

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held in Committee Room 2, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **14<sup>th</sup> June 2022**

### **Present:**

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman);

Cllrs. Barrett, Chilton (vice-chair), Hayward, Howard-Smith, Ledger, Meaden

### **Apologies:**

Cllr. Brooks, Burgess, Farrell, Mulholland

### **Also Present:**

Cllrs. Blanford, Harman (remotely)

Cllr. Wright

### **In attendance:**

Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer, Policy & Scrutiny Officer, Member Services Officer

Compliance and Data Protection Manager (remotely)

## **43 Minutes**

### **Resolved:**

**That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 10<sup>th</sup> May 2022 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.**

## **44 Scope for Consultation and Engagement Review**

The Policy & Scrutiny Officer introduced this item and clarified the key aims of the review. She reiterated that the topic could be correlated to a broad range of services and therefore it was important to keep the review refined and focussed. Members were asked to approve the scope and further volunteers were needed for the Task Group to run effectively.

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

- A Member spoke about Parish Councils frustrations regarding communication between themselves and ABC, where emails and letters were not being responded to in a timely manner. Other Members agreed and added that they also sometimes became frustrated with the lack of response from some Departments and Officers. In addition, Unparished areas were highlighted as having little or no communication from the Council. The Policy & Scrutiny

Officer reiterated that the review was specifically about engagement as opposed to communication (or lack of). The Chairman said that at present the line was drawn under Parish Councils and highlighted the primary problem as getting people to converse and engage with the Council. He advised Councillors that if they had particular continual communication problems with individual Officers, then this should be raised with the Director in charge of that Service. It was suggested that a separate review of internal communication be undertaken. The Chairman asked the Policy & Scrutiny Officer to run the topic of general communication through the selection matrix.

- The methodology used for public consultation was raised as one of the biggest problems in terms of reduced public engagement. A Member suggested that new, unorthodox methods should be considered to obtain information.

**Resolved:**

**That the Scope be approved by the Committee and Cllrs Barrett and Chilton volunteered in addition to Cllrs Blanford, Ledger and Ovenden to form the Task Group**

## **45 Annual Performance Report 2021/22**

The Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer introduced the report, which looked at the achievements and milestones that the Council had realised over the year in the context of the Recovery Plan 2020-2022. The report also summarised performance against the council's suite of key performance indicators (KPI's) for the year 2021-2022.

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

- A Member drew attention to the section of the report regarding the backlog of planning applications. The Budget Scrutiny Task Group had requested that the Planning Department be given time to implement certain changes and then report back to the Committee. He wondered whether now was the time to invite them back, in order to update Members on the work still outstanding. The Chairman agreed that progression had been made by the Department, and he suggested that before Planning attend a Committee meeting, a secondary report be produced to show comparisons between where they stood at the time of Budget Scrutiny and where they were now. This would allow the Committee to see what measures had worked effectively, and if any trends were present.
- The issue of land acquisition for affordable housing was raised, specifically the financial implications and restrictions in regards to purchasing new sites for the next consignment of affordable and social housing, within the next couple of years. The Chairman added that social housing was a permanent addition to the Councils assets, and therefore borrowing was feasible, since the asset value had longevity. The problem was in regards to borrowing and

any government caps that may be introduced in the future, plus the tough competitive market for land acquisition. A Member added that it was thought that some of the larger housing developers had already put down payments on large sections of potential house building land around the country, and suggested garden towns could be an alternative option for local councils in the future.

- A Member highlighted the need for bigger houses (with more bedrooms) to be built, to accommodate larger families.
- It was noted that the Report did not comprise many projects or events from Tenterden.

**Resolved:**

**That the Committee note the contents of the Annual Performance Report and approve its publication on the Council's website.**

## **46 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report and Tracker**

The Policy & Scrutiny Officer introduced the report, which detailed the work carried out by the Committee over the year in line with the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme. This included a Task Group review of the Section 106 process and presentations from external bodies including KCC and NHS CCG, regarding youth unemployment and young people's mental health.

**Resolved:**

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

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