

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 **23rd July 2019**.

Present:

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

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

Also Present:

Cllrs. Buchanan, Wright.

Communications & Marketing Manager, Head of Environment and Land Management, Grounds Maintenance Operations Manager, Director of Finance and Economy, Senior Policy and Scrutiny Officer, Member Services and Ombudsman Complaints Officer.

93 Declarations of Interest

Cllr. Chilton made a Voluntary Announcement as he owned a small news company.

94 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 25th June 2019 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

95 Ashford for You Review

The Communications and Marketing Manager introduced this item. He said he would provide a brief review of the Ashford for You magazine, as well as discussing the wider context of how the Council communicated with residents. He went on to give a presentation which covered:

- Details of the varied ways in which the Council communicated with residents and the public, including external and internal methods.
- In-house teamwork to create branding and concept for Aspire Landscape Management, including vehicle artwork and uniforms. Also, devising the

vehicle artwork for waste and recycling lorries, local elections promotion and branding for market stalls events.

- Upcoming support for the Town Centre team to deliver key high-profile town centre projects.
- Working with national and international media and a national external PR agency.
- Reacting to the evolving methods of communicating with residents and the public including ABC News Hub, social media and the Ashford for You magazine, which was delivered to every household in the Borough.
- Communication with Members via media updates, and contributions to the weekly Members' Newsletter etc.

The Chairman opened up the item and the following questions/comments were raised:

- Members considered that Ashford for You was an excellent magazine, but felt there could be more coverage of issues in rural areas. A Member suggested that the Communications Team should contact rural Parish Councils to see if they had any issues to contribute, and, in particular, speak to editors of Parish magazines. The Communications and Marketing Manager said he would take this on board.
- A Member asked how the external PR company had been chosen. The Communications and Marketing Manager explained that this had been done via a tender and interview process.
- In response to a question about the cost of producing the Ashford for You magazine, the Communications and Marketing Manager responded that each edition yielded approximately £3,700 in advertising income. This did not cover the cost of producing each edition, which was roughly £10,000, including print and postage costs. The major expense was in staff time.
- A Member asked what measures were in place to gauge the effectiveness and value for money of delivering the magazine. The Communications and Marketing Manager said that residents had been asked specific questions via a survey to understand how effective the magazine was in communicating with residents. The survey results had been very positive.
- In response to a question about what methods provided the best value and benefit, the Communications and Marketing Manager replied that it depended on the audience and that a number of different types of communication channels were required to reach the maximum audience. The magazine was an important communication tool, as were social media and the more traditional media channels.

- A Member asked about the editorial structure of the magazine and how the content was derived. The Communications and Marketing Manager replied that the whole Communications and Marketing team was involved in the magazine production, although there was an overall editor. The team liaised with Officers, Management Team and members of the public for material, but they were always looking for suitable content. He emphasised that this was a lifestyle magazine, and was particularly suitable for families and older residents.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

96 Performance and Development of Aspire Landscape Management

The Head of Environment and Land Management introduced this item and highlighted the key points within the report. She explained the background to the establishment of the service and plans for the future. She said the Aspire service had been hugely successful, and worked across large areas of the Borough, providing contracted in-house work as well as landscape management. An appraisal had been undertaken to explore potential commercial income generating opportunities, but the main driver was to continue to provide excellent service across the Borough and this should not suffer at the expense of income generation. It was also important to avoid competing in markets where self-employed, sole trader residents were likely to be operating.

The Chairman opened up the item for discussion and the following questions/comments were raised:

- Members agreed that the Aspire team provided an excellent service. A Member asked whether it would be possible to deliver services at Chilmington. The Head of Environment and Land Management replied that the Chilmington Management Organisation would put out their land management requirements to tender, and this would be an opportunity for the Aspire team to put in a competitive bid.
- A Member asked about the pros and cons of a Trading Company. The Head of Environment and Land Management drew Members' attention to the table under paragraph 1 of her report, which provided this information.
- In response to a question about restrictions on commercial income generating work for local authority trading companies, the Director of Finance and Economy explained that there were measures in place to ensure that any local authority entering the market would act competitively in the market place.
- A Member asked about the regime of verge cuts. The Grounds Maintenance Operations Manager responded that highway verges were part funded by KCC, who paid for 6 annual cuts. The Council provided another 6 annual cuts. There were 12 cuts to amenity land. There were 16 – 18 annual cuts on gateways and roundabouts.

- A Member asked about mapping of ditches in the Borough and the team's ditch clearing workload. The Head of Environment and Land Management said that there were in the region of 20 drainage systems that the Aspire service now maintained. However, the team were not taking on any work from new developments, but were concentrating on attending to those identified as priority and already in the Council's ownership.
- There was a question about the storage location for the team's tools and machinery. The Head of Environment and Land Management explained that these were kept at the depot in Cobbs Wood. An open day had been arranged for 4th October, and Members were invited to attend and find out more about the team and their work.
- Members congratulated the Head of Environment and Land Management and the Grounds Maintenance Operations Manager on the quality of the team's work and their success to date.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

97 Future Reviews and Report Tracker and Topic Selection Flowchart

The Senior Policy and Scrutiny Officer introduced this item. He explained that the Tracker provided the standing commitments for the year, as well as items for future consideration.

He advised that he was currently trying to arrange Budget Scrutiny training sessions for Members of the Committee in advance of the budget scrutiny process commencing.

A Member requested that an item be added to the Tracker covering the current and future financial situation at Ashford College. The Senior Policy and Scrutiny Officer said he would speak to Officers about bringing this to a future Committee meeting.

Resolved:

That the report be received and noted.

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