

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 19 September 2023 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor Phil Fellows (Chair); Councillors D Green, Austin, Bright, Britcher, Currie, Davis, Farooki, Paul Moore, Packman and Worrow

In Attendance: Councillor Manners, Towning

464. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the following Members:

Councillor Wing, substituted by Councillor Garner;
Councillor Kup, substituted by Councillor Wright;
Councillor D'abbro, substituted by Councillor J. Bright;
Councillor Pope.

465. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

466. BROADSTAIRS FLOOD AND COAST PROTECTION SCHEME

Mike Humber introduced the report and made the following comments:

- The Broadstairs Flood and Coast Protection Scheme was funded via the environment agency and local levy grant funding to the value of £880,000.
- The Broadstairs pier was first constructed 250 years ago, and played a vital role in stabilising the beach at Viking Bay.
- If the coastal defence, including the pier, were to fail in the next 20 years, it was estimated that 54 homes were expected to be lost to coastal erosion.
- The scheme would reduce flood risk to properties on Harbour Street in Broadstairs and also to the rear of Viking Bay.
- The risk of not taking action was that low-lying properties would experience flooding more regularly.
- The scheme included works to the facing blocks of the pier, repairs to the fishermans slipway, improvements to the sea wall and repairs to the cobblestone steps to the foreshore.
- Additionally, the scheme would improve the standard of flood defence from one in 10 year standard, to a one in 200 year standard.
- Planning permission for the scheme was granted in June 2023, tender documents had been prepared ready for competitive procurement.
- Construction phases were estimated to be April 2024 – June 2024.

Members noted the report.

467. VIKING BAY TO DUMPTON GAP SEA WALL REPAIRS SCHEME

Mike Humber introduced the report making the following key points:

- The Viking Bay to Dumpton Gap Sea Wall Repair Scheme was a capital maintenance project.
- The scheme focussed on an 1100 metre length of sea wall between Viking Bay and Dumpton Gap.

- The sea wall was approximately 60 years old; many of the structural components had become eroded by wave energy and tidal action.
- Following a successful application for grant funding, via the environment agency flood and coastal erosion risk fund, £406,000 had been allocated to the scheme.
- It was of high importance to maintain the existing infrastructure that the council had around its coastline.

Members asked questions and made the following comments:

- Members were pleased that schemes like this were taking place.
- Ramsgate East Pier had suffered significant damage recently, were there any plans to look at this?
- Would there be a published full scheme of works regarding how the work would be carried out?
- In Broadstairs by the clifftop there had been a severe sinkhole, has there been a full survey across this entire area?
- Was this considered funding that had been bid for competitively?
- Queries were raised regarding the projected lifespan of the work, was the work considered future proofed?
- Was there any plans to refurbish parts of Ramsgate Western Undercliff?

Mike Humber responded with the following points:

- The East Pier at Ramsgate was inspected by the maintenance team, this damage would be looked into.
- When the programme is confirmed, there would be engagement with local businesses. The timing of the works would be sensitive. There would be consultation with businesses to minimise the impact.
- The sinkhole was considered a fairly unusual situation. This had most likely been caused by groundwater moving and washing the fine material out behind and gradually causing a hole to occur. Generally this was not the case around the coastline.
- The funding criteria was outcome measure based.
- All the design work takes into account the effects of climate change. The council would work to the latest standards. The economics were usually based on a 100 year life span.
- There was a plan to maintain the Ramsgate Western Undercliff to keep this safe.

Members noted the report.

468. LED STREET LIGHTING CONTRACT

Mike Humber introduced the report making the following key points:

- The LED Street Lighting Contract was a capital scheme in the 2023/24 programme.
- The Council was responsible for approximately 500 street lights around the district.
- This contract would lead to improvements to approximately 200 street lights, with works including either a new LED lamp, a brand new entire LED fitting or a new column.
- Through stakeholder engagement with Broadstairs Town Council there had been a contribution secured to undertake works at Victoria Parade and Broadstairs Harbour.
- Tender documents had been prepared. The planned time scale was for works to begin in January 2024 and completed by July 2024.
- The light improvements were all across the district.

Members commented and asked the following questions:

- Concerns were raised regarding Broadstairs Town Council's contribution, officers were asked to ensure that the contribution would be used to cover lighting upgrade costs in specific parts noted by the Town Council and not in other parts of the district.

- Was there a prioritisation of areas?
- Would heritage columns be maintained and preserved?
- What were the locations of the street lights which would be updated?
- Did the scheme include sturgeon lights?

Mike Humber responded to members comments and questions:

- The contribution was for enhanced lighting. The contribution wouldn't be spent elsewhere, it would be spent on Victoria Parade and at the Harbour.
- There was a prioritisation of areas across the district. Minimising impact was of high importance.
- The majority of work did not include the columns and focussed on the lamps themselves. This would be further looked into.
- These were across the district. Further detail would be provided.
- The scheme did not include the sturgeon lights. This is detail which would be further looked into.

Members noted the report.

469. COASTAL ZONE MAINTENANCE CONTRACT

Mike Humber introduced the report making the following key points:

- The council had 16 miles of coastline around the district that was maintained by the technical services team.
- This was maintained through a maintenance contract, which was due to expire in January 2024.
- It was proposed to put in a three year contract, with a two year extension option.
- This was base budget funded revenue maintenance work, informed by regular detailed inspections of the coastline by the technical team.
- Without this contract the council would be unable to react to urgent routine and repair works and be open to an increased level of insurance liability.
- The budget value each year for the contract was £244,000.

