

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2021 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor Rev. Stuart Piper (Chair); Councillors Fellows, Austin, Boyd, Currie, Coleman-Cooke, Huxley, Keen, Pat Moore, Paul Moore, L Piper and Tomlinson

In Attendance: Councillor Ashbee

333. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Rattigan.

334. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

335. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Fellows proposed, Councillor Tomlinson seconded and Members agreed the minutes as a correct record of the meeting held on 26 August 2021.

336. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATION

Councillor Ashbee, Leader of the council made a presentation on the vision for the council. The main points of the presentation were as follows:

- At the end of the current term of office, cabinet want be able to demonstrate some deliverables achieved;
- With regards to governance matters, the council was moving on well in addressing those issues and cabinet welcomed the governance review;
- The council was looking to leveraging as much as possible inward investment into Thanet, as Government funding of council activities has been declining year on year;
- The building blocks for success from the levelling up funding was to encourage inward investment into the district for the future.
- Levelling Up Funds: The council was bidding for about £50million. If successful, this fund would form the foundation of for further investment into the area;
- Young people would be encouraged to stay in Thanet after graduating and work in the area;
- Parkway Station: This was a big investment for Thanet and it opens up new opportunities for the local area;
- There was a need for the council to focus on investment areas that would create the greatest economic impact;
- Visit Kent: The council supports this campaign for attracting tourism into Kent;
- Local Plan: The Local Plan enables investment by defining investment opportunities in different parts of the district;
- The council would encourage big digital companies to come and invest in Thanet. However these companies can only come here if there are the right skill sets among the local population. That is why is it important to invest in education as well;
- The coastline is one of Thanet's greatest assets.
- Support for the Ramsgate Port and Harbour would also create inward investment;

- Council Property Strategy: This was being renewed and once it was completed, it should give the council opportunities for development;
- TDC Office Accommodation: This issue was also still under review, more so in view of the flexible working that has been introduced by the council (initially on a pilot basis); There was need to review and ascertain how much space was needed for TDC conduct its business.
- Manston Depot: There was also a need to explore the potential for the Manston Depot rationalisation;
- Working as East Kent: Moving forward the model of district councils of Thanet's size was probably no longer viable. It was therefore necessary to look at better ways of working by combining with other councils. A Unitary Council approach is a long process and not achievable in the shorter term. However, a Combined Local Council would be a more viable approach. This was once considered a few years back but was dropped following the failure to get support from all of the other councils.
- A White Paper on Devolution was expected to be published soon. This would give some steer on how the council can move forward;
- The Leader's vision was for TDC to be part of a Combined local Council;
- Cabinet had also identified to deliver on the following areas:
 - a. A Youth Council;
 - b. Identify an approach for offsetting the costs of visitors to Thanet, particularly in areas of cleaning up the beach and promenade areas, cleaning of toilets and enforcement especially during peak visitor periods. There was a need to review options for concessions in order to make more income;
 - c. Explore the possibility of establishing overnight beach huts by setting up pods along the seafront, to increase visitor experience and raise income;
 - d. Seek the resolution of setting up Travellers temporary sites;
 - e. Push for Thanet District to be known as Isle of Thanet.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- How will the Margate Town Deal benefit the area if implemented successfully?
 - Were there any current outline ideas regarding the setting up of overnight beach huts?
 - On previous occasion the idea of overnight beach huts was mooted, but there was significant outcry from some local residents against the idea;
 - Were there any examples of successful collaborations by councils that were not unitary council models?
 - Was the council doing anything to encourage visitors into Thanet to use public transport in order to address the issue of Climate Emergency?
 - How can the council assist those who have been homeless from becoming homeless again?
 - Coming out of the pandemic what was the council doing to encourage a focus on health and wellbeing for local communities?
 - Could the council issue out council waste bags to popular seafront shops to encourage shoppers to discard their rubbish appropriately?
 - These are bags similar to the ones issued out to volunteer litter picking groups;
 - Was the council going back to the drawing board regarding identifying some temporary sites for Travellers?
 - Could the council consider reforming the tax bands and business rates?
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- The council should be allowed to keep the money from sale of right to buy properties, instead of the current 30%;
 - Currently the council got 12p in every pound. The council should be getting more;
 - Did the council make regular representations to the two local MPs on these issues?

