Monitoring Officer and Solicitor to the Council,   OSC
T W Mortimer LLB Solicitor

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Notice of a Meeting, to be held in the Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford, Kent, TN23 1PL on Tuesday, 11th October, 2022 at 7.00 pm.

_____

The Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are:-

Councillor Ovenden (Chairman)
Councillor Chilton (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs.   Barrett, Blanford, Brooks, Burgess, Farrell, Hayward, Howard-Smith, Ledger, Meaden and Mulholland

Agenda

Page Nos..

1.   **Apologies/Substitutes**

To receive Notification of Substitutes in accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (c)

2.   **Declarations of Interest**   1 - 2

To declare any interests, which fall under the following categories, as explained on the attached document:

a) Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)
b) Other Significant Interests (OSI)
c) Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests

See Agenda Item 2 for further details

3.   **Minutes of the last Meeting**   3 - 8

To approve the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 13th September 2022, subject to noting the following Post Meeting Note under Minute No.140: -

"A Member asked if there was a separate committee that reviewed how we were managing mental health and wellbeing. The Chairman explained that the O&S committee performed that role through this annual sickness report."

_____

Queries concerning this agenda? Please contact:
 telephone: 01233 330491 email: membersservices@ashford.gov.uk
Agendas, Reports and Minutes are available on: www.ashford.gov.uk/committees

Declarations of Interest (see also "Advice to Members" below)

(a)   **Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)** under the Localism Act 2011, relating to items on this agenda. The <u>nature</u> as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

 A Member who declares a DPI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting for that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted).

(b)   **Other Significant Interests (OSI)** under the Kent Code of Conduct relating to items on this agenda. The <u>nature</u> as well as the existence of any such interest must be declared, and the agenda item(s) to which it relates must be stated.

 A Member who declares an OSI in relation to any item will need to leave the meeting <u>before the debate and vote</u> on that item (unless a relevant Dispensation has been granted). However, prior to leaving, the Member may address the Committee in the same way that a member of the public may do so.

(c)   **Voluntary Announcements of Other Interests** not required to be disclosed under (a) and (b), i.e. announcements made for transparency alone, such as:

- Membership of amenity societies, Town/Community/Parish Councils, residents' groups or other outside bodies that have expressed views or made representations, but the Member was <u>not</u> involved in compiling or making those views/representations, or

- Where a Member knows a person involved, but does <u>not</u> have a close association with that person, or

- Where an item would affect the well-being of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc. but <u>not</u> his/her financial position.

 [<u>Note</u>: Where an item would be likely to affect the <u>financial position</u> of a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc.; OR where an item is <u>an application made</u> by a Member, relative, close associate, employer, etc., there is likely to be an OSI or in some cases a DPI. ALSO, holding a committee position/office within an amenity society or other outside body, or having any involvement in compiling/making views/representations by such a body, may give rise to a perception of bias and require the Member to take no part in any motion or vote.]

Advice to Members on Declarations of Interest:

(a)   Government Guidance on DPI is available in DCLG's Guide for Councillors, at
 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/5962/2193362.pdf

(b)   The Kent Code of Conduct was adopted by the Full Council on 19 July 2012, and a copy can be found in the Constitution alongside the Council's Good Practice Protocol for Councillors dealing with Planning Matters. See https://www.ashford.gov.uk/media/2098/z-word5-democratic-services-constitution-2019-constitution-of-abc-may-2019-part-5.pdf

(c)   Where a Member declares a committee position or office within, or membership of, an outside body that has expressed views or made representations, this will be taken as a statement that the Member was not involved in compiling or making them and has retained an open mind on the item(s) in question. If this is not the case, the situation must be explained.

