

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held in Committee Room No. 2, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **13th June 2023**.

Present:

Councillor Bell (Chair),
Councillor Chilton (Vice-Chair).

Cllrs. Bartlett, Feacey, Joseph, Ledger, McGeever, Shilton, C.Suddards.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(c), Cllr McGeever attended as Substitute Member for Cllr Michael.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Giles, Michael.

In attendance:

Cllrs. Gathern, Mulholland.

Head of Policy & Performance, Policy & Scrutiny Officer, Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer, Member Services Officer.

Also in Attendance (virtually)

Cllr. Forest.

30 Election of Chair

Resolved:

That Councillor Bell be elected as Chair for this Meeting.

31 Election of Vice-Chairman

Resolved:

That Councillor Chilton be elected as Vice-Chair for this Meeting.

32 Declarations of Interest

Cllr	Interest	Minute No
Feacey	Made a Voluntary Announcement that he was Chair of Ashford Volunteer Centre	34

33 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 14th March 2023 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

34 O&S Work Programme 2023/24

The Policy & Scrutiny Officer introduced the report, and provided a brief summary of the Work Programme and the process for topic selection. She asked Members to primarily consider whether the Freedom Leisure Contract item should remain, since an internal audit was underway which would result in a report going to the Audit Committee for review. In addition, the Cabinet Schedule of Key Decisions had been included and would be a standing item on the agenda going forward.

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

- A Member noted that the general cleanliness and maintenance of the Stour Centre had deteriorated, and suggested a review of this be undertaken. The Policy & Scrutiny Officer would take this forward.
- It was suggested that the Savings Schedule was made a high priority and presented for the Budget Scrutiny Task Group to review. With the Council having to make significant savings, it was prudent for the Schedule to be studied prior to the formulation of the budget in September time. The Chair added that the Leader had stated that pre-scrutiny be undertaken in regards to the savings needed. A report was due to go to Cabinet and more information would be made available following that. The Head of Policy & Performance added that it was a recommendation that came out of the preceding budget scrutiny.
- The Chair and Vice-Chair spoke to the Committee about the opportunity to review Council procedures following the election and new administration and Leader of the Council. A new Corporate Plan would be formed in 2024 and it was proposed that the new Leader be invited to attend a Committee meeting to offer some pre-scrutiny and outline the initial findings and layout for the new Corporate Plan. He acknowledged that Officers would be assessing what had been delivered to date, the new priorities and focus on current circumstances such as the Cost of Living Crisis, and a typical timeframe for the process was 6-8 months.
- Housing Delivery and Management was put forward as another topic for the Committee to scrutinise.
- The Chair went onto speak about ensuring resources were utilised efficiently during this period of financial restraint and pressure and another idea was to review staff motivation in terms of effective, smart working, productivity, and incorporate working from home procedures. The Policy & Scrutiny Officer

referred to the review of hybrid and remote working undertaken in the previous year and highlighted that a follow up report would be presented to the Committee this year, which could be built into that topic. The Chair agreed and highlighted that he wanted the focus to be on outcomes and about eliminating any un-necessary procedures.

