

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 **12th October 2021**.

Present:

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

Cllrs. Burgess, Farrell, Howard-Smith, Krause, Ledger, Mulholland.

Also Present:

Cllr. Shorter

Cllrs. Feacey, Hayward, Sparks, Wright (remotely).

In attendance:

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

145 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 14th September 2021 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

146 Carbon Neutral Action Plan

The Strategy and Policy Development Manager gave a presentation to the Committee, which provided a recap of the Plan and an overview of the consultation outcomes. It included details on the following areas:

- Overall Aim
- 8 Priorities
- Consultation
- Questionnaire
- Social Media
- Face to Face
- Next Steps

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

- A Member suggested that targets needed to be included within the Plan, and that the Council should be involved with lobbying and liaising to push forward the Strategy. Further to this, he added that there could be some extra detail

included under Priority 7 to measure how much an area of land had increased. The Strategy and Policy Development Manager advised that targets would be developed as a result of the study that Laser Energy were undertaking. She agreed that lobbying at local and national level was recognised as a necessary action for change to happen.

- With regards to a query regarding the disconnect between free parking in certain Council owned car parks against the cost of using public transport, the Strategy and Policy Development Manager agreed that the option of taking public transport needed to be made more attractive than using own cars, but this was a larger scale challenge that needed tackling.
- A Member queried whether air quality within the home should be something the Council considered in terms of harmful gasses and chemicals contained within household products. The importance of raising awareness to enable residents to make informed choices was highlighted, and the overlap between the Air Quality Strategy and the Carbon Neutral Plan was acknowledged.
- A Member spoke about the funding figure put aside for carbon offsetting, and whether it would be for 1 year or 5 years. He commented that the UK market was voluntary and essentially unregulated, and the offsetting market was growing. There could be an opportunity to lobby for a carbon exchange system, especially since Kent was a primarily rural area, and therefore could ultimately profit from being a greener part of the country. ABC did endorse the Kent and Medway Energy Low Emissions Strategy, which contained an objective for a Kent wide offsetting programme.
- The urgency of the situation was stressed and a Member spoke about the appetite from residents about where to get help to decarbonise their buildings. She noted that many residents were disappointed that the consultation was held online and were unfortunately unable to participate. A new bidding process for the public sector decarbonisation fund had been set up and ABC were encouraged to utilise this. The Strategy and Policy Development Manager responded that some residents had expressed a willingness to take action, but subsequently asked if the Council could provide extra resources, which was not realistic. A Member agreed that utilising materials and resources readily available should take priority over solutions that were costly both financially and environmentally.
- The Strategy and Policy Development Manager said that having a dedicated Officer for carbon neutrality would be extremely beneficial, and this was something she hoped would be considered for the future.
- A Member underlined the importance of the Local Plan and Planning Policy Task Group in being utilised efficiently to develop the policies needed to achieve carbon neutrality. Additionally he suggested a scheme to help partner up individuals wanting an allotment or to do gardening with people that may be struggling with the upkeep of their own green area, with the sharing of vegetables/flowers to take the form of payment.
- It was hoped that Laser Energy would have completed their study by early next year. After which, there would be some workshops that Members would

be invited to attend. The study was based on the Council's corporate property portfolio, staff/Members travel to and from the office, and details from the waste contract.

- A Member asked which public body determined best practice and ensured future proofing. The Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development and Communications explained that ABC were part of various networks, including the Climate Change Network at KCC and the LGA.
- A final point was made about sharing information between ABC and Local Councils to assist with projects in more rural areas, and the importance of continuing to engage with the community and Members.

Resolved:

That the Carbon Neutral Action Plan be received and noted.

147 ABC Annual Report

The Governance & Data Protection Officer introduced this item; the Annual Performance Report for 2020-2021, April to March inclusive.

The report was made up of two parts -- a narrative documenting some of the achievements and milestones reached over the year, and the second section was the annual outturn report. 2020-21 had been an unprecedentedly challenging year and this report documented many of the challenges faced, and explained how the Council was forced to adapt and embrace its Recovery Plan. The report was previously presented to Cabinet in July alongside the Draft Corporate Plan report.

A Member asked about KPI 91B, specifically at what point was a Section 106 agreement completed. The Governance & Data Protection Officer advised that it was considered completed once it was agreed, rather than at full completion.

Resolved:

That the ABC Annual Report be received and noted.

148 Budget Scrutiny Review Report

The Policy and Scrutiny Officer introduced this report, which included a review that looked at the current process, drew comparisons with other Local Authorities and made suggestions for improving the budget scrutiny procedure. A proposed Budget Scrutiny schedule had been drafted, with a series of meetings in December. There were six recommendations contained within the report, which included appointing members of the Task Group. Cllrs Ovenden, Chilton and Ledger volunteered, and three remaining members would be decided.

Recommendation:

It was recommended that the Committee:

- i. Approve the Proposed Budget Scrutiny Schedule regarding the Draft Budget 2022/23.**
- ii. Appoint at least four members of the main Committee to form the Budget Scrutiny Task Group looking at the draft budget 2022/23.**
- iii. Agree to include a 'lessons learnt' section within future reports of the Budget Scrutiny Task Group to evaluate the process annually.**
- iv. Request additional narrative around the draft budget papers and provide separate details of the council's biggest income streams.**
- v. Agree to hold all budget scrutiny meetings virtually to enable flexible working for Members and to increase participation at meetings.**
- vi. Approve the ongoing provision of budget scrutiny training sessions when required and advise Members to sign up to external training offered when possible.**

149 Update on Digital Transformations Recommendations

This item was introduced by the Policy and Scrutiny Officer, and she explained that the O&S Task Group was formed to conduct a review on the progress of digital transformation across Council services. Eight recommendations had been produced and approved by Cabinet in October 2020. The purpose of the report was to update Members on the progress of the recommendations since they were approved.

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

- The Chairman said that the online calendar function of Mod Gov was not updated regularly and did not work at all within the App. He added that this was an issue that needed to be looked at to ensure no disparity between Members and Officers calendars.
- A Member asked whether hybrid meetings would be expanded to other meetings. It was advised that there were still ongoing discussions about this.
- The Portfolio Holder explained that he was relatively new back into this Portfolio, but acknowledged the points raised and advised that the IT & Digital Transformation Advisory Committee was the best forum for these types of queries. The Chairman stated he felt that digital progress was moving slowly.
- A Member spoke about her own situation as her son had tested positive for Covid and she had taken the decision not to attend the meeting in person, to

ensure she did not risk infecting any vulnerable colleagues. The Government legislation meant that since she had not attended the meeting in person, she was unable to participate in any vote.

Resolved:

That the Update on Digital Transformations Report be received and noted.

150 Future Reports Tracker

Resolved:

That the Future Reports Tracker be received and noted.

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