

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Held at: Council Chamber - Civic Centre Folkestone

Date: Tuesday, 26 September 2023

Present: Councillors James Butcher, Bridget Chapman, Laura Davison (Chair), David Godfrey, Anita Jones, Alan Martin, Elaine Martin, Jim Martin, Connor McConville and John Wing (Vice-Chair).

Apologies for Absence:

Officers Present: Andy Blaszkowicz (Director of Housing and Operations), Gill Butler (Chief Officer - Housing), Ewan Green (Director of Place), Jake Hamilton (Committee Services Officer), Rod Lean (Chief Officer - Place & Growth), Sue Lewis (Committee Services Officer), Ola Owolabi (Chief Financial Services Officer), Susan Priest (Chief Executive), Matt Rain (OD & Engagement Business Partner) and Andrew Rush (Chief Officer Place & Regulatory Services).

Others Present: Councillors Jim Martin, Polly Blakemore, Rich Holgate, Rebecca Shoob and Paul Smith (FFT Consultant).

11. **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Connor McConville declared an interest in relation to item 8 due to his position as a board member for Otterpool Park LLP. He therefore withdrew to the public gallery during the consideration of said item.

12. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 July 2023 were submitted, approved, and signed by the Chair.

13. **Minutes of the Finance and Performance Sub-Committee**

The minutes of the meeting held on 06 July 2023 were submitted, approved, and signed by the Chair.

14. Cabinet Member updates

In accordance with the Constitution Councillors, Rich Holgate the Cabinet Member for Place Plan, Heritage, Tourism and District Economy and Polly Blakemore the Cabinet Member for Transport, Regulatory Services and Building Control attended the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and provided a general update in relation to their portfolio's.

15. Housing Repairs & Maintenance options appraisal

Gill Butler, Chief Officer for Housing, introduced the item and made note to the following:

The Housing Repairs and Maintenance (R&M) current contract with Mears Ltd is due to expire 1st April 2025. In addition to the responsive repairs service and planned maintenance i.e. the replacement kitchen and bathrooms capital programme, the contract also covers void repairs and some compliance related services.

This is a crucial customer facing service and the full Options Appraisal will evaluate the risks, benefits, and costs of each considered option. Before the Options Appraisal is completed Members are asked to input into the way forward for this important project and feedback on early recommendations from project consultants Faithorn Farrell Timms (FFT) who have been appointed to provide commercial experience, technical knowledge, and project management skills to support the council through the project stages.

The final report, expected to be considered by Cabinet in November 2023, will include recommendations to the council to give the best possible VfM and level of service delivery to our council tenants and leaseholders.

Paul Smith, FFT Consultant explained the current appraisal options within the presentation (attached).

The Committee raised several points, including, their appreciation for the improvement in tenant statistics across the board, the importance of maintaining good customer services. They discussed price per property and the different appraisal options outlined in the presentation, including the hybrid model and whether the Council was aware of any other authority using said model, also, whether there would be more options in the final report to cabinet.

The Chief Officer of Housing and the FFT Consultant responded to comments raised by members, advising them there could potentially be more appraisal

option in the final report to cabinet, and that the hybrid model is common and used by several authorities, including, Maidstone Borough Council.

It was concluded that members could contact the Chief Officer for further information and that further updates would be shared with the Committee ahead of the final report to cabinet.

16. Folca LUF update and Civic Centre Relocation.

The presentation was introduced by Rod Lean, Chief Officer of Place and Growth and Matt Rain, OD and Engagement Lead Specialist.

The presentation provided an update on the redevelopment proposals for Folca 2. Including, progress to date in relation to Phase 1 and Phase 2, architects commission, design development, business case preparation and overall programme.

The Committee was asked to provide feedback in order to inform the direction of the project and future reporting to Cabinet.

The Committee Members raised several points, including, how the space will be utilised, what percentage would be allocated for public space, potential KCC occupation and commercial use. They asked whether the space could be used to generate revenue between phase 1 and 2, and whether the BREEAM rating was achievable. There was discussion about using the space on a temporary or permanent basis for the Civic Centre relocation, and how residents could provide feedback and whether the plans for a Medical Centre were still going ahead.

