

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 30 May 2023 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor Phil Fellows (Chair); Councillors D Green, Austin, Britcher, Currie, d'Abbro, Davis, Kup, Paul Moore, Packman, Pope, Wing and Worrow

In Attendance: Councillors Garner and Whitehead

448. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor K. Bright and Councillor Farooki.

449. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Packman declared an interest regarding Agenda Item 6 (Q3 and Q4 2022/23 Tenant and Leaseholder Performance Report).

450. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Paul Moore proposed, Councillor Austin seconded and Members agreed the minutes to be a correct record of the Panel meeting held on 14 March 2023.

451. ESTABLISH THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2023-24

Councillor Fellows, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel led the discussion and asked Members for items to add to the Panel's work programme.

Members said that items to include to the work programme could either be one off officer reports, cabinet member presentations and scrutiny review topics. They acknowledged the need to prioritise the review topics in order to work within resources available. They said that there was a need for the Panel to look at wider issues affecting local communities in Thanet. Members said that it was important for the Panel to be flexible with the scoring matrix used in prioritising review topics so that when an urgent and important issue affecting communities arose, the Panel would be able to respond to the need to review such an issue by re-prioritising the list of topics. Thereafter Members requested that these topics be included in the Panel's work programme:

- Cost of living crisis (including debt);
- Health and Wellbeing;
- Housing affordability – how was that impacting on local communities and what TDC could do;
- Broken bins review: Council used to repair bins that whose lids would have been broken during waste collection;
- Parking charges review;
- Review of the Winter Gardens;
- Review of the Toilet Strategy;
- Manston site review. Invite Mr Tony Freudmann to make a presentation;
- Review planning enforcement. What could be done to come up with a fair protocol? The review could also look at planning enforcement at Ramsgate Harbour;
- Review multi agency working in Housing;

- Review regularly the Independent Monitoring Officer's (IMO) implementation plan;
- Housing development: How does the government work out housing numbers for the Local Plan? How are the type, location and quality of housing determined? How do developers negotiate social housing quotas in development projects, sometimes from a high of say 30% to 15%?
- What is the health impact of some of the council's projects?
- Fly tipping and abandoned vehicles;
- Review the impact of tourism on TDC (visitor parking, tourist tax, AirBNBs and visitor economy; can these be handled better?);
- On street parking income review;
- Grant funding: What is TDC missing out on due to lack of staff resources to maximise on grant funding sources? What can the council do to maximise grant funding income?
- How is the Section 106 fund used? Jackey Bakers changing rooms could have been refurbished using these funds;
- Review the lifts and disabled accessibility to Thanet beaches;
- Cabinet Member Presentations: The new Leader of Council to be invited to make a presentation on his vision for the next four years;
- Cabinet Member Presentations: Invite each of the Cabinet Members to present on the key reviews currently taking place in their respective portfolio areas once those reviews have been completed;
- Levelling Up Fund regular projects implementation updates (through officer reports);
- Review of historical decisions made by TDC on key projects.

Members requested that information describing future key decisions to be made should be more detailed in the Forward Plan than was currently the case, (particularly in the 'what this decision will mean' section).

The Panel agreed the following that:

1. Mr Freudmann be invited to make a presentation on Manston site;
2. The topics identified above as potential work programme items be added to the work programme for 2023/24.

452. BUILDING SAFETY ACT 2022

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

- This was a new legislation that enhances the safety of high rise residential buildings;
- The Building Act 2022 introduced new duties regarding fire and building safety;
- It was applicable to the Council's tenants and leaseholders services because it is the service that manages the Council's housing stock;
- TDC owns six high rises residential buildings that fall into the scope of this new legislation;
- The Act required the requirement of a building safety case;
- A building safety case was about all the information about how the risk of fire spread and structural safety of the building was managed;
- This information is submitted annual to the new regulator for building safety;
- This Act also introduced two new roles and responsibilities for landlords or building owners and these are the Accountable Person and Principal Accountable Person;

- Some changes had been made to the Housing team to accommodate these requirements. The Building Safety and Compliance Manager role had been introduced to the team structure;
- A review of the Fire Risk Assessment Policy had been carried out. Changes to the Regulatory Reform Order 2005 for Fire Safety had also been made;
- Enhancements were needed to be made to the compliance for data storage in relation to this new Act.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- What were the resource implications of taking this duty on as a council?
- Had TDC received additional resources to assist carry out these new duties?
- How were these responsibilities articulated to residents?
- How did the Housing team reach out to hard to reach groups and leaseholders?

