

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR RESOURCES
6 JUNE 2013**

Present: Councillors Batsford, Davies, Howard, Pragnell, Sinden,
and Webb (in the Chair)

Lead Members in attendance: Councillors Birch and Cartwright

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following councillors declared an interest in the minutes as indicated:

<u>Councillor</u>	<u>Minute</u>	<u>Interest</u>
Cartwright	5	Personal – Member of GMB Union
Davies	4	Personal – Member of the National Union of Teachers
Howard	5	Personal – Member of GMB Union
Sinden	5	Personal – Chair of Hastings & District Trades Council
Webb	4 and 5	Personal – Member of GMB Union, Hastings Trade Council and east Sussex County Council

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 February 2013 be approved as a true record.

3. CORPORATE PLAN PART III – YEAR END PERFORMANCE INFORMATION AND TARGET SETTING 2013/14

The Policy and Partnerships Officer presented a report to advise Members of the year-end actual performance by the staff in the Corporate Resources Directorate against the targets and milestones set out in Part II of the

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR RESOURCES 6 JUNE 2013

Corporate Plan for 2012/13. The report also set out actions that would be taken to address any areas of shortfall in performance during 2013/14. Members views were sought on the performance indicator targets for the activities overseen by the Committee proposed for 2013/14.

The report outlined that 2 units at Castleham Archive were likely to be vacated in the near future. Members were advised that one of the units was likely to require some modifications before a new tenant could be found. Consideration was given to marketing strategy for the new units, once they have been returned to the Council.

Members highlighted the arrangements for a joint procurement service with Wealden District Council as a positive example of joint working.

The Committee discussed the Local Authority Mortgage Scheme. Members noted that a second phase of the scheme had been launched in March 2013, after Cabinet committed a further £1 million indemnity. Whilst the scheme aimed to support first time buyers onto the housing ladder, it also encouraged responsible borrowing, by the inclusion of a 5% deposit requirement. Members suggested gaining further feedback from those who had participated in the first phase of the scheme. The Committee were advised that a report would be presented to Cabinet regarding the possible expansion of the scheme across all of East Sussex, with additional funding being provided by East Sussex County Council.

Members congratulated staff on the excellent collection rates for Council Tax and non-domestic rates, outlined in the report. Consideration was given to the impact of the changes to the Welfare System and how this might affect the average number of days to process a new Housing Benefit claim. The changes had resulted in a significant increase in the volume of enquiries received, at a time when resources had been reduced. As a result of these considerations, it had been necessary to increase the projected number of days to process a new Housing Benefit claim for March 2014 to 15.0. Councillor Birch recommended that the Scrutiny function should continue to monitor the number of Housing Benefits claimants and statistics from associated services in the year ahead.

Consideration was given to the projections for the proportion of working days/ shifts lost due to sickness absence. Members underscored that following the recent restructure and the increased workloads of staff, issues regarding stress related illness should be monitored closely.

The Committee welcomed the results of a recent Stonewall submission, which ranked the Council 239 out of 369 organisations, an increase of 54 places from last year.

Members discussed the rationale for relocating the Tourist Information Centre element of the Contact Centre to Aquila House. Councillor Birch explained that the Contact Centre project had delivered significant savings; however, it

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR RESOURCES
6 JUNE 2013**

had been necessary to refine some aspects of the model. The relocated Tourist Information Centre would be best placed to deal with enquiries from visitors, given its location on the seafront in the town centre. The Committee requested that the relocation of the Tourist Information Centre should be publicized, by amending any promotional materials and placing appropriate signage around the town. The Head of Communications & Marketing explained that new town maps were being produced showing the new Tourist Information Centre location, and appropriate signage was being erected at Hastings Station.

The Committee noted that recent meetings of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) had welcomed a number of key representatives in local healthcare and education. Members were advised that the Minutes of LSP meetings were available to view on the Council's website.

RESOLVED that

- 1. Members consider the information that will form Part III of the Corporate Plan, and;**
- 2. That the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the proposed performance indicator targets for 2013/14 be referred to the Cabinet meeting on 10th of June 2013, and;**
- 3. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee thank staff for their hard work in achieving the targets set out in the Corporate Plan.**

4. FORWARD PLAN 1 JUNE TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2013

This item was moved up the Agenda, with the agreement of the Chair.

The Policy and Partnerships Officer introduced this item, and asked Members to identify any areas for more detailed consideration.

5. UPDATE ON PROPOSALS FOR HASTINGS CROWN POST OFFICE

Under the Council's Constitution, an Overview and Scrutiny Committee may invite representatives from outside bodies to address it and discuss issues of local concern. Following a request from Scrutiny Members, for an update on proposed changes to the operation of Hastings Crown Post Office, representatives from the Post Office Limited and the Communication Workers Union had been invited to attend the Committee meeting. The Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Services were also invited to the table for the duration of this item.

Overview and Scrutiny Members had formulated a series of questions, which had been circulated to both parties in advance of the meeting. Members

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR RESOURCES 6 JUNE 2013

interviewed the representatives from the Post Office Limited and Communication Workers Union, individually. Discussion took place regarding the profitability of the existing Hastings Crown Post Office, the level of government subsidy received by the Post Office Limited and the continuance of staffing and service provision, should a franchise model be adopted. The Committee also asked a number of supplementary questions of both the Post Office Limited and the Communication Workers Union, after their initial questions had been answered.

The Committee requested further information on the criteria used to identify a Crown Post Office which may be suitable for franchise. Members also asked for examples of existing franchised offices, which had been adopted in towns of a similar size and demographic.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the evidence given by the Post Office Limited and the Communication Workers Union at the meeting, and that the Chair, in consultation with Scrutiny colleagues, will consider an appropriate response.

6. SUGGESTIONS FOR FINANCIAL ECONOMIES AND NEW SOURCES OF INCOME

The Policy and Partnerships Officer invited Members to submit their suggestions for financial economies and new sources of income, which would be taken forward for further consideration. Consideration was given to the sale of merchandise in Council Museums, online and in retail facilities.

7. WORK PROGRAMME 2012-13 QUARTER FOUR UPDATES AND FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME IDEAS

The Policy and Partnerships Officer presented a report to update Members on the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme. The three Scrutiny Reviews, which had been selected as part of the Overview & Scrutiny Work Programme for 2012/13, had been completed. Members would consider the Future Work Programme Ideas at the Annual Joint Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees, when they would formulate their Work Programme for 2013/14.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.20pm)