

Appendix C – Director Report: Operational Services

Subject: **2015/16 Performance Review Director’s Report**

Submitted to: **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **14th June 2016**

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Introduction

1. As quarter 4 is the end of the financial/performance year, it is worth highlighting not only areas of concern but some areas of outstanding achievement from 2015/16. I also picked out a couple of issues I believe might be of significance in the forthcoming period.

Development Management

2. As reported before this part of the Planning Service was given additional financial support to help it address issues caused by staff shortage and sickness. Andrew Palmer and latterly the new Planning Services Manager, Eleanor Evans have worked hard to provide short term responses and to consider the changes needed in the future. Eleanor will be completing her review and recommendations shortly as agreed previously. These will be the subject of discussion with members of Overview and Scrutiny.
3. Without pre-empting the bulk of Eleanor’s review there has been a general “strengthening” of processes and report writing around decisions. Greater thoroughness may have implications for staff time and there may be a need to consider this alongside issues of existing and proposed performance requirements and cost.
4. In terms of yearly performance the results (contained within the performance review document) are:

i) Major applications completed in 13 weeks or as agreed with applicant:

Target 90%

Q1 67%

Q2 50%

Q3 88%

Q4 100%

Average 83%

ii) Minor applications completed within 8 weeks or as agreed with applicant:

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Target 85%

Q1 69%

Q2 60%

Q3 81%

Q4 79%

Average 71%

iii) Householder applications completed within 6 weeks or as agreed with applicant:

Target 65%

Q1 42%

Q2 36%

Q3 70%

Q4 50%

Average 48%

5. In general, a marked improvement in performance can be seen following a period of difficulty caused by staff shortages and the pressures of dealing with the Queensway Gateway application and Rocklands.
6. The Government is currently consulting upon a series of new performance standards for Planning Services and this consultation expired in April. The consultation paper runs alongside the Housing and Planning Bill which has been through both the House of Commons and House of Lords. The House of Commons are now considering whether to accept amendments suggested by the House of Lords. If agreement isn't reached on suggested amendments this may delay the implementation of new measures which were initially anticipated in Autumn 2016. Local authorities not achieving minimum standards may lose their right to assess applications and determine decisions.
7. It will therefore be important to ensure that the planning process (which goes beyond the Development Management team into Legal Services, Conservation and a variety of external consultees) is structured in a way which will deliver these targets. Central to this is a planning team which is confident in taking and interpreting advice and takes responsibility for the overall process. For both officers and members in all Councils this will mean decisions being firmly rooted in Planning Policy and the ability to do this speedily.
8. i) Current statutory targets are:

HBC Performance Against
Targets

50% of major applications determined in 13 weeks	HBC 83%
80% of appeals against major decisions dismissed	HBC 100% (no appeals made)

ii) Proposed new targets are:

Estimated HBC Performance
Against New Targets

60-70% of non-major applications determined in 8 weeks	HBC 79%
80-90% of appeals against non-major decisions dismissed	} 48%
90% of appeals against major decisions dismissed at appeal	100% (no appeals for majors this year)

There is therefore a need to ensure that the decisions of both officers and members are as challenge proof as possible. This means a balanced interpretation of policy and ensuring that applications are not turned down without sound planning grounds and that those grounds would be clearly identifiable to an inspector.

Waste Contract

9. Performance around the delivery of refuse collection and street cleaning will often be an issue. Our contractors, Kier operate over 4 out of 5 of the districts in East Sussex as one contract but there are different local management arrangements and issues in each. Locally, the performance of the contact is mixed:
 - Street cleanliness – target 5% future outcome 4%
 - Recycling – target 30% recycling outcome around 30%
 - Bin collections missed – target 130/100,000, outcome around 146/100,000
10. The relationship between the partners and Kier is sometimes challenging but the Council continues to achieve the savings from the contract. There are certainly issues connected with the reporting of dog mess, dumping and other issues electronically to Kier which are then claimed as completed when this doesn't appear to be the case. This is being followed up in discussion involving colleagues from Corporate Services operating the reporting systems as well as the Waste Team. Clearly for an electronic reporting system to be effective it must command belief in its integrity and this doesn't appear to currently be the case.
11. I do not believe the relationship with Kier is likely to be without tensions. The value of the contract to the company is much diminished by the reduction in recyclable values. The contract is managed through a combination of the Joint Waste Committee, the Central client manager based with Rother, and day to day local contract management through our own waste team. HBC staff will continue to press for the best possible service from the contract and in particular the correct operation of reporting systems.

