

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held as a virtual meeting on the **9th February 2021**.

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman)

Cllr. Chilton (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Blanford, Burgess, Campkin, Farrell, Hayward, Howard-Smith, Iliffe, Krause, Ledger, Mulholland.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Bartlett, Bell, Feacey, Shorter, Sparks, Wright.

Chief Inspector. Sparkes, Detective Inspector. Johnson.

Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Communications, Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Community Safety and Resilience Team Leader, Community Safety Officer, Compliance & Data Protection Manager, Governance & Data Protection Officer, Policy & Scrutiny Officer, Member Services & Ombudsman Complaints Officer, Member Services Officer.

221 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Bartlett	Made a "Voluntary Announcement" as he lived adjoining to the Sevington IBF	223
Chilton	Made a "Voluntary Announcement" as his relative worked for Kent Police	223
Farrell	Made a "Voluntary Announcement" as he had undertaken voluntary work for Ashford Vineyard	227
Krause	Made a "Voluntary Announcement" as Deputy Portfolio Holder for Finance & IT, he would withdraw from the meeting for the item on Budget Scrutiny	226
Hayward	Made a "Voluntary Announcement" as she was a member of Ashford Vineyard	227

222 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of this Committee held on the 10th November 2020 be approved and confirmed as an accurate record.

223 CSU Annual Update

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing introduced the report and explained that a holistic approach had been taken to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in the Borough and the CSU continued to work effectively with all partners in their efforts.

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

- In response to a question asking whether the same case could have been reported twice, the Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager explained that this was a possibility. However, the CSU and Kent Police met regularly to discuss cases and to ensure the appropriate agency was handling.
- A Member spoke about the Border Control Project (BCP) and the criminal implications that it may pose e.g. smuggling, human trafficking and theft. He wondered how much that would feature as part of the CSU efforts over the coming years. Chief Inspector. Sparkes explained that the BCP site was being independently run and had contracted a security team. There was a strong multi agency effort for the border exit plan and daily figures were being monitored by Kent Police for any increase in criminal activity, of which there had been none. Control measures had been built in and moving forward, Kent Police would work in partnership with local and national government to ensure the site remained free from issues that could impact on the local community. Detective Inspector. Johnson added that the Police and the ABC Brexit Cell met fortnightly to monitor community tensions and understand the local impact of the Inland Border Facility sites. The Community Safety and Resilience Team Leader explained that protocols were in place for safeguarding issues in conjunction with KCC and with the Counter Terrorism Police also. She encouraged Members and the public to use the Report It App for any issues including HGV parking, community tension, EU transition transportation issues/general congestion issues.
- Consideration was then given to the different type of crimes that occurred through lockdown because people were living each day in closer proximity. Chief Inspector. Sparkes explained that there was a definite change in the calls being received, and it was important to bear this in mind when reviewing

the statistics. The predicted spike in domestic abuse calls had not been as high as anticipated, but criminals had found innovative ways to continue their activities throughout the lockdown; drug dealing had swiftly adapted and anti-social behaviour and community tension was abundant, which unfortunately could often be a pre-cursor to more severe crime. Young people had been particularly affected by the lack of social interaction and support networks e.g. youth centres, and the concern for them going forward would be on a national scale. Members of the public could still utilise the 101 or 999 telephone number to report any type or level of crime, or alternatively via social media/online reporting as before Covid-19. The Community Safety and Resilience Team Leader reinforced the benefits of the Report It App, to analyse the statistics and consider any lessons learned. It enabled the CSU to identify and observe where ASB may be arising, and helped to manage expectation. Establishing new partnerships with other agencies was also key to assist in lower level disputes that would fall below the radar of the Council or the Police. Mental Health and Wellbeing were anticipated to be major issues arising from Covid-19.

- In response to a query about the conditions for a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO), the Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager advised that a PSPO could be applied to a public space experiencing high levels of ASB, with prohibitions being applied to that geographical area. It could also be adapted to the need of the area e.g. gated areas. She explained the process which included evidence gathering, public consultation, and delegated authority by the Head of Community Safety and Wellbeing.
- A Member asked about the impact of Covid-19 on the Traveller community. Chief Inspector Sparkes made the distinction between the established traveller site at Chilmington, and the wider transient community that move around different sites. The latter had decreased, probably owing to the robust stance the Council had taken towards unlawful encampments. Legislation had been produced to protect encampments from Covid-19, as they were deemed a vulnerable group due to lack of engagement with medical services. The Police had therefore taken a more tolerant stance across the county, except where crime or ASB had occurred and the usual law enforcement would be carried out. Support had remained for the established travelling community in Ashford, which included advice on medical concerns and social distancing.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

224 Safeguarding Annual Update

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing introduced the report, which outlined the council's obligation to work in partnership to protect children,

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young people and adults at risk from abuse or neglect, preventing impairment of their health and development.

