

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 July 2016**.

Present:

Cllr. Michael (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Feacey, Hicks, Krause, Link, Sims.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (iii) Councillor White attended as a Substitute Member for Councillor Burgess.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Chilton, Burgess, Mrs Martin

Also Present:

Cllrs. Clokie, Shorter, White

Head of Housing, Housing Strategy Manager, Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer, Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Officer, Member Services Officer.

98 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Feacey	Made a "Voluntary Announcement" as a Member of the Ashford Volunteer Centre	100
Sims	Made a "Voluntary Announcement" as Director of the Ashford Volunteer Centre	100

99 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 28th June 2016 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

100 Housing Framework Annual Report

The Housing Strategy Manager introduced the report and explained that it provided an annual update on achievements during 2015/2016 against the actions set out in

the Housing Framework 2013-2018. The report outlined a review of the Housing Frameworks priorities to respond to national and local challenges and aspirations. The Vice-Chairman in the Chair opened up the report to the Committee and the following questions/comments were raised: -

- A Member asked what type of properties the 10 homes were that the Property Company had acquired. The Housing Manager explained that the lead officers dealing with the purchasing worked within the Property Department but she had been informed that they were mainly 2/3 bed houses. These properties would be let on the open market and did not fall under the social housing remit.
- A query was raised asking who people would direct enquiries to regarding affordable housing and shared ownership. The Housing Strategy Manager advised that access to information was available via a Help to Buy Agent or BPHA (a major housing association and socially-motivated property business).
- A Member asked if there was any intention to increase the capacity of temporary accommodation to alleviate the financial burden of placing people into bed & breakfast accommodation. The Housing Manager responded that they were continually looking into purchasing a suitable property, similar to that of Christchurch House. A property had recently been pursued and initial communications made, but unfortunately the transaction was unsuccessful.
- The Housing Manager talked to the Committee about the recent work undertaken with Porchlight around homelessness in the borough. The Council funded Porchlight to provide a rough sleeping outreach worker in the Ashford area. A working group had been formed which included street pastors, police officers and ABC to assist rough sleepers in accessing self-help services. A Member asked whether the figure of 89 stated in the report for the number of homeless applicants on the housing register related to people on the streets. The Housing Manager advised that the figure related to people who had been accepted as homeless and were in temporary housing such as Christchurch House or ABC private sector leased properties or in B&B awaiting permanent accommodation. It was estimated that the number of people sleeping rough in the Borough at any one time was between 1 and 5 people. She explained that although guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) required that an annual rough sleeping estimate was provided, ABC in conjunction with Porchlight monitored and acted on rough sleeping cases more frequently on a weekly basis throughout the year.
- A Member asked who assessed applicants for disabled adaptations and the Housing Manager confirmed that in all cases Housing Officers liaised formally with Occupational Therapists who undertook the assessment. A suggestion was made that ABC could work with Ashford Volunteer Centre and the Housing Manager agreed this was a good idea. A question was asked why the amount spent on private adaptations was higher than for ABC tenants. The Housing Strategy Manager explained that ABC housing was maintained to a high standard and lots of properties were already well equipped so a higher proportion of minor adaptations may be required. Private sector

properties often required major work that was likely to increase costs. The Portfolio Holder added that the HRA was legally not able to pay for private adaptations.

- A Member asked what procedures were in place for long term empty properties. The Housing Manager explained that there was no funding available for ABC to assist with funding to repair empty properties but officers investigated cases reported to them and offered advice on the options available. These included either working with the KCC No Use Empty Campaign to access a KCC loan to enable a property to be brought back into use or where the property was in good condition, the Housing Team could offer to take over the management of the property and let it on behalf of the landlord. In addition in certain cases the Council could apply to the Residential Tribunal for an Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO). If such an order was granted by the tribunal the local authority could arrange to repair and tenant the property and recoup the costs via collection of rental income. However nationally these orders were few and far between, and notoriously difficult to obtain.
- The Housing Strategy Manager talked to the Group about fuel poverty and explained that the Housing Department were investing in a modelling tool provided via the British Research Establishment (BRE) to identify a range of private sector information including properties that had low energy efficiency. The Housing Manager added that they held regular private landlord events and promoted energy efficiency via these events. In addition, Housing ran an accreditation scheme for private landlords and had a very small budget to encourage private landlords to undertake energy efficiency improvements for accredited properties.

