

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held in Committee Rooms 1 and 2, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **14th September 2021**.

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman);
Cllr. Chilton (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Hayward, Krause, Ledger, Suddards.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (iii) Cllr. Suddards attended as Substitute Member for Cllr. Farrell.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Blanford, Farrell, Howard-Smith.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Harman, Sparks.

In attendance:

Jane O'Rourke – Associate Director of Children and Maternity Commissioning Team, NHS

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

102 Declaration of Interest

Councillor Hayward made a 'Voluntary Announcement' since her children had previously accessed NHS Young Peoples Mental Health Services.

103 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 13th July 2021 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

104 Presentation on Young People's Mental Health

Jane O'Rourke gave a presentation to the Committee that covered the following areas:

Spotlight: Impact of Covid
System Response

Continuing Challenges

Services in Ashford

Ashford children and young people's mental health and neurodevelopment services

KOOTH online counselling

Mind and Body early-intervention self-harm support

NELFT locality (MH) waiting times

NELFT ND assessment waiting times

Local Transformation Plan

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

- A Member asked about the relationship between the NHS CCG and Local Authorities, in particular when relaying information to the public. Jane explained that the relationship had improved over the last year and the CCG worked in collaboration with Local Authorities, Social Services and the Education Service and had formed joint projects and working groups to ensure the communication between the partners and families was consistent across the board. The Kent Information Hub had been created and incorporated relevant information.
- With regards to the 18-week wait time, a Member expressed concern that this was a long time for a young person with mental health issues to be waiting for help. She asked whether there was an intermediate service that could be offered whilst children were awaiting full access. Jane acknowledged that this was a huge challenge and advised that there was a 4-hour response target for children in crisis attending acute hospitals. Investment had been made into the home treatment services to tackle the long waiting times, and to divert children in crisis away from A&E units. The aim and emphasis was on preventative services also.
- In response to a question regarding funding and resources to assist with refugees, Jane confirmed that support within Kent for unaccompanied asylum seeking children was in place and a national programme had been set up to accommodate increased capacity, including additional mental health services, specialising in trauma that that cohort of refugees may have experienced.

105 Corporate Plan 2022 to 2024 and the Annual Report

The Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications together with the Strategy and Policy Development Manager introduced the Draft Corporate Plan, which outlined and highlighted the following priorities and objectives:

Corporate Plan to 2024

The Ashford Ambition

Green Pioneer

Caring Ashford

Targeted Growth

Our Principles

Consultation

Consultation to date

Next Steps

The presentation and Draft Plan were then opened up to the Committee and the following questions and points were raised: -

- A Member asked why carbon offsetting was not included within the report and wondered whether investment opportunities could be incorporated at no additional cost to the Council. The Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications explained that high-level actions from the Carbon Reduction Action Plan had been duplicated within the Corporate Plan. Consultation was underway regarding the Carbon Reduction Plan and work was ongoing on the Carbon Descent Plan. Actions around tree planting and solar generation were included, with the focus on carbon reduction foremost. The Strategy and Policy Development Manager added that the Council had endorsed the Kent and Medway Energy & Low Emissions Strategy.
- Concerning tourism, a Member asked whether the Railway Project was still expected to be established, but it was not currently included within the Action Plan.
- A Member asked when the measures within the Plan were expected to be agreed. It was hoped that they would be agreed and come into effect from April 2022, but it was challenging to measure service performance and change within the Borough. The performance framework would be presented as an appendix of the Plan. Potentially, one measure could be relevant to more than one action, so it could indicate performance relating to two or three actions. The final plan was due to go to Cabinet in November. The Chairman highlighted that the means of measurements within the Plan were essential to know if the Council were performing successfully. Members agreed and highlighted the need for open discussion about what those measures should be.
- A Member queried whether some of the report should highlight the need to increase the level of manufacturing output from Ashford. The Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications responded by saying that the wording may need to be reviewed, because research from the Ashford Ambition report had shown that manufacturing within Ashford was lower value than elsewhere in the country, and that some manufacturing was at risk of automation. Therefore, the priority was to focus on knowledge based and creative industry. A Member commented that she felt that some manufacturing industries within the Borough were being overlooked and they should be encouraged to continue their operation within Ashford. The Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications agreed that these areas should be encouraged, but acknowledged that Ashford was falling behind on education and wage levels.
- A further question probed how productivity could be increased when it was already 'maxed out' since the pandemic had resulted in less or zero commute time with more people working from home. The Head of HR and Customer Service said there was a balance to be sought. Productivity had improved but equally there were some people that struggled with working from home.

- In relation to international markets, a Member spoke about focus on emerging and established business in Ashford, particularly now it was a border town with major international links. The Council was working with the Chamber of Commerce to ensure it supported businesses in the right way to access those international markets.

Resolved:

That the information be received and noted.

106 Corporate Performance Report (Quarter 1)

The Governance & Data Protection Officer introduced the report, which gave an overview of performance between April to June 2021. The report monitored the Key Performance Indicator's set out in the Recovery Plan 2020. The KPI suites were currently being reviewed, and Members were invited to mention any that they felt should be considered.

The Chairman spoke about adding new KPI's and noted the difficulty with the base line. The Governance & Data Protection Officer explained that there were foundation KPI's around core functions of the council, but the ones adapted to themes or projects were the ones that would not have a baseline, in which case historical data could then be examined.

A Member queried how the Council could address the issues in the Planning Department around retention of staff. The Chairman advised that a representative from the Planning Dept. would be best placed to respond to the query, but that Stodmarsh had played a part in the backlog of Planning applications. The Governance & Data Protection Officer added that the Stodmarsh Mitigation Strategy had gone to Cabinet and was progressing.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

107 Annual Sickness Report

The Head of HR and Customer Services introduced the report, which provided annual information on sickness and absenteeism for 2020/2021. She advised that it had been an unusual year in that the Covid pandemic affected it, working from home had been implemented, and some staff were shielding or self-isolating. Covid related absences had been recorded separately to avoid distortion of the annual figures. The overall percentage of sickness had reduced, attributed to people not physically being in the office or out in public places, and home working being available to those that were mildly unwell. Mental ill health was the largest reason for absence, although the actual number had reduced since the previous year.

The Chairman noted that he could not observe anything in the report to indicate that being in the workplace throughout the pandemic would have improved the figures; the reverse could be true instead. The Head of HR & Customer Services explained

that the Office had been open to certain members of staff that were struggling with working from home.

In response to a question regarding monitoring of safe workstations for staff, The Head of HR & Customer Services explained that initially the government relaxed the duties on employers regarding Display Screen Equipment assessments. The Council then decided to undertake remote assessments, and provided refresher training and an online DSE form for staff to complete, a couple of times throughout the lockdown period. She stated that although this was not ideal, it has ensured that staff were made aware of their own duties and were able to communicate any problems they may be having. The Member added that it was important to be mindful of discouraging too much screen time and that some quite serious symptoms could sometimes be masked by other minor symptoms.

Resolved:

That the Annual Sickness Report be received and noted.

108 Future Reports Tracker

The Policy and Scrutiny Officer introduced the Tracker and spoke about the issue of air quality that had been raised at the last meeting. This had been scored via the Matrix and resulted in a mid-range score. A new KPI for air quality had been created in line with the Corporate Plan, and the Committee would receive a presentation in October regarding Carbon Neutrality, so the Chairman had agreed that this topic could be revisited in the future.

A Member briefing about the Port Health Service had been arranged as a virtual briefing for Thursday 23rd September.

A Member suggested that Heritage within the Borough could be reviewed and championed by the Committee in the future.

Resolved:

That the Future Reports Tracker be received and noted.