

## **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 **10<sup>th</sup> March 2020**.

### **Present:**

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman)

Cllrs. Chilton, Farrell, Howard-Smith, Iliffe, Krause, Ledger.

### **Apologies:**

Cllr. Burgess, Michael, Mulholland.

### **Also Present:**

Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Communications, Head of Planning & Development, Compliance and Data Protection Manager, Economic Development Manager, Economic Development Officer, Governance & Data Protection Officer, Policy & Scrutiny Officer, Member Services Officer.

## **346 Minutes of the Last Meeting**

### **Resolved:**

**That the Minutes of this Committee held on the 11<sup>th</sup> February 2020 be approved and confirmed as an accurate record, subject to the following amendments:**

**Minute 299 should read “...Kent Police aimed to recruit 472 Officers in the next 12 months...”**

**Minute 299 should read “...Ashford was not currently in the Top 5; this was reviewed on a monthly basis and founded on intelligence plus threat and risk assessments.”**

**A Member further added an amendment to the Minutes of the Meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2020, where Minute 270 should read “...the topic relating to Elwick Place be removed, since this issue had been picked up by another Committee and was therefore no longer appropriate.”**

## **347 Report on Broadband and promotion of Fibre to the Premises**

The Economic Development Manager introduced this item and explained that the report had been produced in response to a request from the O&S Committee in correlation to the Local Plan Policy EMP6 implementation. Early dialogue between

developers and providers had resulted in a draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), and this would be consulted on over the next few months.

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

- The Chairman asked how enforceable the SPD would be and could construction be delayed if the developers did not comply. The Head of Planning & Development explained that it largely came down to the logistics of viability and competing priorities. Ashford was in a robust position as they were pioneering this policy and had not yet been through the process. The Economic Development Manager added that the Government were driving forward with this issue and there were only a few other similar policies nationally. It was expected that this would also drive value into developments.
- In response to a question around the Local Plan Policy on page 12 of the report, the Economic Development Manager confirmed that a calculation for the method to determine sites with 10 or more employees in the rural areas could be provided to developers, as guidance based on the area and use class of a development portion would be applied to the Employment Schemes.

## **Resolved**

**That the report be received and noted.**

## **348 Quarter 3 Corporate Performance Report 2019/20**

The Governance & Data Protection Officer introduced this item which summarised performance against the Council's suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) for Quarter 3. He explained that moving forward there may be variations to the KPI's in response to the review of the Corporate Plan.

Areas for the Committee to note in particular included page 18 KPI44 and KPI45 where an associated housing benefits award accuracy indicator had recently been created by the Department for Work and Pensions and the figures reflected positively on Ashford. KPI23 on page 23 of the report related to the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme and Ashford Borough Council were attending the Local Government Chronicle Awards on the 18<sup>th</sup> March as they had been nominated for an award under the Diversity and Inclusion category for their work on the Programme.

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

- In relation to KPI08: New Business Support, a Member asked what the nature of the support was. The Economic Development Manager explained that there were several methods including a triage system whereby clients could email, telephone or speak to an Advisor face-to-face. The Council and Chamber of Commerce had also held discussions with the Jobcentre so that

people looking to start up their own businesses or become self-employed would also have access to these support channels.

- The Chairman asked for more information in relation to KPI38; Speed of Major Planning Application Decisions. The Head of Planning spoke to the Committee about the recent problems experienced in the Planning Department, which had contributed to the % of applications falling below the 60% threshold. A drop in staffing levels had resulted in the team being unable to maintain sufficient monitoring of applications. The backlog at its worst had stood at 1100 applications, but this had now fallen to 650. He added that it was important to be aware that the speed element of the Governments monitoring was over a 24 month period, as opposed to monthly performance. Quarter 3 showed an improvement and it was the Departments priority to maintain the progress they had recently made.
- In response to a question regarding homelessness and annual comparison of figures, the Governance & Data Protection Officer confirmed that a number of Housing reports were brought to the Cabinet throughout the year. A yearly comparison could also be included within the Corporate Performance Report.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be received and noted.**

### **349 Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2020/21**

The Policy & Scrutiny Officer introduced this item and confirmed that the Tracker had been updated to reflect the discussion at the last O&S meeting. Management Team had seen the Work Programme and Matrix and had commented positively stating that it was well thought out. It had been suggested that the Procurement Team make a presentation to the Committee at some point this year regarding the procurement of external contracts. The Policy Team were also currently drafting a scope for the Digital Transformation Task Group, which was anticipated to be ready by the end of April.

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

- A Member requested that the subject of the Vicarage Lane development be brought back to the Committee, after the Project Manager had recently left the Council, and this was agreed.
- In response to a question asking for a report offering clarification around Section 106 monies and where these should be allocated, the Head of Planning spoke in detail to the Committee. He explained that essentially the prerequisite for Section 106 funding came from a need within the community, and this was contained within the Local Plan. There was however a necessity now to develop a more strategic set of processes round that. A viability discussion was one way to ensure S106 funding was allocated appropriately.

The Chairman added that S106 allocation was more frequently being seen spread around the Borough as opposed to being contained within the area of development, and this seemed to counteract the idea that S106 was there to mitigate the impact of new housing developments. A Member suggested that it would be beneficial for Ward Members to be involved with S106 discussions and the Chairman added that the Committee would like to receive a report on this topic.

- A suggestion was made that the Committee receive an update on the position of Ashford College, after it had entered administration and certain courses on offer at the College had since been withdrawn. The Economic Development Manager agreed that it would be useful to understand East Kent College's plans if they were to take over operation of the Ashford Campus in the near future and would look at inviting a representative at the appropriate time to come and present to all Members and provide an opportunity for questions.

**Resolved:**

**That the report be received and noted.**