

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **26th March 2013**.

Present:

Cllr. Chilton (Vice-Chairman in the Chair);

Cllrs. Apps, Bartlett, Bennett, Davison, Galpin, Mrs Hutchinson, Link, Mrs Martin, Mortimer, Shorter, Smith, Yeo.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Adby, Hodgkinson, Robey.

Also Present:

Head of Business Change & Technology, Communications & Marketing Manager, Policy & Performance Officer, Senior Scrutiny Officer, Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer.

394 Declaration of Interest

Councillor Shorter declared an ‘Other Interest’ as the Lead Member for Procurement and IT.

395 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 26th February 2013 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

396 Update Report on Communications

The Communications & Marketing Manager introduced the report. He advised that the report was broader than that brought before the Committee in 2012. It highlighted the roles and responsibilities of the Team and priorities going forward.

During the discussion, the following issues were raised:

- The enhanced report was welcomed. The Communications & Marketing Manager advised that the Team was proactively investigating ways to improve the level of responses to consultations.
- A Member raised concern regarding the leaflets that had been distributed to residents in connection with the green waste recycling contract; the telephone

number provided did not appear to be being answered. The Head of Business Change & Technology acknowledged that there had been problems with the contact telephone number. The process should have been handled better with checks being taken out before the distribution of the leaflets. A Member felt that the Committee should bear in mind that pressure had been placed on both Environmental Services and the Communications Team by Councillors to ensure that the new service was up and running quicker than had been initially anticipated. Members needed to be aware of the consequences of their decisions. Another Member agreed and added that an 'end to end' check should be undertaken before any leaflet or promotional material was distributed to ensure that this problem did not recur.

- In response to questions from Members, the Communications & Marketing Manager advised that they would continue to focus on the promotion of the information about welfare reforms and the rollout of the new waste and recycling scheme. A Member highlighted a useful article that had been published by Tunbridge Wells Borough Council on the implementation of welfare reforms, the Communications & Marketing Manager advised that he would look at this article.
- A Member reiterated her concerns regarding the 20% of the Borough's residents who did not have access to IT. It was advised that following the implementation of the Five Year Business Plan the Council's strategy was to move towards more automated methods of communication. However, it should be noted that there were staff at the Gateway who could assist residents who were either unable to or uncomfortable with the use of IT.
- Some Members were despondent about the level of responses received to the Core Strategy Review and questioned how the communications strategy had been handled. The consultation had been led by the Planning Department with support from the Communications Team. A lot of work had gone into the consultation process, with all media platforms being used, from the consultation portal to media liaisons and the production of materials. Members felt that the general public struggled to understand the importance of responding to consultations and often felt that once they had lodged a comment/complaint on one consultation this was taken as read. It was proposed and agreed that a representative from the Planning Department be requested to attend a future Meeting of the Committee to discuss the communication and consultation strategy for the various Development Plan and Supplementary Planning Documents as well as the Core Strategy Review.

Resolved:

- That (i) A representative from the Planning Department be invited to attend a future Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee to discuss the communication and consultation strategy for Consultation with the Public especially in relation to the Core Strategy Review.**
- (ii) The report be received and noted.**

397 Updated Ashford Borough Council Business Plan Performance Report, Q3 2012/13

The Policy & Performance Officer drew Members' attention to the report. The report was the fourth of its kind and provided a key snapshot of the progress being made with the Five Year Business Plan and Performance Indicators. Progress with the Business Plan had been positive and it should be noted that they were now over half way through the Business Plan period. Local and National Indicators had shown that house prices had steadied in the area, with average selling prices having risen by 11% in the Borough over the last 12 months.

A Member was delighted with the report and felt it should be noted that the report provided a lot of information in an easy to understand format.

Members requested information in relation to the location of B&Bs utilised by the Council, there were some concerns that the B&Bs being used were outside of the Borough and so could cause some difficulties for those whose support systems and jobs were within the Borough.

Further clarification was requested on the breakdown of the affordable properties that had been constructed in the Borough during the current financial year. Members felt it would be useful to know if the figures related solely to properties constructed by the Council or if they included properties built by Housing Associations.

The Policy & Performance Officer advised that he would investigate these points and report back to the Committee. The end of year report would provide further information on the areas raised by Members and would not just provide headline statistics.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

398 Future Reviews and Report Tracker

The Senior Scrutiny Officer drew Members' attention to the Tracker. The Meeting of the Committee in April would receive a presentation from Stour Valley Arts on 'Stour Valley Arts - investing in Ashford', an update from the Community Safety Partnership and a report on the Code of Conduct for Charity Street Collections.

Some Members raised concern regarding the proposed formation of a Task Group to consider the refurbishment of the 'dark-side' of the Stour Centre. They felt that the refurbishment should be considered by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair advised that the Task Group would consider the details of the refurbishment, and if the Committee wished it could request that the final report from the Task Group be considered by the Committee. This was agreed by the Committee.

Two Members felt that this was unacceptable and the Overview & Scrutiny Committee should not be side-lined. The refurbishment should be considered by the Committee.

Resolved:

- That (i) The Overview & Scrutiny Committee requests that the final report of the Stour Centre Refurbishment Task Group be considered by the Committee to enable the proposal to be scrutinised,**
- (ii) The Future Reviews and Report Tracker be noted.**

In accordance with Procedure Rule 15.5 Councillor Mrs Martin requested that it be recorded that she voted against the proposal.