The Chief Officer for Place and Growth, responded to comments raised by members, explaining that the project is still in early stages, but did confirm 30% could potentially be used by KCC for services such as the Library and Adult Education, but this is dependent on design plan. The Council could not currently confirm how much space would be utilised for members of the public or commercial use, however there are ideas to have a multi-use council chamber and made mention of the Test Lab for potential commercial use.

The Chief Officer went on to explain that the building could not be used to generate revenue between phase 1 and 2 due to health and safety regulations. It was also confirmed that the building could potentially be used on a temporary basis for the Civic Centre relocation with a view of moving to Otterpool Park in the longer term, with frontline services i.e. CAP potentially remaining at Folca.

17. Otterpool Park: Strategic Direction, Funding and Delivery.

Dr Susan Priest, Chief Executive and Ewan Green, Director of Place, introduced the item.

The report, presentation and appendix covered the outcome of a review of key issues that the Council requires to consider in relation to the strategic direction, funding and delivery of Otterpool Park. The presentation included detail on delivery and financial risks for the Council and emerging recommendations for Cabinet.

Councillor Jim Martin, Leader and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy addressed the Committee, advising them that he had spoken with the five surrounding parishes, local businesses, developers, KCC, Homes England and with changes to MRP requirements, he reaffirmed the council's position in that a change to the current approach to finance the project is necessary.

The Committee members raised various issues, including, the importance of selecting the right joint venture partner, the aspirations and achievability of remaining green considering the financial restrictions, and asked questions about the council's view of members involvement and whether OSC could effectively scrutinise the proposals and Delivery Plan with limited technical expertise. Balancing the risk and reward of the project, timescale in-terms of the extreme risk as detailed in the Corporate Risk Register, the impact of delays on the districts housing circumstances and whether the council has considered joint venture partnerships for individual phases of the project were matters also covered.

The Chief Executive, Director of Place and Councillor Jim Martin, Leader and Cabinet Member for Otterpool Park and Planning Policy responded in detail to comments and reiterated the importance of the decision to be made and that the joint venture proposals were still in the early stages of exploration. The council welcomes continued involvement from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet and Audit and Governance.

Proposed by Councillor James Butcher,
Seconded by Councillor John Wing; and,

Resolved

- 1. To receive and note report OS/23/03.**
- 2. To consider the presentation and provide feedback in order to inform a report to Cabinet.**
- 3. To formulate a Task and Finish Group to support and scrutinise any potential joint venture proposal following Cabinet's decision to explore the matter. Terms of Reference to be drawn up.**

(Voting: 9 for; 0 against; 0 abstentions)

18. Princes Parade Petitions

Andy Blaszkowicz, Director of Housing and Operation's introduced the item.

The report responded to the 2 petitions referred to Overview and Scrutiny committee following the Council meetings on 22nd February (Petition A) and 29th March 2023 (Petition B). Council has asked the following of OSC in respect of the 2 petitions:

- Petition A - That the Petition be referred to OSC for their observations before deciding whether to examine the issues raised by the petition.
- Petition B - To examine the issues raised by the petition as part of a future scrutiny programme.

The Committee Members raised points including, the timescale of when the hoarding would be removed and when the council is likely to hold consultation on the rewilding.

The Director of Housing and Operation's responded to said comments, advising the committee that the council is expecting to produce a report to the relevant members/officer in late November and, providing the budget allows, the council is hoping for the hoardings to be removed in December/January 2024. As for the rewilding consultations, the primary object of the council is to remove the hoarding, further discussions are to be had on the timescale of the consultations.

Proposed by Councillor Elaine Martin,
Seconded by Councillor Anita Jones; and,

Resolved

- 1. To receive and note report OS/23/02.**
- 2. No further examination of the issues raised by either Petition A or B by OSC is required, as the current work authorised by Cabinet being undertaken by Officers continues to respond to the requests in both.**

(Voting: 9 for; 0 against; 0 abstentions)