

# FINANCE, BUDGET & PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY PANEL CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT TO COUNCIL FOR 2018/19

Council	<b>28 March 2019</b>
Report Author	<b>Cllr Lynda Piper, Chairman of the Finance, Budget &amp; Performance Scrutiny Panel</b>
Status	<b>For Information</b>
Classification:	<b>Unrestricted</b>
Key Decision	<b>No</b>
Ward:	<b>Thanet Wide</b>

## **Executive Summary:**

The purpose of the report is to highlight some of the key activities that were planned for and achievements made by the Finance Scrutiny Panel during the course of the 2018/19 municipal year.

## **Recommendation(s):**

1. Members are invited to discuss and note the report.

## **CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

<b>Financial and Value for Money</b>	There are no financial implications directly arising from this report. The report provides a briefing to Full Council about the current work activities and achievements made by the Finance Scrutiny Panel.
<b>Legal</b>	There are no legal implications directly arising from this report. A presentation of the Panel Chairman's annual report to Full Council enables the Chairman to fulfil their duty as is required by the Council's Constitution.
<b>Corporate</b>	<p>There are no corporate risks associated with this report. The report enables discussion by Members at Full Council on the activities of the Finance Scrutiny Panel.</p> <p>The debate on the Panel Chairman's report contributes to open communication across the council. A strong scrutiny function contributes to an open democratic process for decision making and delivery of value for money services as council decisions are interrogated by Members before they are implemented. In instances where such decisions are interrogated after implementation, there will be lessons to learn for future policy development.</p>

<b>Equality Act 2010 &amp; Public Sector Equality Duty</b>	<p>Members are reminded of the requirement, under the Public Sector Equality Duty (section 149 of the Equality Act 2010) to have due regard to the aims of the Duty at the time the decision is taken. The aims of the Duty are: (i) eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act, (ii) advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it, and (iii) foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.</p> <p>Protected characteristics: age, gender, disability, race, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief and pregnancy &amp; maternity. Only aim (i) of the Duty applies to Marriage &amp; civil partnership.</p> <p>Please indicate which aim is relevant to the report.</p> <p>Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act,</p> <p>Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it</p> <p>Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.</p> <p>No implications arise directly but the Council needs to retain a strong focus and understanding on issues of diversity amongst the local community and ensure service delivery matches these.</p> <p>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.</p>
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<b>CORPORATE PRIORITIES (tick those relevant)✓</b>	
A clean and welcoming Environment	
Promoting inward investment and job creation	
Supporting neighbourhoods	✓

<b>CORPORATE VALUES (tick those relevant)✓</b>	
Delivering value for money	✓
Supporting the Workforce	
Promoting open communications	✓

## 1.0 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The Finance Scrutiny Panel is entitled to make an annual report to Full Council at the end of each municipal year. This report summarises the key activities and achievements of the Panel during 2018/19.

- 1.2 During this municipal year, the Panel Chairman presented three reports to Council on the review activities that were carried out by the Panel. The Panel conducted all the scrutiny work activities that are within its terms of reference as reflected in Annex 1 to the report.
- 1.3 The approach was for the Panel to request cabinet member presentations on topical issues and engaging the executive in debate. On some of those occasions the discussion would end up in the Scrutiny Panel forwarding suggestions to cabinet members for further consideration. The Panel also identified review topics from the Forward Plan and requested an officer report and presentation at meetings. The cabinet member responsible for the policy area would be in attendance to respond to queries from the Members and offer policy direction.
- 1.4 The third aspect of the work of the Panel was consideration of issues that were referred to it in instances where Cabinet sought input from the Panel before making either a final decisions on such matters or making recommendations to Full Council.
- 1.5 This report would therefore provide the basis for debate by Members on the Panel's annual activities and hopefully lead to sharing of views and ideas to enhance the Council's scrutiny function.

## **2.0 Cabinet Member Presentations at Panel Meetings**

### **Presentation on Ramsgate Port & Harbour**

- 2.1 The Panel engaged the Leader of Council in discussion to understand the nature of the budgetary challenges affecting the running of Ramsgate Port & Harbour in order to provide suggestions that Cabinet could consider in finding a solution to those challenges.
- 2.2 In concluding that debate the Leader of Council committed to finding a way to improve the operations at the Port and would also be improving the communication of messages relating to the Port & Harbour.

## **3.0 Key Issues from the Forward Plan reviewed by the Panel**

- 3.1 In November 2018, the Panel debated the proposed fees and charges for 2019/20 and forwarded to Cabinet the following recommendations:
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.
- 3.2 In response, Cabinet agreed to set up an all party cabinet advisory group to look at future fees and charges. Cabinet also agreed to remove the fee for cremation services of children under the age of seventeen years.

4.0 In January 2019, the Panel was invited to review the council budget proposals for 2019/20 that were later recommended to Full Council by Cabinet. Members discussed the proposals with the Leader of Council, Portfolio Holder for Financial Services and Estates and senior officers. The Panel sought and got assurances from Cabinet that the proposals being considered would lead to a balanced budget.

4.1 One of the key aspects of the budget proposals was tackling the budget gap and in particular, addressing the budget deficit at the Port of Ramsgate. The Panel got assurances that the issue regarding the port would be concluded by the time Full Council met in February. After the debate, Members did not forward any recommendations to Cabinet.

## **5.0 One-off Reports requested by the Panel**

### **Presentation on Temporary Accommodation for Homeless Households**

5.1 Members received a presentation that detailed out the significant amount of work being done by the Homelessness Team to tackle homelessness in the district by providing quick response support to households that found themselves in difficult situations. This was made possible in part by the recruitment of additional staff to the housing advisor and Landlord Liaison Officer roles.

5.2 The team had done some tremendous work against a background of shortages in affordable homes in the district. The Panel appreciated that this shortage also reflected the national trend. Members noted with appreciation that the Council's housing development programmes had delivered affordable homes in the district, which contributed to the reduction of households on the housing waiting list.

5.3 By way of illustration, during this financial year the Council delivered 51 unit new built programme, 35 units in Cliftonville, 29 Empty Homes programme in Ramsgate, an Intervention Programme in King Street in Ramsgate and an Acquisitions Programme that had so far completed the acquisition of 6 new homes.

5.4 The Panel however noted that delays in making payments under Universal Credit was having an impact on some households' ability to pay rent and causing such households to accrue arrears of rent that were then difficult to catch up. Against these challenges, the Homelessness Team had prevented 213 households from homelessness (as at end of September 2018) as opposed to 92 households during the same period in the previous year.

5.5 For Members reference, the work programme for the Panel for 2018/19 is attached as Annex 2 to the report.

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## **Annex List**

Annex 1	Finance, Budget & Performance Scrutiny Terms of Reference for 2018/19
Annex 2	Finance, Budget & Performance Scrutiny Panel Work Programme 2018/19

## Background Papers

Title	Details of where to access copy
None	N/A

## Corporate Consultation

<b>Finance</b>	Matthew Sanham, Interim Head of Financial Services
<b>Legal</b>	Tim Howes, Director of Corporate Governance and Monitoring Officer