

# Annual Overview & Scrutiny Panel Report to Council for 2021/22

Overview & Scrutiny Panel Panel 31 March 2022

**Report Author** Councillor Stuart Piper, Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Panel

**Status** For Decision

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Key Decision** No

**Ward:** Thanet Wide

## Executive Summary:

The purpose of the report is to highlight some of the key activities that have been planned and implemented by the Overview & Scrutiny Panel for the 2020/21 municipal year period.

## Recommendation(s):

Members are being asked to comment on 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 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 The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel is required to present an Annual Panel report towards the end of each municipal year to share an overview of the work undertaken by the Panel during the course of the year under review.
- 1.2 The report comments on a number of activities carried out by the Panel during the period under review. It is hoped that this report would therefore provide the basis for debate by Members on the Panel's annual activities and hopefully lead to sharing of views and ideas to enhance the Council's scrutiny function.
- 1.3 The Council continued to organise its work around the challenges posed by the covid-19 pandemic. However with the successful launch and implementation of the national immunisation programme to fight the pandemic, the government removed the emergency legislation that allowed the Councils to conduct their meetings and make formal decisions remotely. In person meetings at the Council offices were resumed, whilst still managing the risks to the wellbeing of both staff and Members.

### **2.0 Cabinet Member Presentations**

- 2.1 During the course of the year the Panel engaged cabinet members in discussions on a number of subject matters that fall under their respective portfolio areas. The purpose of these engagements through cabinet member presentations at Panel meetings was for the Panel to contribute to policy decisions on issues under active

consideration of the executive as well as get an update on the current matters that the Cabinet was working on.

### **The Leader's Vision**

2.2 At the meeting on 26 October 2021, the Leader of Council made a presentation on the vision for the council under the current Executive. The Panel noted with interest the following highlights of that presentation:

- **Inward Investment:** 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. It has to be packaged and marketed in a way that will attract business to the district;
- 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;
  
- **Future Model of District Councils:** 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.

2.3 The Panel will be keeping a watching brief on all those areas that were highlighted in the Leader's presentation.

### **Community Safety and Youth Engagement**

2.4 The Panel also received a presentation on 23 November 2021 from the Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Youth Engagement. Some of the key points made during that presentation included the following:

2.5 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.

2.5 The Panel was also advised that Cabinet was working on 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.

2.6 Members will again be keeping a watching brief on these cabinet projects.

2.7 The Panel received further presentations at the meetings on 17 February and 15 March 2022 as follows:

- An overview presentation on the Private Sector Housing in Thanet and commenting on how the Council regulates private sector housing in the district;
- How TDC has been responding to the need for improving information dissemination and conducting council business (including holding council meetings remotely) in response to the pandemic and how the council can develop its capacity and resilience moving forward.

2.8 Councillor Bob Bayford, Cabinet Member for Environmental Services and Special Projects was invited to the 19 April 2022 Panel to present on the Climate Emergency Declaration made TDC, addressing the following question; “How is the Council doing in achieving the aims and objectives of its Green Agenda?” The presentation is still to be confirmed.

2.9 An invitation was also extended to the Leader of Council to attend the Panel meeting on 21 July 2022 to share her view and experience regarding “The Efficacy of using the CAGs Approach in policy development and decision making.” The presentation is still to be confirmed.

### **3.0 Scrutiny Reviews conducted by the Panel**

#### **Scrutiny Review Topics**

3.1 In 2019/20 through to 2021/22, 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). One such topic was a review of the council's coastal waste collection practices with a view to improving the cleanliness of the district's coastline to create a welcoming environment for the local communities and visitors from outside Thanet.

#### **Memorial plaques and Monuments**

3.2 The reviewing of memorial plaques and monuments in the district was initially given priority in order to expedite the review of what was then a topical issue nationwide. Cabinet then had expressed an interest to establish a policy for managing memorial plaques and monuments in the Thanet. The Panel was approached to contribute to the establishment of that policy by Cabinet.

3.3 However due to the anticipated new legislation which would include new guidance on how the council could address the issue of monuments and plaques in the district, it was not possible to continue with this work stream. On 20 April 2021, the Panel decided to temporarily halt and therefore keep in abeyance the work of the Memorial Working Party until an appropriate time. Since there has not been any new announcement of new legislation/guidance by the government to date, this review remains in abeyance.

#### **Planning Enforcement Working Party**

3.4 The Planning Enforcement Working Party reviewed the current approach being used by the council's Planning Enforcement Team with a view to coming up with some recommendations on how the Panel could contribute to the current review of the Planning Enforcement Protocol. The working party was set up on 20 April 2021 and reported back to the Panel on 20 July.

3.5 The Panel was advised that there was an ongoing council wide review of the the Planning Enforcement Protocol and forwarded the following recommendations to be considered as part of that wider review, that:

- a. Investigations be carried out to determine the potential utility of a planning enforcement portal on the council's website to provide updates to members of the public and elected members on current cases, as well as increasing the availability of information about the Enforcement process for the public;
- b. A review be conducted to identify how the council could come up with a more effective system of prioritising planning enforcement cases;
- c. A review be conducted to determine how best to improve communication between the council and complainants regarding planning enforcement cases being handled by the council;
- d. Investigations be carried out to determine how best the council could include proactive work in the planning enforcement protocol.

