

## OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 December 2024 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

**Present:** Councillor Phil Fellows (Chair); Councillors D Green, Austin, J Bright, Britcher, Currie, Davis, Kup, Makinson, Packman, Pope, Pugh, W Scobie, Wing and Worrow

**In Attendance:**

### 62. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the following Members:  
Councillor Farooki, substituted by Councillor Makinson;  
Councillor Paul Moore, substituted by Councillor Pugh.

### 63. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

### 64. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Green proposed, Councillor Currie seconded and the Panel agreed the minutes to be a correct record of the meeting held on 19 November 2024.

### 65. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATION ON PARKING

Councillor Kristian Bright, Cabinet Member for Parking made a presentation on the Parking Strategy and asked the Panel to comment on the proposed strategy. During the presentation Councillor Bright made the following comments:

- This was a comprehensive strategy with eight broad objectives; four for on street and four for off street parking;
- There were fifty two actions with thirty for off street and 22 for on street parking;
- There were short, medium and long term objectives for the strategy;
- This strategy was for the period up to 2044. It was a twenty year parking strategy;
- The aim was to make the car parks enhanced, integrated, future proofed and balanced;
- The aim was to ensure that streets were well managed, cleaner, enhanced and less congested;
- There would be a need to work with residents and businesses for motorists to use car parks;
- The public consultation had resulted in 4,866 responses being received by the Council. This was quite a high response rate. Eighty six percent supported the vision;
- There was resistance to flexible tariff structure with 45% responses not in support;

- Residents talked of the need for a balance between residents parking and dedicated coach and motor homes parking;
- Residents also talked about preserving green spaces and increasing vegetation;
- The annual parking budget would fund the quick wins in the strategy;
- The Joint Transportation Board would discuss the strategy on 17 December before it goes to Cabinet for decision on 19 December 2024.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- Would there be use of ANPR technology?
- These were very impressive proposals and they were a long time coming. How would this strategy be communicated to residents, in order to explain why the Council was considering such proposals?
- It was pleasing to note that the strategy had proposals for bike hangars;
- This strategy was important for the local residents as councillors were receiving a number of case work related to parking;
- The Council should lead the way on electric vehicle charging points that should be established across the district;
- Having solar panels on car park roofs was a fantastic idea. Was there going to be a review of this strategy in time?
- The use of ANPR technology would be useful as it would relieve staffing resources and it would also deter anti-social behaviour;
- The strategy to reduce traffic was welcome. Would car clubs be a council managed or community group managed approach?
- How would this strategy combat dangerous school street parking during school runs?
- How much were the quick wins going to cost?
- Car parks could be enhanced to provide work spaces to enhance the towns;
- Electric vehicles (EVs) would have a long presence. It was therefore important to review the strategy regularly to take into consideration any changes in technology. It would be helpful to state when the reviews would be and the type of such reviews;
- Coach parking should be sited where residents would have to walk which would help with their health instead of living them by shop doors;
- It was good to see such a good response to the consultation. Underused car parks should be developed to encourage more usage;
- Could the council liaise with owners of private car parks to encourage more usage;
- Signage for car parks was important. More houses to come through housing development in the district would also mean more traffic. Quick wins were a great idea, but it was also about how the Council was going to communicate these to the public;
- Would parking and garages on tower blocks be part of this strategy? If they were not could these be included in this parking policy?
- There needed to be joined up thinking between Parking and Tenant and Leaseholder Services;

- How could the Council make parking easier for residents without overcharging them?
- It was important for the strategy to consider accessibility to car parks particularly for families with small children and therefore having family with babies parking bays on the ground floor;
- Staffordshire car parks were surrounded by residential properties. There was therefore an opportunity to make these suitable for residents use;
- More enforcement should be considered for verge parking, as this created mud mess;
- It might be that follower beds should be put on these verges to discourage verge parking.

