

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 **23rd April 2013**.

Present:

Cllr. Adby (Chairman);
Cllr. Chilton (Vice Chairman);

Cllrs. Apps, Bennett, Davison, Feacey, Hodgkinson, Mrs Hutchinson, Link, Mrs Martin, Mortimer, Smith.

Apology:

Cllr. Yeo.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Mrs Blanford, Claughton, Galpin

Mr Huttson Lo – Director – Stour Valley Arts

Community Safety Service Manager, Arts and Cultural Industries Manager, Community Safety Office Co-ordinator, Senior Scrutiny Officer, Member Services & Scrutiny Support Officer.

414 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Hodgkinson	Declared an "Other Interest" as she had taken part in street and store collections for the Royal British Legion Ashford Branch, the RNLI and the RSPB. In addition she was the Secretary of the RNIB Ashford Fundraising Group.	417
Mortimer	Declared an "Other Interest" as he was a Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinator	418

415 Minutes

Resolved:

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

416 Stour Valley Arts – Investing in Ashford – A 12-Month Review and Presentation to O&S Committee

The Arts and Cultural Industries Manager introduced the item and gave an overview to the working relationship and 3-year Service Level Agreement that Ashford Borough Council had with Stour Valley Arts (SVA). SVA was a significantly important arts organisation based in both Ashford Town Centre and Kings Wood, Challock and its aim was to increase awareness and enjoyment of contemporary art while encouraging greater interest in the environment through arts commissions, school education projects, public exhibitions, publications and international collaborations.

Ashford Borough Council, together with the Arts Council England (ACE) and Kent County Council (KCC) had, a year ago, responded constructively and quickly to support SVA with their Recovery and Stabilisation Strategy to ensure that they continued to deliver top quality arts development in the Borough whilst improving their administration and operational arrangements.

In the past it had been a concern of Members that SVA's focus was not sufficiently based on Ashford priorities and were not adequately investing in Ashford. Since the Council and others had committed to supporting SVA, the organisation had made significant strides to meet these expectations.

Mr Hutton Lo – Director of Stour Valley Arts, then addressed the Committee and explained that since he had joined SVA as Director, he had refocused their Business and Funding Strategy, and through increased partnership working - was able to better involve the public and other locally based stakeholders in their work within the natural environment. There was much evidence that they were working towards meeting the Council's expectations and these had been listed in the report.

Stour Valley Arts had been present in Kings Wood for 20 years, where 8 or 9 art pieces remained intact within the forest. Their most well known piece was 'Score For A Hole In The Ground' <http://www.scoreforaholeintheground.org> which was due for refurbishment and repair.

SVA's vision was to make Kings Wood become Ashford's equivalent of The Tate Modern's 'Turbine Hall', commissioning one major piece (like Score For A Hole In The Ground) a year and to work in partnership with other organisations inside and outside of Ashford to achieve this. They were also seeking possible investment to increase public facilities in the forest such as a Visitor Centre, Café and toilets.

In terms of bringing quality artistic work closer to the people of Ashford, and supporting the growth of the local cultural industries - SVA had set up a Town Centre Gallery at Elwick House, which was intended to become a creative hub and local resource to host regular exhibitions, local artist meetings and provide hot desking for creative organisations. It would also enable Ashford and Kings Wood to be better connected.

Continued investment for new work and maintenance of the existing, was a key priority for SVA and whilst the investment from ABC, KCC and Arts Council England was crucial, further funding from a wider field would be sought to enable changes within SVA and assist with its plan to become the UK's leading Arts and Environmental Organisation. SVA was now about Ashford but with international ambitions.

During the discussion the following points were raised.

- The work of the SVA incorporated all age ranges, including schools and the elderly, with regular forests walks being popular. Work with young carers and children at risk was particularly important.
- There was some vandalism, but this was accepted as part of art in the public domain. What was a priority was to educate people and deepen the engagement of the community with the art around them. The work itself was extremely considerate of the environment. Kings Wood was a man made wood and as such needed maintaining and this was taken into account when planning work pieces.
- Funding opportunities from Europe were being explored and a Member's suggestion to approach McArthur Glen for partnership work with their proposed investment in Ashford would be taken away for further consideration. Mr Lo was now sitting on the Council's Public Art Working Group so their involvement with developments and initiatives would happen more easily. Mr Lo detailed their small, part time staffing structure and the current funding that the SVA were receiving.
- SVA confirmed they were fully part of the East Kent City of Culture 2017 bid, as one of the founding organisations. A Member encouraged other Members to support the bid through Facebook, Twitter and other social mediums.
- One Member raised the issue of the lack of transport links from the Town to the forest, citing the need for this to be improved and because of this, how important it was to have an active gallery space in the Town Centre.
- Overall Members were very pleased and impressed with the work of SVA and content that the agreement in place with ABC was effective.

