households on the housing register were actual families?
- How much of an impact will this development bring to families in the district;
- Was the priority of this Council to build on brownfields?
- Would any of the properties to be built accessible for use by people with disability or the aged?
- Would solar systems and other energy efficient systems be installed on these properties?
- Would the new development be built in one location or around several sites across the district?
- How many houses did the Council lose from its stock to Right to Buy purchases?
- This was good news. With the continued rise in the cost of living, would the Council be able to adjust year on year to keep affordable housing accessible to deserving persons?
- Members were proud to support this proposal when it was presented at Full Council on 13 July 2023. Had any study been made on affordable housing in the district?
- There was a Rise team to support residents who might need support. However, was there a holistic approach to tenancy management?

Mr Porter and Councillor Whitehead responded as follows:

- Single people were the largest group of individuals on the housing register and half of them were in temporary accommodation;
- It was always the Council's priority to build on brown fields;

- The steer to build on agricultural land was coming from the central government. Although the Council did not agree with that approach, it had to work within the confines of permitted policy;
- The Council always ensured that all its new development was adaptable for use by individuals with disability or elderly people. The Council promoted a lifetime access to homes approach;
- New development also prioritised energy efficient buildings and would therefore incorporated as many measures as were possible;
- The Council projected the number of houses lost to right to buy to fall this year. Income generated from rent collected was important to Council's ability to develop more housing;
- Cabinet preferred genuine affordable housing where the rent should be below or at the same level as the housing allowance. At the moment the allowance was below affordable housing rent;
- Temporary accommodation was a huge cost to the Council. That money could have been used for housing development;
- In addition to the work done by the Rise team, the Financial Wellbeing team also worked to support residents with their housing support needs.

There being no further comments, Members noted the report.

460. LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND: PURCHASE OF 9 HOMES

Bob Porter, Director of Place introduced the report Councillor Whitehead, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing also made introductory remarks. They made the following points:

- Council had considered the report on proposals for the purchase of 9 housing units to be purchased from central government grant which would contribute to 60% of the purchase costs;
- 40% of the funding for these units would come from the housing subsidy Right to Buy receipts or S106 Agreements;
- This was an important addition to the Council's housing stock;
- The resettlement of refugees from Afghanistan and Ukraine had not been focused. In some cases, it had led to homelessness;
- These units would provide housing for refugee families for three years and thereafter the units would become part of the Council's stock;
- This was a significant contribution to affordable housing in the long term.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- Members were supportive of this initiative. These families had gone through traumatic experiences. Was there any health wellbeing support being provided to them?
- Were these families allowed to work to make a contribution to the district?
- Before there was any formal support for the refugee families there was a community support group in Ramsgate which provided some support to these families. This was a very useful group;
- It was important for the press release to be put out in a proper context regarding this proposal in order to address those who say, "what about us."
- One Member asked what would happen to these families' housing situation after three years of receiving housing support from the Council.

Mr Porter and Councillor Whitehead responded as follows:

- There were no restrictions to the working status of the refugee families;

- Working with KCC, the Council had provided financial support to these families. This support came with the right to work in the economy, once they had been approved by the Home Office;
- The Ramsgate social group was supported by one of the Council staff who had been recruited to provide support to Ukrainian families;
- 9 units were 0.12% of the Council housing stock, but contributed in a significant way. This was part of the Council providing for all people. This was how Council would want communities to be treated by others if there were similar circumstances;
- There were two types of tenancy; licence tenancy and lifetime tenancy. These families would qualify for either of those at the end of the three years.

There being no further comments, Members noted the report.

461. LEVELLING UP FUND AND MARGATE TOWN DEAL PROJECTS UPDATE

Louise Askew, Head of Regeneration and Growth made a presentation to the Panel and highlighted points:

