

# REVIEWING THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2020/21

**Overview & Scrutiny Panel** 18 February 2021

**Report Author** Committee Service Manager

**Status** For Decision

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Key Decision** No

**Ward:** Thanet Wide

## **Executive Summary:**

This report sets out a framework for activities of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel for 2020/21 and asks the Panel to review the work programme.

## **Recommendation(s):**

1. Members are requested to comment and note the report.

## **Corporate Implications**

### **Financial and Value for Money**

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report but elements of the suggested work programme may have financial and resource implications which would need to be managed within existing resources, or alternatively compensating savings found.

### **Legal**

The role of scrutiny is set out in section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000. The council must also have regard to the statutory guidance on Overview and Scrutiny from the ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government when exercising its functions.

### **Corporate**

The work programme should help to deliver effective policy decision making by scrutinising executive decisions before, and at times after, implementation.

The sub-committees assist the work of scrutiny as they would carry-out an in-depth study of any issue referred to the groups under their terms of reference. An active Scrutiny programme is part of good governance.

### **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 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.

## **CORPORATE PRIORITIES**

This report relates to the following corporate priorities:

- Communities

### **1.0 Introduction and Background**

- 1.1 This report allows the Panel to review and amend the work programme for the 2020/21 municipal year agreed at the meeting on 27 August 2020. Due to the ongoing national health emergency caused by COVID-19, Council meetings continue to be conducted through the virtual facility.
- 1.2 As the Annual Council meeting has been deferred, it technically means that means that the 2019/20 work programme will continue until such time as the council committees are reconstituted at the annual meeting. However for ease of reference Democratic Services will refer to work scheduled to be carried out in 2020/21 as the 2020/21 work programme.
- 1.3 The current statutory guidance for the scrutiny function says, effective overview and scrutiny should:
- Provide constructive 'critical friend' challenge;
  - Amplify the voices and concerns of the public;
  - Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role; and
  - Drive improvement in public services
- 1.4 With this in mind, Members may wish to ensure that the Panel work programme for the year provides opportunities for critical but constructive challenge to the Executive, articulate any concerns about matters that are the business of the council and strive for improved service delivery by the Council and other public agencies working in Thanet.

### **2.0 The Current Situation**

#### **Scrutiny Topics**

- 2.1 The Panel had started working through the list of scrutiny review topics and agreed that they prioritised using the matrix that was established and agreed upon by Members. Whilst some of the topics would be considered through conducting reviews others would be expedited through one off reports (where appropriate).

- 2.2 At the August meeting, the Panel agreed the scrutiny review topics and the order in which these topics would be considered. The reviewing of memorial plaques and monuments in the district was given priority in order to expedite the review process and contribute to the establishment of the policy by Cabinet. The topic details are highlighted at Annex 2 of the report.
- 2.3 At the 27 October meeting, the Panel agreed to consider the seeming public perception that “Planning enforcement in the district is slow.” The discussion would focus on addressing the key question, “Why is the planning enforcement process seemingly so slow in Thanet and how can it be made more efficient?” Members also agreed to consider “Street Scene: Abandoned vehicles.” The main question to be addressed would be “How can TDC speed up time taken to clear abandoned vehicles?” Both these topics would be considered through a one-off report on 18 February 2021.
- 2.4 It should still be borne in mind that these reviews were being conducted in an environment largely controlled by events of the Covid-19 pandemic. There would therefore be a need for flexibility to quickly respond to changing circumstances, as the country fights the pandemic.
- 2.5 Statues and Blue Plaques: The Memorials Working Party met on 30 September and considered a report by the Monitoring Officer on developing the criteria for reviewing and plaques in the district. They met again on 25 November and the working party was now waiting for the lead officer to draft the policy document for review by Members before reporting back to the Panel.
- 2.6 Street Scene Review: As reported elsewhere on the agenda, the Panel would be reviewing this issue looking at abandoned vehicles and how TDC can speed up time taken to clear abandoned vehicles.
- 2.7 Planning Enforcement Review: Members would also be a Planning Enforcement review through a one off report, as reported elsewhere on the agenda. This was in order to determine why the planning enforcement process was seemingly so slow in Thanet and how can it be made more efficient.
- 2.8 Crime Stats in Thanet: The Panel would also receive and review a performance report from Kent Police. Again this item would be covered elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting.

#### **Cabinet Presentations at OSP Meetings**

- 2.5 Currently there is an intention to invite the Leader of Council to discuss the Cabinet’s vision moving forward. The Panel needs to agree on a more appropriate timing for this presentation.
- 2.6 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.
- 2.7 Members may also wish to reflect and comment on the content in Annex 3 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.

#### **Adoption of a new Housing Assistance Policy**

3.1 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”.

3.2 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**

3.3 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.”

3.4 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.

3.5 Cabinet further considered this matter at the meeting on 17 September 2020 and agreed the following:

1. That the identification of appropriate tolerated stopping sites becomes part of the Local Plan review;
2. That Officers continue with an officer and partner group, working with known groups of gypsies and travellers to address site access and behaviours.

3.6 The Local Plan Review Cabinet Advisory Group met on 16 November to consider recommendations to forward to Cabinet. In the CAG report there is a recommendation that “the Local Plan update should extend the Plan period to 2040,” and address among other issues “The provision of Gypsy & Traveller sites to meet identified requirements.” Cabinet agreed the recommendations on 17 December 2020.

3.7 The main watching brief on this issue is for the Panel to satisfy itself that during the review of the Local Plan this issue is addressed as per the decision made by Cabinet.

## **4.0 Options**

4.1 Members are asked to comment and note the report.

4.2 Members can review the current work programme and make changes depending on the collective agreement by the Panel.

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### **Annex List**

Annex 1: Overview & Scrutiny Panel Work Programme for 2020/21

Annex 2: Scrutiny Review Scoring Matrix

Annex 3: Record of OSP Pre and Post Decision Reviews for 2020/21

### **Background Papers**

None

### **Corporate Consultation**

**Finance:** Chris Blundell, Director of Financial Services

**Legal:** Tim Howes, Director of Corporate Governance and Monitoring Officer