

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 15 January 2013 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor Driver (Chairman); Councillors Harrison, Bruce, Campbell, E Green, I Gregory, Hibbert, Huxley, King, Marson, Moore, D Saunders, M Saunders, H Scobie, M Tomlinson and Watkins

In Attendance: Councillor D Green

302. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the following Members:

Councillor Gibson substituted by Councillor Huxley;
Councillor Gideon substituted by Councillor M. Saunders;
Councillor Hornus substituted by Councillor Bruce;
Councillor W. Scobie substituted by Councillor H. Scobie.

303. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

304. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

Details are provided under Minute numbers 305 and 306.

305. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 23 OCTOBER 2012

The minutes were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

306. MINUTES OF EXTRAORDINARY MEETING HELD ON 20 DECEMBER 2012

The minutes were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

307. FURTHER DETAILS ON OPTION 'A' OF PROPOSED SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS FOR THANET DISTRICT COUNCIL

The item was deferred to an Extraordinary Overview & Scrutiny Panel meeting that has been scheduled for 12 February 2013.

308. THANET DISTRICT COUNCIL; DRAFT TENANCY STRATEGY 2013-2017

Madeline Homer, Director of Community Services reported that following consultation with the Executive, there was a need to withdraw the item from the Cabinet agenda for January 2013. This was in order to re-draft the strategy document and bring it back to both the Overview & Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet at a later date. She said that it was no longer achievable to put the strategy in place by 15 January 2013. Government had initially indicated that the deadline date was April 2013, but later moved to January 2013.

309. REPLACEMENT REPORT - HOUSING STRATEGY 2012-2016

Madeline Homer said that Members had been briefed about the proposed draft Housing Strategy at a Members Briefing session in June last year. It was a legal requirement for Local Councils to adopt Housing Strategies for their areas and these have to be renewed

regularly to take into consideration any changes brought about by legislation, like the Localism Act.

Some Members made the observation that there was an increase in Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) applications in Central Ramsgate. Madeline Homer said that her team was working on a Displacement Policy to get the balance right for the distribution of HMOs and they were monitoring the situation. This issue would also be addressed through the revised Local Plan.

As part of the monitoring, information would be collected from a number of sources, including through the "Your Home, Your Health Survey". This will assist in determining how tenants living conditions could be best improved by sign posting the vulnerable residents who needed help. Madeline Homer said that there was a need to have a clear picture of the nature of the problem and the approach to solving the issue should be sensitive. It should acknowledge the fact that student populations living in some of these HMOs do bring in a positive contribution to the local economy.

Members suggested that an analysis should be undertaken to determine the impact of the new EU entrants, Romania and Bulgaria on housing provisions in Thanet. However Madeline Homer said that the impact was not likely to be a significant factor on registration figures; internal migration as a result of Welfare Reform was a greater risk. She reported that Kent County Council was working on a model to determine housing demand in the County in 15-20 years time.

Some Members suggested that it may be useful to get age profiles of people perceived to require social housing in order to get the housing policy more focused. Other Members said that it was important to have joined up thinking in providing a framework for social housing in the area, particularly in inter-agency information sharing on housing availability. Madeline Homer advised Members that her team was speeding up decisions on allocation of housing.

As regards the likely impact of the new benefit regime, Madeline Homer said that FOI research undertaken by officers on some London Boroughs seems to suggest that there is no significant intention to obtain accommodation in Thanet for re-housing their tenants. However final analysis of the information had not yet been completed. One London Borough had indicated that they were looking for housing in Thanet. The Universal Credit and Benefit cap was as yet to be implemented. Officers would continue to monitor the situation. Madeline Homer agreed that the title in the report that refers to "Home Improvement Pack" should read "Home Information Pack".

Members agreed to recommend the proposed draft Housing Strategy to Cabinet.

310. REPLACEMENT REPORT - ALLOCATIONS POLICY

Madeline Homer introduced the item. She said that Member workshops had been undertaken in October last year and some feedback was received from these workshop sessions and taken on board in drafting the updated version of the Allocations Policy. This draft version will be going to Cabinet on 22 January 2013 and out for public consultation between 25 January 2013 and 1 March 2013; before coming back to the Overview & Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet and then to Council for adoption.

One of the significant proposals in the policy document is how Council should manage the housing register. There has been a re-definition of criteria for qualifying as Band A or Band B housing priority need which includes urgent medical or welfare needs. This will mean an increased number of households on the register would fall into Band C.

Members said that there was a need for strict and clear definitions that would enable consistent application of the policy for all. Members suggested that the appeals

procedure should be more clearly spelt out in the policy document. They said that it was important for the policy to ensure that the medical grounds covered were comprehensive enough so that they included mental health conditions. They observed that that thrust of the policy appeared to be to manage realistic expectations for those households on the housing register. Madeline Homer indicated that the policy would aim to provide housing on a fairer basis.

Councillor Bruce proposed that the draft policy includes an eligibility criterion rent arrears apply to all social housing providers within or outside the Thanet area.

Members agreed to recommend the draft Allocations Policy to Cabinet with the following additions:

1. A clear Appeals Procedure;
2. Ensure medical grounds are comprehensive and include mental health;
3. Include that the rent arrears apply to all social housing providers within or outside the Thanet area.

311. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13

Councillor Harrison, Chairman of the East Kent Clinical Strategy Review Task & Finish Group said that he had forwarded submissions to the East Kent Hospitals University Foundation Trust Board making observations on the proposed clinical strategy for East Kent. He then read out at the meeting the response he received from the EKHUFT Board wherein the Board Chairman was encouraging TDC Members to respond to the public consultation which was going to be launched soon.

The report was noted.

312. FORWARD PLAN AND EXEMPT CABINET REPORT LIST FOR THE PERIOD FROM 22 JANUARY 2013 TO 2 MAY 2013

The report was noted.

Meeting concluded: 8.29 pm