Resolved: That

- i) the report be received and noted**
- ii) the report be approved for publication on the Council's website**

101 Ashford Borough Council's Performance Dashboard

The Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer introduced the presentation and explained that an online system had been developed which offered users a more in-depth and interactive way of viewing performance data and statistics. This insight would always be available to view, but the system could also produce paper reports for committee. A demonstration of the Dashboard was then presented to the Committee.

The Vice-Chairman in the Chair opened up the item to the Committee and the following questions/comments were raised: -

- A Member asked if the data would be publically available and the Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer advised that whilst the information

could be made publically available in the future, it had been agreed that its initial use would be as an internal management tool.

- The Vice-Chairman asked how data would be managed and checked, and the Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer confirmed that whilst “Super-users” would govern the data, the system was able to flag up any information that may have been inputted incorrectly.
- Members asked if a quarterly report would still be made to the Committee and the Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer confirmed it would be, but it was worth noting that the advantage of the Dashboard was that data could be viewed on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.

102 Budget Scrutiny Task Group Report

It was the responsibility of the O&S Committee to agree the set up and membership of a Budget Scrutiny Task Group which would scrutinise the Council’s draft 2017/2018 budget and report its findings to the O&S Committee and then report to Cabinet on the soundness of the budget. The Vice-Chairman explained that it did require a commitment of time and asked for volunteers. A Member explained that the Task Group was not so much about number crunching but more about identifying whether what was being proposed was deliverable. The Vice-Chairman volunteered himself and would speak to the Chairman about inviting other Members. Several Members advised that they would check their diaries and come back with an answer. A suggestion was made that a briefing session be arranged.

Resolved:

- (i) that the O&S Committee agree the set up and membership of a Budget Scrutiny Task Group.**
- (ii) that Members feedback to the Chairman and the Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer their availability**
- (iii) a briefing session be arranged for Members before the start of the budget scrutiny process**

103 Implementation of Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 Report

The Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer introduced the item and explained that the Cabinet Office were imminently expected to produce extra guidance to Local Authorities regarding what was expected in relation to the Public Services (Social Value) Act. Depending on the content of this guidance, the Procurement Officer may attend a future Overview & Scrutiny meeting.

The Vice-Chairman opened up the item to the Committee and the following questions/comments were raised: -

- The Committee discussed what the Public Services (Social Value) Act meant and how it was primarily about adding value to the community when procuring Public Service contracts, but it was also good practice to consider Social Value for all procurement activity.
- A Member mentioned that some Officers seemed unaware of the Act and asked whether it had been implemented at ABC and the Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer explained that further information had been provided, but perhaps had yet to filter down to Officers on a wider scale.
- The Portfolio Holder spoke about the new Resource Manager that had been in post since January and the Project Implementation Document that she had produced to assist the Procurement Officer in adding value.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted

104 Future Reviews and Report Tracker

The Vice-Chairman discussed various items on the Report Tracker and opened up the items to the Committee and the following questions/comments were raised: -

- The Committee agreed they were happy to receive the Disaster Recovery Report circulated via email by the Scrutiny and Overview Officer.
- A Member asked for a Feasibility Study to be undertaken on the impact of removing the wastewater facility in the town. Members discussed the issue of Ashford being a growth area and having responsibility for the infrastructure to support growth. The Water companies had reported capacity to 2025 so it was important to ascertain what plans were in place for after that time. The Senior Policy, Performance & Scrutiny Officer explained that a report was being drafted regarding this issue and would be circulated to Members shortly.
- The Vice-Chairman discussed public engagement and the need to publicise what the O&S Committee did. If external agencies such as Southern Water and the NHS were to be invited to O&S, then this would undoubtedly encourage residents to attend meetings. The Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Officer would take this forward.
- A topic for future scrutiny was 5 Year Land Supply and a Member reported that the Leader had mentioned at the last Planning meeting that he would be writing to DCLG for clarification on what to do when developers bought land

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- The Committee agreed to cancel the meeting scheduled for August.

Resolved:

- (i) that the tracker be noted**
- (ii) the meeting in August be cancelled**

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