

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 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, Keen, Pat Moore, Rattigan and M Saunders

In Attendance: Councillors J Bayford and D Saunders

340. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the following Members:

Councillor Paul Moore, substituted by Councillor Mave Saunders;
Councillor Lynda Piper;
Councillor Tomlinson;
Councillor Huxley.

341. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

342. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Fellows proposed, Councillor Coleman-Cooke seconded and Members agreed the minutes as a correct record of the meeting held on 26 October 2021.

343. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATION - COMMUNITY SAFETY AND YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Councillor George Kup, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Youth Engagement made a presentation about his portfolio at this meeting. The presentation focused on the key projects currently being implemented under his portfolio and in particular those projects with a focus on youth engagement. It was interesting to note the partnership working between TDC and Thanet Community Safety Partnership to deliver a number of projects that included the following:

- The Community Shield - to assist victims of crime with safe spaces and medical help;
- The Safety Webpage - this will provide a map that locates using GPS where an individual who needs help is;
- Ladder of Risk - Initiative with schools to assist young people better assess risk about the activities they may engage in;
- Thanet Bike Project - This is hoped will occupy young people and move them away from Antisocial Behaviour (ASB);
- Bike Safety Campaign - To assist people better understand how to keep their bikes safe from thefts. This because bikes are some of the items that are mostly targeted for theft;
- Loan A Cone - This enables residents living near schools to keep their driveways free of antisocial parking during school runs;
- Online exploitation awareness - This projects targets children to build resilience in children about internet safety;

- Breaking the Cycle - This project engages young people to tackle ASB. To better tackle this problem agencies share information about areas of concern and hotspots;
- Amnesty Bins - This project has proven to be successful as it has seen people dropping offensive weapons at given locations mostly at train stations;
- Safer Streets - Home Office grant (£300k) has been used to refurbish CCTV facilities, clean up graffiti etc. in Eastcliffe and Central Harbour areas to help reduce crime;

The presentation also highlighted future projects that the council was working on including setting up a Youth Cabinet Advisory Group made up of young people from the local communities who would be advising Cabinet on what they would like to see the council do for young people in Thanet.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- How was the council going to advertise the various programmes and initiatives focussed on young people and reach out particularly the most difficult to reach out to?
- Members were impressed by the number of initiatives developed and being implemented by TDC to engage young people;
- Safe Streets: How were these project sites identified?
- Would the bike maintenance project be introduced to other areas of Thanet outside where the current activities are?

Councillor Kup and Penny Button, Director of Safer Neighbourhoods responded as follows:

- You Tube and other social media platforms were some of the ways that the council would try to reach out to you people;
- The council was reaching out through youth clubs and schools;
- Safe Streets: This project was informed by the information generated by Kent Police and was led by the Crimes Commissioner;
- TDC was one of four other local councils to get projects funded by the home Office under Safe Streets programme;
- The Bike Project had not yet been started, but would coming soon
- Officers were planning to have a Members briefing on that subject

Members noted the presentation and thanked Councillor Kup.

344. TLS KPI Q1 & Q2 - HOUSING PERFORMANCE REPORT

Sally O'Sullivan, Tenant and Leaseholder Services Manager introduced the report and made the following points:

- The Housing Services Team has come a long way from October 2020 when the services was brought back in-house;
- Income management was looking good;
- The Services was currently scoping the capital works;
- By the end of December the Royal Crescent tender would be in place;
- Tenants survey feedback indicated that the service was getting better;
- The Services was still working on improving the standards for Landlord Compliance including fire risk;
- The team was working on improving voids;
- Working relations with Mears had improved significantly.

Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- The council started from a bad position but now the situation had significantly improved;
- It was good to note that an 18 months improvement plan was now in place;
- Members were happy to hear that the Mears contract was going on ok;
- What were the penalties if Mears underperformed?
- How long was the current contract?
- Where were the tenants meetings being held?
- Were there any training opportunities for tenants training?

Bob Porter and Sally O'Sullivan responded to Member comments and questions as follows:

- There were no specific penalties in the contract;
- The main focus was on making improvements in their performance;
- Monthly meetings are held between TDC officers and Mears;
- Strategic meetings are held quarterly;
- The contracts ends in 2025;
- Mears experienced some difficulties in recruiting for some of the trades, hence the backlog in some work areas;
- Supply of materials had also been an issue;
- However both of the above issues had since been resolved and there should be an improvement in performance and tackling of the backlog;
- Currently tenants meetings were being held online. The intention is to move them to the TDC Main Offices;
- Tenants would in future be offered training to enable them to scrutinize the performance of the service;
- They would also be trained so that they could assist the Service with equality impact performance and the tender process;
- The council had started a programme of tenancy visits, which helps identify properties with problems and the visits help ascertain the condition of these properties;
- Where existing tenants had requested to move, officer conduct inspections to pick out any issues regarding the condition of properties;
- These visits also help tackle tenancy fraud;
- Officers also provide advice on damp and mold issues.

Thereafter Councillor Fellow proposed, Councillor Currie seconded and Members agreed to note the report.

345. INCREASE PROVISION OF HOUSING RESPONSE OFFICERS AT THE TOWER BLOCKS

Sally O'Sullivan introduced the report and advised Members that the proposals before the Panel were meant to improve performance in cleaning services by providing dedicated resources to tower blocks. There was a need for frequent cleaning of these premises. The presence of Housing Response Officers (HROs) would also make residents feel safer. The council would have direct control over the quality of the service. From a tenants' survey that was conducted by the Housing team, the majority of the residents agreed to the additional costs going to the recruitment of HROs.

The Panel reviewed proposals for "increasing provision of Housing Response Officers (HROs) at the tower blocks". The proposals are aimed at improving service provision to tackle litter, weeds and fly tipping at the tower block areas. HROs would help improve housing services performance levels with repairs, maintenance and cleaning. Members were quite supportive of these proposals.

Councillor Fellows proposed, Councillor Rattigan seconded and Members agreed to forward to Cabinet the proposals for the increased provision of Housing Response Officers at Tower Blocks.

346. FEES AND CHARGES 2022-23

Chris Blundell, Director of Finance and Acting S151 Officer introduced the proposals for fees and charges for 2022/23. Members were advised that the proposals had been first considered by the Fees and Charges Cabinet Advisory Group over two meetings in September and October. There were proposals for increasing collection of garden waste from the current £53 to £55. At the meeting on 18 November, Cabinet had proposed an across the board increase of fees and charges of 3% and not 2% as had been initially proposed, in recognition of the increased level of inflation in the national economy.

Members also considered the proposals for 2022/23 fees and charges and concurred with the proposals as agreed by Cabinet on 18 November. The Panel was particularly pleased with cabinet efforts to start a pilot project that would see the introduction of reduced parking charges for electric vehicles in parts of the district in order to contribute towards the reduction of carbon emissions in the district and assist change consumer choices.

It was also noted that Thanet still charged more than most crematorium service providers. Members advised that the council ought to consider the possibility that the public might end up going to a private service provider where the charges were less.

Councillor Fellows proposed, Councillor Rattigan seconded and Members recommended that Cabinet forwarded the proposed fees and charges for 2022/23 to Full Council for adoption.

347. REVIEW OF OSP WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2021/22

Councillor Fellows gave a brief verbal update about the work activities of the Coastal Waste Scrutiny Review Working party and thereafter Members noted the report.

348. FORWARD PLAN & EXEMPT CABINET REPORT LIST

Members noted the report.

Meeting concluded: 8.01 pm