

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held in Committee Room No. 2, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **12th September 2023**.

Present:

Cllr. Bell (Chair),
Cllr. Chilton (Vice-Chair).

Cllrs. Bartlett, Mrs. C. Bell, Feacey, Joseph, Ledger, Meaden, Michael, C. Suddards.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(c), Cllr Mrs C. Bell attended as Substitute Member for Cllr. Shilton.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Arnold, Buchanan, Shilton.

In attendance:

Assistant Director Planning and Development, Head Of Policy and Performance, Digital Transformation Manager, Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager, Member Services Officer.

Also in Attendance (virtually)

Cllr. Harman

Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer

130 Declarations of Interest

Cllr	Interest	Minute No
Bell	Made a Voluntary Announcement that he was a Member of Biddenden Parish Council	136
Feacey	Made a Voluntary Announcement that he was Chair of Ashford Volunteer Centre and Chair of Ashford International Development Company	133

131 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 11th July 2023 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

132 Update on Future System Upgrades with Arcus Global

The Assistant Director Planning and Development and the Digital Transformation Manager gave a presentation to the Committee, which outlined the following areas:

- Public Register (Improvements)
- Delivering Phase 2, Overarching Vision and Delivery Times
- System History
- Project Progress
- Incorporating Lessons Learnt

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

- The Digital Transformation Manager and Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager would be signing off the User Acceptance Testing, and this had been ratified by the Director of Health and Wellbeing and the Project Management Group.
- The website featured a feedback section for users to comment on changes and/or improvements they would like to see.
- History of planning applications would be kept, in accordance with certain statutory requirements but consideration was needed as to how much historical information would be published.
- The project had kept within the budget, but the timeframe had slipped slightly. It was anticipated though that this would be brought back in line when the data mapping and end of user testing overlapped.
- Reporting from Arcus would be circulated to the Director of Place, Space and Leisure and the Assistant Director Planning and Development.
- There would be a future opportunity for staff and other groups including external users to test the system.

Resolved:

That the update be received and noted

133 Corporate Performance Report Q1

The Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer introduced the report, which covered the themes and broad priorities as represented in the current corporate plan, including Green Pioneer, Caring Ashford, Targeted Growth and the Council's underlying principles and key performance measures. Whilst progress generally remained strong across the measures, there were areas where increased focus would prove beneficial. Homelessness triage cases remained high and the corporate property occupancy rate had dipped, and this was not surprising when considering the ongoing cost of living squeeze.

The positives within the report included recycling rates returning to exceed target in the period and planning measures beginning to move positively over the coming quarters with the nutrient neutrality issues looking to be progressing towards a national resolution.

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

- A Member highlighted the Electrical Recycling amnesty projects and asked if this meant that households would no longer be able to include small electrical recycling with the normal waste collections. The Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer advised that the Electrical Recycling projects focussed more on repairing and re-use. The Member asked that the Committee receive a more in depth answer, in order to be able to circulate to residents. The Head of Policy and Performance advised that extra funding had been sourced for this project.
- Concerning the proposal for a travel plan for ABC staff on Page 20 of the agenda, a Member stated that this had previously been considered. The Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer explained that there were several initiatives being considered in line with the forthcoming office move to International House, but more information could be sought.
- The Chairman highlighted the recycling rate, and suggested increasing it to 55%, with a view to reaching the forthcoming target of 65% in approx. fifteen years time. The 55% recycling target was previously met in 2021/2022. He requested that a recommendation be made to Council, and a change be made to the Constitution that the Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) for the Portfolio Holder should be linked to achieving that target. A Member considered that this would be problematic since recycling rates were connected to the education of residents. Members agreed the target should be increased, but some reflected that the SRA should not be solely linked to that target figure, but it was an interesting concept. The Chairman proposed the recommendation that the target be raised to 55% with a view to increasingly raising the target to eventually reach 65%. In addition, 20% of the SRA payment would be dependent on that rate being achieved. The Head of Policy and Performance advised that Waste Contract Implementation would be coming to the October committee meeting. Some issues had been raised at a recent Cabinet meeting regarding changes to legislation in the future and some Members felt that the proposal was being presented too hastily. The Chairman was keen to make the proposal now. Eight Members voted in favour of the motion, one abstained, one voted against.
- A Member expressed disappointment that Portfolio Holders (PH) were not present at the committee meeting. She acknowledged that the Corporate Performance Report covered a wide range of topics and areas, but for future meetings felt it would be helpful for the PH to attend. Other Members agreed and suggested the Chairman write to all PH'S. The Vice-Chair proposed a change to the Constitution to include mandatory participation at meetings concerning their Portfolio. A Member raised concerns about this and said that

invites should be sent from the Chairman and to consider that people are busy with other commitments. The Chairman suggested that PH's should attend each quarter when the Performance Report was included on the agenda. The Vice-Chair added that this was a historical problem and dated back to when he was Chair of O&S. The Vice-Chair made the proposal that a change to the Constitution be made to include mandatory participation by PH's at meetings concerning their Portfolio. Seven Members voted in favour and three Members abstained from the vote.

