

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 July 2022 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, Leys, Pat Moore, Paul Moore, L Piper, Rattigan, Tomlinson and Wing

In Attendance: Councillor J Bayford

391. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies received at the meeting.

392. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

393. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Tomlinson proposed, Councillor Coleman-Cooke seconded and the Members agreed that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting held on 26 May 2022 were a correct record.

394. UPDATE PLANNING ENFORCEMENT REVIEW

Bob Porter, Acting Corporate Director of Place introduced the report and made the following points:

- This was an update regarding the review of the planning enforcement protocol since July 2021;
- The enforcement protocol will need to make reference to the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill;
- The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill includes proposals to extend the time that enforcement action can be taken for breaches of planning control;
- The report includes a proposal to explore including a monitoring charge in all new section 106 planning agreements, so that the funding could be used to monitor planning conditions compliance;
- The full review will be completed once The Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill is enacted into law;
- New software is being purchased for the Planning Department. This will facilitate the publication of information about on-going enforcement cases on the council's website;
- The council is also preparing a protocol covering enforcement complaints that have both planning and Environmental Health implications. The new protocol will set out how the two services areas will work together and who will lead in which circumstances.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- Members welcomed closer working between Planning and Environmental Health. This seemed sensible and good for the public;
- It was also a good idea to use S106 funds for monitoring the implementation of 106 Agreements;

- There are significant heritage properties across the district and with only 2 officers to monitor them. Was it not possible to use part of the S106 funds to monitor work around listed buildings;
- There are not enough staff for Planning Enforcement. Other similarly sized councils had more staff resources for this council function. Could the council, not recruit apprentices to add to the staff numbers;
- What was the officer's impression regarding the member enquiry Portal?
- The council had registered successful prosecutions for non compliance with planning conditions. This will give a strong message to individuals to adhere to conditions set out by the Planning Department.

Bob Porter responded to Member comments and questions as follows:

- Having an enforcement officer who specialises in heritage buildings would be helpful, but could not be funded from section 106 agreements. Expenditure from S.106 agreements could only be spent on things that related to the specific development they were linked to;
- The Planning Enforcement team could be more proactive with additional resources; however securing these resources with the council's current financial position would be a significant challenge.
- A report is being prepared for Cabinet setting out the position in relation to S106 contributions, their intended use, how much had been spent and what on. The report will also include the council's Infrastructure Funding Statement
- The Member Portal is helpful. More work was needed to work on a number of issues to improve the portal and it is helpful if members can use a new form for each enquiry that they wish to make.

Members noted the report.

395. TENANT AND LEASEHOLDER SERVICES KPI Q4

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

- Significant improvements had been made and the Regulatory Notice had been removed;
- The Improvement Plan that was set to March 2022 had been accomplished;
- The team continued to work with MEARS in order to meet the performance targets;
- Arrears had fallen. However more work still needed to be done to reduce the level of debt;
- The capital work programme performance had improved significantly.

Members made comments as follows:

- Why have 'Voids' increased?
- Why have customer satisfaction levels gone down?
- Members were impressed by the effort being made by the Housing team;
- The tenants newsletter was now more accessible to residents;
- With the ongoing energy crisis, did officers think that the non payments of rents would increase in the future?
- Where residents referred to training services to enable them to manage their finances better?
- Southern Water demonstrated how to serve on water costs. Would officers be sharing such information with residents?
- Was there a risk to the council if and when the sponsorship arrangements for Ukrainian refugees broke down?

- There were some families who would like to get involved in hosting the refugee families. How could they go about it?
- Were there any long standing complaints from residents that had not been responded to?

Sally O’Sullivan, Bob Porter and Chris Blundell, Acting Deputy CEx & S151 Officer responded as follows:

- Although the ‘Voids’ were still high, they had decreased from the previous quarter’s performance report;
- There were major ‘Voids’ from East Kent Housing which had been outstanding for a long time;
- There had been an increased response rate to the survey on customer satisfaction due in part to the changes to the questionnaire which had been simplified to make the questions easier to understand. This had contributed to more honest responses;
- The Housing team support residents to maximise their income and take up benefits they are entitled to and sign post residents to support services;
- The corporate risk report that was going to the Governance and Audit team also focused on identifying areas of support for residents;
- The Home Energy Officer was working on approaches for energy efficiency for homes;
- Officers were working on a net zero strategy for the council’s housing stock in order to improve the energy efficiency for residents;
- This strategy would be in line with the government strategy. A report would be going to the Housing Cabinet Advisory Group, Climate Change Cabinet Advisory Group, OSP and Cabinet in the coming months;
- The break down in sponsorship arrangements for Ukrainian refugee families has been flagged as a risk with the Homelessness service;
- The Private Sector Housing team was currently supporting the Homes for Ukraine Programme. The council visits the homes of any sponsors to check for suitability before any rematching the refugee families with new sponsor family, in the event that the original sponsorship breaks down;
- There were not many long standing complaints in the period. Complaints were being responded to in time. For those that took their complaints further to the Ombudsman, the council had provided responses to the Ombudsman Office;

Members noted the report.

396. REVIEW OF OSP WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2022/23

A Member requested that the Panel conduct an urgent review of the decision by Stagecoach to discontinue bus services for some routes in Thanet. Members had received some complaints from residents regarding this decision by Stagecoach. Members acknowledged that this was a decision by a private company, but further said that the company was providing a public service.

Mr Nick Hughes, Committee Services Manager advised the Panel could review this decision by Stagecoach. It was important to consider the timeline for when this decision would be implemented in order to consider the matter before then. The Panel could invite Stagecoach representatives to an extraordinary meeting to discuss the matter, before 28 August when the decision was to come into effect. Kent County Council (KCC) could also be approached to ask about subsidies for bus routes. KCC could bring this matter up to the Joint Transportation Board (JTB).

Members agreed that Stagecoach, KCC representatives and Councillor Mave Saunders as the JTB Vice Chair be invited to an extraordinary meeting to discuss the issue regarding the decision to discontinue bus services for some routes in the district.

Members agreed that Councillor Pugh be invited to the Panel meeting on 25 October 2022 to discuss the Levelling Up Funds and Regeneration Projects in Thanet.

Members noted the report.

397. FORWARD PLAN & EXEMPT CABINET REPORT LIST

Members noted the report.

Meeting concluded: 7.50 pm