

## TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL

### OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held at the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1RS, at 6.30 pm on Monday, 13 March 2023

**Present: Councillor Seán Holden (Chair)**  
**Councillors Atkins, Britcher-Allan, Ellis (Vice-Chair), Goodship, Johnson, Knight, Le Page, McMillan, Morton, Ms Palmer and Rogers**

**Officers in Attendance:** Claudette Valmond (Head of Legal Partnership and Interim Monitoring Officer), Terry Hughes (Community Safety Manager), Gary Stevenson (Head of Housing, Health and Environment), Stuart Clifton (Housing Services Manager) and Caroline Britt (Democratic Services Officer), Inspector Ian Jones

**Other Members in Attendance:** Councillors Chapelard, Pound and Warne

#### APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

OSC1/22 There were no apologies.

#### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

OSC2/22 It was noted that Councillor Palmer was a Director of Property Holdings (Reference Agenda Item 9).

#### DECLARATIONS OF A PARTY WHIP

OSC3/22 There were no declarations that any Member was subject to a party whip.

#### NOTIFICATION OF PERSONS REGISTERED TO SPEAK

OSC4/22 There were no members of the public or visiting Members registered to speak.

#### MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 10 NOVEMBER 2022

OSC5/22 Members reviewed the minutes. No amendments were proposed.

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting dated 10 November 2022 be approved as a correct record.

#### MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 21 NOVEMBER 2022

OSC6/22 Members reviewed the minutes. No amendments were proposed.

**RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting dated 21 November 2022 be approved as a correct record.

#### ITEMS CALLED- IN

OSC7/22 There were no items which had been called-in.

## COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP PLAN 2023-24

OSC8/22 Councillor Nancy Warne, Cabinet Member for Community Safety introduced Terry Hughes, Community Safety Manager who presented the report set out in the agenda.

Questions from Members included the following:

- There was currently no active County Lines in Tunbridge Wells.
- Intelligence on County Lines was being collected all the time and there was currently nothing coming through. However, County Lines was a specific type of drug dealing. Other types of drug dealing was taking place throughout the district.
- For the purposes of the report, the category for Complex and High needs cases related to domestic abuse.
- Further details regarding the number of slight road traffic injuries in Goudhurst and Lamberhurst would be forwarded after the meeting.
- At present TWBC didn't have the resources available to go into schools to talk about race/hate crime.
- The police used to have a team of schools' officers, but this had now been put on hold due to other competing priorities.
- As from June 2023, a Child Centre Policing Team would take on some of this work, looking at the issue of hate crime and getting into schools to see what could be done to educate people around what was acceptable and what was not acceptable.
- It was very important that hate crime was reported and that there was a specialist team available to provide advice and support.
- The Near Miss Register wasn't advertised regularly but this was something the Community Safety Unit could consider.
- The Near Miss Register had been 'live' for about 2 years and to date about 250 incidents had been reported.
- Going forward, consideration was being given to the format of the Near Miss Register form. A form of multiple choice was being considered as the preferred format.
- Further work to analyse the data would be undertaken, which would be presented at a later date.
- Remedial action at specific sites where accidents had occurred were a matter for Kent County Council (KCC). KCC had their own set of criteria that they used to determine what if any action was taken.
- The data from the Near Miss Register might be something that KCC could use in the future.
- Tackling anti-social behaviour in parks was likely to be an issue this year as there was a lack of resources available to carry out this work.
- Currently, 12 evenings at 4 hours per evening had been allocated for security officers to undertake some engagement work with retailers and members of the public. Going forward, consideration would need to be given to an action plan for open spaces.
- There wasn't a breakdown of figures for hate crime. However, reports of hate crime were looked at on a daily basis to see if there were any traits or trends. At present there were no particular trends.
- Residents should be actively encouraged to report instances of anti-social behaviour. The level of response by the police would however depend on priorities.
- There was concern that the efforts of voluntary Speedwatch teams were being frustrated and some were now being disbanded due to the