Councillor K. Bright and Penny Button, Head of Neighbourhoods responded to member comments and questions as follows:

- Yes, ANPR technology would be used as part of the parking strategy;
- Having the appropriate Comms would be a key factor in ensuring that this strategy became successful. This strategy was full of positive things that the Council did on the subject. The strategy would need to be set up in way that the residents could understand it;
- If by next year the Council has not made progress with this strategy, Cabinet would review it;
- A progress update report would be presented to the Panel annually;
- Council was committed to reaching net zero;
- TDC was currently working with KCC on grant funding for electric vehicle charging points for car parks and was still to decide which car parks would have these facilities;
- The Levi Fund had on street charging points which the Council could access;
- The Council was starting to get push back with parking enforcement at schools. Feasibility studies on car clubs would inform the policy;
- The Decrim funds had already been allocated to designated car parks that included the Mill Lane car park;
- The Council would need to look at ways to enhance active travel and car parking to free up town centre streets;
- This was a twenty year strategy. EVs would also be improving in technology and become more efficient. The strategy would be flexible to adapt to the changes in technology and law;
- The council had no control over private car parks. However officers could try and engage the owners as requested by Members. Developing trust important for such discussions on usage of car parks;
- Garages at tower blocks was included in the strategy;
- Parking at tower blocks was managed through Estates.

The Panel noted the presentation.

## 66. ADOPTION OF PARKING STRATEGY

Penny Button, Head of Neighbourhoods introduced the report and said that most of the discussion had taken place during the presentation by the Cabinet Member for Parking on a previous item on Parking. Members were therefore asked to comment on the specifics of the proposed parking strategy as detailed in the report and related annex document.

Councillor Pugh proposed, Councillor Davis seconded and the Panel made the following recommendation to Cabinet:

1. That Cabinet considers fixing a five year review of the Parking Strategy to enable updates to be made due to changes that may arise;
2. To forward to Cabinet the officer recommendations in the report.

**67. REVIEW THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2024-25**

Councillor Joanne Bright gave a brief update of the work of the Youth Services Provision Working Party and requested approval for the draft terms of reference that the working party had drafted. These terms were attached as Annex 4 to the work programme report. Two separate survey questionnaires had been sent out to TDC Heads of Service and young people across the district. Responses from this survey would be considered by the working party at their meeting on 9 January 2025.

The Panel agreed the new terms of reference, subject to questions in the document being removed from the terms.

Members noted the report.

**68. OPTION TO PURCHASE CAR PARK, RAMSGATE**

Andreea Plant, Head of Property introduced the report and made the following comments:

- The report presented to the Panel specifically looked at the Council's option to buy the leasehold interest in the Royal Harbour Multi-Storey Car Park in Ramsgate;
- The current lease ran until 2073 with no break options;
- Rent was reviewed every five years based on the construction price index (CPI) and was currently just over £227k per annum. However, by July 2025, it was expected to rise to above £300,000 per annum;
- The lease allowed the Council to buy the property every five years, with the next opportunity in July 2025. The purchase price would be 12 times the rent amount, currently estimated to be at circa £3.6 million plus VAT, though VAT could be reclaimed if the car park use continued;
- The Council would also need to conduct legal and survey checks before purchasing so costs could vary slightly depending on the levels of work required;
- The main reason for purchasing the car park was the significant long-term financial savings it offers;

- For example, if the rent remained at the forecasted 2025 levels of £302k annually (which the Council knew it would not, as the reviews would bring it up every 5 years), the Council would have to pay £14.5 million pounds in rent over the next 48 years;
- Whereas if the Council bought the property the cost of borrowing over the same period would be circa £12.7 million, it would be cheaper by £1.78 million;
- But as was known, the rents would continue to rise, so if the current rate of increase was assumed, the total rental payments could escalate to £27.6 million pounds, therefore purchasing would save the council an even greater amount of up to £14.9 million;
- These were the financial savings alone before considering the benefits from having full control over the site with flexibility to explore future uses, and full control over maintenance and repairs plans.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- Could officers review the calculations just to be sure that these were correct?
- On a value for ,money basis purchasing this property would be adding to the Council's assets;
- The valuation was very high. Was an industry formula used?
- It was a great idea to take control of this asset. Had a structural survey been conducted to ensure that the facility could take on electric vehicles, as these were heavier than non-electric vehicles?
- How would the Council deal with fire incidents if they broke out in this facility?
- How many other assets were being leased by the Council where a similar purchasing approach could be recommended to Cabinet?
- In February 2023, the lifts were reported as broken and two summers had passed without any repairs having been made to these lifts. Could officers offer a deadline by when these lifts would be repaired?