- The Levelling Up Funds (LUF) that were awarded to the Council were through competitive bidding;
- It was hoped that these projects would create jobs and provide opportunities for young people;
- The Regeneration team was working with the Border Force to ensure that the Port of Ramsgate had the right facilities. This included working with different stakeholders to ensure mooring facilities were appropriate;
- The team was also working with key stakeholders and organisations to ensure that the Green Campus creates space for organisations to grow;
- An application to the Seafood Infrastructure Fund to add to the existing Levelling Up Fund fishing facility was unsuccessful. The existing project will provide the fishing fleet with the processing plant required to add value to local fishing activities. The Thanet Fishermen's Association was a key stakeholder in developing the existing project;
- Work was planned on the Clock House and Pier Yard to extend the ground floor to create a food and beverage offer. A full application was going to be submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund following a successful expression of interest. The challenge of working on heritage building was value engineering such properties;
- With regards to the Access to Opportunities projects the High Street Fund element would be delivered in the town centre with the Future High Street Fund project; and an extension to the Newington Community Centre would deliver a kitchen through the Levelling Up Fund;
- The creative sector was growing but faced a challenge to access sites. The Margate Creative Land Trust was therefore set up to create opportunities for the sector to access building/sites for to support the creative industries;
- The Team was hoping to submit a bid for a development grant for the Theatre Royal to the National Lottery Heritage Fund;
- It was great that the district had received government capital funding, which has not happened at such levels of funding for a long time;
- Now the challenge was accessing revenue funding for these projects;
- The Diversifying Heritage Asset: included £4 million for Destination Dreamland: which would go a long way towards making the site fit for purpose and would be directly matched by the site owners;
- Winter Gardens: Condition surveys had been conducted on the site and an agent had been identified to market the site.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- When the time was right would the Regeneration team arrange community engagements for the Coastal Wellbeing projects to share information with local communities on the current projects the Council was implementing?
- Why was the Council still at this stage of the project implementation two years after the start? It was important for the Council to continue with community engagement activities to keep residents informed about LUF projects;
- Members congratulated the Regeneration team for bringing in large amounts of money into the district;
- Could Members of the Panel have access to the timelines for the different projects the Council was implementing so that they could follow the progress?
- Smart Boys, Clock House, Newington Community Centre and the Fisheries Facility would each need an operator. Had any sustainability studies been done to check if each of these projects were viable in the long term?
- It was good to know that the Cadets would still be able to access the sea;
- How were community projects that got funded through retrospective grant payments managing as it was difficult to raise revenue?
- Was there going to be funding for the refurbishment of the Winter Gardens?
- Could the business case for the Dreamland be shared with the Panel?
- What was the current update regarding the Margate Digital LUF project?
- What was the Council relationship with GRASS?
- What was the impact of the LUF and Margate Town Deal projects on the local economy?
- Would there be another round of LUF?

The Chair advised Members that the Panel could invite some of the third party organisations in receipt of government funding to attend Panel meetings and discuss their experiences with Members.

Louise Askew responded as follows:

- A community engagement event was held at the Turner Contemporary at the early stages of developing the business cases for the Margate Town Deal;
- The team would need to have something tangible to showcase to residents;
- The team was working on putting clear timelines together for the projects;
- When the Council submitted bids for the various projects there were only two officers in the team. The team had since grown in number and this was going to help speed up project implementation;
- Due to inflation, some of the project proposals have had to be reviewed. That is why they were at this stage of implementation;
- The community engagement event held at the Harbour this week had attracted about 300 people;
- The Future High Street Fund project would commence in the Autumn;
- More simplified timelines for project implementation would be drawn up and shared with Members;
- The sustainability of projects had been looked into and it was noted that some of these projects had synergy that their management could be brought together. The Team was still working on the issue;
- In April 2022, approval for funding was given to third party community organisations. Internal and External Auditors were monitoring the performance of these projects;
- Grant Agreements had been signed with third party delivery organisations that included the Margate Creative Land Trust;

- Retrospective funding was not always applied to all projects. Town Deal projects nationally were predominantly being delivered by the local councils or other big organisations;
- Access roads: The team was commissioning a roads access study that would determine how these roads could best be developed;
- A study had been conducted on the evening and night time economy and is being finalised. It would be added online and shared with Members;
- Information relating to the Destination Dreamland project would be added to the Council website;
- Margate Digital Campus: The Council was working with the EKC Group and Homes England. Lease agreements needed to be agreed with the council, the LUF Department, EKC Group, Department of Education and Homes England;
- Skate Park: the Skate Park team were planning engagement activities;
- It was too early to make a judgement on the impact of these projects on the local economy;
- There was no announcement as yet as to whether there would be another round of LUF. It had been intimated but the Council was not sure when that would be.

The PowerPoint slides that were used for the presentation are attached as an annex to this minute item.

Members noted the update report.

462. REVIEW OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2023/24

Members made comments regarding the finalised Panel work programme for 2023/24 as follows:

- One Member expressed dissatisfaction at the efficacy of the matrix used to prioritise the scrutiny review topics and indicated that the priority list should enable Members to include on the list and review all externally funded council projects at every Panel meeting;
- Councillor Davis proposed that a review of the current Council's Planning Enforcement Protocol be among the first three topics to be tackled. There was no seconder for this proposal;
- Another Member requested to review health and wellbeing issues affecting the local communities;
- One Member advised that the Planning Enforcement Protocol review would be better dealt with as a review than a one off officer report;
- However, Members agreed to receive an officer report on the Planning Enforcement Protocol advising the Panel on the progress regarding the previous review on the subject. This report might lead to a proper review;
- Members also agreed to review the scoring matrix at a future meeting.

Councillor Kup proposed, Councillor Green seconded and Members agreed to review the following scrutiny topics in this order:

1. Impact of Tourism;
2. Fly tipping and abandoned vehicles;
3. Grant finding review;

and further agreed the membership of the Tourism Review Working Party as follows:

Councillor Austin;
Councillor Kup;
Councillor Green;

Councillor Packman;
Councillor Britcher.

463. FORWARD PLAN AND EXEMPT CABINET DECISION LIST

Members noted the report.

Meeting concluded: 10.00 pm

This page is intentionally left blank