

Overview & Scrutiny Panel Chairman's Report to Council

Council	10 September 2020
Report Author	Senior Democratic Services Officer
Status	For Information
Classification:	Unrestricted
Key Decision	No
Reasons for Key	N/A
Ward:	Thanet Wide

Executive Summary:

This report highlights some of the key activities that have been planned for by the Overview & Scrutiny Panel during the course of this municipal year and progress to date regarding implementation of the Panel's work programme.

Recommendation(s):

Members are invited to discuss and note the report.

Corporate Implications

Financial and Value for Money

There are no financial implications directly arising from this report. The report provides a briefing to Full Council about the current work activities of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel.

Legal

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

Corporate

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.

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.

Equality Act 2010 & Public Sector Equality Duty

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.

Protected characteristics: age, sex, disability, race, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, religion or belief and pregnancy & maternity. Only aim (i) of the Duty applies to Marriage & civil partnership.

This report relates to the following aim of the equality duty: -

1. To eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
2. To advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it
3. To foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

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.

It is important to be aware of the Council's responsibility under the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) and show evidence that due consideration has been given to the equalities impact that may be brought upon communities by the decisions made by Council.

Corporate Priorities

This report relates to Communities.

1.0 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 At each ordinary Full Council meeting, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel presents a progress update report on the activities of the Panel since the last Council meeting.
- 1.2 Such a report would be subject to comment or debate by Members. This is in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.1 of Part 4 of the Council Constitution.
- 1.3 This report updates the Council on the work of the Panel since the last Council meeting and allows for discussion of the work undertaken, therefore strengthening the Council's scrutiny function.
- 1.4 This report follows on from the one presented at Full Council on 9 July 2020. The Panel met once since the last Council meeting.

2.0 Current Scrutiny Activities, including Cabinet Member Presentations

Scrutiny Topics

- 2.1 At the July meeting, the Panel received the list of potential scrutiny topics and agreed that these were going to be prioritised using the matrix that was established and agreed upon by Members. Further discussion still needs to be had to fine tune the topics by identifying the specific problem that Members would like to investigate and the outcomes they would like to achieve as a result of these investigations.
- 2.2 The Panel also agreed to add a topic on the reviewing the proposed considerations for establishing the criteria for reviewing memorial plaques and monuments in the district. Priority would be given to this topic in order to expedite the review process and contribute to the establishment of the policy by Cabinet.
- 2.3 The topics that Members brought up for possible consideration by the Panel are detailed below and are listed in no specific priority order:
 1. **Private rented sector:** How does TDC regulate private landlords and letting agencies in Thanet?
 2. **Empty Properties:** Why does Thanet have the highest number of empty properties in Kent and what approaches can be used to put these properties to use in a timely manner?
 3. **Planning enforcement in the district is slow:** Why is the planning enforcement process seemingly so slow in Thanet and how can it be made more efficient?
 4. **Coastal waste clearance:** How does Thanet ensure that its coastal promenades and beaches are kept clear of rubbish and in the best condition for both residents and visitors?
 5. **Street Scene: Abandoned vehicles** - how can TDC speed up time taken to clear abandoned vehicles?
 6. **Selective Licensing** - Is selective licensing the best way forward for the improvement of the private rented sector in Thanet and if so, could it be replicated in other areas of the district?
 7. **Camper Vehicles being parked on the street for too long:** What is the impact of parked Camper vans on the Thanet roads and can this be regulated by Thanet District Council?
 8. **Promenades - safety concerns cyclists speeding and sharing the footpath:** Would a dedicated cycle path (or markings) along the promenade help control bike/ pedestrian placement (and cyclist speed)?
 9. **Replacement bins for litter/dog waste:** What is the council's reasoning behind complete removal of damaged bins and not replacing them?
 10. **Managing anti-social behaviour on Thanet beaches:** Are beach inspectors the best way to control or manage beach behaviour?
 11. **Weed killer usage:** What is the best approach for managing grass and hedges in public open spaces in the district that can be used to replace the use of weed killers?
 12. **Water user group regulation:** What role does TDC have in ensuring the safety of swimmers and other water users from the behaviour of boat and jet ski users in Thanet bays?

13. **Rough Sleepers:** what are we doing about this as a long term plan of addressing the issue (post COVID-19)?
14. **Modern Slavery: - hand car washes.** Is there any intervention the council can do to address the issue of modern slavery?
15. **Statues and Blue Plaques:** What would be the best approach for managing the discussion on and review of suitability of statues and plaques in the district?
16. **Shellfish collection enforcement:** How is the collection of shellfish from Thanet beaches regulated and how can enforcement be best managed?

