

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Held at:	Council Chamber - Civic Centre, Folkestone
Date	Tuesday, 1 May 2018
Present	Councillors Miss Susan Carey, Peter Gane (Chairman), Ms Janet Holben, Mrs Mary Lawes, Michael Lyons, Ian Meyers, Russell Tillson and Mrs Rodica Wheeler
Apologies for Absence	
Officers Present:	Adrian Hammond (Housing Strategy Manager), Katharine Harvey (Head of Economic Development), Sue Lewis (Committee Services Officer) and Susan Priest (Head of Paid Service)
Others Present:	Councillor Alan Ewart-James, Cabinet Member for Housing and Councillor Mrs Jenny Hollingsbee, Cabinet Member for Communities

96. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

97. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2018 were submitted, approved and signed by the Chairman.

98. **LGA Corporate Peer Challenge - Draft Corporate Position Statement**

Report C/17/101 outlines the corporate position statement prepared by the Council that set outs the council's current position, telling the story of where we are and provides context in preparation for the Peer Team's visit scheduled in June 2018.

Dr Susan Priest, Head of Paid Service, informed Members there will be a 3 day visit by the Peer Team and to assist them with the visit, as part of the preparation, the Council has produced a Corporate Position Statement. This will provide a focus on a selection of activities the Council has undertaken.

This is still a draft document and minor changes can be made before the Leader approves the final statement.

Members paid particular attention to the following:

- The Council, as with other Council's, has financial challenges ahead and this forms part of the position statement. It is hoped the discussion and report that comes back from the Peer Team will help with ideas and thoughts to address this and the other challenges included in the report.
- The LGA Peer Review is a free service the LGA provides to support continuous improvement; it is not a chargeable service.
- The Council has a number of partners and works with many agencies and this is captured within the Corporate Position Statement.
- It was agreed there has been much value in the Ward Profiles prepared and members asked if they would be updated. Information that was provided at the time was correct when the data was published and there is no planned repeat of the work at this stage as they were extremely resource intensive to prepare. As the Council moves forward through Transformation the Policy Team will look at the data sets held and collected by the Council, making available useful information to support Members.
- The Council needs to be clear on what it wants to achieve through growth, paying particular attention to the positive impacts from planning allocations and permissions granted. There is a continuing need for residents to understand what these are and why the Council is supporting growth. This self-assessment will help to do this.
- Member involvement during the Peer Review is a key aspect and will form part of the timetable for the 3 day visit.
- As part of Transformation, staffing resources will be reviewed and the Council is serious about continuing to provide and support training and development needs, paying particular attention to the areas that are often difficult to recruit into. Work with universities has already taken place encouraging graduates and post graduates to be recruited and this has been very successful in areas such as planning and engineering.

Proposed by Councillor Russell Tillson
Seconded by Councillor Mrs Rodica Wheeler and

Resolved: To receive and note Report C/17/101.

(Voting: For 8; Against 0; Abstentions 0)

99. **Draft Healthier Housing Strategy 2018-2023**

This report introduced the draft Healthier Housing Strategy for the period 2018/2023. The document sets out how the Council and its local partners intend to work together to address the housing and related needs of the district.

Adrian Hammond, Housing Strategy Manager informed members that the key focus of the strategy is the delivery of affordable housing (for rent and low cost home ownership) and the improvement of housing conditions with the private housing sector within the district.

The report provides a number of key objectives of the draft strategy and these are shown at 2.1 within the report. Once the draft strategy is complete then there will be a period of public consultation.

Members paid particular attention to the following:

- The Council has a good working relationship with private sector landlords and housing associations, working together to improve the lives of residents and the Council will build on this moving forward. This is a multi-agency initiative which the Council is confident will provide the right level of support across the district.
- It is hoped that with encouragement and support residents can be moved to more suitable housing if they get the right help. Working with East Kent Housing and other agencies to achieve this through financial support and guidance.
- Information in relation to travellers will be made available once data have been analysed and information considered. The Council continues to work with County and other partners to ensure an appropriate response is provided.
- More suitable housing needs to be found for those families that want to provide for elderly relatives. Sevenoaks DC have started a scheme to encourage this and it was suggested that this Council look at how this might be used in the district.
- It is clear that the local housing stock has improved and this has been due, in not small part, to the Council working proactively with landlords.
- There has been an additional 91 affordable homes for rent and shared ownership purchase in the district over the last year.
- There are a number of initiatives in place that East Kent Housing (EKH) administer and although some residents do not always know how to get help they should be encouraged to contact housing officers for advice and guidance.
- Help and guidance can be provided in respect of financial issues surrounding the bedroom tax and although the impact in relation to Universal Credit has been minimal support can be given to those who need it as we move forward. Elderly residents and the additional support they may require can also be given through EKH.
- The Council works closely with the Rainbow Centre and Porchlight to support the needs of those who are homeless and sofa surfing. The Local Housing Allowance varies in amounts payable across the district and is higher in areas that have a greater need.

Proposed by Councillor Michael Lyons
Seconded by Councillor Mrs Rodica Wheeler and

Resolved: To receive and note Report C/17/96.

(Voting: For 8; Against 0; Abstentions 0)

100. **Funding for Shepway Citizens Advice (CA)**

The District Council has historically supported Citizens Advice (CA) with grant funding. In the financial year 2016 /2017, CA dealt with over 5000 enquiries (a significant increase on previous years) and saw over 2000 clients who were supported with specialist advice and casework services. CA provides a vital service to the community, dealing with complex issues that significantly impact upon people's lives. This report proposed future funding options for the Council to consider.

Katharine Harvey, Head of Economic Development confirmed that the CA give an excellent service which exceeds targets. It is a respected service used by many and it is because of this Cabinet is asked to agree the recommendations to provide £67,800 funding annually for 3 years from 1st April, with a funding review after 3 years.

Proposed by Councillor Peter Gane
Seconded by Councillor Michael Lyons and

Resolved:

1. To receive and fully support Report C/17/98.

(Voting: For 8; Against 0; Abstentions 0)

101. **Annual Scrutiny Programme**

Report A/18/07 presented recommendations for the work programme for the overview and scrutiny committee for 2018/19.

Proposed by Councillor Peter Gane
Seconded by Councillor Russell Tillson and

Resolved:

1. To receive and note Report A/18/07.

(Voting: For 7; Against 0; Abstentions 1)