Andreea Plant and Chris Blundell responded to Member questions and comments as follows:

- CPI indexes were used for the calculations;
- There was scope for variability both ways. Paragraph 2.6 in the committee report set out the use of cash balances instead of going to borrow from the market;
- The issue of dealing with fire incidents at the facility was not part of the consideration for this proposal. Once the property ownership was acquired, such considerations would be made. It was worth noting that this car park was designed in 1974;
- Officers would look into whether there were properties that the Council was currently leasing and advise members. However it was important to note that there would be need for similar conditions for the Council to consider a similar purchasing approach. Currently there were twelve properties that were being leased by the Council;

- A contractor had been identified for the repair of the lifts. They were now waiting for the specifications for the lifts. The Property team had met the contractor. The Panel would be advised of any progress.

Councillor Austin proposed, Councillor Davis seconded and the Panel agreed to forward to Cabinet the officer recommendations in the report.

#### **69. TLS KPI Q1 & Q2 - HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT**

Sally O'Sullivan, Head of Tenant and Leaseholder Services introduced the report and made the following comments:

- A brief summary of the KPI showed that the Council's partnering contractors were performing well and this was also supported by the customer satisfaction surveys. This result was expected for Q1 & Q2 as these were the warmer dryer months, when less repairs were reported;
- Reports of Damp mould and condensation also declined during Q2. This was a seasonal trend that would be expected. Reports of damp and mould to were expected to increase during Q3 and there was therefore a need to ensure officers were ready with extra resources should they be required;
- The capital spend did not reflect the progress by the end of Q2. This was because even though a lot of cyclical work had been completed, this did not get invoiced until Q3;
- Three capital projects had been delayed for the lift refurbishment at Invicta House due the requirement for an application to the building safety regulator. These were as follows:
  - Royal Crescent - officers were working toward contract award;
  - Churchfields - this project was booked to start in the new financial year.
- At the end of Q2 the tower block project was where officers expected it to be. With two big milestones being progressed, which were the award of the D&B contract and submission of the BSR applications;
- The BSR application presented the biggest risk to the project timeline as this was a completely new process;
- Void performance saw a dip in Q2, with an average of 43 days to turn re-lets. This was mainly due to complex voids being completed during this period;
- Arrears performance continued to show a positive trend at 3.05% at the end of Q2. This was a 0.19% improvement from the previous quarter;
- This was the second time the ASB dashboard had been presented. As the data set grew officers would be able to start to observe trends which could inform the way that the team could approach ASB;
- This was the first time that officers had presented the compliance KPIs as a dashboard. This had been made possible because the reviewed policies reduced the burden on reporting. The report covering the previous period to 31 March 2024 was considered by the Housing Cabinet Advisory Group. In future, all of the new dashboards would

also be brought to the Overview & Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet for review;

- The team was also currently part way through an internal audit of the compliance arrangements which would be reported to the Governance and Audit Committee in due course, and any recommendations that impact on the service's performance or compliance position would be reported in the next cycle.
- There was one property not compliant for gas in Q2. This was resolved in Q3. The current report was now 100% compliant for gas;
- Fire risk assessments was the only Compliance workstream that was allocated its own dashboard and this was because there still were a lot of outstanding actions;
- There were 538 actions in total with 338 of those being overdue. Of the overdue actions 111 were being addressed through capital programmes which were the towerblock retrofit and refurbishment project, with the award of the low rise flatted blocks door replacement contract and with the contract award for passive fire works;
- There were a lot of new actions being added each quarter. This was due to FRAs being carried out. Focus was put on FRA actions with all teams, many of which were hard to manage because they involved changing the tenants' behaviour by not leaving rubbish or belongings in the communal areas.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- This was an impressive report by the Tenant and Leaseholder Services team;
- How serious were the overdue fire actions?
- PSW was on the decline. MMC was also being dealt with in time and rent arrears were coming down slowly;
- Would third party compliance be checked by the Council?
- Could there be a named contact for both the private sector housing team and the TLS?

Sally O'Sullivan, Ashley Jackson and Bob Porter responded to Member questions and comments as follows:

- Tenants were not put in arrears. They pay a week in advance and there are provided with support to managing rents tpo0 that they do not go into arrears;
- Tenants were given damp, mould and condensation on taking up tenancy;
- Officer would monitor the BSW that was going into decline with customer satisfaction;
- Some of the overdue actions at the tower blocks dated back to 2021. Some of those actions had short completion times;
- Once the contracts were in place, the Council would self-refer to the tribunal and the Council would demonstrate the costs;

- Third party landlords were regulated as Social Landlords. They report to the regulator in the same way TDC did. The Council did not have an oversight over third party landlords;
- The Comms team were working on a new communications structure chart to share with members. Officer would advise Members once the chart was ready for circulating;
- Members could in the meantime send any queries to the Head of Housing and Planning for onward submission to Orbit, where appropriate.