The Leader and Madeline Homer responded to Member questions and comments as follows:

- Margate has been fortunate with the establishment of the Turner Contemporary, which has led to the development of the creative arts industry in the area, including the Dreamland;
- The Town Deal will add to that development and this will keep the momentum of the regeneration of the district going;
- The Creative Land Trust is gaining national attention and viewed as a good and successful model for development of local economies;
- The Town Deal is about community involvement in the regeneration of their area as can be demonstrated with the setting up of the People's Panel that works with the Margate Town Board;

- The council could review coastal parking facilities as a way of improving council income and increasing positive visitor experience. The council also needs to consider reviewing the car parking facilities in general, looking at underutilised car parks and consider to review the pricing structure of parking charges;
- The visitor traffic does not slow that as we get to September. It seems to continue for a while longer. The council needs to tap into this income potential by creating more attractions and consider the idea of providing for overnight campervan parking;
- Combined Local Councils model: the government was currently looking at this issue;
- There was no one size fits all as council have various levels of capacities;

- Government funding was now being accessed through a bidding process. Those councils with a higher capacity for bidding which are the bigger local councils would normally make successful bids much more often than smaller councils;
- It therefore makes sense for TDC to be part of a bigger local authority, as this creates economies of scale;
- Successful bidding frees financial resources that can then be used for other works;
- Climate Emergency: The council and as individual residents have to move away from current consumer behaviour to an electrical transport mentality;

- For the council this would mean setting up a number of charging ports across the district, particularly at the seafront;
- There is a need to find the right balance with the green agenda;
- Supporting the homeless: TDC has won a number of awards for the homelessness initiatives that the council has implemented over the years;
- Homelessness pressures were affecting a number of local councils across the country;
- TDC has a proactive housing team. There is a RISE programme which prevents repeat homelessness;
- There was a lot of council activity during the pandemic to support individuals to prevent homelessness;
- However it should be noted that it is up to the government to come up with policies at a national level to deal with this challenging issue;
- Health & Wellbeing initiatives: Cabinet will be re-establishing the health and Wellbeing Cabinet Advisory Group to work on council initiatives for promoting health and wellbeing in the district;
- The Leader will chair the CAG

- CAGs are important vehicles for working through some ideas before forwarding them to Cabinet for adoption. However the Leader has received some reports about attendance at other CAG meetings which was not particularly good;

- Issuing litter bags to popular seafront shops: The council consider this approach;
- Temporary Travellers Sites: The council advertised for a call for sites. However there were no returns received by the council;
- There were a couple of potential council sites and now there was a need to consider the feasibility of those sites;
- A public consultation would also have to be conducted;
- The facility to be provided should be able to give back a return on investment;
- The Local Plan would fail if these facilities were not provided;
- Council tax: How much a local authority gets out of the council tax is determined at a national level, by the government. It would be good if councils got more than the 12p in every pound;
- While social housing would indeed bring more income to council, borrowing was also possible. However there are limits about how far councils could go down the path of commercialisation. Officers will confirm this issue after the meeting. However it should be noted that there were strict rules about councils engaging in borrowing;
- Officers would also verify how much councils get from the sale right to buy properties;
- The Leader making representations to the local MPs: The leader invited Members to submit their questions for the Leader to forward them to the two local MPs.

Thereafter the Chair thanked the Leader and Members noted the presentation.

