
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT TO COUNCIL

To: **Council – 25 February 2016**

By: **Cllr D. Saunders, Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Ward: **Thanet Wide**

Summary: **The purpose of the report is to highlight some of the key activities that have been planned for by the Overview & Scrutiny Panel during the course of this municipal year 2015/16 and progress to date regarding implementation of the Panel's work programme.**

For Information

1.0 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Members agreed at the Full Council meeting on 2 October 2014 that 'at each of its ordinary meetings, Council will receive a written report introduced by the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel on the work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel since the last Council meeting. Such a report will be subject to comment or debate in the usual way.'
- 1.2 The report will therefore provide the basis for debate by Members on on-going scrutiny activities and hopefully lead to sharing of views and ideas to enhance the scrutiny function at Thanet District Council.

2.0 Community Safety Partnership Working Party

- 2.1 The working party met on 01 February 2016 and reviewed the proposed Thanet Community Safety Plan for 2016/17. Members were pleased with the work of the Partnership in 2015/16. They recommended the draft Plan to the Overview & Scrutiny Panel for onward submission to Cabinet and Council.

3.0 Corporate Performance Review Working Party

- 3.1 The working party met on 08 February 2016 to receive updates on quarterly performance monitoring reports by the Council, EK Services (to include EK Human Resources) and EK Housing.
- 3.2 The working party also received a report on decision making, risk management and good practice in project management.
- 3.3 Members received an update on the Council's progress regarding the implementation of the Peer Review recommendations on improving corporate performance. They were advised that the follow-up Peer Review Challenge would be held over two days (25-26 February 2016). As part of the

preparation for the review Members would be invited to a Members Briefing where the Council's Position Statement would be discussed and subsequently amended as required.

4.0 Electoral Registration Process Review Task & Finish Group

- 4.1 The sub-group has not met since their meeting on 8 October 2015. Members received a report on 'Increasing public awareness of registration under Individual Electoral Registration (IER).' Members noted that Council is still facing a significant challenge in persuading residents to register their details on the electoral role with particular difficulties in encouraging residents to use electronic means such as texting on line and telephone services.
- 4.2 Instead some residents still preferred the traditional method of filling in a paper form and posting it or handing it in. Fears about data theft, is clearly a factor here and this could undermine the Government's stated aim of attempting to move more residents to electronic registration means.
- 4.3 Residents' response to the canvassing exercise has seen some improvement in the return rate of registration forms. The current rate stands at 67%, with the lowest ward response at 30% and the highest at 70%.
- 4.4 Members were advised that officers were still working on strategies for improving voter registration. Members also came up with suggestions for officers to consider. These included placing restrictions on 'access to library facilities' as an incentive to residents to update their details on the electoral roll.
- 4.5 Given the uncertainties around the future of the annual canvass process the sub group agreed that representations be made to the Cabinet Office, to ensure the Government continues to adequately fund the IER process and so ensure there is effective promotion. I am hopeful therefore that officers will be writing to the Cabinet Office on that issue.
- 4.6 The sub group also received an officer report on 'Review of printing and postal voting arrangements for the May 2015 Election.' The May Elections posed some significant electoral administration challenges due to the requirement to manage for the first time Parliamentary, District and Parish/Town Councils elections being held on the same day. This was in addition to the recent major changes brought about by the introduction of the new Individual Electoral Registration system.

OTHER KEY ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED BY THE PANEL

5.0 Review of the QEQM Hospital A & E Services

- 5.1 The work of the QEQM Hospital Cabinet Advisory Group that was set up by the Leader will depend on how soon the East Kent Hospitals University Foundation Trust (EKHUFT) puts information on a possible public consultation of the proposed review of A&E Services.
- 5.2 At the Panel meeting on 15 December 2015, Members were advised that although Cabinet had set up a QEQM Hospital Cabinet Advisory Group, the group had not yet met as Council was still awaiting the appointment of a new CEx for the East Kent Hospitals University Foundation Trust.