Members commented and asked the following questions:

- Was there a review process for the current contractors?
- Was the contract open tendered?

Mike Humber responded:

- The technical services team carried out inspections and observations on site. There was an inspection before works had been paid for.
- The contract was competitively tendered, and was considered open tendered.

Members noted the report.

470. NEW CONTRACT FOR THE SUPPLY OF ELECTRICITY TO 264 SITES WITHIN TDC'S PORTFOLIO

Matt Sanham introduced the report making the following key points:

- The report asked members of the panel to review the new contract for the supply of electricity to 264 sites within the council's portfolio.
- The council's current electric supply contract came to an end at the end of September 2023, and required reprocurring.

Members commented and asked questions:

- Why was this item coming to the panel late, in relation to the end of the contract date?
- Were the 264 all considered the council's sites, or were these properties which the council let out?

Matt Sanham responded to members:

- The team were late in finding out the contract would be in excess of £750,000 and thus a key decision.
- It was unconfirmed whether the properties were let. However, if the properties were let the costs would be passed on.

Members noted the report.

471. DEPARTMENT FOR LEVELLING UP, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES FUNDING UPDATE SIMPLIFICATION PATHFINDER PILOT

Louise Askew introduced the report making the following key points:

- The council had been lobbying central government in order to simplify the process around the three capital programmes: the future high street fund, town deal and the levelling up fund.
- The council had been successfully awarded over £50m of capital funding for projects across Ramsgate and Margate.
- Thanet District Council was one of ten authorities to be part of the simplification pathfinder pilot.
- It was of importance to note that this pilot was about governance and managing reporting back to central government.
- The projects had been agreed and had been through the formal government approvals.
- There would be one single allocation across the portfolio. However, on a project by project basis there was individual budget sheets, and projects would be checked against these sheets.
- There was a set of outcomes and outputs. The projects had been profiled across the new intervention themes. Most notably: connectivity, unlocking industrial and commercial development, strengthening the visitor and local service economy and improving quality of life for residents.
- Reporting would happen once every three monthly, under a red, amber and green scheme focussing on spend and progress. There would also be one six monthly robust report with more narrative around the projects delivery.
- Any changes over £5M within the programme would go back to central government for approval. However, anything under this sum would be approved through the local authority as the accountable body.
- Central government required the council, as the accountable body for the funding, to establish a consolidated governance structure. This would be a strategic oversight board. There was a requirement to have certain people on this board. This would include all levels of government including MP's, county, district and town councils where applicable. Furthermore this included businesses, investors and representatives from the community.

Speaking under Council Procedure Rule 20.1 a Member asked questions and made a comment as follows:

- What would the process be in regards to individual ward councillors to scrutinise the delivery of projects?

- How frequently and how would councillors be updated, was this in line with the quarterly and six monthly reporting schedules?
- There was concern around the light of cost inflation that money may be moved from one project to another.

Louise Askew responded with the following points:

- There were future events being planned, whereby ward councillors and the broader community could attend and find out about the deliveries of the projects.
- All the procurement projects would be coming to cabinet in terms of the approval process.
- The website was frequently updated, and further information was provided into the loop and Colin Carmichael's fortnightly email to members.
- If there was anything specific to a ward councillor, they would be invited through the normal process to find out.

Panel Members made comments and asked questions as follows:

- Congratulations were given for the successful pilot.
- The red, amber, green scheme was considered a positive.
- Questioning regarding how would members of the public and businesses would get involved in the governance structure was raised.
- Had it been considered to have two boards rather than one?
- The new arrangement was considered a positive step and would make the administration of the three schemes more straightforward.
- If funds were reallocated away from Smack Boys, can it be guaranteed that the fabric of the building would be protected?
- The board was an excellent idea, however was it intended to supplement the role of the panel?

Louise Askew responded with the following points:

- The board was not considered a decision making board. The board would not be too large so that discussions are hard to be had. The board would be a way to understand the large sums of money and easily participate in discussions around managing the funding.
- The two highway schemes would now be brought together.
- The council was following the guidance to have one board rather than two. The board was focussed around the governance arrangements. Although the projects were considered specific to towns, the delivery mechanisms were at a strategic level.
- If funding was reallocated the outputs and outcomes still have to be delivered. Opportunities for the Smack Boys building were being looked into.
- The council would remain the accountable body, cabinet would remain the decision maker.

Members noted the report.

472. PUBLISHING OF THE TLS ANNUAL REPORT

Sally O'Suvillian introduced the report making the following key points:

- The report gave detail on the performance for the year.
- The report would be published on the council's website. Additionally, there would be a plain text version that could be read by a web reader.
- Hard copies of the report would be taken to community events.
- The report had been reviewed by the tenant and leaseholder group.

Members commented and asked the following questions:

- Thanks to the team for the report.
- The report was considered to have good practice.
- Was there a reason why 1/3 of the garages noted in the report were unoccupied?

Sally O'Suvillian responded with the following points:

- The garages were not in a state to be occupied at the moment there is a programme in place to bring up the standard of garages ready to be let. There was no shortage of interest for the garages.

Members noted the report.

Meeting concluded : 8.29 pm