
OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL 2015/16

To: **Overview & Scrutiny Panel – 26 April 2016**

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

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Ward: **Thanet Wide**

Summary: **This agenda item allows the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel to outline the achievements of the Panel covering the period 2015/16 and agree a report to Council, which would note any suggestions made by the Panel on possible work programme items for 2016/17.**

For Decision

1.0 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 Thanet District Council's Overview & Scrutiny Panel is entitled to make an annual report to the Annual Meeting of Council. This report summarises the key achievements of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel during 2015/16 and indicates the Panels' suggested priorities for 2016/17.
- 1.2 The Panel unanimously agreed at the beginning of the 2015/16 to disregard political proportionality when setting out the membership of the working parties/task & finish groups. Each of the sub-group membership was set at seven to have 3 UKIP, 2 Conservative, 1 Labour and 1 Democratic Independent Group. Members established three working parties which were the Corporate Performance Review Working Party, Community Safety Partnership Working Party and Electoral Registration Process Review Task & Finish Group.
- 1.3 During this municipal year, the Chairman of the Panel presented to Council five reports on the scrutiny activities being undertaken. The main focus of the reports came from the work activities of the Corporate Performance Working Party and Community Safety Working Party.
- 1.4 Annex 1 highlights the terms of reference for the three sub groups that were on the Panel's work programme for 2015/16.

2.0 Induction training of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel

- 2.1 The Panel would like to acknowledge that the induction training that was provided to all members of the Panel at the start of the current municipal year was helpful as it provided newly elected Members with an initial insight into the role and function of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel in the Council's decision making and policy development process. It increased the confidence

and helped create a better understanding for Members who were new to the role of a councillor after the May 2015 elections.

3.0 Community Safety Partnership Working Party

- 3.1 The working party performed the statutory scrutiny function of the Community Safety Partnership on behalf of the Panel and reports back any recommendations for consideration to the main Panel.
- 3.2 They received update reports on how the Partnership was tackling crime and anti-social behaviour in the district. Members also discussed the national 'Prevent' initiative, and workshops that were being held to raise awareness of this and the 'Channel' process to support individuals who may be at risk of radicalisation.
- 3.3 The sub-group considered and recommended to the Panel, the draft Community Safety Plan for 2016/17. The Panel considered the draft Plan at its meeting of 26 March before making recommendations to Cabinet.

4.0 Corporate Performance Review Working Party

- 4.1 Some Members felt that as a sub-group, their review work had covered a wide brief that involved various Council projects, housing, street cleaning, selective licensing, transport and local plan. At each meeting, Members were able to talk openly and raised points with the officers and if answers were not readily available officers would provide that information forthcoming at a later date, outside the meeting.
- 4.2 Members felt that some of the issues that they raised during meetings were taken into consideration by officers and amendments made to recommended courses of Cabinet and or officer decisions. One of the issues that were of concern to some Members was the East Kent Housing Delivery Plan 2016/17 that listed priorities and promises that were commendable but it was felt to be both unworkable and unrealistic in its content. This was due to the vague nature of some of the promises within the plan and lacked information on substantive action points.
- 4.4 During this year, the sub group received tremendous support from senior officers from EK Services, EK Housing and TDC. It is hoped that in 2016/17 the sub group will be able to carry-out a time specific significant one off review on an issue of their choice that falls within their terms of reference. It is hoped that the outcome of that review project would inform the improvement of the council's corporate performance.

5.0 Electoral Registration Process Review Task & Finish Group

- 5.1 The sub-group received a review report regarding how the Council had managed the May 2015 Elections. These 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.

