

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Held at:	Council Chamber - Civic Centre, Folkestone
Date	Tuesday, 31 May 2022
Present	Councillors Miss Susan Carey, Gary Fuller, Michelle Keutenius (Chairman), Connor McConville, Terence Mullard, Patricia Rolfe, Rebecca Shoob (Vice-Chair) and John Wing
Apologies for Absence	Councillor Peter Gane
Officers Present:	Kate Clark (Case Officer - Committee Services), Katharine Harvey (Economic Development Advisor), Andy Jarrett (Managing Director), Rod Lean (Chief Officer - Place & Growth), Susan Priest (Chief Executive) and Jemma West (Committee Service Specialist)
Others Present:	

1. **Appointment of Chairman**

Proposed by Councillor Fuller,
Seconded by Councillor Shoob; and

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Keutenius be appointed as Chairman of the Overview and Committee for the municipal year 22/23.

(Voting figures: 8 for, 0 against, 0 abstentions).

2. **Appointment of Vice-Chairman**

Proposed by Councillor McConville,
Seconded by Councillor Wing; and

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Shoob be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the municipal year 22/23.

(Voting figures: 8 for, 0 against, 0 abstentions).

3. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Shoob declared a disclosable pecuniary interest as she is a director of Otterpool Park LLP. During the presentation relating to Otterpool Park Stewardship (Minute No 6), Councillor Shoob moved to the public gallery and did not take part in discussions or voting on this item.

Councillor Miss Carey also made a voluntary declaration in relation to Otterpool Park Stewardship, as she was a landowner within the Otterpool Park area.

4. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 April 2022, were submitted, approved and signed by the Chairman.

5. **Appointment of members and election of Chairman to the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Sub Committee**

It was agreed that membership of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Sub-Committee remains identical as the previous year for the municipal year 2022/23; Councillors Fuller, Gane, McConville, Rolfe and Shoob.

Proposed by Councillor Fuller,
Seconded by Councillor Shoob; and

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Connor McConville be appointed as Chairman of the Finance and Performance Scrutiny Sub-Committee for the municipal year 2022/23.

All agreed.

6. **Otterpool Park Stewardship**

Members received a presentation from council officers and the LLP on the emerging strategy to provide long term Stewardship at Otterpool Park.

Members commented on various issues including the following:

- It would be useful to see the benefits of the vehicle remaining in perpetuity. Welwyn Garden City was considered a successful model, and it would be useful to see comparisons, as it was an independent body, not swayed by politics.

- Asset lock – was this possible via certain restrictive covenants put into the associated governance documentation? There was also a need for strict process and procedures, whether that be having to be marked off in tandem with our own councils, or with an additional layer.
- Were the tax implications totally clear, particularly regarding the transfer of assets? Specialist tax advice should be sought.
- The Kings Hill model was considered to work well.
- Welwyn Garden City also acted like a charitable foundation, able to pay for things such as taxis for residents to the doctors' surgery, and funding music studies, etc.
- In regard to giving an asset such as a community centre, it was also a liability, and not only an asset, and can incur huge maintenance costs.
- The example of the Folkestone Parks and Pleasure Grounds Charity could be looked at, as to whether there were any advantages in having a charity, and also maintaining control.
- Otterpool Park would eventually be of a size to justify a town council, and this would ensure democratic accountability to the people living in the community.
- It is important for benefits from Otterpool Park to be shared across the whole district, in terms of services and investment for the future.
- In terms of funding, where will this come from? If a town or parish council is created, a precept could be introduced to help with maintenance costs. However, in the early days, how would this money be secured until such a time as a new town or parish council is created?
- The expertise and specialism of the district council and LLP professionals was vital and there needed to be a strong steer and input going forward until such time that there was certainty that a new vehicle has the expertise and capability to take it forward in a sustainable and effective manner.
- When reporting back to the Committee, it would be useful to have an in-depth understanding of the regulatory burdens for each option, and any tax/revenue generation implications.
- As per the 2017 report, presumably a level of detail would need be finalised prior to the planning application being considered.

The Chief Executive stated that following agreement to a strategic report to cabinet in July, a detailed report would be brought back to the Committee in the autumn, and advised that as the detail becomes fully understood, the Committee would be in a better position to advise on if, and when, a shadow arrangement might be considered appropriate.

The Chairman thanked the officers present for their presentation.

7. **Levelling Up Fund**

Members received a presentation on the Council's emerging submission to the Government's Levelling UP Fund which will be the subject of a report to Cabinet on 16 June 2022. This is based on priority projects identified in the Folkestone Town Centre Place Plan. The presentation included an overview of the Levelling Up Fund, a summary of the priority projects in the Place Plan,

engagement with stakeholders and the selection of projects to be included in the submission.

