

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR RESOURCES

6 SEPTEMBER 2012

Present: Councillors Cartwright (as the duly appointed substitute for Councillor Clark), Howard, Martin, Pragnell, Sabetian, Sinden and Webb (in the Chair)

Lead Members in attendance: Councillors Birch and Kramer

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Clark

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest in the minutes.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 31 May 2012 and 18 June 2012 be approved as a true record.

3. QUARTER ONE PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

Jane Hartnell, Head of Corporate Services, presented the Quarter One Performance and Financial Monitoring Report.

The report advised Members of the performance against the 2012/13 targets and performance indicators in Part 2 of the Corporate Plan and provided a summary of financial information.

Discussion took place and answers received regarding the occupancy of industrial units, the Local Authority Mortgage Scheme, the positive responses received to a consultation on Climate Change Strategy and Council Tax Collection Rates.

The committee noted preparations for the first election of the local Police and Crime Commissioner in November 2012. As a result of this election, the Annual Canvass of electors had been moved forward. Annual Canvass had been running for 33 working days with a 61% response rate, compared to a 59% response rate at the same point in 2011.

Members noted the Hastings and St Leonards Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan. The adoption of this strategy had been delayed to allow comments from an extended consultation period to be absorbed into the plans. The strategy would be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 10 September 2012.

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The committee welcomed the launch of the Disabled Go Access Guide, which will provide an on-line guide to 500 premises enabling people with disabilities to check out venues for accessibility before they venture there. The guide is available at www.disabledgo.com and will be updated to include the details of more venues around the town. Members acknowledged the work of former Councillor Soan in highlighting this issue during his time in office. The local Disability Forum will continue to work with businesses to improve access and facilities for people with disabilities.

RESOLVED that:

- 1. the Committee's comments on Quarter 1 performance be noted, and;**
- 2. staff in the Corporate Resources Directorate be thanked for their hard work and achievements in this quarter**

4. UPDATE ON NEW ARRANGEMENTS FOR COUNCIL TAX BENEFIT

Jean Saxby, Revenues and Benefits Manager, presented a report to advise Members on the draft Council Tax Support Scheme, which is undergoing public consultation until 31 October 2012.

From April 2013, the Government grant for Council Tax Benefit will be reduced by 10%. The national scheme for the payment of Council Tax Benefit will be abolished and each local Council will be responsible for designing its own scheme. Pensioners are to be protected under the regulations and will continue to have their benefit calculated in the same way.

Under the proposed scheme, half of the required savings will be made by changes to the Council Tax Benefit Scheme and the rest by raising additional Council Tax by altering discounts and exemptions e.g. from those with second homes or empty properties. The proposed scheme will mean that most working age customers will need to pay more towards their council tax. In the case of those with savings over £6,000, no benefit will be paid at all. The proposed maximum level of support will be set at £20 per week; as 87% of customers have properties in Council Tax Bands A and B, the impact of this change will fall mainly on people living in Band C properties and above.

It is intended that the new scheme will limit the impact on the most vulnerable households and not penalise those who move into work. The Council has worked with the other Local Authorities in East Sussex to develop a common approach.

Once the scheme has been adopted (must be adopted by 31 January 2013) it must run for at least one year from 1 April 2013. Over the course of 2013 /

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2014 the scheme will be monitored to identify any issues arising from the changes.

Members underscored the importance of engaging local partners in the public consultation period and highlighted that any plans must be in keeping with Council's anti-poverty strategy. Representatives from local advocacy agencies had met with officers to discuss the scheme, and it was hoped that they would submit a formal representation as part of the consultation. The committee also considered the impact of the scheme on Council Tax collection rates and the consequences of any increase in case load.

RESOLVED that:

- 1 the report be noted;**
- 2. members feedback to be considered as part of the consultation**

5. SUGGESTIONS FOR FINANCIAL ECONOMIES AND NEW SOURCES OF INCOME

Jane Hartnell, Head of Corporate Services, presented this item and requested Members continue to submit suggested efficiencies.

6. FORWARD PLAN SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 2012

Jane Hartnell, Head of Corporate Services, delivered this report and asked Members to identify any areas they would like to consider in more detail at their quarterly meetings.

7. WORK PROGRAMME 2012 – 13 QUARTER ONE UPDATE

Jane Hartnell, Head of Corporate Services, presented a report to update Members on the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2012-13 which had been agreed at the Annual Meeting on 18 June.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.35pm)