

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 May 2024 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor David Green (Chair); Councillors Bright, Britcher, Davis, Farooki, Garner, Kup, Packman, Pope, W Scobie, Wing, Worrow and Wright

In Attendance: Councillor Keen

21. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the following councillors:

Councillor Fellows;
Councillor Austin, substituted by Councillor Garner;
Councillor Paul Moore, substituted by Councillor Wright;
Councillor Currie.

22. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

There were no declarations made at the meeting.

23. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Davis proposed, Councillor Britcher seconded and the Panel agreed the minutes to be a correct record of the meeting held on 16 April 2024.

24. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATION BY CLLR KEEN -YOUTH COUNCIL AND YOUTH PROVISIONS IN THANET

During her presentation, Councillor Keen made the following comments:

- The Council was involved in a number of youth projects that included the following:
 - Knife Awareness Programme;
 - Knife Sculpture;
 - Park Life;
 - Ladder of Risk;
 - Ellington Park Youth Café.
- Knife crime awareness was delivered at about nine schools and colleges;
- It was a successful programme. The programme taught young people what was permissible to carry on them and what was not;
- A knife amnesty had been successful and it led to the recovery of over a thousand knives in the bins that had been provided through the programme;
- East Kent College were going to create a knife sculpture which would be mobile and would be carried around the district and displayed at given locations as part of the awareness programme;
- The Thanet Youth Council was established in November 2022;
- It met monthly and was the obvious voice of young people in the district;
- It was youth led. They chair and identify items for the agenda for their meetings. The Council was supported by officers in the Community Team;
- The membership was constantly moving as the young people grew older;

- They hold their meetings at the Thanet District Council offices;
- They designed their own logo and in that process they had to learn how to work as a team and negotiate within the team and come to an agreement;
- They Youth Council would like to publicise their work more in order to engage more young people in the district.

Park Life Community Hub

- This was an multi agency outdoor activities initiative for young people who come to interact with various agencies that included the Police;
- The Youth Council a stall where they talked about their work.

Ellington Pak Youth Cafe

- This was also a multi-agency initiative with activities similar to the Park Life Community Hub.

Ladder of Risk

- This project raised awareness about risks to young people;
- Pickle Ball Court Refurbishment. This would be opened in Summer for young people.

Thanet Games

- Clubs were coming together to stage games for young people in July.
- The Youth Council was looking for new members. About half a dozen young people attended its meetings;
- There were plans for a schools' event in Broadstairs to encourage the school councils to join the Youth Council;
- Councilors were encouraged to publicise the Youth Council activities on their social media pages.

The full details of the presentation are attached as Annex 1 to the minutes.

The Panel asked questions and made comments as follows:

- What was the size of the youth team that was supporting the Youth Council?
- The Youth Council should be allocated a small budget so that they could learn how to manage budgets;
- Had the Council surveyed young people like it does when surveys are conducted for local residents in order to find out what they needed?
- Funding for provisions for young people was an issue which required the Council to work collaboratively with Kent County Council;
- Young people should be able to access pa£20 million funding that had been allocated to Ramsgate. Would the Council be able to allocate funding to you people from the £20 million fund?
- The Police and Crime Commissioner allocated £30k to Thanet District Council (TDC). Could young people be able to access part of this fund?
- Was there anywhere in Thanet where there were blue packs?
- Was the Ellington Park Youth Café a TDC initiative? If it was, could this be replicated across the district (to other towns)?
- It was important for the Council to shout out about the work it was doing with the Youth Council as well as other activities related to you provisions in the district;
- Could the discussions that take place in the Youth Council and activities by the Youth Council be shared with Councillors?

Councillor Keen and Penny Button responded as follows:

- There were five officers who supported the Youth Council. These officers also have other roles in addition to working with young people;
- The Youth Council had a budget of £1,000 that they were responsible for;

- Conducting a survey for you people to find out what their priorities were was something the Council would like to do;
- Regarding young people accessing the £20million fund allocated to Ramsgate, it was important to understand the conditions that came with such funding. The Council was still to understand those conditions;
- In order to access the £30k fund, the Council needed to put in a young people project proposal first;
- The Council would try to submit a project proposal;
- The Council had blue packs at strategic locations across the district;
- Once proven to be a success, it would be a good idea to roll out the youth café initiative across the district. Currently this was work in progress;
- Councillors should invite the Youth Council to their ward activities where they would give young people an opportunity to take part;
- Information about the activities of the Youth Council could be added into the newsletter that is circulated to councillors.

The Panel noted the report.

