

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in Committee Room 2, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **26th September 2017**.

Present:

Cllr. Feacey (Chairman).

Cllrs. Burgess, Hicks, Knowles, Krause, Miss Martin, Mrs. Martin.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Chilton, Ovenden, Bartlett, A. Howard.

Also Present:

Cllr. Shorter.

Mr. Ed Hammond (EH) - Director for Research & Campaigns at the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS).

Policy & Performance Manager, Senior Policy, Performance and Scrutiny Officer, Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer, Member Services Officer.

166 Election of Chairman

In the absence of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, there was a need to elect a Chairman for the meeting by the Members present.

Resolved:

That Councillor Feacey be elected as Chairman for this meeting.

167 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 25th July 2017 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

168 Budget Scrutiny Task Group Workshop (CfPS)

Mr. Ed Hammond, the Director for Research & Campaigns at the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) gave a presentation to the Committee outlining the purpose of Budget Scrutiny and advising on best practice. He added that each Local Authority worked differently and therefore some information may need tweaking in accordance with

ABC procedures. The presentation covered the following points:

- **What is Budget Scrutiny**
- **The fundamental purpose**
- **Mechanics of Budget Scrutiny**
- **Challenges**
- **Impact and Skills**

The presentation was then opened up to the Committee, and the following questions and points were raised: -

- Members agreed that whilst last year's procedure had produced good scrutiny of the draft budget, there had been issues that needed addressing, and they supported the revision and evolution of the process.
- In response to a question asking whether it was considered appropriate to review budget scrutiny without sight of the previous year's data, Mr. Hammond advised that the information needed to be presented in a holistic way, and not in isolation to other sources of data. Some of the evidence received may be informal and it was necessary to filter the relevant information to obtain what was effectively required for scrutiny. It was felt that scrutiny of the quarterly budget monitoring reports at future meetings of the Committee may be beneficial to highlight variances through the year to inform the main budget scrutiny process and keep a watching brief on budgetary matters. The Portfolio Holder advised that he would welcome O&S reviewing the quarterly budget monitoring reports.
- One Member spoke about the financial constraints on the Council and challenges faced owing to the lack of certainty over the government's proposals for Business Rates Retention. Mr. Hammond agreed that the need for focus was increasingly important within the changing landscape of Local Authorities and they were susceptible to criticism if budget scrutiny happened too late.
- The Committee went on to discuss the impact on services and how this fitted in with the budget scrutiny process. Mr. Hammond agreed that because the two were intrinsically cohesive, awareness of service issues was essential. Members noted that in previous years, the task group often became side-tracked from the budget and the session then veered over to focus on service issues. The Senior Policy, Performance and Scrutiny Officer added that officers were working in conjunction with the Chairman on a protocol for identifying and capturing service questions without a budgetary implication for investigation at a later date through the O&S Work plan or Tracker.
- Some Members asked about the inclusion of Deputy Portfolio Holders on the O&S Committee. The Policy & Performance Manager advised that the

constitution permitted Deputy Portfolio Holders to be appointed to both the O&S Committee and O&S Task Groups, provided they did not take part in the scrutiny of any matter for which they had directly undertaken work for the relevant Portfolio Holder. She also noted that this was a constitutional matter that would need to be raised via the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee.

- In response to a question, asking how other Local Authorities approached the budget scrutiny process, Mr. Hammond said that it was a difficult process to manage and get right. He emphasised the importance of sharing the responsibilities and developing expertise to avoid burdening officers. It was imperative that the Council was clear about its common intentions and what it wanted to achieve. A Member spoke about the similarities with school budgets and how the evidence might be triangulated around risk, finance and performance to show the full story.

The Chairman and Committee thanked Mr. Hammond for his presentation and agreed that it had been extremely valuable.

169 Preparations for scrutiny of 2018/19 budget

The Senior Policy, Performance and Scrutiny Officer introduced the report which set out a number of practical changes to be trialled at the Task Group meetings, the first of which had been the CfPS training session at this meeting. The next change involved reorganising the sessions in line with the recent structural changes, so each session would cover a directorate. This would also provide the opportunity to hold the bulk of budget scrutiny over a one-day session, if the Task Group were so minded, rather than multiple sessions over six days as in previous years. There would also be a change to the sessions to ensure they were targeted more towards budgetary matters, with service risk registers, which would be filtered by their financial impact. The final proposal was to capture service-based questions that arose during the sessions, and provide a separate annexe to the minutes in order to add to the Overview & Scrutiny Tracker for investigation at a later date.

The Report was then opened up to the Committee, and the following questions and points were raised:

- One Member commented that the new proposals sounded in line with how the Private Sector undertook Budget Scrutiny and asked if any other Local Authorities were carrying out this approach. The Senior Policy, Performance and Scrutiny Officer advised that the proposals were a combination of Officers' ideas and they were not aware of any other Local Authority working under these specific sets of proposals.
- A concern was raised that there was still too much pressure being placed on Officers and the wording of the reports needed to show failings as well as achievements, in order to provide a concise and accurate picture.
- A Member suggested some refresher training on risk be provided for those Councillors that wanted it, and the Committee agreed to take the proposals

forward.

- Cllrs. Chilton and Bartlett had already expressed an interest in sitting on the Budget Scrutiny Task Group Panel. Cllr. Mrs Martin and Miss. Martin said that they too would be willing to form part of the panel. With some Members absent from the meeting, it was decided that the Corporate Scrutiny & Overview Officer would email an invitation to sit on the panel around to all of the Committee.

Resolved:

That

- (i) The Committee endorsed the proposed changes to the Budget Scrutiny Task Group process for 2018/19.**
- (ii) The Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer would email the Committee inviting them to join the Task Group Membership.**

170 Quarter 1 2017/18 Performance Report

The Senior Policy, Performance and Scrutiny Officer presented the Quarter 1 Performance Report to the Committee. He explained that the report contained summary highlights from the online Performance 'Dashboard' for each of the Council's Corporate Plan areas. An archive system had been added to the Dashboard, and this enabled Members to see any trends developing and achievements over a 12 month period. The Council's Annual Report had also been added to the website and was now available for members of the public to view. It was accompanied by a timeline of significant milestones from the Corporate Plan. This was updated on a monthly basis and the Senior Policy, Performance and Scrutiny Officer would email the link around to Members.

The Committee then discussed the outcomes of the Performance Report and some commented that the result and/or value of the Council's actions was not always visible. The Senior Policy, Performance and Scrutiny Officer advised that the Performance Report was a snapshot in time and welcomed any feedback from Members via email to him. The Portfolio Holder added that some data would be presented specifically as part of the departmental reporting process.

Resolved:

That

- (i) the Senior Policy, Performance and Scrutiny Officer email the website link to Members.**
- (ii) the report be received and noted**

171 Future Reviews and Report Tracker and Topic Selection Flowchart

The Chairman confirmed there were no new items on the tracker to discuss.

Resolved:

That the Tracker be received and noted.

Queries concerning these Minutes? Please contact Clare Ricketts:
Telephone: 01233 330491 Email: clare.ricketts@ashford.gov.uk
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