Housing issues

12. It remains a real concern that the Council's ability to deal with issues of homelessness will be further tested moving forwards. Members will note that the

number of homeless acceptances has increased and Housing colleagues feel this trend will continue.

13. Rents within the local housing market are above what many in housing need can afford, particularly so for those on very low incomes or in receipt of out of work benefits. Whilst this has been a long standing issue in London and more affluent parts of the South East is now being felt more widely across the region, including Hastings and other areas of the coast. This must in part be a result of the same pressures driving people out of wealthier hotspots in search of more affordable options in housing in areas that relatively speaking still remain lower value. This may in turn further encourage other authorities to directly house families out of area at least on a temporary basis.
14. The impact of the new housing Bill and further welfare benefit reforms look likely to place further pressures upon those for whom there are few affordable housing options now available. The following welfare reforms are of particular concern regarding their potential financial impact on those at risk of homelessness are
 - a planned reduction in the benefit cap from 26,000 to 20,000 per annum
 - a four year freeze on benefits
 - the ending of the family element of child tax credits and a restriction of payments to 2 children.(and the equivalent changes with universal credit when introduced)
 - a 4 year freeze to LHA rates
 - The withdrawal of HB entitlement for 18-21 year olds which comes on top of an increase in the age at which the single room allowance is applicable from 25 to 35 years of age
15. Members will receive a full briefing on housing and homeless issues shortly via the Members Bulletin because it is important that there is a wide understanding of the changes taking place in the housing market – part of which has historically been strongly linked to the benefits economy.
16. Additionally the welfare reform outlined above when considered within the context of the Governments general Housing policy direction, seems likely over the next few years to result in:
 - More homes being made available for first time buyers and those who can afford to pay higher rents
 - fewer Housing Association properties being available at social and affordable rent levels over time,
 - Reduced security of tenure for social housing tenants
 - Reduced income for some benefit recipients
 - Increased difficulty accessing the private rented sector for people on benefits
 - Reduced income for housing associations and therefore less borrowing capacity for new developments
 - Less government funding for affordable rent in the foreseeable future
 - Increasing pressure on homelessness, particularly amongst young people

17. It orders to maintain levels of homeless prevention it will be necessary for the Council to redouble its efforts moving forward. The Council has a strong record in tackling homelessness and has made a number of successful interventions to avoid homelessness in recent years.

- a) The Council has sought to tackle issues in the supply side through its local licencing activity. The Selective Licencing of 12 wards was very successfully launched in November and subject to the results of a further stock condition survey, work will begin on considering whether to extend the additional licencing of HMOs in the town centre wards beyond the end of the current 5 years scheme .
- b) The Lettings Agency continues to expand albeit at a slower rate than originally envisaged. Nevertheless it is on course now to reach the break-even point in 2016/17

The Coastal Space project will deliver at least 68 new rented and homes and we aim to extend this through a 3rd programme with funding by the SELEP and the Borough Council, if a SELEP bid is successful. In addition the YMCA DownsLink scheme which has provided a further 83 spaces for young people over the last 2 years.

- c) Additional interventions with the street community include commissioning an outreach service to assess need and provide information. This is shortly to be complimented by a CCG commissioned Housing and Well Being Hub currently under development with Health Colleagues.

On a positive note

18. I cannot sign off 2015/16 without acknowledging the raft of success delivered by our teams across the Council. In no particular order I would ask that members note in which their officers had sole or major roles:

- The delivery of the Source Skatepark
- The revival of Hastings Pier
- The achievement of a “good” standard for our bathing water
- Delivery of a state of the art CCTV scheme
- Licencing scheme
- 3 successful Fish Festivals organised, and Jack in the Green and Bonfire events supported
- Conclusive study making the economic case for extending HS1 to Hastings and Bexhill
- Adoption of the Development Management Plan
- Long term properties returned to use
- Hugely successful Active Hastings programme recognised with new ESCC funding support package
- Bottle Alley refurbishment
- Extra funding obtained and preparations made for 950th anniversary celebrations