Discussion took place on various issues, including the following:

- It was important that contingency was built in, particularly with rising inflation.
- In terms of match funding, it was worth instigating discussions with partners such as KCC Highways at an early stage.
- What would happen if one of the three projects was not successful in the bid?
- Was there still scope for organisations, such as the Rainbow Centre, to be given space within the FOLCA building?
- Would there be a breakdown of each of the components?
- What were the risks? Had contingency been built in? And had the governance and decision making time requirements for partner organisations been factored in to the bid?
- There had to be some expenditure in this financial year – was this administrative expenditure, or capital expenditure? Was it expected that the cap in terms of the administrative budget would be spent, and would any of that be available to cover work which had already taken place?
- In terms of the new square to replace the bus station, there would likely be additional expense. How would the council deal with this long term?
- Was there an opportunity for rebranding, perhaps to commemorate the jubilee?
- What was the time frame for drawing down the funding?
- Would there be an impact in terms of parking in Bouverie Square?
- The expenditure to date would be part of the place plan, but was there any provision for unsuccessful bids to recoup costs if needed?

The Economic Development Advisor, and Chief Officer – Place and Growth, responded to some of the comments, and made point including the following:

- The council were already working with KCC Highways, who were also on the steering group.
- The council could only bid for £20 million from the fund, but the match funding would depend on the project total, but could be more than 10%.
- There was a strong strategic argument that the three projects formed a cohesive bid, and all aimed to improve the town centre and accessibility.
- In terms of the Folca building, all options would be considered, but it was important to ensure any proposition was viable. Colliers consultants had been appointed to carry out the due diligence.
- A more detailed delivery plan was being reported to Cabinet. A key part of this work would include costings, and a breakdown of the components, but it was anticipated that things would continue to evolve until the bid submission.

- There was a risk that the bid might be unsuccessful, but the council will have to continue to work on the projects, incurring costs, in anticipation of being awarded the funding so that the March 2025 deadline for delivery can be met. The three projects are aligned with the council's corporate priorities. Contingency will be built into the bid, and the governance requirements for partner organisations decision making will be taken into account. It is anticipated that the Leader of KCC will be providing a letter of support for the project.
- Some capital spend in 2022/23 is required for the bid and delivering a tangible asset would be ideal, but this could be spend on the design/feasibility work.
- In respect of the improvements to Bouverie Square, commercial opportunities are being considered and this could provide revenue to cover longer term maintenance costs. For example, the current bus station could become a café, or something which could generate revenue for the council. The costs of refurbishment of this building are included in the bid.
- The new highways arrangements would not affect accessibility to the current Bouverie Place car park.
- In terms of the time frame, having liaised with neighbouring authorities, their experiences were that the funding agreement took some time to be drawn up, but the funding was then available promptly.
- FHDC was a priority one area, and £125k was awarded for capacity funding to develop the bid, so there will be no need to recoup any funds. However, any money spent at the design stage could be recouped if the bid is awarded.

The Chairman thanked the officers present for their presentation.

8. **UK Share Prosperity Fund**

Members received a presentation on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the preparation of the related Council Investment Plan which will be the subject of a report to Cabinet on 20 July 2022. The presentation included an overview of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, funding to be received by Council, emerging themes and priorities for which the funding may be allocated and the process to complete the Investment Plan.

Members commented on various issues and made points including the following:

- In terms of the focus on the cost of living for the vulnerable, could a smoking cessation service be offered to help people make savings in terms of the rising cost of cigarettes?
- Green skills – It was not just the hard skills of retrofit needed, there would also be a need for people to do assessments of biodiversity net gain, across the country.
- KCC have a strategic framework, and there will be money passed down via that, and there will be work going on with public rights of way, and in terms

of access to green space, with a possibility of some synergies with the work of the district.

- It was important to ensure that the funding was shared across the district.
- In terms of skills schemes, with people working for longer at an older age, digital skills could be a useful area, as well as offering schemes focused on young parents wanting to upskill and return to work. Any help given to local residents would be welcomed.
- Low skill workers training could be low quality and repetitive. There were re-training areas where there could be a real impact, such as green training and digital training.
- It was also important to try and encourage local businesses, stakeholders and partners to move away from zero hours contracts or minimum wage as a standard. Many people suffering financial crisis were in this difficult position.
- There is an opportunity to utilise established facilities within the district, such as community hubs, food banks, and local training opportunities, which could be more cost effective.
- With the funding over three years, there needed to be realistic ideas. Even simple things such as providing boxes of food, with recipe cards to help people know what to cook. In terms of skills, it would be worth liaising with East Kent College, as the leader in Kent in terms of the built environment.
- With regards to the setting up of the local group, had there been much response from businesses?
- How many NEETs (Not in Employment or Education or Training) were there in the district, as this could be an opportunity to build a bridge to these experiencing barriers to progressing in life. The Romney Resource Centre and Marsh Academy already did a lot of work with NEETS and have had some positive outcomes. In terms of impact, this could be an area where a real difference could be made.

The Chief Officer – Place and Growth responded to some of the questions raised, and made points including the following:

- With regard to cooking and recipe cards, Thanet District Council have a good model, and the team would work with the Health, Wellbeing & Partnerships Senior Specialist, looking at existing provisions to see how best to utilise the funding.
- The council were looking at key priorities and linking up with models mentioned to see how well they work. In addition, being mindful of bringing in the right knowledge and skills, volunteer groups and partners would be identified.
- Data was being looked at, including the number of NEETs in the district. This was a key part of developing the investment plan, to identify the needs of the district.