

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR RESOURCES  
25 NOVEMBER 2013**

Present: Councillors Batsford (from 6.05pm), Howard (from 6.35pm), Pragnell, Sinden, and Webb (in the Chair)

Lead Members in attendance: Councillors Birch and Cartwright

**13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

<u>Councillor</u>	<u>Minute</u>	<u>Interest</u>
Howard	16	Personal – member of Unison

**14. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2013 be approved as a true record.**

**15. QUARTER TWO PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT**

The Head of Corporate Services presented a report to advise Members of the performance against the 2013/14 targets and performance indicators in Part II of the corporate plan. The report also provided a summary of financial information.

The committee welcomed the increase in Development Control income, which had been the result of a few larger planning applications.

Members noted that the launch of a further phase of the Local Authority Mortgage Scheme, funded by East Sussex County Council (ESCC), had been postponed by Lloyds Bank while it considers the implications of the Government's Help to Buy scheme. The Head of Finance advised that Lloyds Bank had stated that schemes authorised by 30 November 2013 would be able to proceed. ESCC were investigating the feasibility of launching the scheme by this date.

Members were pleased to note that the Council had received an unqualified audit opinion for the annual statement of accounts on 30 September 2013.

The Committee congratulated the Fraud Investigation Service on their efforts to tackle serious fraud cases.

Discussion took place regarding the ongoing refurbishment of 6 – 8 Pelham Arcade, as part of the Council's target to support the new operator of St Mary

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR RESOURCES 25 NOVEMBER 2013

in the Castle to fulfil the potential of the venue. Members were advised that the estimated completion date of the refurbishment works was January 2014. The delays had been caused by additional works due to the age of the building, sickness absence amongst the building contractors and the listed building consents required for the change of use of the premises to a restaurant and café. Councillor Birch reiterated the Council's commitment to ensuring the works are completed to the required conservation standard, and to bringing the café area back in to use as soon as possible.

The Head of Finance outlined that collection rates for Council Tax were improving, and it was anticipated that the Council would meet its year end target. Councillor Cartwright highlighted that the Council had exceeded its targets for the average number of days to process housing benefit and Council Tax claims. Members suggested that Scrutiny Steering Group review the classification of targets.

Consideration was given to the review of the Council's constitution. Working Arrangements Group had approved a number of updates, including a revised Member / officer protocol, for submission to Cabinet and Full Council. The committee thanked the Chief Legal Officer for her efforts in improving the accessibility of the Council's constitution, to ensure it remained fit for purpose in the future.

The Head of Corporate Services advised that the vinyl at the front of the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) was due to be replaced. Members also requested that the signage at Robertson Street, directing pedestrians to the TIC, be adjusted.

The committee welcomed the success of the 'Switched On Hastings' energy switching campaign, in delivering savings for residents on their energy bills. Council officers had responded to enquiries from the public and supported residents in signing up to the scheme. The Head of Corporate Services explained that a de-brief would be held to analyse the monitoring information from the first round of the scheme. In particular, consideration would be given to the marketing of future rounds of the campaign and developing further links with local Housing Associations, to raise awareness of the offer.

Members requested an update at a future committee meeting on rental negotiations with the landlord of Aquila House, and plans to carry out repairs to the building.

### **RESOLVED that –**

- 1. the committee's comments on Quarter 2 performance be addressed by the relevant Lead Member(s) with appropriate action and report back.**
- 2. staff in the Corporate Resources Directorate be thanked for their hard work and achievements in this quarter.**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR RESOURCES  
25 NOVEMBER 2013**

**16. UPDATE ON CONTACT CENTRE ARRANGEMENTS**

The Head of Corporate Services presented a report to provide a detailed update on the Community Contact Centre (CCC). The report set out actions taken over the past six months to improve the CCC. A Tourist Information Centre (TIC) had been opened to deal with enquiries from visitors. Consideration had been given to feedback from staff, customers and other Council services to identify the best way forward, specialist consultancy advice had also been sought regarding handling Revenues and Benefits enquiries.

Efforts had been made to identify and address training gaps, to enable staff to take a flexible approach when dealing with a broad range of enquiries. Improvements had also been made to the communication between the front desk of the CCC and the call centre. This would enable the CCC to cope with peaks and troughs in customer demand. Planning was underway to ensure adequate provisions are in place to cope with high volumes of enquires at particularly busy times of the year, such as during Council Tax billing, drawing on previous experience.

The Head of Corporate Services acknowledged that the period of change at the CCC had created additional pressures on staff; she gave the committee an overview of the mechanisms in place to mitigate these pressures.

The report also outlined proposed actions to develop the CCC over the next six months, with an emphasis on a customer first approach.

Opportunities for a 'channel shift' to dealing with more enquiries on-line were underway. Members noted that this would make the Council more responsive to customer's needs, particularly when dealing with confidential or sensitive enquiries. The Council would also undertake service reviews, with the aim of streamlining operational processes and reducing avoidable contact.

Consideration was given to the facility for customers to nominate a representative to speak on their behalf. Members were mindful of the associated data protection issues. The Contact Centre Manager gave the committee an overview of the process for dealing with these enquiries. The Head of Corporate Services invited members to submit examples of their experiences of using the CCC, which would assist the Contact Centre Improvement Board in identifying further training requirements.

The committee thanked the Head of Corporate Services for her report.

**RESOLVED that –**

- 1. Members acknowledge the steps being taken to address performance in the Community Contact Centre and make any suggestions they feel appropriate for the Contact centre Improvement Board to consider.**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR RESOURCES  
25 NOVEMBER 2013**

**17. FORWARD PLAN DECEMBER 2013 TO MARCH 2014 AND  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2013 – 14 QUARTER  
TWO UPDATE**

The Senior Corporate and Democratic Services Officer introduced this item. He advised that Members had commenced two reviews, which had been selected at the Annual Joint meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny reviews in June. A draft Overview and Scrutiny Charter, which had been formulated by a working group of Members, was also nearing completion.

Member's views were sought on items contained within the Forward Plan, which detailed reports to be considered by Cabinet over the coming months.

**18. SUGGESTIONS FOR FINANCIAL ECONOMIES AND NEW  
SOURCES OF INCOME**

Councillor Howard had made a suggestion regarding the online sale of merchandise from the Tourist Information Centre and museum gift shop. The Head of Corporate Services noted this suggestion and agreed to update the committee, either by email or at its next meeting.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.25pm)