25. PORT OF RAMSGATE - MAINTENANCE DREDGING

Mike Humber, Director of Environment introduced the report and made the following points:

- This report describes the proposed plan for maintenance dredging at the Port of Ramsgate for this financial year;
- The dredging plan will require a key decision to undertake a single dredging campaign with an estimated value of £362k;
- This proposal will be recommended to Cabinet on 30 May and if approved, the work will be undertaken via an existing 4+1 years' maintenance dredging term contract that was awarded to the marine contractor Van Oord in 2021;
- The total value of the 2024/25 dredging plan is £477k, the budget value is £325k;
- It will therefore also be recommended on 30 May that Cabinet approves a one-off General Fund revenue budget virement from the Corporate Contingency budget to fund the estimated £152k shortfall;
- The proposed dredging is via a method known as hydrodynamic dredging which mobilises deposited sediments back into the water column. The suspended sediment then leaves the harbour on a falling tide;
- Hydrodynamic dredging methods have been used at Ramsgate for approx. 12 years and have proven to be more financially efficient than mechanical methods such as grab dredging;
- Previous hydrodynamic dredging campaigns at Ramsgate have delivered PV productivity rates of approximately £2.00/m³ of sediment removed. By comparison, mechanical dredging can cost much more, in the region of £3.50/m³;
- The dredging planned this year will focus on the port turning circle, port entrance, harbour entrance and the approach to Berth 4/5. The council has a contractual obligation to provide vessels with access to Berth 4/5 for the purpose of discharging cargoes to the Brett Aggregates site;
- The volume of sediment to be removed during this dredging campaign is approximately 124,000m³ which for context is roughly the same in volume as the water held in 50 Olympic size swimming pools;
- It is important that dredging at the port is undertaken within the next 1-2 months to maintain an acceptable depth of water in the port at all states of the tide. It also makes sense to plan this work over the summer to avoid the increased bad weather risk associated with winter dredging;

- In order to secure the dredger in June, an order has been placed for a smaller 75,000m³ dredging campaign at an estimated cost of £228k. This will improve vessel access but without the more substantial dredge campaign there is a greater chance that we would need to undertake further work later in the financial year;
- The approval of the proposed key decision will increase the quantity of dredging undertaken allowing for a greater depth to be achieved across the entire area to be dredged;
- Environmental monitoring will be undertaken alongside the dredging operation to mitigate the risk of adverse effects on nearby receptors. This is important as the port is in close proximity to multiple designated sites that are rich in biodiversity;
- The dredging planned for the port in June will take 2-3 weeks to complete. Engagement will take place with stakeholders at the port and the harbour and updates will be provided as required via usual communication channels including Notices to Mariners. The plan for this year can be found at appendix A of the report.

The Panel asked questions and made comments as follows:

- A councillor asked what the legal impact would be for the council if dredging was not carried out;
- The budget for port maintenance had been reduced year on year. Why was that approach taken by Council?
- Had any consideration been made regarding using a dredging method that would become more cost effective over time?
- The Council did not spend the budget on the port maintenance when it needed to have done it Was there any mileage for the Council to dredge a depth of four metres for Berths 4 and 5 that were only used by Bretts?
- What percentage of that budget allocation was for dredging Berth 4/5?
- The Panel welcomed the dredging proposals. With hindsight the Council should have allocated more funding for the port maintenance over the years;
- Would there be a point in time when there would be no dredging?
- Was the material that was dredged being deposited where it could end up on the Ramsgate Main Sands and was the sediment clean material?
- Was it possible to reduce the ingrain into the harbour in the longer terms?
- What position was the port in financially?
- Which corporate contingency budget was this virement coming from?
- During the budget process when the Council was setting the reserves levels, was this virement factored in?

Mike Humber responded to the Panel's questions and comments as follows:

- The Council had a legal obligation as statutory harbour authority to maintain the conditions of the harbour;
- Not dredging risked vessels running aground and this would impede trade;
- Sea material stayed suspended if the water is moving but when it approached the harbour, it would settle on the bed of the harbour. This is what creates the need for dredging;
- Depth was monitored three times a year. It was usually the case that more sediment was created during winter periods;
- Most ports conducted dredging operations to maintain access for vessels;
- The Council had contractual obligations with Bretts and also as a port authority to keep the port accessible to vessels;
- The Council also monitored the chalk reef at Pegwell Bay to make sure it was not affected by any dredging activities;

- The Council also practiced a 6-hour window between the dredging cycles to avoid any sediment affecting the chalk reef;
- Water dredging could not be used in the marina;
- There was a designated site for depositing the material from grab dredging. The method suggested was hydrodynamic and so the sediment would be reintroduced to the waters column and taken away on the tide, as a result, sediment would therefore not be deposited at the Ramsgate Main Sands;
- The Council also carried out water sampling to check if there was any contamination in the sediment;
- It was not possible to reduce ingrain due to the natural movement of tides and vessel movements;
- The council published accounts for the port annually. The reserves covered any eventualities including issues relating to the port;
- Officers would share information with the Panel after the meeting regarding next year's implications for the port budget.

Thereafter the Panel noted the report.