- The Chair then made a proposal for Cabinet that the current expectation that staff work in the office two days a week be increased to three days a week. He added that the aspiration would be four days a week and that productivity be reported quarterly via the Performance report. The Head of Policy & Performance asked for clarity around which agenda item this proposal related to and the Chair advised it was under the Corporate Performance report. A Member asked whether any contractual arrangements were in place, and was advised that the expectation was around two days per week. The Council took a mixed approach and had various flexible working policies in place for staff. Some Members had attended a meeting regarding the move to International House where space and cost implications were discussed, and this could have some bearing on what was being proposed. The Chairman confirmed that this was not a mandate to change the constitution; this was just a proposal to Cabinet. A Member reminded the Chair that the Committee had already requested scrutiny of Productivity, Staff Morale and Hybrid Working and the report was due to come to the Committee in Spring 2024. He expressed concern that staff morale could plummet if these changes be proposed before the Task Group had begun to scrutinise the topic, and gained insight from or consult with staff and management. The Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager added the report had now been brought forward and would be actually coming to the Committee in February 2024. She suggested exploring what other Local Authorities (LA) were implementing, but the Chair stated that some LA's were often slow to take the lead. A Member expressed his apprehension over staff wellbeing and said that LA's were already short-staffed, so this needed to be managed very carefully. The Chair reiterated that this proposal was to go to Cabinet, but agreed that the proposal be deferred until the committee had sight of the report.

Recommended:

- That**
- i) the report be received and noted**
 - ii) the Cabinet be requested to raise the recycling target to 55%.**
 - iii) Full Council be requested to seek a constitutional change so that 20% of the Special Responsibility Allowance for the relevant Portfolio Holder was dependent on the achievement of the recycling target.**

- iv) **Full Council be requested to seek a change to the Constitution to include mandatory participation by PH's at meetings concerning their Portfolio**

134 Residents Survey and Analysis

The Head of Policy and Performance presented this item to the Committee, and the presentation outlined the following information:

- Introduction
- Demographic Spread: Gender and Economic Groups
- Distribution of Age Groups
- Responses to Questions asked
- Summary of Results
- Next Steps

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

- The issue of cashless car parks was raised and a Member said that a request had been made to maintain at least one coin machine in each car park.
- A Member spoke about the consultation gender imbalance for responses and ensuring the sample was representative.
- The Chairman spoke about the potential plans for the Ashford Monitoring Centre (AMC) and suggestions regarding camera monitoring. A Member commented that the AMC had been invaluable during an incident on the High Street whereby some individuals had baseball bats and machetes, and the AMC were able to notify police and get them quickly to the scene. Investment in new equipment had been made to the AMC, and it was imperative that real time monitoring was in force. The Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager told the Committee that AMC featured on the Tracker for an agenda item and had been brought forward to the next O&S committee meeting and this would include information on savings options, so this could prove a better opportunity to review this item. The Chairman said in that case that the mandate would not be put forward to Cabinet, but the recommendation to Cabinet would stand that the suggestion (that AMC be made into a remote Centre) should not be pursued.
- The Chairman went onto to speak about the Chief Executive's Newsletter publication, and said he believed this was better received by residents because an ABC Officer had produced it, as opposed to any newsletters written by Councillors. He sought to pass a motion to amend the Constitution to run the Council for the next twelve months as if in a run up to an election and only publications including images of and announcements by Officers be circulated to residents. The Head of Policy and Performance was uncertain that Newsletters formed part of the Constitution. Members expressed their concerns and the Vice-Chair said he felt it would be unfair to expect Officers to defend and implement decisions that had been made by Councillors

elected by the public. The Chairman re-considered and withdrew that motion.

- The low response rate to the survey was discussed and the parameters around that.

Recommended:

That Cabinet be requested to not pursue the suggestion that AMC be reformed into a remote Centre.

135 Consultation and Engagement Review

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

136 O&S Tracker 2023 to 2024

The Scrutiny and Partnerships Manager introduced the report and said that South East Water had been invited to attend the November committee meeting; they had requested that questions be submitted in advance, via email to her. The Chairman asked if residents and businesses that were affected by the recent water stoppages including restaurants and farmers, could be asked for their observations in advance of the meeting. Compensation for residents was also a topic for consideration. The Chairman added that it might be beneficial to invite Parish Councils to view the meeting.

Infrastructure was an area that could also be considered to be put on the Tracker.

Resolved:

That the Tracker be received and noted.