

FINANCE, BUDGET & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 30 August 2018 at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber - Council Offices.

Present: Councillor Lynda Piper (Chairman); Councillors Campbell, Connor, Falcon, Parsons, S Piper and Taylor-Smith

In Attendance: Councillors I Gregory, Ashbee, Jaye-Jones and Shonk

9. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the following Members:

Councillor Martin;
Councillor Dexter, substituted by Councillor Taylor-Smith.

10. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

11. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Campbell proposed, Councillor Connor seconded and Members agreed the minutes as a correct record of the meeting that was held on 17 July 2018.

12. QUARTERLY PERFORMANCE REPORT Q1 2018/19

Hannah Thorpe, Head of Communications introduced the report and advised Members that the presentation style had been changed to make the report more transparent and easier to understand. The general overview was that the performance had been positive and improving whilst acknowledging that there were some areas where the performance was below target.

The Council like most other councils across the country was experiencing unprecedented levels of demand for housing. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government indicated through a letter to the Council that they were impressed by how Thanet District Council was managing this demand. The Council had also experienced a large increase in Freedom of Information requests (FOIs) and was working on new approaches for managing the case load which was expected to improve the performance levels of responding to FOIs

Members made comments and raised questions as follows:

- In the period under review, the HRA capital spend was at 2.41% of 100%. Was this not a low performance?
- It was good to note that the statistics for homelessness had gone down significantly;
- Had officers done any work to establish the reasons for the surge in homelessness?
- Did the Capital Programme include housing?
- If the implementation of the Capital Programme led to completed homes, there would not be an increase in homelessness;
- The demolition of old garages could provide additional space to build new houses;

- The average meterage of boats/boat houses moored at the Ramsgate Port & harbour had been exceeded, but the profit had gone down. Why was that the case?
- Was there a difference in charges for the meterage?
- Were there different rates for motorhomes?
- Members thanked officers for the new presentational style of the performance information and hoped that where possible more information narrative could be added;
- Where there sanctions that could be imposed on the Council for failing to meet the deadlines for responding to FOI requests?
- The sections in the report highlighted in 'Grey' did not have statistical information like targets. Members queried why this was the case?
- Enforcement report: The report showed that the enforcement figures had gone down. Why was it the case? Was this because there was not enough staff to enforce or was it because there was improved behaviour by residents?
- Could performance information regarding the enterprise counts across Kent be used rather than the SE as this could be more meaningful because the performance of the council in collecting business rates would be measured against other councils in the county? This would determine how much of the proportion of collection the council would retain (under the business retention scheme for the county);

Ms Thorpe gave the following responses:

- With regards to the HRA performance, the 100% target is an end of year target (rather than target for the quarter under review) and there was still time to complete the work before end of the year;
- FOIs – There had been an increased demand for information and the council was working a new approach that would help improve the response rate and management of caseloads;
- Information reported under the areas marked in 'Grey' was generated by external agencies and had been included in the report as contextual information for Members information only.

Ms Thorpe further agreed to forward any unanswered queries to the appropriate officers for more detailed explanations.

Councillor Campbell proposed, Councillor Stuart Piper seconded and the Panel agreed the following recommendation:

That the "Count of enterprises in Thanet" indicator should be amended to a 'Count of enterprises across Kent.' This was because the level of retention (under the business rates retention scheme) was dependent on the how Thanet District Council performed against other councils participating in the scheme in attracting business enterprises to operate in the district.

Councillor Stuart Piper proposed, Councillor Campbell seconded and Members agreed the following:

That Cabinet introduces performance targets for the issues highlighted in 'Grey' in the report, if it was not possible to so, a report be brought back to the Panel advising why the proposal could not be implemented.

13. ELECTORAL VOTER REGISTRATION - 2017/18 CANVASS

Ms Claire Hawken, Electoral Services Manager introduced the item for debate and reported that the canvass response rate for 2017/18 was 88.01%. Whilst this was a good

response, there was room for improvement. Voter registration forms were delivered mostly by hand delivery and in some cases sent out by Royal Mail.

Getting residents to respond was a challenge. This year's canvass response rate was currently at 70.34% and this was looking promising for a good response rate by end of 2018/19. Managing this exercise required resources and additional budget allocation could assist in improving the results.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- The take up of registration by email was encouraging;
- Could officers use social media to publicise the voter registration exercise?
- Were officers investigating new approaches to use in order to reach out to hard to reach communities to encourage increased response rate to the canvass?
- Was the council permitted to use other sources of information like council tax and benefits system to identify residents who ought to be on the electoral register?
- Could officers include a single sentence at the foot part of the council tax letter to remind residents about the requirement to register as electors?

Responding to the questions Ms Hawken made the following comments:

- The Council could use social media and had used twitter and Facebook to publicise the voter registration exercise;
- Door knocking remained one of ways to help increase the response rate to the registration exercise;
- Council was permitted by law to use the council tax and benefits system database to send out invitation to register letters to residents in the district;
- Council also had access to information from the KCC British citizens' ceremonies and schools and care homes data.

Ms Hawken also agreed to investigate further the Panel suggestion that some wording be added as a footnote to the council tax letters reminding residents of the requirement to register to vote.

Members thanked Ms Hawken for the informative report and noted the report.

14. REVIEW THE FINANCE SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2018/19

Members noted the report.

15. FORWARD PLAN AND EXEMPT CABINET REPORT LIST FOR PERIOD 15 AUGUST 2018 - 31 JANUARY 2019

Members noted the report.

Meeting concluded: 7.54 pm