

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee held in Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **25th February 2025**.

### Present:

Cllr. Chilton (Chair)

Cllr. Ledger (Vice-chair)

Cllrs. Arnold, Bartlett, Feacey, Gathern, Giles, McGeever, Michael, Shilton, Suddards.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2(c), Cllr C Suddards attended as Substitute Member for Labour Vacancy.

### Apology:

Cllr. Walder.

### In attendance:

Cllrs. Betty, Nilsson

Assistant Director of Environment, Property & Recreation, Head of Policy & Performance, Safety and Wellbeing Manager, Commercial Portfolio Operations Manager, Interim Estates Officer, Specialist Valuer, Senior Estates Officer, Estates Officer, Specialist Management Support Officer (Safety and Wellbeing), Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer, Democratic Services & Ombudsman Liaison Officer.

### Also in attendance virtually:

Cllrs. N. Bell, Hayward.

## 320 Declarations of Interest

Councillor	Interest	Minute No.
Feacey	Made a Voluntary Announcement that he was Chair of the Ashford Volunteer Centre, Ashford International Development Company and Vice – Chair of the Ashford Heritage & Memorial Charitable Foundation.	<b>323 and 324</b>

## **321 Minutes**

### **Resolved:**

**That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 2025 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.**

## **322 Corporate Performance Report Q3**

The Senior Governance & Data Protection Officer introduced the report, which summarised performance against the Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) reflecting the Borough Plan 2024-2028.

The report was opened up to the Committee and the following responses were given to questions/comments: -

- A Member welcomed the programme for improvements to play areas. He also queried why the recycling rate had fallen to 46%. It was clarified that the rate was accumulative, and the drop occurred during the transition period when the contractor changed. It had since risen to 50%.
- A further request asking for restaurants to remove their 5-star rating on display in windows, after being downgraded for hygiene ratings, would be passed onto the Food Hygiene Team.
- New businesses were required to provide Green Travel Plans by the Planning Team and CP\_KPI\_06 was a measure currently being reviewed.
- A query was raised regarding Electric Vehicle Charging Points and whether the rate of charge was sufficient. It was confirmed that the chargers were installed to match the electrical supply, and the points in the Borough were a mixture of 7, 15 and 22 kw. An on-street project in collaboration with KCC was at the consultation stage and this would create a further 26 charging points.
- A written response would be sought in response to a query about increasing the scope of the Beacon Centre and the ZED PODS in relation to services for rough sleepers/homeless people.

### **Resolved:**

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

## **323 Safeguarding Annual Report**

The Safety & Wellbeing Manager introduced the report, which detailed the work undertaken to meet the Council's safeguarding obligations and activities that the Council had participated in or organised, in conjunction with external partners.

The report was opened up to the Committee and the following responses were given to questions/comments: -

- In response to a question about domestic abuse housing accreditation training and how many staff were already trained, the Safety and Wellbeing Manager explained that 96% of staff were compliant with level 1. Level 2 was for managers or people that worked in frontline roles within the organisation, and the training for that was face to face and delivered twice a year. The next training event was scheduled for March, after which a higher number of staff would be trained to level 2. Several Officers were meeting next week to provide a strategic overview of the accreditation process including training.
- The Chair referred to the Safeguarding Lead Officers Group and how the Officers that fulfilled all the functions were doing so on a volunteer basis. He queried whether this was a satisfactory position to be in and asked Members if they felt that ABC should be looking to allocate some more resource to this to give the Officers sufficient amount of time to undertake that role competently, and recompense them accordingly. Members agreed and spoke about the importance of clearly defined parameters of the safeguarding role and that Officers should be fairly remunerated for it. They considered what the views were from the safeguarding team and CSU. The Safety and Wellbeing Manager outlined the work that she and her colleagues undertook in relation to safeguarding and the reviews and checks that were undertaken throughout the year. The Officers specialised in the fields they were in and she felt that ABC had a good oversight in relation to how they responded to and managed safeguarding referrals. The type of referral would determine the level of involvement e.g. in cases concerning children, ABC would tend to make the referral but would not have a lot of involvement further from that point inwards because the referral would likely transfer to a child protection environment. ABC may be invited to attend meetings in relation to some cases, particularly if a housing issue was identified and the majority of ABC referrals were in relation to adults. A further point was made around responsibility and accountability, and that if anything were to go wrong, who would be held to account.
- A further query was raised regarding DBS checks for Councillors and the Committee discussed the option to make a recommendation to Cabinet. Members were informed that the HR Team oversaw that DBS Checking process and so it would be prudent to obtain a response from the HR team. A Member noted his surprise that Councillors were not automatically DBS checked and had to arrange their own.
- In response to a query around Martyn's Law (which required public venues to prepare for and protect against terrorist attacks) the Safety & Wellbeing Manager confirmed that she was attending a conference the following day, and would have more information after that conference.
- There were numerous reasons for the increase in the number of referrals. Improvements to the IT system had made processing of referrals easier and training enabled staff to be more alert to safeguarding issues. The cost of living crisis also continued to have an impact on safeguarding as there were continuing financial pressures on families.