- With a new refuse contractor in place, the topic of refuse collections and recycling rates was another suggestion for the Work Programme. It was understood that the routes could be changing, and so the Chair felt it would be useful to scrutinise in order to ensure the same mistakes weren't repeated, as had been previously whereby many bins were not emptied. The headline following from that would be anticipated recycling rates and what ABC would like it to be. In addition, the Vice Chair requested that the measures for refuse in blocks of flats to be included and a Member also asked that the rule concerning bulk collections be revised, with regards to where items may be slightly more than 6 inches abutting the Highway.
- The subject of Mayoralty was discussed, in particular finding volunteers and the length of term for the Mayor. The Vice-Chair acknowledged the importance and demanding role, and considered extending the term could ease the difficulties often encountered with the annual shifting of the Mayor. The Chair highlighted that this may be a constitutional change and was happy to be advised with regards to the protocol followed for this type of amendment to be approved. The Committee voted and were in favour of this proposal.
- Another change proposed by the Chair and Vice Chair was to the length of term for the Leader of the Council. He proposed that it revert back to a yearly term as opposed to the current 4 yearly term which was implemented by the former Leader. Again, the Chair highlighted that this may be a constitutional change and was happy to be advised again with regards to the protocol followed for this type of amendment. A Member voiced his concern about this change, stating that it was too soon following the recent change in leadership. Another opinion was that Group Leaders were elected on an annual basis and therefore Council Leaders should also be.
- A discussion took place regarding how the current four year term had come about.
- The Committee voted with seven in favour and two opposed to the recommendation. The Motion was carried.
- A Member spoke about residents' difficulties obtaining GP appointments and suggested that this topic be put forward for consideration by the Committee. Cllr Bartlett added that as KCC Member he would be attending a meeting in July, concerning GP appointments in the County and invited Members to attend that meeting virtually or in person. The Head of Policy and Performance highlighted that KCC had the statutory duty for health scrutiny within Kent, and the O&S Committee needed to be mindful of their influence over the outcomes.

- In response to a question around anti-social behaviour and inviting Kent Police along, it was confirmed that this was a standing item on the agenda and reviewed annually.
- The percentage of population identifying as 'non-white' had doubled since the 2011 Census. A Member asked the Committee to consider the ways in which ABC could engage to support those residents with integration within the community and utilising local services efficiently. The Head of Policy and Performance highlighted some tools that could be useful when considering this issue, e.g. the Borough Profile document and a deprivation study that had been previously been undertaken. The Council's Equality Objectives was soon due for review, which would provide a good opportunity to address the subject. The Vice-Chair suggested BAME and democracy as a more specific topic and noted that during the election-canvassing period there were numerous households that were not registered to vote, many of which the residents were BAME.
- The Head of Policy and Performance had stated that all of the topic suggestions would be taken away and put through the matrix system in the usual way. The Chair and Vice-Chair confirmed that they were happy to be kept informed of the progress of those topics.

Resolved: that the proposed topics be assessed using the scrutiny topic selection criteria and a report be made back to the next meeting of this Committee.

Recommended to Full Council:

That (i) a report be prepared for the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee to consider extending the term of office of the Mayor to up to two years.

(ii) a report be prepared for the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee to consider amending the term of office of the Leader of the Council from four years to one year.

35 O&S Annual Report 2022/23

This report was introduced by Policy & Scrutiny Officer, and outlined the work carried out by the Committee for 2022/23. Reviews and recommendations were contained within the report and Cabinet had been supportive of all the recommendations made.

The Chairman and Committee thanked the previous Committee Members and Officers for their work during that time and for the report.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

36 Corporate Annual Performance Report

The Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer presented the report Which was the annual performance report reflecting the corporate plan 2022-24. The annual report was made up of two parts, a narrative section that summarised some of the milestones and achievements made across the year, expressed against the Corporate Plan themes. The second section was the annual Key Performance Indicators, which displayed the Councils performance against the Corporate Plans suite of KPIs.

The performance framework was an important pillar in monitoring performance, showing where the Council had performed well and also highlighting where the focus needed to be drawn in order to continue to offer the services expected by residents and broader stakeholders.

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

- The Chair drew attention to Council Tax Collection rates (KPI44), and considered whether the slight decrease was that a reflection of the Cost of Living Crisis.
- KPI09 for recycling or composted waste had dipped owing to the Q4 data not yet being made available.
- A Member queried whether the Council anticipated an increase in the number of Fly Tips registered, owing to the departure of an Enforcement Officer. Highway
- The Chairman asked about the process around introducing more KPI's into the report and it was explained that they do tie in with the Corporate Plan, so with the new Corporate Plan on the horizon, new KPI's could be considered.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

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