

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2013 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor Driver (Chairman); Councillors Harrison, Campbell, Gideon, E Green, I Gregory, Hibbert, Hornus, Marson, Moore, D Saunders, W Scobie, M Tomlinson and Worrow

In Attendance: Councillors Fenner, D Green, C Hart, King and Poole

313. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies received.

314. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

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

Dr Glenn Back, Democratic Services & Scrutiny Manager introduced the report and gave a brief summary of the key issues. He said that one of the first key tasks for the Panel was for Members to decide which of the options set out in paragraphs 4.2 to 4.5 of the report they preferred (ranging from no-change, to replacing the main Scrutiny Panel with three standing-committees). Whichever option was preferred would have implications for the detailed handling of processes such as call-in. This aim was that the recommendations agreed at this meeting would be reported to the Constitutional Review Working Party on 7 March, to Standards Committee on 27 March and to Council on 18 April for final approval. The Annual Meeting of Council would then adopt the new model for the 2013/14 Municipal Year.

Some Members said that they would prefer a scrutiny arrangement that would strengthen the role of scrutiny in a pre-decision policy development arrangement. This model would encourage a more inclusive approach to policy development as non executive Councillors from both the Political Group in administration and opposition Group(s) would participate in policy making from an early stage of the process. They therefore suggested the adoption of the three scrutiny committee structure that would replace the current model.

Other Members suggested a possible fourth Scrutiny Committee that would be responsible for scrutinising strategic executive decisions only. Several Members said that in a three-committee model, the main Panel would have to be dropped as keeping it might unduly slow down scrutiny, whereby sub-groups would have to report to the sub-committees which would then report to the main Panel before an issue can be finally recommended to Cabinet and/ or Council.

There was some concern about the ability of Members and Officers to service such a three Scrutiny Committee structure. They pointed out that there was a need to know the exact cost implications of the model that was being proposed as these proposals might have a budget implication for Council. Dr. Back noted that the report speculated that the models in the paper might require an extra 0.5 FTE to 1.0 FTE to support. However, he acknowledged that such an estimate was not precise at this stage and would need to be reviewed in the light of operational experience. After all, the way in which the work programme of any new sub-committees might develop could not be known with certainty

at this stage. Members indicated that the new system should be able to respond to the need to undertake investigations of pertinent issues affecting the residents of Thanet District, in addition to their role in policy development.

Councillor W. Scobie proposed, Councillor Campbell seconded and Members unanimously agreed the following:

1. To recommend to the Constitutional Review Working Party (then Standards Committee and Council) that the Overview & Scrutiny Panel be abolished and replaced by three Overview & Scrutiny Committees as is reflected in the officer report;
2. To recommend that Council approach the East Kent Joint Independent Remuneration Panel for advice regarding the amendment of the Special Responsibility Allowance Scheme to reflect the new scrutiny arrangements.

316. CABINET DECISION CALL-IN:- NOTICE ON MOTION REFERRED BY COUNCIL - RAMSGATE ROYAL SANDS

Councillor Campbell proposed, Councillor W. Scobie seconded and Members agreed to move to the next item of business (i.e. not to debate this item). Thus the call-in fell and no recommendations would be made to the executive.

317. REJECTED PETITIONS REPORT - PETITION REGARDING DUMPTON GAP BEACH DOG BAN

The report was noted.

318. CABINET DECISION CALL-IN: - INTRODUCTION OF DOG CONTROL ORDER - DUMPTON GAP

An explanation was offered by one of the Members regarding the decision made by Cabinet to reject the original request to introduce a dog ban on the Dumpton Gap Beach. They said that there had been previous discussions regarding this when the original scheme had been developed and it had been felt that such a ban would have had a negative impact on the recently introduced walking routes as part of promoting tourism in Ramsgate. This promotion is targeting the growing market of domestic tourism which has seen an increase in dog owners who prefer to go on holiday with their pets.

Some Members said that there was a need to improve the signage of restrictions on dogs at some of Thanet beaches. They said that adequate impact analysis should be carried to ensure that neighbouring areas would not be affected by decisions made by town or parish councils.

Some Members were concerned about the perceived inadequate provisions in the Council's Petitions Scheme regarding "duplicate" petitions. Dr. Back replied that the scheme had not really anticipated the set of circumstances that had happened in this case. The second petition had been ruled out as a repetition of the first even before the first had been reported to Council. When the original petition had been reported to Council the second petition had not been referred to. Dr. Back felt that was probably a mistake, and offered to present options for review to a future meeting of the Constitutional Review Working Party. Members were also concerned that Ward Members were not advised of petitions affecting their wards until they were reported to Council for consideration by Members. This would also be referred to the Constitutional Review Working Party.

Councillor W. Scobie proposed, Councillor Campbell seconded and Members agreed the following be referred to the Constitutional Review Working Party:

1. That the TDC Petition Scheme be amended so that when a second petition is rejected on the basis that it is generally similar to a previous valid one that has not yet been reported to Council, then the Council should be made aware of the second petition;
2. That Ward Councillor(s) should be informed of all petitions that directly affect their ward once they have been received by Council, regardless of whether they were valid or not.

Thus no referral was made to the executive regarding the call-in.

319. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PROGRAMME 2012/13

There was a request from one Member for more regular meetings of the Corporate Improvement & Budget Working Party. The Chairman agreed to discuss the issue with the Chairman of the Working Party. The Chairman also reminded Members to start collating information regarding the work undertaken by their respective task & finish groups during 2012/13 and produce their group's "annual report". These reports would form the basis of the development of the Panels' Annual Report to Council.

Councillor Driver, Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel proposed that an invitation be extended to the newly elected Kent Police & Crime Commissioner, Ann Barnes and the Chief Constable of Kent Police, Ian Learmouth to attend a meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel and respond to questions to be raised by Members regarding policing matters in Kent in general and Thanet District in particular.

Other Members suggested that an extraordinary meeting of Council be arranged to host the Kent Police & Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable of Kent Police instead. It was suggested that the Council forum would provide wider participation by all Members of the Council. Councillor I. Gregory proposed that a list of pre-set questions be produced and forwarded to Ann Barnes and Chief Constable Learmouth so that Members can get full responses to their queries.

Dr. Back noted that although the Panel had waived political proportionality at the beginning of the Municipal Year, it had nevertheless agreed a set "ratio" of membership for the task-finish groups from across the Political Groups. Given recent changes in Political Groups, there was now a need to review membership of several of the task-finish groups as set out in the agenda report.

Members agreed that:

1. The Overview & Scrutiny Panel Chairman approaches the Council Chairman to explore the possibility of calling an extraordinary Council meeting to host the Kent Police & Crime Commissioner, Ann Barnes and Chief Constable of Kent Ian Learmouth, to ask them to respond to pre-set questions regarding policing in Kent in general, and Thanet District in particular;
2. That Political Groups would forward to Democratic Services, names of their Members to sit on the task & finish groups/working parties as a result of the changes to the membership of some of the Political Groups.

Meeting concluded: 8.25 pm