#### **Coastal Waste Scrutiny Review**

3.6 At the meeting on 26 August 2021, 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 2021 and agreed a work programme for conducting their review work. They identified the key witnesses (witness groups) to talk to in order to gather evidence for their report.

3.7 On 21 October 2021 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 2021 they met representatives from parish and town councils who oversee a partition of the district's coastline.

3.8 On 10 November 2021, the working party met two more council officers from the Tourism department (the Director of Regeneration and Tourism Manager). On 15 November 2021 met a number of volunteer litter group representatives.

3.9 The working party is now in the process of drafting their report with recommendations and taking it through the pre-approval process for presentation to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 19 April 2022. It is hoped that a number of recommendations will be forwarded to cabinet for their consideration and decision.

## **4.0 Call-Ins**

### **Proposed Disposal of 18 Albert Street: Call-In of Cabinet Decision**

4.1 The Panel called in a cabinet decision on the disposal of 18 Albert Street property and considered the call-in at an extraordinary meeting on 8 July 2021. The Panel wanted to ascertain whether cabinet had explored all viable options available.

4.2 Some of the key comments made by the Panel were as follows, that:

- This was a property in an upcoming area in Ramsgate. Residents were concerned about the loss of the property with historical significance;
- The Ramsgate Future Project could make good use of assets like this one;
- The property could be turned into a community asset if funding was available;
- This property could be used for training students on asset restoration for historic assets;
- Cabinet should be requested to delay of up to three months the decision for disposal in order to consider other options;
- The Levelling Up Fund was not meant for the purchase of properties like 18 Albert Street, Ramsgate;
- Instead the council should be looking best value for this property;
- Delay in disposing the property would be mean delay in income getting into the HRA;
- Local interest in the property could be to bid for the property;
- Whilst it was a good idea for the community to own the property, the challenge was the community groups often ran out of money to manage such properties, as has been demonstrated on previous occasions.

4.2 However no further action was taken by the Panel as they did not make any recommendations to Cabinet on this matter.

## **5.0 Community Safety Partnership Scrutiny**

### **Kent Police Presentation - Modern Slavery in Thanet**

5.1 Members engaged Kent Police during a presentation on modern day slavery in Thanet by the Acting Chief Inspector for the district. The purpose of this presentation was for the Panel to investigate whether there were any businesses in Thanet that were practising modern day slavery and if so how this could be stopped.

5.2 Kent Police confirmed that they were not aware of any current cases of exploitation at car wash businesses across the district.

5.3 Members were advised that however car wash businesses nationally have been known to have exploitation problems and that Police would normally refer victims with

health problems to social services (adult protection referrals). Domestic servitude were difficult cases to report and were therefore under-reported.

- 5.4 The national crime agency runs awareness campaigns to advise the public about various forms of domestic violence and servitude and how these cases can be reported to the Police and on the Panel's suggestion this material could be after a refresh for Thanet purposes. The Acting Chief Inspector agreed to take this idea up with the Kent Police Press Office.

## **6.0 Pre Decision Scrutiny**

6.1 The Panel reviewed proposals on a number of issues that later went to cabinet and in some cases Council for final approval. These included the following:

- Statement of Community Involvement - Results of Public Consultation and Adoption;
- Event Policy and Suitability of Events Documents;
- Increase provision of Housing Response Officers at the tower blocks;
- Fees and Charges 2022-23;
- Council Budget for 2022/23;
- HRA Budget for 2022/23;
- Birchington Neighbourhood Plan - Regulation 16 consultation - Formal Response from Thanet District Council.

6.2 Members reviewed Cabinet's budget proposals for 2022/23 and made the following recommendations:

1. To allocate up to £125,000 from the New Homes Bonus allocation for the capital works required to the Ramsgate Eastcliff and Viking Bay coastal lifts to ensure they are in full working order for the foreseeable future;
2. To allocate the full remainder of the New Homes Bonus allocation as capital to provide additional in-house temporary accommodation;
3. To transfer £200,000 from the risk management reserve to a new climate risk and opportunity reserve.

6.3 Although Cabinet rejected the recommendations, Cabinet indicated that they were considering and pursuing other long-term sustainable funding options for the repair and on-going maintenance of our coastal lifts. With regard to the reserve transfer for climate change projects, Cabinet indicated that the monies that sit in the Risk Management Reserve would be available for such projects as and when needed. Cabinet was also looking in this area for external funding opportunities as well.



## **7.0 Options**

7.1 Members are asked to comment on and note the report

*Or*

7.2 Members may simply wish in addition to noting the report, make suggestions to the work of the Panel.

**Contact Officer:** Charles Hungwe, Senior Democratic Services Officer, Tel: 01843 577186  
**Reporting to:** Nick Hughes, Committee Services Manager, Tel: 01843 577208

### **Annex List**

Annex 1: Overview & Scrutiny Panel Scrutiny Review Topics for 2021/22

Annex 2: Record of OSP Pre and Post Decision Reviews up to 2021/22

### **Background Papers**

None

### **Corporate Consultation**

**Finance:** [Chris Blundell \(Director of Finance\)](#)

**Legal:**