

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2017 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor D. Saunders (Chairman); Councillors G Coleman-Cooke, K Coleman-Cooke, Ashbee, Campbell, Connor, Dexter, Grove, Parsons, Rusiecki, Taylor and Taylor-Smith

In Attendance: Councillors: Wells and M. Saunders

132. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the following Members:

Councillor Dixon;
Councillor Dennis;
Councillor Falcon, substituted by Councillor Taylor;
Councillor Curran, substituted by Councillor K Coleman-Cooke;
Councillor Martin, substituted by Councillor Taylor-Smith.

133. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

134. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Campbell proposed, Councillor G. Coleman-Cooke seconded and Members agreed the minutes as a correct record of the of the meeting that was held on 15 August

135. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATION - THE LEADER OF COUNCIL PRESENTATION ON THE EAST KENT MERGER

Councillor Wells, Leader of Council made a presentation in response to a question raised by the Panel. In his presentation Councillor Wells made the following points:

- Council had put in place a medium term financial strategy (MTFS) that reflected that there would not be a merger of the East Kent authorities;
- This was based on a four year government financial settlement;
- The financial strategy was aimed at making the required immediate and medium term savings;
- The merger would have made efficiency savings of about £5-7million per year across the four participating councils;
- There would have been one-off £10million transaction costs to facilitate the changes;
- The 2017/21 council MTFS was produced on the basis of there being no merger of the four East Kent Councils;
- The 2018/22 was being prepared as per current arrangement (i.e TDC working on its own to identify revenue sources to build the budget);
- There were still significant budgetary challenges;
- There were also some uncertainties relating to the local government support grants leading up to 2020 where there would be no revenue support grant for councils;

- There was no Local Government Finance Bill in this year's Queen Speech;
- Government funding was reducing every year and business rates may fill-in the budget gaps but there is no firm decision on that issue as there some pilot schemes still being tested;
- In 2012/13 TDC had just over £21million in the budget compared to £19million in 2016/17 and £16.7million in 2017/18;
- The Council received revenue support grant in 2012/13 of £9.6million and by 2021, Council would need to have in place a self-financing budget (i.e. all £16.5million) as the Council would receive no revenue support grant
- The Council had received notice of changes to the structure of the New Homes Bonus six weeks' prior to the Council's budget meeting, which has resulted in a shortfall of £1million;
- Council made some bad decisions in the past;
- The Peer review gave credit to TDC for operating council affairs in business like way;
- The Council was exploring a number of options to create savings, including sharing offices with external agencies like is the current situation with Thanet CCG;
- Shire and District Councils had been the worst hit by a decrease in government revenue support grants.

In response to the presentation Members raised the following points and questions:

- Was there any opportunity for merging with other agencies as was suggested in a previous approach called 'Common Places/Total Place concept'?
- There was a urgency for TDC and other local councils in the area to make savings in short to medium term to reduce overheads and work with sustainable council budgets;
- Parish/Town Councils would lose about 33% per year as a result of the reduced government spending;
- What were the plans for raising the £16.5million in 2021?
- Would it be correct to suggest that the Council may be forced to reduce some of the services it currently provides?
- A Conference in Birmingham looked at a paper on Enterprising Councils, it was interesting to note that Sevenoaks District Council had developed a successful business using its New Homes Bonus funding;
- Had Council considered using the various experiences and skills that some of the current councillors have got in assisting with identifying sources for raising income?
- Business rates were quite high for some businesses in the high street in Margate. Could these be reviewed downwards?

In responses to Panel observations and questions Councillor Wells, Madeline Homer, CEx and Tim Willis, Director of Corporate Resources said the following:

- Council currently had an office share arrangement with Thanet CCG and Council would be prepared to explore similar arrangements with other external agencies;
- Council was currently working with other public bodies around sharing assets and working collaboratively under the title 'Thanet Leadership Group' that sought to work strategically in delivering services in a cost effective way as 'Strategic Enablers;'
- A significant amount of cost savings due from the merger were to be found in sharing management costs. Council had by law to come up with a balanced budget;
- Small Members Briefings would be used to share some thoughts with all councillors and get suggestion from Members;
- Cabinet would be sharing thoughts during the budgeting process for 2018/19;

- Addressing future financial challenges would also consider outsourcing non-core services (for example the revenue and benefits being considered for outsourcing to CIVICA by East Kent Services);
- Council ought to be cautious when considering income generating projects, as including such projections in the MTFS could lead to future problems if the projects did not yield the anticipated income;
- TDC was in the process of creating a Business Transformation Manager role to drive through ideas for income generation for the Council;
- Council will continue to invest in capital projects to reduce council costs;
- Council issue out a skills audit that would be used to engage Members in activities for identifying viable income generating projects that TDC could explore;
- Democratic Services would be issuing a skills audit for members, in which they could identify additional skills members had that could assist the Council.
- Council could reduce business rates, but the biggest challenge would be to come up with criteria for such a scheme. There would also be a need to address the question 'why introduce such a scheme in Margate and not in other areas in the district.'

The Chairman thanked the Leader for the presentation and the Panel noted the report.

136. DREAMLAND PROJECT REVIEW - LEARNING & ACTION POINTS REPORT

Madeline Homer, CEx introduced the report and acknowledged Member contribution to reviewing the Dreamland and coming up with learning and action points regarding the management of a complex project like the Dreamland.

Members in turn also acknowledged that although there had been some challenges in managing the project it had ultimately been a very successful project.

The Panel noted the report.

137. REVIEW OF OSP WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2017/18

Members requested and Officers agreed to ensure that the Local Plan Working Group workshops were not going to be held at the same time as the budget briefing sessions that were referred to in the Leader's presentations earlier on a separate agenda item.

138. FORWARD PLAN AND EXEMPT CABINET REPORT LIST FOR 11 OCTOBER 2017 - 31 MARCH 2018

A Member requested that a report on 'Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) for Dog fouling & control' be brought to a future Panel meeting for scrutiny.*

**Post meeting note: After a Cabinet decision made on 25 October regarding the PSPO, the request to scrutinise the Order was withdrawn by the Member.*

Meeting concluded: 7.45 pm