- lack of support from the police.
- Correspondence from residents regarding speeding matters were taken seriously and officers would be sent out to assess the area and if necessary undertake some enforcement.
  - The Violence Against Women and Girls Initiative (VAWG) had not yet been set up. The Community Safety Managers in West Kent would be getting together later in March to take this forward.
  - Community Safety Officers and the Police Anti-Social Officer were able to visit schools to both educate against anti-social behaviour and to act where occurrences had taken place. If Members wanted to speak about a particular school, they can contact the Community Safety Unit.
  - Female gender mutilation came under the domestic abuse priority. DAVSS (Domestic Abuse Volunteer Support Services) had undertaken a number of workshops for GPs, Schools and Community Leaders.
  - The level of reporting to the police was dependent on the confidence of residents in the police. The police were keen to encourage residents to report incidents. They received and acted on a large number of reports about neighbourhood issues.
  - It was noted that incidents were not always as they first appeared. Serious allegations e.g. attempted child abduction cases should always be reported to the police to be investigated.
  - The Near Miss Register could be better promoted, including in schools.
  - Anecdotally, there had been an increase in the number of cases of anti-social behaviour being attributed to young girls.
  - A considerable amount of investment was required to install and run speed cameras. Speed Cameras were expensive to buy, with the additional cost of maintaining them (which could be considerable as many units were vandalised).
  - From June 2023, more police officers would be joining the Community Safety Unit who would be trained in speed enforcement.
  - The Safety Camera Partnerships were responsible for installing and managing speed cameras. The decision to install a speed camera was based on a strict set of criteria and subject to the level of funding available.
  - Road safety, including speeding was very important, but there had to be a balance with the many other priorities the police had. But they were keen to work with Speedwatch volunteers and certainly didn't want to see this important work be disbanded.
  - Police statistics related to particular crimes and associated conviction rates could be obtained and this could be broken down per Ward if this would be useful.
  - Details related to Near Miss Data in the rural areas (split from Town Centre) was not immediately available and would be reverted after the meeting.

Comments in debate included:

- Information related to why speed cameras were so expensive would be useful to Members to better understand why they were not installed in more places.
- It was suggested that up to 80% of road accidents were not reported as there was no confidence that any action would be taken. There

was concern that the crash data was therefore not representative of the number of accidents that actually occurred.

- The Committee could recommend developing a strategy around the issue of speed cameras.
- The Committee could ask officers for a report on speed camera enforcement.
- Speed cameras were linked to the number of fatalities at a given site.
- Inappropriate speeds was a major issue and something the Committee should be putting pressure to do something about.
- It was agreed that an invitation should be sent to the Safety Camera Partnership to attend a future meeting (June meeting if possible). And to be included on the Work Programme for 2023-24.
- There was a tendency to over engineer school crossings. Perhaps a suggestion should be made to KCC to ask them to rethink how they approached school crossings.
- It should be recognised that any action would be related to the level of resources and funding available.
- There remained concern that the level of reporting had dropped as the level of confidence in the police had dropped.

#### **RESOLVED –**

1. That the Community Safety Partnership be supported; and
2. That the following actions be taken forward:
  - a. That future reports include information related to numbers of arrests, prosecution and conviction rates (to be broken down per Ward).
  - b. An invitation be sent to the Safety Camera Partnership to attend (ideally) the next Overview and Scrutiny Meeting (June 2023). Or if not June, to a future meeting. And for this item to be added to the OSC Work Programme.

#### **LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND**

OSC9/22 Councillor Hugo Pound, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning introduced Stuart Clifton, Housing Services Manager who presented the report set out in the agenda.

Before questions and to help aid Member discussion, a summary of the comments raised at the Communities and Economic Development Cabinet Advisory Board was given:

- Properties would be sought with the minimum EPC standard, with the aim of aspiring to those with a higher than minimum EPC standard.
- Properties would be sought that required as little refit as possible.
- Properties would be available to those on the Housing waiting list and assessed against the Council's current policy.
- Properties would not be purchased outside the Borough.
- The scheme required the purchase of 1 x 4 bedroom property, with the rest likely to be either 2 or 3 bedroom properties.
- It was anticipated that the Council would be able to find properties within the prescribed budget set.

- Only s106 money could be used for the scheme.
- If the Council failed to find all the properties, it was likely that a proportion of the money would have to be returned to Central Government.