337. EVENT POLICY AND SUITABILITY OF EVENTS DOCUMENTS

Penny Button, Director of Safer Neighbourhoods introduced the report and made the following points:

- The Events Policy was first put in place in 2016;
- Elle Sutton, Community Officer has been working on making a number of updates, including changes to the terms and conditions that have to be signed by the event organiser;
- There is also an additional document attached to the policy which details what is on offer, i.e. the council land that can be hired by organisers;
- There is also content on reduction of carbon emission;
- The Suitability Events Documents controls the advertising associated with events;
- A recommendation has been made that cabinet make a decision on whether date restrictions should be in place for when beach events can take place;
- Events sites have been updated;
- Currently the council is charging for standard sites and Premium sites;
- Once the update policy has been adopted by council, the charging rates would be for small, medium and large sites;
- The costs are divided into community costs, commercial costs and enthusiasts costs;
- Officers have spoken to events organisers and have received some feedback;
- The policy proposal will be going to Cabinet on 18 November 2021.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- Was the insurance premium the same for all events?
- The policy was now more readable and set out impressively;
- Safety Action Group: Having a 4 week deadline to respond before the event was not adequate. It was too short a deadline;
- It would be a good idea for TDC to inform town/parish councils of upcoming events, so that no other events are organised around the same time. This would

prevent smaller events being drowned out by bigger events that have larger sound systems;

- Has the Climate Change officer been consulted?
- Can the council transfer carbon offsetting to events organisers?
- When parish councils are holding non commercial events on council land they are still charged for using council land. Why was this the case and could this not be changed?
- Small groups that would like to host events are charged for officer time. Was that the case? If it was, this would put off any small groups from hosting events. Could this be considered?
- The events notification form to be submitted at least 14 weeks before the hosting of the event: Although this has been reduced from 16 week; this was still too long, why?
- Circulating a list of events would be handy. Can this be done?
- Lighting of the beacon in June 2022: There is a need to plan for the health and safety measures to be put in place for that event;
- It would be good for the district council to work closely with the town and parish councils on events matters.

Penny Button responded to Member comments and questions as follows:

- The 14 weeks deadline is an absolute minimum. Discussions with event organisers would have started long before that deadline
- Elle Sutton has been working on improving liaison between the council and parish/town councils regarding the hosting of events;
- In summer the council works with Kent Police regarding the security for events in the district. Officers also monitor the social media to see if there are any barbeques being planned for the beach;
- Carbon offsetting: The council does not have the ability to force events organisers. However officer encourage events organisers to think of ways of carbon offsetting for their events and build the that into the promotion of those events;
- Charging parish councils for events on TDC land: There is a cost to hiring council land but this is an issue officers could look into and advise. However there is a need for consistency of approach. Lighting the beacon is not charged for by TDC
- The road closures that are done by KCC and that is where the process is long;
- The council was moving towards digitalisation and events hosting applications will be made online and it will make sharing of information easier;
- Health & Safety Officers would be able to assist with setting up a protocol for such measures for the lighting of the beacon event in June 2022.

Councillor Paul Moore proposed, Councillor Austin seconded and Members recommended to cabinet to agree that TDC liaise with Town and Parish Councils and Margate Trustees informing them of events happening locally in order to better manage the hosting of events in the district.

Subject to the above recommendation Councillor Tomlinson, Councillor Paul Moore seconded and Member agreed to recommend the updated Events Policy to Cabinet for adoption.

338. REVIEW OF OSP WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2021/22

The Chair advised the meeting that Kent Police representative Temporary DCI Matthew Smith would be in attendance at the 18 January 2022 Panel meeting to make a presentation on "Modern Slavery in Thanet." This is at the invitation of the Panel.

Councillor Fellows, Chair of the Coastal Waste Scrutiny Review Working party gave a verbal update on the work of the sub group. He said that the working party had met on three occasions. The first meeting was to agree on an approach for conducting their work.

The second was to interview and gather evidence for their report from Gavin Waite, Director of Communities. This was followed by another meeting with Councillor Bob Bayford, Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Special Projects, Mike Humber, Director of Operations and Lisa Collingwood, Education Officer (Enforcement Services).

A few other meetings were lined up in November to gather evidence from volunteer litter picking community groups, business groups and parish/town councils.

Members noted the report.

339. FORWARD PLAN & EXEMPT CABINET REPORT LIST

Members noted the report.

Meeting concluded: 8.55 pm