

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR RESOURCES

11 FEBRUARY 2016

Present: Councillors Webb (Chair), Howard, Sinden, Roberts, Beaver and Pragnell

Lead Members in attendance: Councillors Cartwright and Chowney

Apologies for absence were noted for Councillor Batsford

Prior to the start of the meeting, members stood and observed one minutes silence in memory of Councillor John Hodges.

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

12. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 NOVEMBER 2015

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2015 be approved as a correct record

13. QUARTER THREE PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

The Director of Corporate Services and Governance presented a report which advised members of performance against the 2015/16 targets and performance indicators in the corporate plan for quarter 3. The report also provided a summary of financial information.

The Director of Corporate Services and Governance commented that the Business Support team were heavily involved in supporting the ongoing refurbishment of Aquila House. The team were also involved in the roll out of new technology which would support changing working practices across the organisation.

The committee noted that works were underway to create a new civic suite on the upper ground floor of Aquila House. East Sussex County Council had also completed their refurbishment of the Town Hall to form the new Register Office. Members requested a tour of the new Register Office, when it was convenient for this to be arranged.

Members were mindful that the Community Contact Centre would receive a significant increase in the number of enquiries over the weeks to come, as a result of the new council tax billing period. Planning was underway to minimise the impact on the service and other customers during this extremely busy time.

The Director of Corporate Services and Governance explained that sickness absence was robustly managed across the organisation by the People, Customer and Business Support team, but with sensitivity for individual circumstances. Members noted that, as the organisation reduced in size, any period of sickness absence would have a more significant impact on the statistics. The committee highlighted that Councillor Sue Beaney had been appointed as the council's Mental Health Champion, the

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Director of Corporate Services and Governance added that it was likely the Executive Manager of People, Customer and Business Support would be appointed as the lead officer for mental health.

Discussion took place regarding the recruitment and retention of staff, particularly given the national shortages of some professional services. The Director of Corporate Services and Governance highlighted that it was important to use recruitment resources imaginatively to attract high calibre staff. It was also important to offer development opportunities for existing staff. The process of mapping of council services had engaged staff in reviewing working practices, and in some cases this had identified resources which could be more effectively re-deployed elsewhere.

The Assistant Director for Financial Services and Revenues commented that the budget setting process had been particularly challenging this year, as there had been delays receiving the details of the council's financial settlement from government. Members noted that the report to Budget Cabinet recommended a 2.08% increase in the borough council's part of council tax, in order to achieve a balanced budget.

The Director of Corporate Services and Governance updated members on preparations for the Police and Crime Commissioner and Local Government Elections which would be held in May. The team were also carrying out initial preparations for a referendum of the UK's membership of the European Union, although the date this would take place had not yet been confirmed.

Members were advised that the council had received a significant number of Freedom of Information requests during the last quarter, it was important that the impact of dealing with these enquiries on overall capacity within the organisation was monitored carefully. The Director of Corporate Services and Governance noted that a new Firmstep module was currently being developed which would assist the council in collating and monitoring these enquiries.

The Director of Corporate Services explained that the council continued to develop the My Hastings Online package, which would make a number of council services available online. The team implementing the system were also developing interfaces between the reporting systems used by the council's contractors. A comprehensive overhaul of the council's website was also underway; a Customer First Communications Champion had been appointed and was in the process of designing a new layout for the site. Service teams would also be asked to review the content of their areas of the website. Members noted that this was process was a key part of the implementation of the council's customer first strategy.

The Assistant Director for Financial Services and Revenues explained that there had been delays to housing benefit subsidy grant claim. The council's claim was subject to a complex audit process before it could be submitted to the Department for Work and Pensions; this had resulted in slippage in the original timescale. Similar delays had been experienced by a number of other authorities.

The committee welcomed the update that the target of 15 days to process new housing benefit claims had been met, against a national average of 24 days.

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Members welcomed the continued high occupancy rate of the council's industrial units.

RESOLVED that: -

- 1) **The committees comments on quarter 3 performance be addressed by the relevant Lead Member(s) with appropriate action and report back;**
- 2) **Members reflect and feedback on ways of reporting performance information being tested and set out in the report, and;**
- 3) **Staff in the Corporate Services and Governance Directorate be thanked for their hard work and achievements in this quarter**

The reason for this decision was:

To undertake and improve performance monitoring and management arrangements in the context of broader organisational transformation.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 7.00 pm)