

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

Minutes of the meeting held on 19 November 2024 at 7.00 pm in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Cecil Street, Margate, Kent.

Present: Councillor Phil Fellows (Chair); Councillors D Green, Austin, J Bright, Currie, Davis, Donaldson, Huxley, Kup, Paul Moore, Packman, Pope, W Scobie, Wing and Worrow

In Attendance: Councillor Garner

52. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from the following members:

Councillor Britcher, substituted by Councillor Huxley;
Councillor Farooki, substituted by Councillor Donaldson.

53. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Pope declared a significant interest regarding agenda item 9 on the External Grant Funding Scrutiny Review Report.

54. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Currie proposed, Councillor Packman seconded and the Panel agreed the minutes to be a correct record of the meeting held on 15 October 2024.

55. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATION

Councillor Keen made the following comments as part of her presentation:

- A lot of work on knife crime awareness had been done a few months ago around knife crime in order for young people to understand the ladder of risk;
- This awareness campaign had been hugely successful. The campaign reached out to 1033 young people in colleges and schools across the district since it was started in summer 2023;
- Amnesty for the surrender of knives led to significant number knives being surrendered;
- A large sculpture would be made out of these knives. The design had been chosen and the work would be completed by Easter 2025;
- The Thanet Youth Council that was established in 2022 had proven successful. It had a small membership mostly of young people still in school. They had designed their own logo;
- The Youth Council had identified “Keeping Thanet a safe place for young people” as their priority;
- This led to a project being completed at Dane Park;
- The Youth Council was represented at the Independent Advisory Group (IAG), a Kent Police working group. Chief Inspector Ian Swallow attends meetings for this group;
- An event was held by the Parklife Community Hub and it was attended by a number of you people organisations that included the Thanet Youth Council (who had their own stall);

- The Ellington Park Youth Café was established as a safe space for young people to hang out. This builds their confidence;
- There was the Ladder of Risk, which was a mat that would be placed in a room for young people to use as a tool that they could use to identify risks;
- Pickleball Courts were refurbished;
- A Safety in Action event was held in March each year for age groups 10-15 years;
- It was worth noting that the PIE Factory was under threat due to funding challenges. Thanet District Council was looking at how the PIE Factory could be best supported;
- The government had just announced a Youth Strategy. It would help to study these government proposals and see how this new strategy could create opportunities for young people in Thanet.

Members asked questions and made comments as follows:

- Were there any groups that the Council mostly focused on?
- Would the sculpture be moved around the district on a tour?
- The closure of youth clubs for under 18 year olds had a detrimental effect on children. It was pleasing to note that the Council was working on youth projects;
- It was important that such information on youth projects should be shared with ward councillors. There should be a Council protocol in place that required for information to be shared with councillors for events that were managed by the Council and were taking place in wards;
- Members were concerned by the financial challenges being faced by the PIE Factory. In what way was TDC engaging the organisation to provide support?
- Could the Council the budget allocation for the Youth Council be increased from the current £1000 next year?
- What work was the Council going to undertake with the Youth Council to increase safe spaces for young people across the district?
- How was the Council going to involve young people in the design of safe spaces and recreational facilities as this would enable the Council to understand what young people wanted?
- An effective way to engage young people in school would be through engaging ward councillors as they played a liaison role for schools;
- Was the Council going to review how it could support those youth who were leaving the Youth Council and keeping them motivated as they transition into formal employment, having left school.

Councillor Keen, Mike Humber, Director of Environment and Penny Button, Head of Neighbourhoods responded to member questions and comments as follows:

- The knife sculpture would be taken around the district;
- Thanet District Council did not provide youth services;
- Cabinet was reviewing ways for assisting the PIE Factory so that they could continue with their work in the district;
- The £1,000 budget for the Youth Council was still unused. Cabinet was not sure whether the Youth Council needed a bigger allocation or not;
- The Council conducted "Feel Safe" surveys at schools. A number of issues were brought up for discussion at Youth Council meetings in order to capture the views of young people;

- Where there was scope to put up new equipment around the thirty-three play areas across the district, the Council would consider such proposals. The Council would like to engage young people and parishes on these issues;
- TDC was considering a number of approaches that offered opportunities like apprenticeships to young people.

The Panel thanked the Portfolio Holder for the presentation and noted the report.

56. REVIEW THE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2024-25

Councillor J. Bright, Chair of the Youth Services Provision Review Working Party gave a verbal updated on the work of the sub group. Councillor Bright said that the working party was meeting on 21 November to agree their work activities for the review.

The Panel Chair said that the following cabinet member presentations were lined up for future Panel meetings:

- Councillor K. Bright would present on Parking at the 10 December 2024;
- Councillor Keen would be invited to attend the 21 January 2025 meeting to present on Poverty in Thanet;
- Councillor Alboin would be invited to the 11 February 2025 meeting to present on biodiversity;
- CEx would be invited to make a presentation on “The potential benefits and challenges to TDC of contemporary business practices such as hot desking, working from home, customer relationship management and artificial intelligence.”

One member requested for a Cabinet member presentation on Events in the district.

The Panel noted the report.