If any Member has any doubt about any interest which he/she may have in any item on this agenda, he/she should seek advice from the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, or from other Solicitors in Legal and Democracy as early as possible, <u>and in advance of the Meeting.</u>

This page is intentionally left blank

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held in Committee Room 2, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **13th September 2022**

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman);

Cllrs. Blanford, Burgess, Hayward, Ledger, Meaden, Mulholland

Apologies:

Cllr. Chilton, Howard-Smith

Also Present:

Cllrs. Feacey, Pickering

Also in Attendance (virtually)

Cllr. Harman

Assistant Director HR Customer Services Communications and Digitalisation, Director of Place, Space and Leisure, Human Resources Manager

In attendance:

Head of Policy & Performance, Assistant Director Planning and Development, Team Leader, Plan Making and Infrastructure, Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer, Policy and Democratic Services Assistant, Member Services Officer

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Committee held a 2-minute silence in memory of Her Majesty the Queen, who died on Thursday 8th September 2022.

137 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 14th June 2022 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

138 Corporate Performance Report (Quarter 1 2022/23)

The Chairman spoke to the Committee about the items on the agenda, including the Corporate Performance Report, where Planning featured quite heavily. He asked that discussion be kept stringently to the reports, and he advised that at the final agenda item he would propose a Task Group be set up to review the issues that Planning had experienced in regards to their IT system.

The Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer summarised performance against the council's updated suite of KPIs reflecting the Corporate Plan 2022-24.

He explained that many performance indicators from the previous council's framework had been retained and allowed for historic data comparison. However, a number of new performance indicators had been agreed upon, for which data was only available for the last quarter. As this was the first of the performance reports reflecting the Corporate Plan – all measures had been included both those which, going forward, would be reported upon annually and those reported upon quarterly. The aim was to provide a complete view of the councils KPI suite for this first report. Measures were grouped into the corporate plan themes, that of Green Pioneer, Caring Ashford, Targeted Growth and the Council's underlying principles.

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

- The Chairman asked about the sections where no status was present and it was clarified that the value was sometimes the trend, rather than a specific or obvious target.

- When asked for his comments on the Planning items within the report, the Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer stated that after working closely with the Planning department, he knew how exceptionally hard they worked. Unfortunately, they had experienced hindering issues outside of their control including Stodmarsh and IT limitations.

- The Assistant Director Planning and Development explained that by Quarter 4 he anticipated the Service being in a more stable position. He reiterated that some of the performance issues were governed outside of the Council's control. Stodmarsh was a long standing issue and progress was being made to try and resolve that, with Natural England's assistance. Those deterring factors that were within the Departments control, should be resolved by Quarter 4. The Manager suggested that the figures be configured to show the number of applications that were impacted by Stodmarsh, thus showing the true impact that issue alone was having on overall case numbers.

- In response to a question asking about trends in numbers of applications, it was clarified that there had been an increase earlier in the year, but this had flattened out near and was now about average. The earlier increase could be attributed to economic factors and the pandemic whereby homeowners were making alterations to their properties instead of looking to move house.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

139 S106 Review – Process Mapping Update

The Team Leader, Plan Making and Infrastructure introduced this item. The report provided an update on the process mapping exercise of the current process for identifying, negotiating, implementing and monitoring S106 agreements in

response to the first recommendation of the O&S S106 Task Group report to Cabinet in November 2021.

In addition, it provided an update for the Committee in respect of the remaining seven recommendations (in Table 1), progress in respect of the Mid Kent Audit actions and other S106 related work streams currently being led by the Plan Making and Infrastructure Team.

The main theme within the report was the process mapping exercise, which had been broken down into three parts; the policy formulation stage or plan making phase, the planning application phase, and the monitoring and implementation phase.

The report was opened up to the Committee and the following questions and points were raised: -

- A Member asked whether the processing mapping exercise could also be applied to content. The Assistant Director Planning and Development explained that content was a policy issue and would be considered at the stage of discussions with the developer.

- The guidance for Officers (mentioned in Table 1 of Page 49 of the report) would be produced around the same time as the handbook for Members and Parish Councils.

- A question was asked whether the timeframe to prompt Parish Councils (contained within the sub-process outlined on page 58) could be longer, and could more flexibility be built in. The Team Leader, Plan Making and Infrastructure highlighted that caution was needed in this area, owing to legal implications, but it was hoped that more flexibility could be built in once the rules and regulations had been reviewed.

- The Team Leader Plan Making and Infrastructure indicated that the new Arcus system would replace the manual task mentioned on Page 61 of the report where by Officers had to check with Finance colleagues whether funding had been received. **Post Meeting Note:** It was confirmed that while improvements had been made to the current system of manual checks in terms of the information shared and frequency of meetings, that these would continue as there were no plans to link the Council's EFin system to Arcus.

