

Minutes of the meeting of the **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held at the Council Offices, Whitfield on Monday, 14 June 2021 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Chairman: Councillor C D Zosseder

Councillors: M Bates
T A Bond
P M Brivio
S C Manion
M Rose
R S Walkden
P Walker
H M Williams

Officers: Strategic Director (Corporate Resources)
Head of Community and Digital Services
Private Sector Housing Manager
Democratic and Corporate Services Manager
Democratic Services Officer

15 APOLOGIES

There were no apologies for absence received.

16 APPOINTMENT OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

The Democratic and Corporate Services Manager advised that no notice had been received for the appointment of substitute members.

17 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

18 MINUTES

The consideration of the Minutes of the previous meeting on 24 May 2021 was deferred.

19 DECISIONS OF THE CABINET RELATING TO RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The decisions of the Cabinet relating to recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held on 7 June 2021 were noted.

20 ISSUES REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE BY COUNCIL, CABINET, OR ANOTHER COMMITTEE

The Democratic and Corporate Services Manager advised that there were no issues referred to the Committee by Council, Cabinet or another Committee.

21 NOTICE OF FORTHCOMING KEY DECISIONS

The Democratic and Corporate Services Manager presented the Notice of Forthcoming Key Decisions to the Committee for its consideration.

In the absence of any dissent, it was agreed that the Notice of Forthcoming Key Decisions be noted.

22 SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Democratic and Corporate Services Manager presented the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme to the Committee for its consideration.

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme be noted.

23 PUBLIC SPEAKING

The Democratic and Corporate Services Manager advised that no members of the public had registered to speak on items on the agenda to which the public speaking protocol applied.

24 REVISED HOUSING ASSISTANCE POLICY

The Private Sector Housing Manager presented the report on the Revised Housing Assistance Policy.

The intent of the revised Housing Assistance Policy was to simplify the process for applicants. The current policy, which dated from 2017, consisted of several different grants and it was not uncommon for applicants to have work funded from up to four different grants/loans each requiring a separate application. This also included the Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) that all Councils were legally required to provide, and which was funded from the Better Care Fund.

The main focus of the Council's discretionary Housing Assistance was in respect of:

- Schemes to improve the health and independence of persons with disabilities
- the elderly and those with long term health conditions
- To reduce the number of homes with serious hazards
- To enable more effective use of the Disabled Facilities Grant
- To encourage empty homes back into use

Members were advised that one of the key revisions to the policy was to replace the Disabled Adaptation Grant (DAG) with a Disabled Independence Grant (DIG). The new grant would deal with most situations so that in future an applicant would have either a DFG or a DIG.

The main features of the new DIG were:

- The grant would have a maximum limit of £38,000. The maximum limit on DFGs was £30,000 and for DAGs it was £20,000.
- It would include provision for repairs of up to £3,000. Repairs were not currently included in DFG or DAG grants.
- Grant conditions would only apply for grants that exceeded £15,000. In contrast, conditions for DFGs started at £5,000.

There were also a number of other grants available as followed:

- Disabled Home Assistance Grant which was only available to persons receiving a Disabled Facilities Grant or a Disabled Independence Grant. The application had to be made by the homeowners.
- Disabled Relocation Grants were available where a person was eligible for Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) assistance, but where the property was unsuitable for adaptation to their specific needs, or the Council believe it would be more reasonable or practical to move and adapt another property. The maximum assistance available was £20,000 comprising of a grant covering 70% of the eligible cost.
- Disabled Adaptation Loan was available where a person was in receipt of a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) or the Disabled Independence Grant (DIG) and where the Council, in consultation with Kent Social Services, was of the view that it is necessary, reasonable and practicable for the DFG adaptations works to exceed the maximum grant limit. In such circumstances a loan of up to £20,000 would be made available to fund the cost of eligible works that exceeded the DFG maximum.

The Council had also employed its own Occupational Therapist (on a part-time basis) to speed up the processing of grants.

Members were advised that the Council's scheme was one of the most generous in Kent and that any unused funding each year would be carried over and be made available for the following year.

That it be recommended to Cabinet that decision CAB5 be endorsed as follows:

- (a) That the existing Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy be amended in order to simplify and improve the assistance available to disabled residents.
- (b) That the Head of Regulatory Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing and Health, be authorised to make further minor changes to the policy.

25 FOOD POVERTY REVIEW

The Democratic and Corporate Services Manager presented the draft Food Poverty Review to the Committee for its consideration. The Head of Community and Digital Services was also present to provide advice to Members on a number of areas relating to the Review and the work of the Council with the Community and Voluntary Sector.

Members welcomed the news that the Council had increased its grant to the Citizens Advice Bureau, which included work to help with debt advice and fuel poverty.

Members discussed the following points in respect of the Food Poverty review:

- To acknowledge that this was not just a local issue
- To welcome the news that the Council was working with Deal Town Council and Members in respect of a potential food pantry project for Deal

- To emphasise the need for more work to be done to encourage the take up of school meal vouchers
- The importance of quality food aid and not just the volume of food aid provided
- The issue of consulting the Salvation Army was raised and in response Members were advised that they were not an active food aid provider in the Dover District
- The importance of being clear about the Council's role in respect of food poverty
- The importance of the multi-agency partnership work that provided food poverty support in the district

It was agreed that the Democratic and Corporate Services Manager and the Head of Community and Digital Services should develop draft recommendations for the Committee to consider at its next meeting.

The meeting ended at 7.23 pm.