

Overview & Scrutiny Panel Chair's report to Council

Council	12 January 2022
Report Author	Committee Service Manager
Status	For Information
Classification:	Unrestricted
Key Decision	No
Ward:	Thanet Wide

Executive Summary:

This report comments on the activities of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel for 2021/22 which were agreed by the Panel on 25 May 2021 as the work programme for the year..

Recommendation(s):

Members are being asked to comment on, make suggestions 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 Department of Leveling Up, Housing and Communities 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 working parties assist with 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 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 was 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 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. This is in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 15.1 of Part 4 of the Council Constitution. The report is subject to comment or debate by members.
- 1.2 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.
- 1.3 This report follows on from the update report that was presented at Council on 14 October 2021.

2.0 The Current Situation

Scrutiny Review Topics

- 2.1 In 2019/20 through to 2020/21, the Panel started working through the list of scrutiny review topics and agreed a prioritised list 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).

Coastal Waste Scrutiny Review

- 2.2 At the meeting on 26 August, the Panel set up a five member Coastal Waste Review Working party to conduct a scrutiny review of coastal waste collection practices in the district. The working party met for their first formal meeting on 6 October and agreed a work programme for conducting their review work. They identified the key stakeholders (witness groups) to talk to in order to gather evidence for their report.
- 2.3 On 21 October the working party met council senior officers from Operational Services. These included the Corporate Director of Communities and Director of Operations. They also met the Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Special Projects. On 4 November they met representatives from parish and town councils who oversee a portion of the district's coastline. On 10 November, the working party met two more council officers from the Tourism department (the Director of Regeneration and Tourism Manager). On Monday, 15 November met a number of volunteer litter group representatives.
- 2.4 The working party is also expected to contact other local councils who manage a coastline to share experiences. The working party is expected to report back their findings to the Panel in the early part of 2022. In the meantime, the Chair of the working party will give verbal updates at Panel meetings.

Memorial Plaques and Monuments

- 2.4 The review of memorial plaques and monuments was initially prioritised in order to expedite the review of what was then a topical issue nationwide. At the time, Cabinet expressed an interest in establishing a policy for managing memorial plaques and monuments in Thanet. Cabinet approached the Panel to contribute to the establishment of that policy. However due to the anticipated new legislation which will include new guidance on how councils can address the issue of monuments and plaques, it was not possible to continue with this work stream. On 20 April 2021, the Panel put the work of the Memorial Working Party on hold until an appropriate time.
- 2.5 Annex 1 details the current work programme before any new work has been added. All the scrutiny review topics that the Panel identified as ongoing work streams that may involve work during multiple municipal year periods are detailed in Annex 2 to the report.

Cabinet Presentations at OSP Meetings

- 2.6 Councillor George Kup, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Youth Engagement, gave a 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 is 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 project 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;

2.6 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.

2.7 Councillor Jill Bayford, Cabinet Member for Housing will give a presentation on “An Overview of the Housing Services” at the Panel on 17 February 2022. This presentation will assist the Panel to decide whether to conduct a review on a topic identified in 2020/21 about the private rented sector: ‘How does TDC regulate private landlords and letting agencies in Thanet?’

2.8 The rest of the work programme will be made up of items which have been referred to the Panel by Cabinet. These items are part of the Council Budget and Planning Framework and are identified from the Forward Plan. Other items which may have a significant public interest and which the Panel believes will enhance the decision making process may also be added to the work programme.

3.0 Pre Decision Scrutiny

Increasing provision of Housing Response Officers (HROs) at the tower blocks

3.1 On 23 November, 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 supported these proposals.

Review Fees and Charges Proposals

- 3.2 Members also considered the proposals for 2022/23 fees and charges at the meeting on 23 November 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.

4.0 Options

- 4.1 Members may opt to offer suggestions for consideration by the Panel;
or
4.2 Members may simply wish to comment on and note the report.

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Annex List

Annex 1: Overview & Scrutiny Panel Work Programme for 2021/22

Annex 2: Scrutiny Review Topics with the Scoring Matrix

Background Papers

None

Corporate Consultation

Finance: Chris Blundell, Director of Finance

Legal: Estelle Culligan (Director of Law and Democracy)