26. APPROVAL FOR THE FOLLOWING TLS POLICIES: REVIEWED COMPLIANCE POLICY

Sally O'Sullivan, Head of Tenant and Lease Holder Services introduced the report and made the following comments:

- When the service transitioned in October 2020, the Council adopted new landlord compliance policies. These policies were drafted by a consultant and they were very robust due to the position that the Council was in regarding being under notice by the Regulator for Social Housing;
- Policies need to be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they are still working in the way that they were intended and are kept up to date with current legislation or regulations. The polices for that have been reviewed are:
 - Gas Safety
 - Electrical Safety
 - Passenger Lifts
 - Water Hygiene
 - Asbestos
- The fire safety policy was reviewed and adopted in June 23, following the introduction of the Building Safety Act 2022 and strengthening of fire safety regulations. The changes made to the 5 policies are:
 - Removal of repetition, thus shortening the policies;
 - Ensuring the policies reflect current legislation, regulation and best practice;
 - Removal of reference to other council departments;
 - Complete review of reporting regime.
- The Tenant and Leaseholder Services (TLS) team provided reports to enable the Council to monitor its programmes, taking appropriate action where necessary and giving assurance. At the point of transition, it was important that the services provided robust reporting with early warning systems in place;
- The team had looked to reducing the reporting through these new policies as the compliance workstreams were now operating as business as usual, rather than recovery. This meant that much of the reporting was now redundant;
- The service could still provide assurance with a high level overview of the compliance position with commentary that would explain any fluctuations in statistics;

- Any cause for concern would be escalated at the time and dealt with immediately and this would be reflected through performance reports with an explanation in the commentary.

The Panel asked questions and made comments as follows:

- How often were these policies reviewed?
- Did tenants groups make any recommendations for consideration by the Council?
- Should these policies not be reviewed annual as part of best practice?
- The Panel thanked the tenant and leaseholder services team and said that officers had worked hard to correct some of the problems that tenants experienced during the time when council housing stock was under East Kent Services;
- Ward Councillors were now fewer referrals from residents.

Sally O'Sullivan responded to the Panel's questions and comments as follows:

- Policies were reviewed every two to three years;
- Tenants group did not forward any recommendations for the reviewing policies;
- In 2020 one of the reasons for bringing the service in-house was the issue of compliance;
- The health and safety statutory including gas safety compliance were the main issues of concern;
- Thanet District Council self-referred itself to the Regulator for Social Housing Landlords. The Council took part in monthly meetings with the Regulator as part of progress monitoring;
- The Council worked through this process to the satisfaction of the Regulator and the Regulation Notice was removed in late 2022;
- The TLS team always undertook risk assessments which would result in action to correct any situation;
- The team also reported on the performance of the service quarterly to the Overview & Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet;
- The Council was now in a good place regarding its statutory compliance position.

The Panel noted the report.

27. ESTABLISH THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2024-25

Councillor Green, Chairing the Panel meeting proposed and the Panel agreed that Councillor Edwards and Councillor Will Scobie be added to the External Grant Funding Review Working Party membership.

When asked how the working party chairs were selected, Nick Hughes, Committee Services Manager said that this was done at the Panel meeting when the sub group was set up. He further said that there was an agreement not to consider political balance for this membership. Members would volunteer to be on such groups during the Panel meeting. The working party could also agree its Chair if none was appointed by the Panel.

Councillor Davis reported to the Panel that the External Grant Funding Review Working Party met on 13 May and reviewed their terms of reference and recommended that these should be changed to address the question "How can we maximise grant funding coming into Thanet?" Councillor Davis said that the working party agreed to forward the draft terms of reference to the Panel:

- Report to focus on smaller grants (say up to £250k);

- Focus primarily on smaller voluntary sector bidders & how we can support them;
- Ask them what information & skills they have and identify where the gaps are;
- Ask town & parish councils, infrastructure bodies & funders re their experience of working with Thanet organisations & what might help improve success rates;
- Outline what's worked, what hasn't and how we might tailor our support in future for greater impact without overburdening officers/ creating significant extra costs.

Councillor Farooki proposed Councillor Wing seconded and the Panel agreed that the draft terms of reference and work programme of the External Grant Funding Review Working Party be brought back to the 18 June Panel meeting.

The Chair reminded the Panel that officers had been asked to bring regular project update reports for the regeneration projects being implemented in the district. The Chair said that they had not received these reports.

Bob Porter, Director of Place made the following comments:

- Two reports had been presented to the Panel with one detailed report having been considered by the Panel towards the end of 2023;
- Officers would be bringing back detailed reports of any projects that the Council was working on. Officers were working on a new project management system;
- This would provide a better way for sharing progress on project implementation with councillors. The reporting mechanism to be adopted would alert councillors on progress as delivery occurred on key projects. Officers would not be able to provide regular project updates on everything;
- A size assessment tool for assessing the impact of the projects by each manager. This would trigger some projects to be reported to the Overview & Scrutiny Panel and Cabinet;
- This assessment tool would also be used to ascertain risks that projects would bring to the Council and how such risks could be mitigated. This approach would assist identify those projects that needed to be reported to the Panel and Cabinet.

The Chair was satisfied with the detailed response provided by Bob Porter.

Councillor Scobie proposed, Councillor Worrow seconded and the Panel agreed that the Leader be invited to the June or July Panel to make a presentation on the progress regarding implementation of the five new corporate priorities.

A request was made for the Panel to receive an update scrutiny training regarding the new government scrutiny guidance.

Nick Hughes, Committee Services Manager advised the meeting that Democratic Services were going to conduct a scrutiny refresher training on 24 July 2024 and this would cover the new government guidance.

Members agreed the work programme for 2024/25 and noted the report.

Meeting concluded: 8.44 pm