The Panel noted the report.

## **70. THE HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY**

Ashley Jackson, Head of Housing and Planning introduced the report and made the following comments:

- Councils across England were required by the Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996 to offer Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) to people who qualify;
- These grants were mandatory and were restricted to helping people with disabilities to adapt their homes to make them accessible and more suitable for their needs;
- The funding for these grants came from central Government via the Better Care Fund;
- If a Council wished to offer financial assistance towards anything other than DFGs they had to adopt and publish a Housing Assistance Policy which gave full details of the assistance, they would offer to householders in their area for property adaptation, improvement or repair. The things the BCF money was spent on included the following:
  - Individual DFGs;
  - Health and Housing Co-ordinator co-funded with Dover;
  - Town & Country Housing (T&CH) Home Straight scheme (hoarding);
  - Handyperson Enablement Service co-funded with Dover;
  - Contribution towards salaries for staff facilitating the expenditure of the budget.
- It is imperative that the Council has in place a fair policy that takes into account changes since the last policy was agreed in 2019. Proposals that we are consulting on included the following:
  - Increasing the maximum grant allowance from £30,000 to £50,000;
  - Extend discretionary grants to tenants rather than just to Landlords;
  - We are also proposing to limit the number of grant applications that can be submitted to prevent fraud.

The recommendations to Cabinet are:



1. The consultation draft of the Housing Assistance Policy is approved;
2. The council conducts a public consultation on the draft policy;
3. The results of the consultation be published on the Council's website;
4. Authority be delegated to the Head of Housing and Planning in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing to determine any minor amendments to the policy;
5. Authority be delegated to the Head of Housing and Planning in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder to consider and determine requests to waive the requirement to repay grants in exceptional circumstances.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- Why was it necessary to provide for delegated power to two individuals for this decision;
- Such decisions should go to formal meetings that include the Scrutiny Panel;
- It was balance between risk and harm to residents;
- Some Members said that they did not view the approach to delegate authority as being problematic;
- The pejorative wording at page 26 of Annex 1 should be removed from the document.

Ashley Jackson, Chris Blundell and Bob Porter responded to Member questions and comments as follows:

- Grants only become payable when such cases arise;
- These would usually be cases of extreme personal difficulties for the individuals;
- Council had carried out a few such cases and it was worth noting that these cases were also confidential;
- It was also worth noting that S151 Officer had delegated authority to write-off debts to a certain agreed level.

Councillor Austin proposed, Councillor Britcher seconded and Members agreed to forward to Cabinet the officer recommendations in the report.

## 71. THE HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

Ashley Jackson introduced the report and made the following comments:

- The Council was required to publish an allocations policy. The allocations policy determines who is eligible to apply for housing, how applications are assessed and prioritised and how affordable and social rented homes in the district will be allocated;
- There are a number of changes from the existing Allocations Policy which are detailed in the report specifically proposed changes to:
  - Eligibility
  - Banding

- Advertising and Allocation
  - Equality and Diversity
  - Complaints
- At the end of November the government announced new regulations to remove the local connection requirements for veterans to access social housing;
  - The Council was currently awaiting the details on this and this update would be included in the revised document. The recommendations to Cabinet were that:
    1. The consultation draft of the Allocations Policy be agreed;
    2. The draft policy be subject to public consultation to be conducted early in 2025;
    3. The results of the consultation will be published on the Council's website;
    4. Authority be delegated to the Head of Housing and Planning in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing to make minor amendments to the policy;
    5. That the policy be reviewed on an annual basis, or when required.

Councillor Austin proposed, Councillor Pugh seconded and Members agreed to forward to Cabinet the officer recommendations in the report.

