

Compliance and Enforcement Board

Notes of a Virtual Meeting of the Compliance and Enforcement Board held on Microsoft Teams on the **26th July 2022**.

Present:

Cllr. Bell (Chairman);

Cllrs. Feacey, Forest, Shorter, Spain.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Bartlett, Buchanan.

Solicitor to the Council and Monitoring Officer, Team Leader Planning Enforcement.

Also in attendance:

Cllrs. Burgess, Ledger, Ovenden.

Team Leader Environmental Enforcement, Environmental Contracts and Enforcement Manager, Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Deputy Team Leader Planning Enforcement, Senior Planning Lawyer, Member Services and Ombudsman Complaints Officer.

1. Notes of the Meeting of 26th April 2022

1.1 The Board agreed the notes as an accurate record.

2. Declarations of Interest

2.1 Cllr. Shorter declared that the landowner for his small holding had received a Community Protection Warning. Cllr Shorter said that he had no pecuniary interest in the matter.

3. Environmental Crime Enforcement in Ashford

3.1 The Team Leader Environmental Enforcement introduced this item and drew Members' attention to the key points within the report. The Chairman said that the work of the team was greatly appreciated by Members and by the public.

3.2 The Chairman asked whether the Council was using social media to publicise prosecutions to the maximum effect to act as a deterrent. The Environmental Contracts and Enforcement Manager confirmed that officers were working with the communications team to ensure that appropriate coverage was given on social media and that the public were alerted to actions taken by the Council on environmental crime enforcement.

- 3.2 A Member commented that frequent fly-tippers were using more sophisticated methods to avoid identification. The Team Leader Environmental Enforcement confirmed that tippers were often using different and previously unseen vehicles, but more cameras were now in use to assist local police in identifying offending vehicles.
- 3.3 A question was asked about liaison with Neighbourhood Watch who were very active on this issue. It was considered that it would be valuable to combine knowledge. The Team Leader Environmental Enforcement confirmed that officers were in touch with the Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinator, but that further work could be done in this area, and he would follow up on this.
- 3.4 A Member asked about the mystery blue vehicle which had been involved in fly-tipping and whether there should be a public appeal to identify the vehicle. The Team Leader Environmental Enforcement said he would speak to the communications team about publicising this issue more widely.
- 3.5 A Member said he had sympathy with some individuals who declined to give evidence against fly-tippers because of fear of retribution. He also pointed out that, whilst publicity through social media was important, there were some people who were still not engaged with social media and that it was important to continue to place articles in the Ashford For You magazine, which was distributed to every household in the Borough. This may provide information to those people who did not access social media.
- 3.6 The Chairman concluded by once again thanking the team for their work, and reiterating his desire to see more enforcement publicity through social media and other avenues.

Recommendations/Actions:

That the update report be received and noted.

4. Anti-Social Behaviour in Ashford - Update

- 4.1 The Safety and Wellbeing Manager introduced this item and drew Members attention to the highlights within the report.
- 4.2 The Chairman thanked the team for their hard work and the results this quarter. Another Member added his congratulations to all involved, and also highlighted the funding agreed by Cabinet as proactive action to contribute towards the reduction of ASB in the Borough.
- 4.3 A Member asked about the term 'cuckooing' and the Safety and Wellbeing Manager explained that it was a term for a drugs related offence whereby a vulnerable person's property was taken over to commit a crime.
- 4.4 The Chairman said that he would like to see more results on social media, and asked officers to pass on his request to the communications team. The Safety and Community Manager said that results had been publicised in the

past but she would ask communications officers to refresh and re-share results.

- 4.5 Members discussed the problem of one particularly loud nuisance vehicle disrupting Council meetings, especially in summer when the windows were open. The Safety and Community Manager said that the Monitoring Centre reported any nuisance vehicles to the Police and they could be stopped and fined. She said that she would ask the Monitoring Centre and Police to try and identify this particular vehicle. A Member said that he had approached the local MP with a request that the Council should be included in the Government's pilot scheme to trial acoustic cameras, but unfortunately this request had not been successful. Another Member pointed out that it was still not possible to report noisy vehicles online, and this needed to be provided as an option for residents. The Safety and Community Manager said she would follow up on this point. A Member considered that it was extremely dangerous to have vehicles speeding around in the undercroft as there were young people in the area and they could get hurt.

Recommendations/Actions:

That the update report be received and noted.

5. Planning Enforcement Update

- 5.1 The Deputy Team Leader Planning Enforcement introduced this item and highlighted the key points in the report.
- 5.2 The Chairman raised the question of sufficient resourcing within the team, and said that the team must have resilience to accommodate turnover. He urged officers, including the Assistant Director of Planning and Development, to discuss this with him if it was considered that further resources were required. The Deputy Team Leader Planning Enforcement explained that there was commitment to fill the current vacancy and this was considered a priority. A consultant had now bedded into the team and was providing cover for more senior-level work.
- 5.3 The Chairman congratulated the team on their current achievements and said he would like to see more publicity on social media. The Deputy Team Leader Planning Enforcement said that publicity of this kind of enforcement action was not always a straight-forward matter as taking action against local residents was sometimes seen as controversial and could raise strong feelings within communities.
- 5.4 The Deputy Team Leader Planning Enforcement said that some of the graphs in the report were from the last quarter due to a delay on the new computer system. A Member questioned why there had been no planning comments on the system the previous Monday, and the Deputy Team Leader Planning Enforcement said she would take up the matter with the Planning Business Manager. The Chairman asked for himself and the Assistant Director of Planning and Development to be included in any correspondence on this subject.

- 5.5 A Member asked why there were so few items under anticipated prosecution this quarter. The Deputy Team Leader Planning Enforcement explained that there were no details on anticipated enforcement action this quarter, but on anticipated prosecutions instead as the new system was set up differently. A Member asked why there were no updates on previous cases for Ward Members, and the Deputy Team Leader Planning Enforcement said it was difficult to update on open cases due to the number, but it was hoped that the new system would be able to provide this in due course. The Chairman asked the Deputy Team Leader Planning Enforcement to email him and the Ward Member concerned with this information. A Member pointed out that it was important not to lose the flow of data, and reminded Members that this Board monitored data for the whole Borough and not for individual wards. He wished to see missing sections restored to quarterly reports.

Recommendations/Actions:

That the update report be received and noted.

6. Date of Next Meetings

- 6.1 25th October 2022 at 10am

Councillor Bell (Chairman)
Compliance and Enforcement Board

Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact Member Services:
Telephone: 01233 330349 Email: membersservices@ashford.gov.uk
Agendas, Reports and Minutes are available on: <http://ashford.moderngov.co.uk>