- **Recommended:**
  - i) **That Cabinet consider looking at a form of DBS check for Members**
  - ii) **That Cabinet consider the appropriate compensation levels and formalisation of the current voluntary safeguarding roles**

## **324 Council Commercial Portfolio Update**

The Assistant Director of Environment, Property & Recreation introduced this item, advising that the team had taken a lot of time and effort to put the report together. She introduced a few new members of the team which included the Surveyor, Senior Estates Officer and Estates Officer.

The report was opened up to the Committee and the following responses were given to questions/comments: -

- In response to a question around what could be done with the land associated with unused garages, it was explained that a garage commercialisation strategy was put forward to Cabinet a few years prior and some had already been developed, whilst others were awaiting a Stodmarsh solution. Some sites were awaiting demolition to put units on for storage, and there were specific locations linked to housing sites that were worth retaining for ground source heat pump installation.
- The importance of considering the impact of displacing traffic and putting residential roads under immense pressure when removing garages was noted.
- A Member spoke about the concept of divesting some assets to Town or Parish Councils, and whether that was a process that ABC should consider. It was confirmed that condition surveys were being undertaken across the portfolios and they would help to form the planned maintenance programme, so that the budgets could be managed effectively moving forward. Additionally, the team would review some of those assets, and assess whether they met the aspirations of the Council and what they offered in terms of community value. Consideration would then be given to the amount of maintenance spend on that resource against the return value. It was anticipated that there would be some difficult decisions coming forward to Cabinet regarding those community assets and the financial pressure of retaining them. The Chair added that the Committee should recommend to Cabinet or to whomever the decisions were made that where an asset was being considered for disposal, the Ward Member must also be consulted.
- There was a query about the terms and conditions for the units at Elwick place. The next ERIAC meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> April would examine a strategy to move forward with current proposals and arrange tenants in place.
- Restrictions were in place on the Designer Outlet to ensure certain eateries were not duplicated from the Town Centre.

- The installation of solar panels at Ellingham Industrial Estate was discussed, and consideration was being given to hopefully offer tenants a better deal for their electricity, rather than taking it from the grid which would be a good incentive.
- There was some discussion around the failure of new startup businesses at Elwick Place and the Assistant Director of Environment, Property & Recreation highlighted the importance of the risk assessment undertaken for new businesses and whether prospective tenants had a strong covenant or not. This would also be discussed at the ERIAC meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> April to ensure informed decisions were made before executing any lease on that site.
- A Member spoke about the potential large financial liability that raising commercial sites to EPC rating A or B by 2030 would create for the Council. It was explained that many of the sites at Ellingham Industrial Estate were currently EPC rated E and D. The project to re-roof the units included PV installation and upgrades to insulation. Those units would then move to an EPC rating of B and tenants would then not have to experience further disruption later down the line. This would result in a marked difference to the EPC registers and that commitment in terms of funds had already been signed off by Cabinet.

#### **Recommended:**

- i) **That there is an update to the Garage Commercialisation strategy**
- ii) **To produce a written protocol stating that an initial consultation be held with the Ward Member for assets that are being considered for disposal**

## **325 Schedule of Key Cabinet Decisions**

#### **Resolved:**

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

## **326 Work Programme and Tracker**

The Chair introduced this item and the following points/comments were raised:

- A paper was being developed for Cabinet regarding the Tank in the Town Centre, so that would not need to be included on the Work Tracker.
- A Member said that at the previous Committee meeting, Section 106 monies were put forward as a topic to be added to the Tracker. The Head of Policy & Performance explained that a review of S106 monies had been undertaken a couple of years ago, and she would send that report on to Members. The Committee had reviewed the Section 106 process, and the planning team had subsequently fed back on all of the queries raised. Therefore, if it were to be put through the matrix again, it most likely would be highlighted as one that had been reviewed in recent years.

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25.02.25

**Resolved:**

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

Queries concerning these minutes? Please contact Democratic Services:  
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