- 5.3 The Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) together with EKHUFT have set up a Strategic Board and TDC officer would be seeking more information on the terms of reference of the new Board and meet the new EKHUFT CEx.
- 5.4 Once the new incumbent has settled in the role, Council will be making inquiries as to the progress regarding the review in question. The Panel will therefore continue to maintain a watching brief on the issue.

6.0 Call-In of Cabinet Decisions

- 6.1 There have been no call-ins since the last Council meeting. However it might be worth noting that the Overview & Scrutiny Panel met on 26 January 2016 to consider the Cabinet recommendations to Council on the Council Budget for 2016/17 and the Medium Financial Plan for 2016-2010. Cabinet thereafter met again on 28 January and re-confirmed its position regarding the proposed budget proposals for submission to Full Council. These recommendations were then debated and approved by Full Council on 4 February 2016.
- 6.2 This interactive budget making process, gave an opportunity to the Panel Members to engage Cabinet on budget proposals. This engagement led a positive debate on the process for reviewing the capital programme. From that discussion, the Cabinet Member for Financial Services & Estates suggesting that the Panel could carry-out a one-off scrutiny project on the Council's application of the process for reviewing the corporate Capital Programme. Panel Members considered the suggestion on 9 February, but did not take up the offer to carry-out the review. I am pleased with the process that Council has adopted in drafting next year's Council budget and related financial/investment strategies.

7.0 Cabinet Presentations at OSP Meetings

- 7.1 The Panel invited Councillor Brimm, Cabinet Member for Operational Services to the 15 December 2015 Panel meeting to make a presentation on "Our Vision for the Future of our Parks, Gardens & Playgrounds."
- 7.2 In her presentation to the Panel Councillor Brimm reported that currently staff working in the parks, grounds and playgrounds were carrying out the following key activities:
- Grass cutting of parks and other grounds owned by the Council;
 - Sports ground maintenance through the Your Leisure Partnership;
 - Management of shrubs, beds and hedges in parks and other grounds owned by TDC;
 - Tree Management including East Kent Housing;
 - Provision of Allotments;
 - Development, maintenance and safety inspections of Play Areas and Skate Parks including East Kent Housing;
 - Grounds maintenance for East Kent Housing through a Service Level Agreement;
 - Grave digging and maintenance of Cemeteries;
 - Weed control to all parks, open spaces and foreshores (typically three times per annum);
 - Minor works including planned and reactive works in parks, open spaces, toilets, car parks and the installation of parking meters

7.3 Members were informed that Cabinet was working on an Open Spaces and Parks Strategy for the next 20 years. Councillors and residents would be fully engaged during this process in order to inform the strategy, but it is likely that some hard choices would need to be made around the number of parks and open spaces that the Council can support as funding would clearly be limited.

7.3 A number of options would be considered, including working with and supporting community groups that would volunteer to take on some of the maintenance works. Currently, the parks and open spaces maintenance team was working with over twenty voluntary organisations and the intention was to develop the relationships between Council and community groups to the benefit of the local communities that were served by Council.

7.4 I am looking forward to the public consultation and would hope that all Members take time to respond in order to effectively contribute to the future design of parks maintenance for the district.

8.0 Corporate Implications

8.1 Financial and VAT

8.1.1 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

8.2 Legal

8.2.1 There are no significant legal implications arising directly from this report. A presentation of the OSP Chairman's report to Full Council enables the Chairman to fulfil their duty as is required by the Council's Constitution.

8.3 Equity and Equalities

8.3.1 There are no equity and equalities implications arising directly from this report.

9.0 Recommendation

9.1 Members are invited to discuss and note the report.

10.0 Decision Making Process

10.1 The Council Constitution allows the Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel to present a report at each scheduled Council meeting for Members' information.

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Annex List

None	N/A
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Background Papers

Title	Details of where to access copy
None	N/A

Corporate Consultation Undertaken

Finance	Nicola Walker, Interim Head of Financial Services
Legal	Tim Howes, Director of Corporate Governance & Monitoring Officer
Communications	Hannah Thorpe, Interim Head of Communications