

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Held at:	Council Chamber - Civic Centre Folkestone
Date	Tuesday, 14 November 2023
Present	Councillors James Butcher, Bridget Chapman, Laura Davison (Chair), David Godfrey, Anita Jones (Minute 30), Alan Martin, Elaine Martin, Connor McConville and John Wing (Vice-Chair)
Apologies for Absence:	None.
Officers Present:	Andy Blaszkowicz (Director of Housing and Operations), Gill Butler (Chief Officer - Housing), Jyotsna Leney (Health, Wellbeing and Partnership Senior Specialist), Daisy Madder (Safeguarding Specialist), Fred Miller (Transportation Lead Specialist), Ola Owolabi (Chief Financial Services Officer), and Jonathan Smith (Chief Accountant)
Others Present:	Councillors Jim Martin, Tim Prater, Jeremy Speakman, Polly Blakemore and Rebecca Shoob.

27. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillors James Butcher and John Wing both declared an interest as Directors of Oportunitas.

28. **Minutes**

The minutes of both meetings held on 31 October 2023, were submitted, approved, and signed by the Chair.

29. **Cabinet Member updates**

In accordance with the Constitution Councillor Tim Prater, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Governance provided the committee with a general update, which included some of the following topics:

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Budget monitoring, Treasury Strategy, Investment Strategy, MTFs, Transformation Programme, STAR Chamber, Governance, including an update on proposed committee system. Councillor Tim Prater advised the Council is closing the budget gap; however, members would still have further decisions to make.

After the update, Members raised several points, including the following:

- The role of Scrutiny in the new governance structure and the complexity in which some of the reports are written, may provide the Committee's in the new structure with a challenge on the night.

Members also wanted to thank officers for their work and we're happy to hear that more members would be involved.

Councillor Tim Prater, responded to points raised by members:

- An issue the council faces is trying to facilitate a streamlined process, where members would be able to carry out their business, scrutinise and make decisions during the meetings, but without compromising the effectiveness of the decision-making process. There would also need to be work done on the modelling of reports.

In accordance with the Constitution Councillors Jeremy Speakman, Cabinet Member for Assets and Operations, also, provided the Committee with a general update, which included some of the following:

- Waste Management, it was advised that an independent audit was carried out and a few issues were raised around street cleansing and performance monitoring. An action plan which was accepted by the auditors has been implemented.
- Grounds Maintenance and how despite the service being stretched, the council provides a good service. Councillor Jeremy Speakman went on to say our parks are something to be proud of.
- Projects including Ship Street, Bigginswood, new toilet blocks and the changing places toilets.

Members raised several points, including the following:

- What is the Council's recycling rate?
- Output from the STAR Chamber process, the proposed plan to change for replacement bins, irrespective of the cause.
- Pressures to reduce bins, despite residents wanting more.
- The Council could look at other organisations, volunteers and community engagement to help, such as Marsh Litter Pickers.

30. **Proposed On-Street Parking Charges**

Councillor Polly Blakemore, Cabinet Member for Transport, Regulatory Services and Building Control, introduced the item and made members aware of the supplementary information supplied today (attached).

The report sought the views of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on recommendations to Cabinet for parking charges to be introduced in and around shopping streets in Folkestone, Sandgate, Hythe, and New Romney as shown in appendix 1.

Members raised several points, including the following:

- Several members raised concerns that the implementation of these restrictions could have negative effects on local businesses across the district and may drive residents away from the high street. It was also discussed as to whether the restriction would have any beneficial gain for the council and whether the proposed plans would lead to the desired vehicle churn.
- Members also asked if consultation could be extended.
- If implemented, would the monies gained be ring fenced for active travel?
- Members also raised concerns as to why the closest part of Sandgate Road to the town, leading into Bouverie Place, was not included in the proposed plan?
- Members also asked as to why other areas such as Cheriton, Dymchurch and Lydd were not included in the proposed plan?
- Members also commented on the fact of poor public transportation infrastructure, and lack of bike storage.

Both, Fred Miller, Transportation Lead Specialist and Councillor Polly Blakemore, responded to the points raised by members:

- It was clarified that the map in appendix 1, titled: Folkestone – Bouverie Square, Bouverie Road, Christchurch Road, Cheriton Place, Manor Road, Sandgate Road was in fact incorrect and that the proposed pay and display plan includes the part of Sandgate Road, leading into Bouverie Place (revised map attached).
- It was also advised that the statutory consultation was already extended past the minimum 21 days, it is proposed to run from 24 November 2023 to 18 December 2023 (24 days).
- The council is looking at the four main shopping areas within the district with other areas to potentially be addressed in due course.
- Charges proposed are higher than off-street parking to encourage people to utilise the car parks.
- It was advised that monies gained could be ring fenced for active travel and infrastructure.
- It was elaborated that with the higher turnover, spaces will free up quicker with the proposed 30 minutes on-street pay & display bays in and

around shopping streets in Folkestone, Sandgate, Hythe and New Romney. Drivers must either obtain a ticket from the machine and display it or book the free session via RingGo to avoid a penalty charge.

The Committee resolved to consider the recommendation to cabinet.

31. Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan 2023-2053

Gill Butler, Chief Officer for Housing, introduced the item.

