

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 January 2018**.

Present:

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

Cllrs. Bartlett, Burgess, Feacey, Hicks, Knowles, Miss Martin, Mrs. Martin.

Also Present:

Cllrs. Galpin, Shorter.

Director of Finance & Economy, Interim Head of Finance, Senior Accountant (MH), Senior Accountant (LF), Head of Corporate Policy, Economic Development & Communications, Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer, Member Services Officer.

323 Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the Meeting of this Committee held on the 28th November 2017 be approved and confirmed as a correct record.

324 CLG Select Committee report on Overview & Scrutiny

The Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer introduced this item and explained that the final report of the Communities and Local Government Select Committee made a number of recommendations related principally to Government revising and updating guidance, but a Ministerial response to the report was yet to be released.

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

- A Member observed that the report talked about pre-decision scrutiny and Councils using Freedom of Information requests to obtain information; and that he believed that ABC Members were able to access information for scrutiny purposes. The Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer explained that the report contained a summary of practices from other councils reported to the Select Committee and was not specific to Ashford, and added that nothing in the report had been adopted or implemented.
- Members commented that it was a positive and informative report that emphasised the importance of Scrutiny.
- A suggestion was made that training for Members of the O&S committee

should be mandatory. The Chairman advised that he would write to the Leader (as Chair of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee) and the Lead Member for Member Training on this point. The Corporate Scrutiny and Overview Officer added that he would circulate training material and details of training courses he had received from the Centre for Public Scrutiny and approach the Member Services Team regarding organising training for Members.

- Several Members emphasised the point that Cabinet Members and Deputy Portfolio Holders should not form part of the O&S Committee membership.

Resolved:

- That
- i) The Report be received and noted,
 - ii) The Chairman draft a letter to the Leader (as Chair of the Selection and Constitutional Review Committee) and Lead Member for Member Training recommending that O&S training for Committee Members be made obligatory.

325 Report of Budget Scrutiny Task Group

The Chairman introduced this item and thanked Cllr. Bartlett (for chairing the Task Group) and the Members and Officers that contributed to and attended the meetings. The Minutes from the Overview & Scrutiny Budget Task Groups on the 9th and 10th January 2018 were also circulated for information. Cllr. Bartlett commented that the report gave a good summary of the Task Groups findings. He added that there were some issues that had arisen since the report was written that the Committee should be made aware of:

- The first issue was around NHS Trusts claiming charitable business rate relief, which if successful would mean they would benefit from an 80% discount and this would have a significant impact on the Council's budget. The Director of Finance & Economy expanded upon this and said that a large number of NHS Trusts were arguing their case and ABC formed part of a consortium that were seeking to fight this. If successful then £144,000 rate relief would be awarded to the Hospital Trust, and the bulk of this amount would be borne by KCC. He advised the Committee that the Council had already set aside £3.4 million for any appeal processes and a further £2.4m was budgeted to be added to this provision. It was unlikely that any action would take place over the next year. He recommended that the issue be added to the risk register.
- The second issue was around funding for Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). ABC funding to the CAB had decreased in recent years from £124,000 to £110,000, but with the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) and the Homelessness Reduction Act, the CAB would be placed under increasing pressure, and ABC should ensure they support them as much as possible. The Director of Finance & Economy made reference to the Council Tax and Welfare Reform Task Group and explained that additional staff had been recruited under that Task Group's recommendation to help with extra cases resulting from UC and

Homelessness prevention, and further funding had been made available. The 3 year Service Level Agreement currently in place with the CAB had been welcomed and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and IT added that the Task Group acknowledged the support given by the voluntary sector as a whole.

The Committee discussed the five areas listed on Page 15/16 of the report where it was felt that a review by the O&S Committee would be beneficial. A suggestion was made that the Committee add the Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) to the list for review also. With reference to A Better Choice for Property Ltd, a Member commented that the Council needed to be mindful of the risks of operating private companies. The Vice-Chairman suggested that a representative from the Trading and Enterprise Board, to whom A Better Choice for Property Ltd were held accountable, be invited to attend a future meeting and Members agreed that this was a suitable course of action.

Resolved:

- That
- i) The Report be received and noted,
 - ii) The issue regarding charitable business rate relief be added to the risk register,
 - iii) The MTFP be added to the Future Reviews and Report Tracker, and consideration be given to adding the five additional items listed on pages 15/16 of the report,
 - iv) A representative from the Trading and Enterprise Board be invited to attend a future meeting to answer Members questions concerning A Better Choice for Property Ltd.

326 Future Reviews and Report Tracker and Topic Selection Flowchart

The Chairman advised that Safeguarding and the Community Safety Partnership Update would be on the agenda for February's meeting. A Member asked that the O&S Committee also add the Clean Air Policy onto the Tracker for review (subject to Cabinet approval of the Committee's recommendations on Air Quality).

Queries concerning these Minutes? Please contact Clare Ricketts:
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