

FINANCE, BUDGET & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 20 November 2018 at 7.00 pm in the Council Chamber - Council Offices.

Present: Councillor Lynda Piper (Chairman); Councillors Campbell, Connor, Martin, Parsons and S Piper

In Attendance: Councillor I Gregory

23. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no apologies received at the meeting.

24. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest received at the meeting.

25. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Members requested that the officers provided them with the written explanations to the questions raised at the previous meeting as recorded in the minutes. Mr Nick Hughes, Committee Services Manager agreed to remind those officers who had agreed to provide written responses to ensure that they were sent to Members promptly.

Councillor Stuart Piper proposed, Councillor Campbell seconded and Members agreed the minutes as a correct record of the meeting that was held on 23 October 2018.

26. CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT Q2 2018/19

Hannah Thorpe, Head of Communications and Digital led the discussion by introducing the report and highlighted the following:

- The general trend for Q2 reflected an overall improvement. There were now 17 performance targets that were at or exceeding their targets (16 last quarter), three were amber (one less than last quarter) and 9 were red (which was the same as in the last quarter);
- Clean and Welcoming Environmental: Environmental Health service requests: missed bins, levels of acceptable detritus on the streets and graffiti were all measures at or exceeding their targets. The overall trend of movement was in the right direction. It was worth noting the good targeted work done by the street cleansing team to move performance measurement for graffiti from red (in the last quarter) to green;
- Waste and Recycling re-use: this was currently amber. The overall trend was improving as this had been red in the previous year.
- Levels of acceptable litter in streets –This needed improvement and a focus of resources to move the performance measurement in the right direction (from the current red). Targeted resourcing of seafront areas had affected the resourcing of other areas of the service. Due to the good weather this summer, the demand for extra resources for the seafront areas was extended into September. It was hoped that the performance for this target would improve in the next quarterly report;
- Public Opinion (survey): Satisfaction: residents generally satisfied with recycling service and parks. However residents were not satisfied with street cleansing for the period under review;

- The Enforcement Team had issued over 1,800 litter fixed penalty notices and had carried out over 1,300 enforcement actions. The Council would conduct joint anti-litter initiatives with the public including schools;
- Supporting Neighbourhoods: 10 different targets were measured. Four targets were green, one was amber and 5 were red. Empty homes, living conditions, satisfaction with repairs and homelessness cases which have been prevented: These were all at or exceeding targets. Particular reference should be drawn to homelessness prevention – Over 300 cases have been prevented in the period under review;
- Anti-Social Behaviour target is Amber. This is because the team had recently been under resourced. However the team had recruited a new member (to start at the end of this year) and it was hoped that the target would be back on track in the next quarter;
- Time taken to make decisions by the Homelessness Team and the number of days taken in hotel accommodation by homeless families - The targets were in the red. Although there was a need for improvement, it was worth noting that since the publication of the Quarter 2 report there were no more households that required housing who were in hotel accommodation that the council had a duty to place;
- East Kent Housing: The council had set out a performance plan for EK Housing and the Council was now monitoring the implementation of the plan to ensure that EK Housing performance improved;
- Tenant Arrears figure. Although it was showing below target, the score was not too bad. The Universal Credit was having a negative impact on individuals ability to pay;
- HRA: This will be reported in detail at Cabinet in due course and consideration would be given to rolling over of some of the work into 2019/20;
- Promoting Inward Investment: Two targets were green and one was amber. The amber one was in relation to major planning applications. However the performance was at 77%, which was above the 70% national average;
- Panel recommendation to Cabinet: Count of business enterprises in Thanet against Kent: The performance report now reflected this information;
- Panel recommendation to Cabinet: New targets against the contextual: It had been noted by officers and the changes would be reflected as from report in 2019/20.

After the presentation Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- There seemed to be a public perception that the streets were filthy. Was Council doing anything to change that perception, by publicising the efforts made by the street cleansing team?
- Freedom of Information Requests (FOIs): There was a slight improvement in the response levels to FOIs in relation to the 20 days deadline. Were Members going to get a report for the next quarter that reflected a more significant improvement?
- Enforcement: There were 1,800 enforcement notices in the period under review. What percentage of those enforcement notices were paid?
- Visitor nights had gone down in 2018 as compared for the same period in 2017. Why was that the case, if the district experienced a great summer period?
- Supporting neighbourhoods – Repairs: The workmanship for some of the repairs done by EK Housing was below standard. What sampling was undertaken and how were these surveys conducted?
- Business rates retention scheme: Was the retention scheme based on the number of businesses in the local areas or the amount of rates collected in each district year on year?
- Business rates retention: The increase in the level of business rates was important for council finances. Had officers determined the appropriate figure of

business rates for Thanet in comparison to other districts as this was a determining factor in calculating the revenue stream for the council?