The report set out the parameters of the work and spend that is undertaken by the Council's housing team, underpinning every decision taken in the HRA. The Business Plan (BP) model aligns with the direction and objectives of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), alongside the commitments of the HRA capital programme and acquisitions and new build ambitions for HRA led housing. The HRA BP ensures that the Council continues to provide a financially balanced housing management service that meets legislation and delivers excellent customer service to our tenants and leaseholders across the district. Once approved by Members, a summary version of the HRA BP will be published in 2024.

After the presentation Members raised several points, including some of the following:

- Members advised that they found it challenging to scrutinise the item due to the complexity of the reports and suggested that work needs to be done on the narrative of the reports and figures going forward.
- Members requested clarity on the proposed service charges de-pooling exercise.
- Is the Council on-track to deliver its target on affordable homes for people with support needs?
- 2.6 of the report details the net present value (NPV) of net zero (break-even) over 30 years. Does this need reviewing?
- The Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund – Is the Council assuming future waves of this government funding?
- With the HRA proposing annual resources of £5,000,000 to deliver additional council homes as stated in the report, is there an assumption if we build on our own land those costs will come down?
- Are there any updates on the Ship Street development?
- Does the £38,000,000 capital investment for tenants' health and safety include upgrading the Council's current housing stock?
- Will the item come back to members if there are any future changes?

Members wanted to thank Officers for the extensive report provided.

Andy Blaszkowicz, Director of Housing & Operations, Gill Butler, Chief Officer of Housing and Jonathan Smith, Chief Accountant responded to comments raised by members:

- Currently the tenants pay a flat (or pooled) service charge fee, however, the council is looking at apportioning that out. (Future de-pooling of services charges will bring in income owed to the HRA (at least £400,000 p.a. from 2025/26). A separate paper on this project will be submitted to Members in the New Year.
- The targets that relate to the provision of affordable homes for people with support needs are corporate targets that cover all provision including Housing Association.
- The Council has complex modelling which looks at every scheme and assesses it's NPV / viability. Each potential scheme is reviewed on a scheme-by-scheme basis.
- The assumption in the HRA BP is that the £1million a year provision for decarbonisation will be match funded by future SHDF waves and other sources of such funding in the medium term.
- The provision within the HRA for new build and acquisitions is based on securing some funding from other sources such as Homes England or BLRF the preference will be for the council to consider smaller sites where we own the land and perhaps where we can add value to existing council stock on that site.
- Currently the Ship Street project is in the design process to formalise a planning application. Reports will be going to Cabinet in due course. The Council hopes to submit its planning application soon.
- Capital investment for tenants' health and safety includes meeting decent homes legislation, upgrading the Council's current housing stock including work on damp and mould where it relates to structural causes. Officers will be reviewing year on year, with the plan to bring items and any significant amendments back to members every 5 years.

Gill Butler, Chief Officer of Housing, advised the committee that members could contact her with further comments/feedback before the deadline for Cabinet papers.

Proposed by Councillor Alan Martin,
Seconded by Councillor James Butcher; and,

Resolved:

- 1. To receive and note report C/23/57.**
- 2. To consider the presentation and provide feedback in order to inform a report to Cabinet.**

(As there was no dissent the recommendations were approved by affirmation of the meeting).

32. **Exclusion of the Public**

Proposed by Councillor Elaine Martin,
Seconded by Councillor David Godfrey; and,

Resolved:

To exclude the public for the following item of business on the grounds that it is likely to disclose exempt information, as defined in paragraph 2 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 –

‘Information relating to any individual.’

(As there was no dissent the recommendations were approved by affirmation of the meeting).

33. **Refresh of the Council's Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults Safeguarding Policy 2023 and general update.**

Jyotsna Leney, Health, Wellbeing and Partnership Senior Specialist introduced the item.

The Council is part of the statutory safeguarding role within the wider public sector, with responsibilities to children, young people and vulnerable adults. The children, young people and vulnerable adults safeguarding policy of the Council has been updated and is attached at Appendix 1. OSC were advised of the changes made to the 2021 policy as the refresh takes place every two years. OSC were also advised of the wide range of activity that has taken place over the last year with updates on safeguarding practice.

An explanation was given to members on why part of the meeting was to be heard in private. A redacted version of the policy will be presented to full council excluding personal details (names and mobile telephone numbers). This version will be [placed on the external website. Members asked for a flow chart on how Councillors and members of the public can make safeguarding referrals. This will be made clearer on the website and link to the new policy. Anonymised case studies will also be added to the website. Contractor training on safeguarding will be part of a further review on commissioning key contracts.

Proposed by Councillor Connor McConville,
Seconded by Councillor Elaine Martin; and,

Resolved:

- 1. To receive and note report C/23/56 and note the content of this report and accompanying safeguarding policy attached.**
- 2. To note that Cabinet will also receive a copy of the policy before being presented to full council to adopt.**
- 3. To note that the Council's website has been updated to include additional content relating to safeguarding including further advice to external contractors.**
- 4. To note additional work carried out eg statutory safeguarding audits, reviews and the creation of a care leaver support note.**

(As there was no dissent the recommendations were approved by affirmation of the meeting).