Resolved:

That the report and presentation be received and noted.

417 Face-to-Face Street Collections in Ashford Town Centre

The Community Safety Service Manager introduced the item and explained that this formed part of his remit in his previous role as Licensing Manager before taking up his current role as Community Safety Service Manager. He explained the legislation

and what the Council was able to regulate and what was outside its remit. Complaints had been received and as such the Council wished to find some solution.

It needed to be born in mind that these types of collections raised some £45 million nationally for some very worthwhile charities but that the way that these collections were carried out could appear pressurising and at worse, threatening, so a balance needed to be found. The proposed agreement was set out on page 7 of the agenda and the code of conduct that would be adhered to was also described. The main control would be through the booking process detailed within the report.

During the discussion Members raised the following points:

- The days chosen were considered to be the best based on other collecting regulations. Members were advised that there were exceptions such as the poppy appeal where it was deemed acceptable for them to collect outside of this agreement.
- The agreement had been signed so that it could be put into place quickly, if Members had concerns or determined the agreement to be flawed; they were assured that it could be withdrawn if this was necessary. So far though, the evidence suggested it was being effective and finding the necessary balance, but Members would be kept informed.
- The most obvious way to monitor the success of the agreement was to monitor the level of complaints still received and the Licensing Team would be responsible for this. The agreement had been promoted and had featured in the press.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

418 Ashford Community Safety Partnership: an update on the new arrangements for delivering the Community Safety Plan in the Borough.

The Community Safety Service Manager introduced the item and explained that the O&S Committee was responsible for Crime and Disorder under the Police Justice Act 2006. Annually the Committee would review various aspects of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP). Since this was reviewed last year there had been several changes to the structure of the Community Safety Unit and changes in the leadership of the CSP. There had also been a new strategic assessment and the production of the tactical delivery plan for 2013/14. Moving forward, it was hoped that reporting to Members would allow thought to be put to what could be done in the future to achieve more outcomes and Members were assured that the report would be better presented than it had been previously.

In addition the report detailed that there was to be a project to better understand the performance of the Community Safety Unit and the Ashford Monitoring Centre to identify how they could be better supported and optimised as part of the new structure. The Community Safety Service Manager was able to illustrate how these two units, working together, had had a positive input on the quality of life of residents within the Borough. The approach was going to be more integrative and there were some excellent teams involved and very much on board.

During the discussion the following points were raised:-

- The CSP had been very successful in the past but with these improvements it was hoped that more would be achieved with the same budgets. Members were given some examples of the work carried out by the partners and the successful achievements within the Borough.
- Members discussed various areas within the Borough where they had concerns regarding community safety. There was also some discussion regarding the crime levels and how the statistics could be misinterpreted. An area may be high in some crime areas but not all.
- Members showed concern for the increase in the levels of domestic abuse and substance misuse and the Community Safety Service Manager explained that one of the problems in the past had been the lack of a lead agency in tackling domestic abuse and substance misuse and in relation to domestic abuse, no national agency having responsibility to lead on tackling the issues. Encouragingly the Ashford Domestic Abuse Forum had agreed to take the lead agency role in delivering the CSP's domestic abuse tactical delivery plan. Similarly a combination of Turning Point, KCA and KDATT were taking lead roles in delivering the substance misuse plan. It was also hoped that the troubled families' initiative would make an impact in this area and the Community Safety Manager gave Members a brief outline as to what this initiative entailed.
- Funding continued to be a concern with the funding received likely to reduce in the coming years. Members were assured that as many funding avenues as possible would be explored.
- Members were keen to see Street Pastors have a greater involvement. It was agreed that they were an invaluable support, but as what they achieved could not be formally evidenced, it was unlikely that they would be awarded funds. Members were assured that the CSP was attempting to reach out to as many organisations as possible, without over stretching itself.
- The Community Safety Service Manager accepted that there was work to be done with regard to the relationship with, and support for, neighbourhood watch teams. He agreed to take this from the meeting.
- Members were also informed about the Safety In Action Fortnight, which saw all the relevant CSP partners educating young people through 9 minute sessions on matters of safety. Ashford was the only CSP to do this.

To conclude the Community Safety Service Manager explained that there were plans to increase the powers of the Borough's Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). He detailed what the PCSOs could currently do, and explained that Kent Police were considering regulations to give them new powers including; being able to issue fines for school truancy, throwing fireworks and drinking in public; fine those caught spraying graffiti and fly posting; break up groups of youngsters and take those under 16 home; and search youngsters for alcohol and tobacco.

Resolved:

That the annual update from the Community Safety Partnership be noted.

419 Future Reviews and Report Tracker

The Senior Scrutiny Officer introduced the report.

Resolved:

That the Future Reviews and Report Tracker be noted.
