

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held in Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **11th June 2024**.

Present:

Cllr. Chilton (Interim Chair),
Cllr Ledger (Interim Vice-Chair)

Cllrs. Bartlett, Bell, Dean, Feacey, Gauder, Giles, Michael, Shilton.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(c), Cllr Gauder attended as Substitute Member for Cllr. Gathern.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Arnold, Gathern, Nilsson.

In attendance:

Cllrs. Betty, Campkin, Spain, Townend, Walder, Wright

Head of Policy and Performance, Democratic Services Officer.

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Chair thanked those Members that had served on the Overview & Scrutiny committee over the last year and Cllr Bell for his Chairmanship, and he welcomed all those new Members this year.

36 Declaration of Interest

Cllr	Interest	Minute No
Feacey	Made a Voluntary Announcement that he was Chair of Ashford Volunteer Centre	038
Spain	Made a Voluntary Announcement that he was a Member of the Steering Committee of Bring Back Euro Trains	038

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Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 9th April 2024 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

38 Draft Borough Plan 2024-2028

The Chair advised that unfortunately due to an admin error, the older version of the draft plan had been included in the agenda, but Members would have already had

sight of the current draft plan and it would be re-circulated after the meeting. Members were invited to submit any comments to the Head of Policy & Performance by the end of the week.

A Member emphasised that he had formerly made some comments regarding the draft plan when the earlier version had been circulated, prior to being made public. The Head of Policy & Performance confirmed that all comments were considered at that time and all consultation responses would be incorporated in the final report that would go to Cabinet. She added that a good response had been received from members of the public to date and the consultation period concluded at the end of the week.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

39 Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24 and 24/25 Work Programme

The Chair introduced this item and the Committee agreed that it was a good Annual Report.

The Chair then spoke about the Work Programme and highlighted that following the meeting there would be a Member presentation on the waste contract and surmised that the Committee would want to add a review of the waste contract to the Tracker.

A Member commented that it was a shame that the briefing was not public, since it was such an important subject to residents. He added that it would be beneficial if there were some key snippets of information that could be made public before the briefing, specifically a target date for when the waste collection service would be back to normal. He went on to acknowledge the positive aspect that every Member had the opportunity to ask questions on the presentation, but added that the purpose of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was for a concentration of Councillors who were able to dig into the subject and ask many questions, whereas it had now been diluted into a presentation. The Chair responded that there had been discussions with the administration because many Members had experienced extensive problems with the waste contract in their ward. Therefore, it had been decided that senior officers would be allowed the opportunity to give a presentation to Members, but because some of the information was commercially, industrially and financially sensitive, the Legal team had advised that it would not be able to be made public at this stage. For practical reasons the Chair had asked people to be brief in their questioning, since it was anticipated that there would be numerous questions and queries.

One Member said that he had received requests from residents in his ward that the waste contract be scrutinised by the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and that it was clear that many residents knew their way around the processes within the Council. He said there had been a distinct lack of communication from the Council to residents and he personally had to stop providing updates via Social Media, due to receiving personal abuse and people saying that he was just trying to fob them off.

A comment was made asking whether some guidance could be given during the meeting confirming which parts of the briefing were confidential, and which parts could be communicated publically, so that Parishes and KALC could be given a summary.

Some residents had commented to Members that they had witnessed refuse and recycling going onto the same vehicle and questioned the purpose of separating them out. Better communication was needed for residents to explain that one short-term solution that had been temporarily deployed was indeed collecting all waste in the same lorry to help accelerate the process.

Another Member commented that there was an expectation among many residents that the topic of the waste contract would be discussed at the meeting. It was possible to say what was confidential and was not, and he suggested the Committee table a vote to make the briefing public. The Chair explained that there was no item on the agenda for the waste contract, and therefore it was not possible to vote for it to be public. He agreed that residents needed to know what was happening and how things were going to improve. He went on to explain that the information Members would receive from the briefing on the financial, commercial and industrial issues between the company, the workers and the Council, would enable them to have a better understanding of the problems encountered and why that information, at this stage, could not be in the public domain because of ongoing negotiations.

A further point was made that some form of communication and outcome from Ashford Borough Council should be circulated publicly following the briefing. A target date would be helpful for the public to understand when it was anticipated that the current issues would be resolved. The Deputy Leader asked Members to sit through the presentation initially, and they would then be able to make an informed decision.

Several topics were suggested to be put forward for inclusion on the Tracker. These included:

- The Ashford Cinema, which was already being monitored by the Trading Enterprise Board and therefore the same report could be shared with the Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- Planning backlog, specifically what priority had been given to it because of the risk of money that the Council were disbursing on appeals. This could also include an Arcus update and review, following phase two.
- International House and the progress of the Task Groups, Monitoring Centre and general timeline.

In response to a query about the Monitoring Centre, the Chair confirmed that a unanimous vote in the Council had passed to protect the Monitoring Centre. The Corporate Director of Housing, Customer, Technology and Finance explained that a Task Group had been set up to look at some other areas for investing in Community safety prevention, and there had been no decision on closing the Monitoring Centre.

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Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

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