

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 **8th November 2022**

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman)

Cllr. Chilton (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Barrett, Blanford, Ledger, Meaden

Apologies:

Cllrs. Burgess, Hayward, Mulholland

Also in Attendance (virtually)

Cllrs. Brooks, Feacey, Howard-Smith

Head of Policy & Performance, Policy & Scrutiny Officer

In attendance:

Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer, Member Services Officer

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Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 11th October 2022 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

A Member asked about the process for making recommendations to Cabinet. The Chairman confirmed that the Committee can approach Cabinet or Council. Past agenda items would have to be put back on a future agenda for review and action.

208 Report of the Consultation and Engagement Task Group

The Policy & Scrutiny Officer introduced the report which outlined the key areas discussed by the Task Group during the review and detailed any findings and conclusions. The Task Group noted that the Council had consulted frequently with residents concerning policies, strategies, and developments. Overall, the Task Group supported this work and felt it would be useful to explore new ways of reaching residents in the Borough that may involve looking outside of traditional surveys and questionnaires. Public participation at public facing committees had improved due to the new hybrid working arrangements. However, it was suggested that more work could be done to engage residents with the work of the O&S Committee through social media and the Council's resident

magazine. There were eight recommendations within the report, of which Management Team supported all of them.

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

- A Member applauded the idea to create a Citizens Panel as a proactive way to increase regular face-to-face engagement with residents and the Committee discussed the pros and cons of such forums. One Member noted that it was important to be mindful about placing extra work on Officers. The Chairman advised that at this stage, the recommendations still needed to be approved, and suggested those Members with views on this specific idea attend the Cabinet meeting to voice their opinions. On a secondary note, Cllr Chilton recommended that his name be removed from the membership of the Task Group since he was unable to attend the meetings.
- A review on the recommendations was expected to be undertaken after six months from approval. The Policy & Scrutiny Officer would put this onto the Tracker for April 2023.

Recommended:

That

I. Corporate consultation guidance be produced to provide services with good practice for setting up future consultations. The guidance should include details on the different methods of consultation and set out some minimum standards that need to be complied with before and after a consultation has concluded.

II. Non-conventional methods of consultation should continue to be explored by the Council in order to increase levels of engagement from residents such as video and Hello Lamppost.

III. The use of easy-read versions of consultation papers should be considered for all public consultations.

IV. An internal advisory group should be formed for Officers to review consultations before they are published. The group would meet informally to test and feedback to services about proposed surveys.

V. A calendar of consultations is produced to ensure that the Council can oversee how many consultations are issued to residents during one period.

VI. Work to increase subscribers to ABC publications should continue to be developed by the Council.

VII. The Council explore options around creating a Citizens Panel to encourage local residents to give their views and opinions on services and issues that affect the Borough.

VIII. Residents should be engaged more with the annual scrutiny

work programme via the Council's communications channels.

209 Corporate Performance Report, Quarter 2 2022/23

The Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer introduced the Corporate Performance Report, which summarised performance against the Council's suite of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's). Some areas to note were that the Cost of Living increases were starting to impact business survival rates, homelessness presentations were also increasing, and unemployment figures that were previously decreasing were now starting to plateau. The report did not include Planning KPI figures, owing to the Planning Team having to complete the National Return due at the end of November. However, it was expected that performance would broadly be in line with the previous quarters.

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

- In response to a query asking how far back the figures went, (in order to see previous trends, prior to Covid and lockdowns), the Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer would speak to the Finance team to try to retrieve past data.
- A Member spoke about business vacancy rates, and voiced his concern for Carlton Road with a 12% vacancy rate. He expressed further concern regarding Council Affordable Housing On Street Purchases (KPI 18) and the increase in Homeless Presentations (KPI 19). The Chairman explained that the statistics did not necessarily present the full picture. Vacancy rates would be much lower if the Designer Outlet and other out of town retail units were included within the figures. KPI's were reviewed at the same time as the new Corporate Plan, at which point new ones could be set.
- It was highlighted that the Stodmarsh issue had influenced where developers were now looking to acquire land, often in areas outside of the Local Plan and this resulted in an increase to Officers time and workload, to deal with appeals. Planning and Housing were outlined as some of the customer facing roles with often challenging workloads, and the services were praised for their good work.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted

210 Reports Tracker and Scrutiny Matrix

The Policy & Scrutiny Officer introduced the report and highlighted that Budget Scrutiny was coming up in December and the Teams invitations had been sent out.

A Member asked about the Freedom Leisure Contract and whether the audit review would negate the Committee's evaluation. The Chairman explained that it would be

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beneficial to assess the item after the audit process was completed, and to decide then whether the O&S Committee would still wish to scrutinise.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted

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