- What was the cost of eviction court actions and clean up for travellers' incursions in the district?

Responding to Member queries and comments Ms Thorpe and Mr Tim Willis, Deputy Chief Executive said the following:

- Yes the Council would be doing more to increase the publicity of the Council efforts in cleansing the streets in the district;
- FOI performance: This query would be taken back to the head of service and Director for a response which would be fed back to the Panel;
- Enforcement notices payment – The query would be reported back to Members after consulting the appropriate department;
- The question regarding the number of visitor nights will be responded to after the meeting;
- EK Housing: residents survey: The surveys were conducted by contractors after the completion of the repair works;
- Confirmation would be sought from EK Housing regarding whether the surveys were conducted for completed works;
- Regarding Business Rates Retention Scheme: It was value of business rates collected not the number of businesses. The value and size of the business rates were important to council revenue collection. Having more businesses was equally important;
- Officers would provide the appropriate figure for business rates as requested by the Panel;
- A cost regarding cleaning up on fly tipping and traveller incursions could be provided. However it would only be an average figure rather than a specific cost to the cleaning exercise.

Members noted the report.

27. FEES AND CHARGES 2019-20

Mr Tim Willis, Deputy Chief Executive introduced the report and made the following comments:

- The proposed fees and charges for 2019/20 had been considered and approved by Cabinet on 15 November for recommendation to Council, subject to comments and views from the Finance Scrutiny Panel;
- There was a budget gap of £1.8million and the proposed fees and charges would contribute £189,000 towards closing the gap;
- Any revisions to reduce the proposed fees and charges would mean that new sources of revenue would have to be identified to raise the equivalent amount required to close the budget gap.

Members then asked questions and made comments as detailed below:

- Could Cabinet consider waiving the £50 fee for child cremation? Death in youth was tragic to affected families;
- Bulky Waste: 3 items and 10 sacks would cost £25.50 but 4 items and 15 sacks would cost £25.50. Why would there be such a fee structure as the public would simply choose the latter option;
- Under licensing there were no increases at all being proposed right across the board. One would hope that rate of inflation increases would be considered in the proposals, more so considering that these charges were discretionary;

- Broadstairs Harbour: New charge for vessels over 10metres: If this was new how could there be an 87% increase to this fee?
- Adult cremation: The proposed increase if £50, last year it was increased by £100 (in money terms). If the fee was linked to the cost of providing a service. The 30% increase was excessive. Why wasn't this fee linked to the cost for providing this service rather on market forces? Thanet District Council was the only one who charged this fee for children under the age of twelve in South East Kent. Other districts charge much less and yet they are much wealthier than Thanet;
- Could Cabinet consider setting up a cabinet advisory group for fees and charges for the future budget setting process?
- Could the fees and charges schedule a bit more annotation that would help with understanding the information in the schedule?

Responding to Member comments and questions said the following:

- Bulky Waste: £25.50 would be the minimum charge for bulky waste. A more detailed answer would be provided after the meeting;
- Licensing: The amount charged would be for the services being given and these are determined on the advice from Heads of Service in discussion with Finance department. It was felt that there was no head room for increasing the licensing fees. The Panel could recommend o on this issue to Cabinet;
- Broadstairs Harbour charge: It was not a new charge. This was an error;
- Cremation Charges: The increases in the charges were on a year on year basis.

Councillor Campbell proposed, Councillor Stuart Piper seconded and the Panel agreed to forward the following recommendations to Cabinet:

1. To consider removing the fee for cremation services of children under the age of seven years;
2. To review the costs for cremation services for all age groups, having considered similar charges in other districts;
3. To review the licensing fee charges in order to determine whether it was appropriate that there was no increases in licensing fees across the board;
4. To consider whether it was appropriate to set up an all party cabinet advisory group to look at future fees and charges.

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

Councillor Campbell proposed, Councillor Connor seconded and Members agreed to invite Councillor Gregory to the Panel meeting on January 2019 to respond to Member questions on the draft Council Budget proposals for 2019/20.

They further agreed that this agenda item will subsume the Cabinet Member Presentation, which is usually a standing item on the Panel agenda.

Member noted the report.

29. FORWARD PLAN AND EXEMPT CABINET REPORT LIST FOR PERIOD 10 OCTOBER 2018 - 31 MARCH 2019

Members noted the report.

Meeting concluded: 8.00 pm