Ms O'Sullivan responded as follows:

- The council had approached consultants for assistance;
- The Council had not received additional resources to carry out these additional duties;
- £50k a year would be required to administer these new responsibilities;
- The Housing Revenue Account would be used to access resources to fund these activities;
- The Council will conduct safety consultation for residents to find out how people want to be communicated with in terms of safety information;
- A special high rise group is being established for residents living in high rises;
- The high rise blocks already receive a newsletter every quarter that contains building safety information ;
- A questionnaire asking for demographics was circulated to council tenants;
- Hard to reach groups will be included in the residents groups, including leaseholders.

Members noted the report.

453. Q3 AND Q4 2022/23 TENANT AND LEASEHOLDER PERFORMANCE REPORT

Sally O'Sullivan introduced the report and made the following comments:

- Most of the work streams were working fine. However performance regarding domestic electrical safety certificates was struggling at 90% completion;
- MEARS had been contracted to help improve performance and there was steady improvement being rerecorded, which had seen a performance of 91% in Q3 and increasing to 94% in Q4;
- These actions were being monitored weekly in order to quickly detect any decline in performance;
- Capital spend was also struggling at 56%;
- Income collection was performing well.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- The Panel recognised the hard work being put in by the Housing team as improvements across the board had been outstanding;
- One Member thanked the team for the glossary which was in the report as it made referencing much easier;
- Another Member asked whether there was any evidence that any of the council tenants were struggling with the current economic climate;

- There was no gas work still outstanding.

Ms O'Sullivan responded as follows:

- There has been an increase in tenants who are struggling financially, we know this because there has been an increase in referrals to the Finance Wellbeing team for assistance;
- The Household Support Fund had been very useful in assisting tenants who were struggling financially;
- With regards to the gas stats; the team was monitoring performance weekly to ensure that contractors were reporting correctly.

Members noted the report.

454. Q3 AND Q4 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE REPORT

Hannah Thorpe, Head of Strategy and Transformation introduced the report and made the following comments:

- Greenhouse emissions: the data was not yet available as the data sits in various services areas and collating it was a complex process;
- Street cleansing performance data was now being collected via the cameras that are installed on the council's vehicles. 1,200 photos had been inspected so far and the data would be shared in the next performance report;
- Temporary accommodation: The number of households in temporary accommodation was high;
- Over 1,000 trees had been planted in the period under review;
- The Recycling rate had improved although it was still very low. There was a need to increase education to encourage communities to recycle;
- Street Cleansing public perception was at 26%. There was a need to check and understand the reasons behind this data and to do this in conjunction with the new street cleansing performance indicator to understand perceptions and reality;
- Freedom of Information requests had increased.

The Chair thanked the officer for a clear and detailed report and invited the Panel to comment.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- One Member asked why planning appeals were very high and asked whether these were mostly small or big projects;
- There were now an increased number of households in temporary accommodation, what was the reason behind this increase?
- What was the net gain of trees in the district?
- Did the council have information on the number of applications for felling trees?
- The Enforcement team was doing a fabulous job. However there were some properties that needed enforcement;
- One Member said that litter was an issue in Central Harbour after waste collection vehicles. This could be addressed by getting street cleaners to follow bin collection vehicles;
- Graffiti was also on the increase in the same area;
- Street cleansing was not particularly good. Could a review be conducted on the way of working;
- Street bins had been in some locations across the district. However people were still leaving rubbish where those bins used to be located. Could this be reviewed as well?
- Why was the empty homes figure increasing?

Ms Thorpe and Councillor Whitehead, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Housing responded as follows:

- There was a net gain of 1,048 trees;
- Greenhouse emissions were measured from the TDC properties that include council offices and vehicles. A more detailed response to this question could be made available to Members after the meeting;
- Clarification was given that the Street Cleansing performance reported is capturing public perception and not service delivery. Confirmation given that new street cleansing standards were in place and would be published soon on the website;
- Mike Humber, Director of Environment and/or Mark Greening, Commercial Waste Manager could be invited to attend the next meeting of the Panel to make a presentation on street cleansing if members wanted further information on the service;
- Cabinet was focusing on street cleaning;
- Officers were going to provide information on the increase in temporary accommodation after the meeting.

Members noted the report.

Meeting concluded: 8.20 pm