- The Chairman and Assistant Director Planning and Development spoke about Parishes being encouraged to engage with S106 before it transpired, and the process map should be updated to reflect this. The Chairman stated that parishes must be explored as they were an integral part of the planning process. The process map in the report focused on a Local Plan led approach, with opportunity for dialogue and thought within Parishes, in the knowledge that sites may be coming forward, as in Neighbourhood Plans. Difficulties arose when windfall (i.e. non-Local Plan site) applications were submitted and Parishes and/or the Council were on the back foot, as to understanding the needs or benefits that could be sought as part of any S106. Therefore continual collaboration was needed with parished, unparished and town council areas. A Member added that some Parish Councils rarely dealt

with S106's, so it was important to include wording about them keeping a renewed view, to keep abreast of changes. The Chairman added that S106 funding was gathered generally for the Borough so Parishes should look for S106 contributions from other pots.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

140 Annual Sickness Report 2021/22

The HR Manager introduced the report, which provided members with sickness absence figures for the financial year 2021/22 (01 April 21 to 31 March 22). The figures within the report demonstrated a return to pre-pandemic sickness levels, although it was clear that absences due to Covid 19 had proportionately affected attendance levels.

Mental ill health accounted for 40% of the council's total sickness absence, compared to 34% last year. Although high, this figure followed national trends as reported by the CIPD. The HR manager went on to explain that they were were working with the Health and Safety team to introduce Mental Health First Aiders as an additional layer of support for the organisation.

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

- The Portfolio Holder advised that ABC had superior levels of sickness and attendance in comparison to other Local Authorities, and he thanked staff for contributing to that. In addition, the Council were the first to introduce the concept of Mental Health First Aiders.

- A Member asked about assistance offered in other areas away aside from mental health. The HR manager outlined the 4 wellbeing pillars of physical, financial, mental and cyber, and the plan with Benenden Healthcare where staff can have access to treatment for physical health if NHS waiting lists were long. The Chairman added that the O&S committee were the ones responsible for directing and guiding the HR team concerning health & wellbeing.

- A member of public indicated he wanted to ask a question, but the Chairman explained that this needed to be submitted in writing prior to the meeting.

- In response to a question regarding absence levels when staff were able to come back to the office, the HR manager noted that staff remained positive about returning, but unfortunately she did not have any statistics on this. She added that she could provide them in the next report if the Committee requested.

- Information pertaining to the absence reason from neighbouring Local Authorities was not yet available.

Resolved:

i)   **That the report be received and noted**
ii)   **That the committee wish to receive a further update in a year's time**

141 Hybrid Working

The Assistant Director HR Customer Services Communications and Digitalisation gave a brief introduction to the Committee on the report, which had been requested by the O&S Committee to explore how well the hybrid arrangements were working, with particular consideration in terms of performance, customer satisfaction, savings, human resources and recruitment.

The overarching conclusions were that hybrid working was here to stay across the country, but it needed sustained effort to ensure it continued to work efficiently. Management Team were keen to remain agile, keeping customers' needs at the forefront of decisions and continuing to work flexibly.

The report was opened up to the Committee and the following questions and points were raised: -

- It was confirmed that staff working from home were not receiving any financial assistance towards their utility bills, because they were able to choose whether to work remotely or come into the office.

- The Assistant Director HR Customer Services Communications and Digitalisation clarified that Project Office and Project Cake were initiatives to engage staff in the questionnaires.

- The Chairman spoke about the information on page 10 of the report concerning the main reasons for wanting to work from home more frequently. He noted that one of the top answers were less commuting time and costs, which would help to balance the costs of working from home. The questionnaire would be revisited and regular surveys and reviews would be carried out.

- In response to a question regarding monitoring the effectiveness of hot-desking, the Assistant Director HR Customer Services Communications and Digitalisation explained that there was a trend for staff to gravitate towards certain desks that they preferred working at, within their Team's allocated area. There was now 60% capacity within the Civic centre and there were hot desk areas for 'overspill' on busy days. Additional space was still available on level three for any future strategies if the trend leaned towards working in the office.