57. EVALUATION OF RETENTION OR DISPOSAL OPTIONS FOR HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT UNITS

Ashley Jackson, Head of Housing and Planning introduced the report and make the following comments:

- The Housing Team had worked in partnership with the Tenant and Leasehold Team to produce this report for consideration by the Panel and later by the Cabinet. It outlines the ownership and refurbishment options for the following properties:
 - 37 Hereson Road, Ramsgate, CT11 7DP;
 - Flat 3 Cobb Court, 27 King Street, Margate, CT9 1BZ and
 - 1 Park Lodge, Montefiore Avenue, Ramsgate, Kent, CT11 8BD.
- All three residential dwellings were currently owned by the council. This report examines both the costs of refurbishing the properties and the potential capital receipts from their disposal at auction;
- The recommendation was to dispose of these properties and reinvest the proceeds of the sales in the council’s Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programme, to purchase homes that were more suitable for households on the Housing register;

- The total estimated cost of the essential maintenance required, based on the higher end of the quoted range for all properties, was £291,665;
- Independent valuation reports provided current market valuations for each property:
 - 37 Hereson Road, Ramsgate, CT11 7DP: £102,500.
 - Flat 3 Cobb Court, 27 King Street, Margate, CT9 1BZ and freehold for 27 Kings Street: £328,500.
 - 1 Park Lodge, Montefiore Avenue, Ramsgate, Kent, CT11 8BD and freehold for flats 1, 2 and 3 Park Lodge: £201,000.
- In total, if each property and associated freehold where applicable was sold at its valuation, it would generate £632,000;
- The homes in question would not achieve a required EPC rating due to their age and original construction. 1 Park Lodge and 3 Cobb Court 27 Kings Street were both below the EPC BAND C; which was the minimum the Council would want for properties within its housing stock. Both were Grade II listed buildings and it would be very difficult and expensive make any changes to these properties even if it was possible at all;
- The investment required to get these homes to a suitable environmental standard would be £250,000; which was disproportionate to the amount the Council spent on other properties through the voids or planned maintenance programme. This was the reason why the properties had been empty since being vacated;
- Listed buildings cost more to maintain as parts, materials and labour cost more. This was specifically the case with 1 Park Lodge and 3 Cobb Court both Grade II listed. Park Lodge needed considerable external work (e.g. windows and re-pointing) which would be more costly due to their listed status;
- Two of the homes in question were the last properties in a block that were now all leaseholders and managing multiple tenures in a block was trickier for the TLS team. Cobb Court and Park Lodge were both part of 'blocks' that the Council no longer wholly owned.

Members said that the properties seemed to be good value for money.

The Panel noted the report.

58. ADOPTION OF THE FOLLOWING NEW POLICIES: DECANT POLICY AND DAMP, MOULD AND CONDENSATION POLICY

Sally O’Sullivan Head of Tenant and Leaseholder Services introduced the report and made the following points:

- The need for a new policy could be identified in different ways, in this case, the driver for the Damp mould and condensation policy was legislative and for the decant policy officers identified a need within Council service that would assist with consistent decision making;
- The requirement for a DM&C policy is due to Awabbs Law, which was introduced in July 2023 as part of the Social Housing regulation act. Awabbs law prescribes strict timescales to respond to reports of damp and mould;
- The policy was based on the Council’s policy on what the law directed councils to do. This statutory requirement therefore provided clear guidelines to officers to advise tenants what they could expect from Council service and ensuring the Council was operating within the legislation;

- The Decant policy provided a framework for officers to work by to ensure consistency was applied when faced with a situation where a tenant was needed to be decanted from their home;
- The policy describes the reasons why a tenant might need to be decanted, what the council would do in response and if under what circumstances compensation would be considered.

Member asked questions and made comments as follows:

- If the Council fails to deliver on the policies, would it be helpful to add in some wording that residents can go through the Council's complaints policy first for resolution before seeking legal action?
- Would these policies apply to private sector landlords?

Sally O'Sullivan said that these policies would only cover Council properties and the point raised by a member that adding reference to seek resolution via the Council's complaints policy would be added to the policy document.

The Panel noted the report.

59. LOCAL PLAN MOTION

Mr Craig Solly and Ms Jacqueline Brown addressed the Panel under Public Speaking Procedure Rules.

Ashley Jackson introduced the report and made the following comments:

- The purpose of this report to the Panel was to provide advice to Members in relation to a Notice of Motion regarding the Local Plan;
- The Notice of Motion to revoke the Thanet Local Plan 2020 was not supported and the reasons for that were:
 - The Council had no legal power to revoke a Local Plan;
 - The Council would have to meet the housing requirements generated through the application of the NPPF, rather than the Local Plan;
 - The Council would be at greater risk of planning by Appeal, and could also be at risk of Government intervention; and
 - Important Local Plan policies would be lost, and could not be used during the consideration of planning applications.
- To give a bit more context which was included in the report the Council did not have the power to unilaterally rescind the existing Local Plan before preparing a new Plan;
- There was a power for the Secretary of State (SOS) to revoke a local plan at the request of a local planning authority. It was understood that no such request had ever been made, and the SoS had never exercised this power;
- In the unlikely event that the SoS decided to revoke a Local Plan, the Council would have to rely on the NPPF and other Government guidance in making decisions on planning applications;
- Not only would this entail the loss of a sufficient housing land supply for the Plan period, but it would also remove other key Local Plan policies as well. This was in relation to minimum internal space standards for new housing and water efficiency standards (national standards implemented through policy), affordable housing, Green Wedges, agricultural land, support for social infrastructure and contributions to Bird Wise.

