



Ashford Borough Council

Overview and Scrutiny 2016/17 Annual Report

And

2017/18 Work Programme

Foreword from the Chairman

The previous 12 months has seen the Overview and Scrutiny Committee effectively develop its responsibilities as one of the most important committees at Ashford Borough Council. Through agreeing a thematic work programme for the coming year Members have demonstrated their ongoing commitment to positively improve the work of the Committee, building on the success of the past year.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee already makes a substantive and positive contribution to the work of the Council and through refocusing our work programming we aim to develop the Committee's role in the Council and deliver improvements for residents in terms of both the services provided by the Council and external organisations.

In the past year the Committee has examined a wide range of subjects and has made meaningful, action based recommendations to Cabinet. I would like to offer the Committee's thanks to the Officers and Members who have attended sessions to give their insight in support of our work. I would further like to thank my Committee colleagues for their enthusiasm and attention to detail in scrutinising the information brought before them, and I look forward to the year ahead.

We need to ensure that the Committee undertakes meaningful work that leads to recommendations and outcomes that add value to the work of the Council and improve the quality of life for residents in our Borough and improve the experience visitors to Ashford enjoy.

The Committee welcomes any input from residents and members, whether in suggesting topics for scrutiny or providing contributions to inform scrutiny reviews. Information on how to get involved in the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is contained in this report.

Cllr Brendan Chilton
Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Overview and Scrutiny at Ashford

The Local Government Act 2000 (the Act) introduced a requirement that Councils with a 'Leader and Executive' arrangement must include the provision of one or more Overview and Scrutiny Committees within their Council structure.

Under section 21 of the Act, the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee has power to submit reports and make recommendations to the Cabinet or full Council on any aspect of Council business or any matter affecting the Borough or its residents.

The constitution of Ashford Borough Council contains provisions for a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee to carry out the functions detailed in the Act, although the Committee may assemble task groups from its membership for specific reviews.

In the 2016/17 municipal year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had 12 members, appointed in line with the broad political balance of the Council. The roles of Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee were appointed to opposition members, although the Committee operates apolitically in its discussions, with all members of the Committee working together to ensure that the Council and its services are acting effectively and efficiently.

Issues Scrutinised by the Committee

Since June 2016 the Committee has considered a number of items related to the Council's operations and wider issues affecting the Borough and its populations, including:

- Quarterly updates on the Council's performance against its corporate objectives

- Sickness absence figures for 2015/16
- The Council's Housing Framework
- Implementation of the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012
- Presentations from Southern Water
- Anti-Social Behaviour in the Borough
- Infrastructure planning related to the draft Local Plan to 2030
- Education provision in the Borough (presentation from the County Council's Area Education Officer)
- Ways to increase the profile of the Committee's work

The Committee considers a number of important standing items per year. These items are:

1. Scrutiny of the Council's Budget, carried out by a Committee Task Group

2. The annual report of the Ashford Community Safety Partnership

3. The Council's annual report on Safeguarding Adults and Children at Risk

Budget Scrutiny Task Group

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has a duty to scrutinise the Council's draft Capital and Revenue budget. The Committee assembled a task group whose remit included ensuring that the draft 2017/18 budget was achievable and delivered in line with the Council's 5 year Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and the Council's adopted corporate priorities.

The task group held sessions covering all budgetary areas and Council services and were grateful for the attendance and contributions of Portfolio Holders, Directors, Heads of

Service and the Council's Accountancy team.

Heads of Service presented their department service plans for the coming municipal year alongside up to date risk information; and on the basis of these reports and the budget documents the task group made seven recommendations which the main Committee supported and relayed to the Cabinet.

The Cabinet supported the recommendations, which were that it:

- (i) Be advised that the O&S Committee regards the Council's draft 2017/18 budget as legal and achievable.
- (ii) Endorse the Service Plans and Risk Registers for each service.
- (iii) Request that services include staff resource as a separate and individual risk within the Risk Register for each service.
- (iv) Enhance the consideration of staffing within the strategic Risk Register.
- (v) Require the Project Initiation Document (PID) process to be a compulsory first step for determining the viability of all Council projects.
- (vi) Consider that an overview of progress made in delivering the Council's project programme be added as a regular item to the Cabinet and O&S Committee agendas.
- (vii) Give greater consideration to cross-service and strategic interdependencies and the maintenance of an authority-wide skills register to build resilience and reduce dependence on external consultancy.

- (viii) Seek to continue the existing apprenticeship schemes in place across the Council and extend these where possible.

Through the continued use of the tracker, presented to the Committee each month, Members will ensure that these recommendations are carried out during the 2017/18 year.