In response to a question asking whether safeguarding training could be made compulsory to both staff and Members, the Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager explained that the face-to-face training had recently been revised and moved over to a virtual platform, and it was hoped that compliance would therefore increase, with staff and Members now working remotely.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

225 Quarter 3 Corporate Performance Report

The Governance & Data Protection Officer introduced the Quarter 3 Performance Report, which covered the period from October to December 2020. The report summarised the Council's performance against the Key Performance Indicators covered in the Recovery Plan. The report demonstrated that the pandemic had impacted upon a number of performance indicators over the period, as additional lockdowns and other preventative measures had altered economic activity and our ways of life.

With regards to RPKPI91 about Section 106 files, it was confirmed that these were solely within the Legal Dept. A report on this topic would be coming to O&S in the next few months.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

226 Report from the Budget Scrutiny Task Group

Cllr Krause left the meeting.

The Policy & Scrutiny Officer introduced this item and confirmed that the Budget Scrutiny Task Group had scrutinised the Council's draft 2021/22 budget over four meetings. The Group had covered key areas including Planning service including the budget risk regarding Stodmarsh, the risk to commercial income in light of Covid-19 implications, the impact of proposed operational savings on the delivery of Council services, specifically the Legal department and details of funding for Council projects. She highlighted that in reference to recommendation IV, Management Team had recommended that in order to quantify the additional funding mentioned, assessments would need to be undertaken to cost the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan. The Chairman expanded on this and endorsed that the Committee keep track of this

particular recommendation once it had been quantified. He thanked all the Members and Officers that had attended those meetings.

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

- The Portfolio Holder and Chairman invited those Members voting against the budget to outline their reasons why. Cllr. Chilton confirmed that he was voting against the recommendations, as he did not believe the budget was sound and deliverable, and did not support the restrictions being placed on Parish Councils, or the Council Tax increase being imposed on residents. Cllr. Farrell agreed with the points raised by Cllr. Chilton, and highlighted that a Section 25 assurance from the Section 151 Officer was necessary to say that the administration's budget was sound and deliverable. He added that the budget had been drafted based on the Council's priorities, of which he did not associate himself with, and therefore was voting against the report. Cllr. Campkin voted against the report because of the increase in Council Tax and possible cuts to services, but wanted to add this was by no means a criticism of the Council's Financial Team.
- The Chairman reminded Members that the Budget Scrutiny Task Group was an open forum for all Members to attend and voice their concerns.

The Chairman invited a proposer for the report, since he had been involved with the Budget Scrutiny meetings. Cllr. Burgess proposed the report and the Chairman seconded it.

Recommendations:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee endorse the recommendations of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group to the Cabinet as follows:

I) The Council's draft budget is sound and deliverable as can be at this time, recognising that the economic impact of Covid-19 is yet to be fully determined.

II) It is recognised that there is sufficient reserves to manage the economic risks to the 2021/22 budget. It is recommended that these reserves are maintained particularly given the current uncertainties in the economy.

III) To continue to monitor the performance of the council's commercial income units through regular budget monitoring reports whilst businesses recover from the impacts of Covid-19.

IV) Additional funding should be allocated towards the emerging Carbon Neutrality Action Plan, to ensure that the Council is able to deliver its pledge to become carbon neutral.

V) Cabinet should consider a one-off grant to the disproportionately affected Parishes from the removal of Council Tax Support grant to help smooth the transition to full removal of the Council Tax Support Grant.

227 Future Reviews Tracker

A Member spoke about the process by which grants were allocated to organisations via the Voluntary Emergency Response Appeal (VERA) fund, as highlighted earlier in the Corporate Performance Report (RPKPI24). He raised a concern that more scrutiny should be applied, in particular to organisations/charities with a religious or political basis that were promoting their own membership, an example of which was the Ashford Vineyard. There was a need to ascertain what due diligence was undertaken prior to that funding being awarded. He added that he had no objection to the work they were undertaking in the community, only that he wished to review the processes and policy on grant funding to such organisations. The Chairman agreed and requested a report be brought forward on this issue.

Other topics suggested by a Member for the Tracker were reports on the Better Choice for Property Company, how the housing market would be impacted post-Covid-19, and the proposed changes by Government to the Public Works Loan Board.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

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