Speaking under Council Procedure Rule 20.1 Councillor Pugh made the following comments:

- The Panel should refer this notice of motion back to Full Council;
- The motion was accepted in its entirety when it was first presented to Full Council;
- If the avenue was to write to the Secretary of State, then the Council should do that and exercise that right;
- The District did not have as many green wedges as was thought to be the case. This was an opportunity to start again and allocate development sites in town centres, particularly as the large retailers were now moving out of town centres;
- Mill Lane Car Park and Leopold Car Park were underutilised facilities. These could be turned into housing. This would create more business for retailers in town centres;
- Thanet District Council was threatened constantly with interventions by the government. However interventions never came. There were other Councils across the country that did not have local plans.

The Panel asked questions and made comments as follows:

- This Panel was purely advisory in its role;
- The Local Plan was a framework issue that the Panel could make recommendations to Cabinet for Cabinet to recommend further to Full Council;
- The motion was asking Council to withdraw some of the planning allocations. However TDC did not have the power to do that;
- The Council could not revoke the local Plan, but could seek the Secretary of State to do so;
- There was some merit to discuss the issue concerning brown fields;
- The motion was not ruled out of order;
- The national targets for housing developments could not be achieved. The landscape had changed since Covid, but the government had not responded to this where coastal areas now had more people who had moved to these areas, thereby pushing rents up;
- The current approach to planning was not achieving the target for affordable housing;
- Revoking the Local Plan would mean that the Council would be unable to challenge housing developers;
- Since there was no space for new residents to move into the district, Thanet needed special consideration. That was why the Council should petition the Secretary of State to revoke the current Local Plan;
- What the district needed were jobs for residents to have income, not building more housing. That is why it was necessary to move the motion to Full Council;
- This Local Plan was adopted by previous councils, it was therefore necessary to adhere to the current Local Plan provisions and implement it;
- These issues being highlighted in the discussion were caused by a lack of leadership when there was no overall control of the Council;
- The Local Plan was being revised through the work of a cabinet advisory group. Members were asked to consider the impact of supporting such a motion on the Council as revoking the Plan would lead to building on green wedges;

- This motion should not have gone to Full Council;
- Legal consequences for adopting such a motion should be explored and the Council should seek the highest possible legal advice on the matter;
- Full Council could not debate a motion that the Council could not legally act on;
- An amendment could be suggested to the motion to say that TDC writes to the Secretary of State to revoke the Local Plan. This would then enable the motion to be debated in full at Full Council;
- It would be irresponsible to revoke the Plan as it would be a costly exercise;
- Revoking the Local Plan would entail a deluge of litigation cases that the Council would face;
- It was important to debate this motion at Full council as doing so would send the message home that housing numbers were set by the government.

Members of the Panel were encouraged by the Chair to attend the next Cabinet meeting to speak on the subject under Procedure Rule 20.1 and put their views across to Cabinet during discussion of this matter.

Councillor Kup proposed and Councillor Wing seconded that the motion be referred back to Full Council for a full debate.

The recommendation was not agreed by the Panel.

Councillor Scobie proposed, Councillor Huxley seconded and when put to the vote the Panel agreed that the motion be not supported.

60. EXTERNAL GRANT FUNDING SCRUTINY REVIEW REPORT

Councillor Pope left the Council Chamber before consideration of this item.

Councillor Austin introduced the report and made the following comments:

- Councillor Austin thanked officers for supporting the work of the Panel's working party and the voluntary organisations that took part in the review;
- All recommendations drafted by the working party were meant to bring in external funding into the voluntary sector and would be helpful to the voluntary organisations if adopted by the Panel and forwarded to Cabinet for approval;
- There was a huge amount of skills in the voluntary sector that the council could tap into;
- The UK Shared Infrastructure Funding was playing an important role in connecting local voluntary organisations and funders;
- Some of the findings from this review were similar to feedback from a previous review conducted by the Town and Parish Council Working Party;
- These recommendations were well supported across the voluntary organisations that attended the working party review meetings.

Councillor Austin proposed the report to the Panel and Councillor Fellows seconded.

Other Panel members made comments as follows:

- Members congratulated the working party on the review report produced out of their review work;
- Members thanked Councillor Austin for a well chaired working party;

- They said that the amount of engagement between the working party and council officers was good and the review process was positive.

The Panel agreed to adopt the working party report findings and recommendations and forwarded the report to Cabinet for consideration and decision.

61. FORWARD PLAN AND EXEMPT CABINET REPORTS LIST

Councillor Pope returned to the Council Chamber before consideration of this item.

Members noted the report.

Meeting concluded: 9.04 pm