- Fridays in the office were always a quieter day, whilst Mondays were slightly busier, and the middle of the week showed higher levels of staff working in the office.

Resolved:

      i)   **That the report be received and noted**
     ii)   **That an update report be presented to the Committee in the future**

142 Report Tracker

The Chairman reiterated that he wished to propose a Task Group be set up to review the issues that Planning had experienced in regards to the Arcus IT system. It was anticipated that this would be a closed group meeting.

The Head of Policy & Performance explained that the findings from the Consultation and Engagement Task Group would be presented at the October meeting. The work programme was quite full now with the proposed Task Group the Chairman had mentioned, and then Budget Scrutiny Task Group following that, as well as the reports coming to the full committee in the autumn, as outlined on the Tracker.

The Chairman said that he had been asked to raise the possibility of liaising with the Water Authority and the Head of Policy & Performance confirmed that Southern and South Eastern Water were planning to attend the forthcoming Ashford Strategic Delivery Board meeting. The Chairman asked for someone to report back from that meeting.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact membersservices@ashford.gov.uk
Agendas, Reports and Minutes are available on: https://ashford.moderngov.co.uk

Scrutiny Topic Selection Matrix	1. Represents a key issue for local people.	2. The issue is strategic and significant.	3. The topic falls within a community or corporate priority area.	4. Scrutiny of the issue will lead to effective outcome.	5. Had the topic has been covered elsewhere? (Yes = low score No = high score)	6. Represents an issue of concern to stakeholders and partners.	7. The issue is of community concern or there is a high level of dissatisfaction with one or more services.	8. The scrutiny activity is timely.	Score	Rank	Review Type
Implementation of Planning IT System	5	4	5	4	5	5	5	4	**37**	*1*	TG

Each of the topics are scored for degree of 'fit', e.g. 1 (low) to 5 (high). The reviews with the best fit achieve the highest score.

1. Represents a key issue for local people.

2. The issue is strategic and significant.

3. The topic falls within a community or corporate priority area.

4. Scrutiny of the issue will lead to effective outcomes.

5. Has the topic been covered elsewhere in other services? (Yes = low score   No = high score)

6. Represents an issue of concern to stakeholders and partners

7. The issue is of community concern or there is a high level dissatisfaction with one or more services.

8. The scrutiny activity is timely.

Review Type:

Each topic has an indicated review type: Task Group (TG), One-off report or Presentation (R), Member Briefing (B), Other (O)

Score	What the score means
31 to 40	The issue/item has a high likelihood of entering the Scrutiny Work Programme but should be prioritised according to score
20 to 30	Item/issue has less chance of gaining a place on the Scrutiny Work Programme and should be held in abeyance
Under 20	Item/issue should not normally gain a place on the Scrutiny Work Programme

This page is intentionally left blank

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report Tracker – October 2022

	Current Work Programme		
Report Title	**Date due to O&S**	**Reporting Service**	**Scope of what is to be scrutinised**
Implementation of Planning IT System	October to December 2022	Planning and Development	The Committee proposed to review the recent implementation of the planning IT system with Arcus Global. This would be a review to understand what lessons can be learnt for the roll out of future transformation projects.
Consultation and Engagement Task Group	November 2022	Policy and Performance	The final report and recommendations of the Consultation and Engagement review will be presented to the Committee.
Budget Scrutiny Meetings	December to January 2022/23	Finance and IT	Scrutiny of the draft budget 2023/24 will take place over three or four meetings during December and January.
Freedom Leisure Contract	Early 2023	Environment, Property and Recreation	A report to review the council's new leisure operator. Scrutiny of this topic would examine how the service has been running, the savings made to the council and the levels of customer satisfaction with the service. Note: An internal audit of the contract is underway and a report could come to O&S after the audit process has been completed.
Planning Service Progress Update	Early 2023	Planning and Development	During scrutiny of the draft budget for 2022/23, Members agreed that it was important to closely monitor the progress of the Service and an update report on this in later 2022 would be requested by the Committee.

This page is intentionally left blank