Questions from Members included the following:

- Acquiring properties with an average purchase price of £300k would be challenging. Properties would also need to meet certain criteria, e.g. close to amenities, schools, transport and close to local communities. This would probably mean the more rural areas of the Borough would be unsuitable.
- Ultimately, the key driving factor would be affordability.
- Given the tight timescales there would be no time to build new properties for this scheme. Existing housing stock would be used.
- An additional £20k per property would be available for other capital costs, including ensuring the property was sustainable.
- In terms of ongoing support, the Council had a Ukrainian Support Team, there was also support from the voluntary sector. With regards to the Afghan families, Kent County Council working with the Home Office were in the lead.
- There was a strong social network for Ukrainian families.
- Government had not given any guidance to Councils in respect of how long families would be housed in these properties, but instead would allow Councils to be flexible in their approach depending on local need.
- The Council's minimum contribution to the scheme would be £2.8m. It could choose to add more s106 money but it was unlikely that the Council would use all its available s106 money for one scheme.
- The £300k per property (for 14 of the 15 properties) was an average price, so there was flexibility depending on the price of each property found. The Government were contributing 50% for the 4 bedroom property so this would be dealt with separately.
- The scheme required the Council to provide 1 four bedroom house.
- If the Council was unable to acquire all 15 properties a proportion of the funding would be returned to Central Government.
- The Government's contribution amounted to £120k per property so this would be the likely figure that would have to be returned should the Council deliver less than the 14 properties prescribed (1 x 4 bedroom property would be treated differently).
- The contribution from Government for the 4 bedroom property was higher so the amount that would have to be returned would be higher, approximately £285k (for a total property value of £570k).
- If the 4 bedroom property was the only property the Council was unable to deliver, it would need to seek guidance from the programme organisers.
- The Council would seek advice and help from other stakeholders e.g. Town and Country Housing when looking for suitable, available properties.
- Help from the Parishes would be very welcome.
- The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) had been provided by Government and just required signing (subject to Cabinet approval).
- The scheme had been offered to those Authorities with significant pressures and included all the districts in Kent and Medway.
- The Government had allowed for regional differences in house prices.

- The figure of 15 properties was from Central Government.
- The Council's ambition was the properties would be set at the social rent rate. If families were not working, they would receive additional benefits e.g. Universal Credit.
- The current view was that the Ukrainian families would return to Ukraine. The outlook for the Afghan families at the moment was less clear. However, current thinking was that Afghan families would aspire to finding work, their own properties and settle in the UK in the long term.
- The Council was loathe to use all its available s106 money as there were other initiatives in the Borough that would benefit from this money.
- The use of s106 money was defined within the individual developer agreements and could only be used for this purpose if it was in accordance with the agreement.
- It would be important to ensure that the s106 money was being used correctly.
- The programme was to deliver family sized accommodation so it was unlikely that flats would be appropriate. Additionally, it was unlikely the Council would look to leasehold properties, preferring instead to use freehold properties.
- The MOU included details of the sum of money the Government would be providing.
- Town and Country were not listed as a partner as the preference was to keep all the Council's options open.

**RESOLVED** – That the recommendations to Cabinet be supported.

## **DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT 2022-23**

OSC10/22 Caroline Britt, Democratic Services Officer introduced the report set out in the agenda.

Discussion and questions from Members included the following:

- Councillor Atkins had not been included in the Membership – this would be amended.
- The minutes of the meeting held in January 2023 had been delayed, but they would be available for the next meeting in June 2023.
- The minutes of this meeting would also be available for the next meeting in June 2023.

**RESOLVED** – That the draft Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2022-23 be approved subject to updates following the meeting dated 13 March 2023 to be presented for final approval at the next meeting in June 2023.

## **WORK PROGRAMME**

OSC11/22 The Work Programme was presented to the Committee.

- It was noted that this was the end of the municipal year so the majority of the items had been actioned/completed.

- The work of the Contracts Task and Finish Group was ongoing. A report would come to Overview and Scrutiny in due course.
- Suggestions for items to be included in the Work Programme for 2023-24 should be sent to the Chair of OSC for consideration.

**URGENT BUSINESS**

OSC12/22 There was no urgent business.

**DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

OSC13/22

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday 19 June 2023.

NOTE: The meeting concluded at 9.00 pm.