

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Tannery Lane, Ashford on the **25th June 2019**.

Present:

Cllr. Ovenden (Chairman);
Cllr. Michael (Vice-Chairman);

Cllrs. Burgess, Forest, Howard-Smith, Iliffe, Krause, Ledger, Mulholland, Ward.

In accordance with Procedure Rule 1.2 (iii) Cllr Ward attended as Substitute Member for Cllr. Chilton.

Apologies:

Cllrs. Chilton, Farrell.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Campkin, Pickering, Wright.

Head of HR & Customer Services, Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Comms, Senior Policy & Scrutiny Officer, Member Services Officer.

53 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of this Committee held on the 26th March 2019 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

54 Annual Sickness Absence Report 2018/2019

The Portfolio Holder for HR & Customer Services introduced the report that provided annual information on sickness absenteeism for 2018/2019. He explained that although there had been an increase in total amount of days lost due to sickness, the picture was not all bad. Short-term sickness had actually decreased, which was a positive indication. Cases of Mental ill health (including stress) had almost halved, and the revised Sickness Policy had been reviewed and a draft was currently with Unison for their remarks.

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

- A Member asked whether any case of absence could be attributed to a shortage in personnel within the Council. The Head of HR & Customer Services explained that some cases of long-term absence were because of stress/pressure, but more of these were owing to non-work related pressure. Ashford took a robust and consistent approach to mental ill health, resulting in the reduction this year. Management Team were mindful of Officer capacity and had approved additional resources to assist with managing this.
- In response to a question from the Chairman asking for a comparison to National averages and trends, the Head of HR & Customer Services said that she would obtain this information and circulate to the Committee.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

55 Wye3 Masterplan Report

The Chairman confirmed that this item had been deferred, because there was not enough time before the Meeting for Officers to draw up a substantial report. A Task and Finish Group would be set up in order to review the Masterplan report and take statements from the Parish Council, Planning Department and the Developer and then bring back any recommendations to August's Overview & Scrutiny Committee Meeting. The Chairman asked for volunteers and advised that the Senior Policy & Scrutiny Officer would provide Members with provisional dates.

A Member asked if a conflict of interest would arise if he took part in the Task Group, as he sat on the Planning Committee. The Senior Policy & Scrutiny Officer advised that members on Planning may not want to volunteer for the Task Group, as it may result in their having to declare an interest at Planning Committee should it be required to determine any subsequent planning application arising from the area covered by the Wye3 Masterplan.

Resolved:

That Councillors Iliffe, Ledger, Michael, Mulholland and Ovenden would form the Task & Finish Group.

56 Annual Performance Report (including Quarter 4 Performance Report)

The Senior Policy & Scrutiny Officer introduced the report that was presented in a new format. He explained that the information collated came from a variety of sources across the Council, and any questions he was unable to answer at the meeting, he would follow up with Officers and report back to the Committee.

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

- A Member commented that the report contained very useful information and asked if it was intended for external parties. He noted that there was no reference to data relating to rental income from corporate assets. The Senior Policy & Scrutiny Officer explained that data concerning returns on investment had been included in the financial outturn report for 2018/19, which had been presented to the previous Cabinet. Further financial information would be included in the quarterly financial reports that were presented to Cabinet and the Budget Scrutiny Task Group would then have sight of rental income data when reviewing the draft budgets for the coming year. The Head of Corporate Policy, ED & Comms went on to say that, there would be some benefit in including some financial information, in order to provide a more rounded statement.
- In response to a question regarding the position of Credit Unions, The Senior Policy & Scrutiny Officer confirmed that the Council had issued a subordinated loan to Kent Savers of £10,000 in line with the recommendations of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee. This had enabled Kent Savers to expand their loan book and offer further services to residents of the Borough. A staff promotion with the Credit Union had just been launched in the form of a payroll deduction savings and loan scheme. In response to a question regarding the return of the loan, the Senior Policy and Scrutiny Officer advised that the Council had waived interest in issuing the loan and repayment was not expected or sought. As a subordinated debt, the loan would only be repaid to the Council following all other debts in the event of the Credit Union failing.
- A Member asked what measures were in place to ensure that the Corporate Property Company was being properly scrutinised. The Senior Policy & Scrutiny Officer explained that the Property Company was an arm's length entity, with scrutiny of its operations provided by the Trading and Enterprise Board. The Board was a formally constituted Committee of the Cabinet and was chaired by the Shareholder Representative for the Company. The Overview & Scrutiny Committee had reviewed the Company last year and made several recommendations to Cabinet around the governance of the Trading and Enterprise Board and the Property Company, which had since been put into effect. Further to this, feedback would be sought from the Director of Finance and Economy concerning a request from the O&S Budget Scrutiny Task Group to track which assets were decreasing/appreciating in value.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

57 Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report

This was a standing report covering the last 12 months. The Committee were asked to consider items for inclusion on the agenda over the next year.

The Chairman commented that a lot of work had obviously gone into the excellent, comprehensive report.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

58 Future Reviews and Report Tracker and Topic Selection Flowchart

The Senior Policy & Scrutiny Officer drew the Committee's attention to two items on the Tracker for July's Meeting; Ashford For You and Aspire Performance. He invited Members to liaise with the Chairman or himself about potential ideas to be considered for future meetings.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.