## **72. ACCELERATED TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME**

Ashley Jackson introduced the report and made the following comments:

- Overview and Scrutiny Panel was asked to consider and comment on the contents of the report and the recommendations to Cabinet;
- Thanet District Council had a duty to provide temporary accommodation to people who were eligible for assistance, homeless and in priority need. The demand for temporary accommodation had increased consistently since 2012 and this had been replicated across the country;
- The rapid increase in people presenting as homeless and in need of TA had played a substantial part on the increasing pressure on local authorities;
- The Council's budget for TA in 2024/25 was £1,005,860, offset by a budgeted income of £350,000 from Housing Benefit and rent;
- These budgets had been significantly exceeded, due to the demand for TA and the net overspend across all Housing Options budgets in 2023/24 was £1.3m and this was forecast to be £800k in 2024/25.
- The Council was currently accommodating 303 households in temporary accommodation, just under 170 of those were in other parts of Kent, hence the proposal to purchase 170 units of temporary accommodation within Thanet;
- The business model was explained in detail in the report and officers had developed a toolkit to assess viability. To be viable, temporary accommodation schemes needed to show a saving almost immediately to prevent an impact on the Council's general fund budget position;

- In summary to ensure that this programme was financially viable, and a lower cost than the Council's current temporary accommodation arrangements residents would be charged a social rent and a service charge;
- The recommendations to Cabinet were that:
  3. The council progresses with a programme to acquire or develop up to 170 homes for use as temporary accommodation;
  4. Cabinet recommend the required general fund capital budget of £38.762m as part of the annual budget setting process across the financial years 2025/26 and 2026/27;
  5. A six monthly update on the delivery of the programme is provided to Cabinet;
  6. The letting of these homes will be in accordance with the Council's Temporary Accommodation Policy, approved by Cabinet in July 2024.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- Finance reported an overspend of £800k. At the moment there were a lot of households in temporary accommodation and that if number dropped, would that expose the Council?
- Why had temporary accommodation become an issue?
- Were these properties being developed and or purchased by the Council as temporary accommodation exempt from rent to buy?
- The government was looking into the issue of temporary accommodation across the country. This scheme being proposed by the Council seemed to stand on its own merit;
- What were the pressures on the General Fund? It would help make clear recommendations if such financial pressures were made known to the Panel;
- Members fully supported these proposals, considering that some major housing developments were struggling to reach the 30% affordable housing requirement;
- The new properties to be purchased would help manage the human costs where some households would find themselves in temporary accommodation being placed outside the district;
- Bringing back families who had been placed outside the district was something the Council needed to consider. Such schemes as this would go a long way to achieving this;
- This project was asset based. It had far reaching impact on the welfare, mental health and financial wellbeing of residents;
- This would enable households to get stability to their lives;
- One hundred and seventy properties was a specific figure. Had the Council identified such properties?
- Where in Thanet would the 170 properties be?
- It had always been difficult to convince developers to build one bedroom properties. Could the Council engage developers in this discussion for 1 bed properties?
- The Panel needed to make recommendations to manage risk.

Ashley Jackson, Bob Porter, Director of Place and Chris Blundell, Director of Corporate Services & S151 Officer responded to member questions and comments as follows:

- The Council had made an investment in a resalable asset;
- Housing had gone up in value. There was a risk that prices for housing could go down;
- This programme was different to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA);
- This programme would not be able to cover its own costs. However it was cheaper than what the Council was currently doing;
- These proposals would save money;
- If the Council did not need these properties in the near future, it could sell them at market value and cover other developments;
- The second option was to move these properties into the HRA housing stock. However that would work if the HRA could be seen as sustainable;
- The third option would be to establish a housing company and charge a rent higher than was currently being charged for the Council's other housing stock;
- There had been a spike in the last two to three years in demand for temporary accommodation resulting from the rentals in the private sector that had been increased. Landlords in the private sector had served notices to households in order to let to someone else who had a higher rent offer;
- CiPFA was commissioned to give advice on these schemes;
- These properties were exempt from the rent to buy scheme;
- These schemes would be considered as key decisions and would be presented to Cabinet for decision;
- Each of the schemes would be pre decision scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel before being taken to Cabinet for final decision;
- There was a degree of risk to consider. As the schemes developed, officers would be looking at the performance through a review of the medium term financial strategy;
- The 170 properties would be smaller units spread across the district. Officers would be looking at central locations to identify sites for the location of these properties;
- Officers hold discussions with developers on unit sizes to see if any developments could include 1 bedroom units.

Councillor Scobie proposed, Councillor Packman seconded and Members made the following recommendation to Cabinet, that:

1. The Overview and Scrutiny Panel supports the decision which will provide much needed temporary accommodation for Thanet residents in Thanet whilst reducing pressure on the Council finances.
2. To forward to Cabinet the officer recommendations in the report.

**73. FORWARD PLAN AND EXEMPT CABINET REPORTS LIST**

Members noted the report.

Meeting concluded: 9.35 pm