- 5.2 Members gave credit to the Electoral Services Team for a job well done in successfully managing the May Election considering the significant challenges that the department faced during this election.
- 5.3 It is commendable that the sub-group suggested that in order to enhance the voter registration in the District and given the uncertainties around the future of the annual canvass process; 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.
- 5.4 These representations to the Cabinet Office were made in a letter sent out on 18 November 2015 and the letter requested for continued Government funding of the Individual Electoral Registration (IER) process in years to come to ensure effective resource availability to promote registration. Council received a Cabinet Office update that was also sent out to all other local Councils on 31 March 2016. In the correspondence the Cabinet Office indicated that they had agreed, in principle, a finance package for IER with Her Majesty's Treasury for the next four years.
- 5.5 The Cabinet Office will fully fund the net costs associated with the introduction of IER for 2016/17. They will provide Local Authorities with further information about the initial allocations in April and hope to make financial transfers before the end of May. As in previous years, there will be another Justification Led Bid (JLB) process starting in January during which Local Authorities can bid for further funding if required
- 5.6 As the May 2016 Kent Police and Crimes Commissioner Election day draws closer, preparatory work that includes recruitment and training of count and polling station staff, is ongoing.
- 6.0 Watching Brief Issue: QEQM Hospital Services Review by East Kent Hospitals University Foundation Trust (EKHUFT)**
- 6.1 The Panel has noted that the Leader of Council has set up a cabinet advisory group on the subject and their first meeting is scheduled for 21 April 2016. No new information has been produced by EKHUFT to date.
- 7.0 Watching Brief Issue: TDC Artefacts Collection Management Review at the Margate Museum**
- 7.1 This issue was carried forward from the previous municipal years. The Panel received an officer report and on 18 July 2015 recommended to Cabinet that 'the application for external funding through the Heritage Lottery Fund be pursued as a matter of priority.'
- 7.2 In response on 22 October 2015 Cabinet agreed 'that delegation is given to the Director of Community Services to make an application for external funding through the Heritage Lottery Fund for the total cost of the professional archivist post be pursued as a matter of priority.
- 7.3 Recent staff vacancies has meant that it has not been possible to advance this bid but it will now be taken forward by the new Director of Community Services, Rob Kenyon.

7.4 Feedback from Panel Members

- 7.4.1 In preparation for this report some Members have given feedback that the current scrutiny work programme and approach does not lend itself to robust pre-decision scrutiny and as a result they felt that the Panel has had a limited role to play in policy development. They indicated that the impact of scrutiny in the decision making process has been limited particularly with regards to 'holding decision makers to account' and acting as 'check and balance' to the executive. Annex 2 has the list of questions that Panel members had to consider in providing their feedback.
- 7.4.2 During this municipal year, the Panel has not undertaken any external scrutiny investigation on an issue which affects the local area.
- 7.4.3 The Panel could consider whether it would like to recommend that Cabinet supports an approach for the Panel or its sub-committees to undertake time limited one off reviews of significant policy or other corporate matters for consideration by Cabinet whilst taking in to account the demands on Officer time.

8.0 Call-In of Cabinet Decisions

- 8.1 The Panel called-in one Cabinet decision in 2015/16, on Manston Airport. The report required Cabinet Members to make a decision on the way forward regarding identifying an indemnity partner if Council were to go ahead with making an application for the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) of Manston Airport.
- 8.2 The Cabinet decision was:
- a. That having reviewed its position, details of which are contained in the Cabinet report, that no further action be taken at the present time on a CPO of Manston Airport, on the basis that RiverOak do not fulfil the requirements of the Council for an indemnity partner;
 - b. To note that this is the second time that RiverOak have not fulfilled the requirements of the Council for an indemnity partner.
- 8.3 The Panel agreed to take no further action regarding this matter. Both the Cabinet and Panel meetings generated a significant level of public interest and Member debate.

9.0 Cabinet Presentations at OSP Meetings

- 9.1 The Panel engaged the Leader of Council and the Cabinet Member for operational Services at two separate meetings on 18 August and 15 December 2015 respectively. The Leader shared the Cabinet vision with regards to the Council's new corporate priorities and values for 2015/19. This debate was significant in that it established the executive's position for the new budget proposals for 2016/17.
- 9.2 The Operational Services Portfolio Holder presentation advised the Panel that Cabinet were working on a new Open Spaces and Parks Strategy for Thanet for the next twenty years. The Panel awaits the public consultation process and the finalised Strategy document.

10.0 Corporate Implications

10.1 Financial and VAT

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

10.2 Legal

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

10.3 Equity and Equalities

10.3.1 There are no equity and equalities implications arising directly from this report. However it is important to be aware of the Council's responsibility under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and show evidence that due consideration had been given to the equalities impact that may be brought upon communities by the decisions made by Council.

11.0 Recommendations

11.1 The Panel may wish to make recommendations regarding the information outlined in section 7.4 of the report.

11.2 To agree that the Chairman presents the Annual Report to the next scheduled Full Council meeting.

12.0 Decision Making Process

12.1 The Council Constitution allows the Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel to present a report at the end of each municipal year detailing a summary of scrutiny work undertaken by the Panel and its sub-groups for Members' information.

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Annex List

Annex 1	Terms of Reference for TFGs/Working Parties – 2015/16
Annex 2	Questionnaire used for sourcing additional Member views

Background Papers

Title	Details of where to access copy
None	N/A

Corporate Consultation Undertaken

Finance	Nikki Walker, Interim Head of Financial Services
Legal	Ciara Feeney, Head of Legal Services & Deputy Monitoring Officer