Annual Report of the Community Safety Partnership

At least once a year the O&S Committee operates as the designated Committee responsible for Crime and Disorder issues (as required under the Police and Justice Act 2006). In line with this designation the Community Safety Partnership for Ashford present an annual report on their work within the Borough and set out their priorities for the coming year.

In February 2017 The Committee received a presentation on the Community Safety Partnership's work from the Borough Council's Head of Health, Parking and Community Safety; Portfolio Holder for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety and Health, Parking and Community Safety Manager; along with Detective Inspector Andrew Bidmead of Kent Police and Elizabeth Tweed, Chair of the Ashford Domestic Abuse Forum.

The update outlined positive developments with regard to pursuit of the Partnership's objectives, including:

- Ashford Borough Council's Cabinet agreeing the permanent funding of the One Stop Shop and Freedom Programme Co-ordinator post to continue the partnership's excellent work in tackling domestic abuse.
- The total number of people killed or seriously injured on roads in

Ashford falling by 17% from 2014 to 2015.

- Support programmes run for victims of domestic abuse are well attended, and the Ashford One Stop Shop is well attended.
- Significant work has been undertaken in schools and across other sectors to raise awareness of child sexual exploitation.
- The reported number of anti-social behaviour incidents in the Borough remaining the lowest in the County.

The Community Safety Partnership representatives also outlined the priorities for the coming year, which the Committee endorsed. These are:

- Road safety
- Safeguarding
 - Child sexual exploitation
 - Human trafficking
 - Modern slavery
- Domestic abuse and sexual offences
- Organised crime
 - Drugs
 - Gangs
 - Serious acquisitive crime
 - Digital crime
- Prevent

Safeguarding Adults and Children at Risk

In 2015 the audit partnership recorded the Council's safeguarding activities, procedures and policies as "weak". Following on from this assessment, a significant amount of work has been undertaken to improve and update the Council's approach to safeguarding, resulting in a subsequent audit review in 2016 recording the Council's safeguarding as "sound".

As a recommendation of the initial audit, a requirement for reporting to the Overview and Scrutiny was made, and

in March 2017 the Committee received a presentation from the Council's Designated Safeguarding Officer, Safeguarding Champion and Portfolio Holder for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety. This presentation outlined the work undertaken in the 15 months following the "weak" audit.

The Committee were pleased to note that the most recent bi-annual audit on safeguarding (required under section 11 of the Children Act 2004) showed that the Council was at 100% compliance. In discussing the report the Committee commended the progress made so far and made three recommendations which Cabinet agreed. These were:

- (i) That safeguarding training form part of the induction training package for new Councillors.
- (ii) That level 2 safeguarding training sessions are made available for Borough Councillors.
- (iii) That consideration be given to making safeguarding training available to Parish Councillors.

In order to maintain focus in this crucial area of the Council's work, a similar report is now an annual item in the Committee's forward plan.

2017/18 work programme

In suggesting topics to form a work programme for 2017/18, the Committee agreed three themes for its work going forward. These are:

1. **Air Quality** – to be the subject of a specific task group review
2. **The Wellbeing Agenda for Ashford**
3. **Futureproofing the Borough**

A draft timetable for the year's meetings is included below. This gives an indication of how the work programme can be incorporated alongside the Committee's standing item reports and other requirements.

Getting involved in Overview and Scrutiny

You can get involved in the Committee's work by:

- Making a suggestion for scrutiny
- Coming to a Committee meeting to hear the debate
- Putting forward your views as part of a scrutiny review

For more information about how to get involved you can email the scrutiny team at:

overviewandscrutiny@ashford.gov.uk

or go to:

www.ashford.gov.uk/overview-and-scrutiny.

Month	Standing Agenda Items	2017/18 Work Programme
June	Q4 Performance report	Air Quality - <i>Task Group meetings</i>
July	Housing Framework Annual Report	Air Quality - <i>Task Group meetings</i>
August		Air Quality - Task Group report back
September	Q1 Performance report	Wellbeing - AHWB updates/Priority Health Issues (overview)
October		Wellbeing - Rented Accommodation conditions (overview)
November	Q2 Performance report	Wellbeing - Youth engagement (overview)
December	<i>Budget Scrutiny Task Group meetings</i>	Wellbeing - Review meeting
January	Report of Budget Scrutiny Task Group	Wellbeing - Review report back
February	Community Safety Partnership update Q3 Performance report	Futureproofing - Infrastructure provision; education; broadband (overview)
March	Safeguarding Adults and Children at Risk	Futureproofing - Major Transport projects; rail; roads; watercourses, flooding and drainage (overview)
April		Futureproofing - Review meeting
May	O&S Annual Report O&S Programme Setting	Futureproofing - Review report back