2.4 Each proposed scrutiny topic has been refined into a specific question and these have then been scored via the approved matrix and the results are in this link: [Scrutiny Review Scoring table](#) and the explanatory notes for the matrix are in this link: [Scrutiny Review Scoring Matrix Notes](#) At the Panel meeting on 27 August 2020, Members confirmed the priority order for implementing the scrutiny reviews.

2.5 In making the decision, the Panel considered the current resource implications resulting from the Coronavirus pandemic as this will have an impact on which the review projects can be taken forward at this time. The implementation for the scrutiny review projects goes beyond this current municipal year.

Cabinet Presentations at OSP Meetings

2.6 The Panel is considering inviting the Leader of Council to discuss the vision moving forward. Members are still to agree on a more appropriate timing for this presentation.

2.7 For the August meeting, two reports were presented by the Deputy Leader of Council and these one-off reports had been requested by the Panel. These were the:

- a. Draft Empty Homes Plan 2020-23;
- b. Tenant and Leaseholder Service Transition Update.

2.8 The rest of the work programme for 2020/21 is detailed in Annex 1 to the Council report. This schedule is subject to amendments during the course of the year as Members may add more items for reviewing.

2.9 Members may also wish to reflect and comment on the content in Annex 2 which provides an opportunity to review and keep track of the spread of the scrutiny review work, particularly between pre and post decision scrutiny activities.

3.0 Panel Recommendations to Cabinet - Implementation Monitoring

The Panel keeps a watching brief on all the issues in this section, until the executive decisions are fully implemented.

Proposal for the disposal of the Dreamland freehold

3.1 The Panel called-in a Cabinet decision regarding the Dreamland freehold and recommended the following back to Cabinet:

1. That Cabinet seeks three independent valuations for the Dreamland site before an agreement is reached with a buyer, and;

2. Cabinet requests an 18 year housing development restriction in the agreement instead of the proposed 10 years.

3.2 In response Cabinet agreed the following:

1. To authorise another market valuation of the Dreamland site in order to ensure that sufficient breadth of comparable evidence is considered for the sale. Both valuations to be used to demonstrate that best value is obtained.
2. To retain the proposed 10 year housing development restriction on the Dreamland site as agreed by Cabinet on 01 August 2019. Delegated officers to continue the negotiations to explore the suggested extension fully as part of the sale process.

3.3 The Panel is maintaining a watching brief on this matter as the negotiations progress.

Adoption of a new Housing Assistance Policy

3.4 At the July 2019 meeting, the Panel considered a report on the “Adoption of a new Housing Assistance Policy” and recommended to Cabinet that Council writes to Kent County Council requesting that “KCC ring-fenced the £405k (Top sliced/payment to KCC projected for 2019/20) for use by Thanet residents”.

3.5 Cabinet forwarded the request to KCC via a letter sent to KCC by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Safer Neighbourhoods on 12 August 2019. The Panel is awaiting a response from KCC.

Travellers Review Recommendation

3.6 After a scrutiny review conducted by a working group, the Panel recommended to Cabinet that “further work be undertaken including extensive public consultation to assess the feasibility and cost implications of establishing temporary tolerated sites in the district.”

3.7 Having considered the Overview and Scrutiny Panel recommendations on 16 December 2019, Cabinet agreed to the following:

“That further work was undertaken to assess the feasibility and cost implications of three temporary tolerated sites in the District, at Potten Street, St Nicholas at Wade, Tivoli Brooks and Ramsgate Port, with a view to using them on a rotational basis”.
Members are maintaining a watching brief on the issue.

Council Budget Setting 2020/21

3.8 Members reviewed the 2020/21 Council budget proposals forwarded to the Panel by Cabinet and engaged the Cabinet Member for Financial Services in discussion at the January meeting.

3.9 After some debate, Members made the following recommendation to Cabinet to consider before submitting the budget proposals to Full Council for final decision:

“that Cabinet considers identifying a resource to support coastal projects.”

3.10 Thereafter Cabinet recommended to Council and on 6 February 2020, Members agreed the following:

- a. That subject to funding availability, a resource be identified to support coastal projects.

3.11 The Panel will continue to monitor this issue to check if any progress has been made to secure the funding for coastal projects.

4.0 Options

4.1 Members are asked to comment and note the report.

Contact Officer: Charles Hungwe, Senior Democratic Services Officer
Reporting to: Nick Hughes, Committee Services Manager

Annex List

Annex 1: Overview & Scrutiny Panel Work Programme for 2020/21
Annex 2: Record of OSP Pre and Post Decision Reviews for 2020/21

Background Papers

None

Corporate Consultation

Finance: Chris Blundell, Director of Finance

Legal: Tim Howes, Corporate Director of Governance & Monitoring Officer