

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR SERVICES
13 FEBRUARY 2014**

Present: Councillors Cooke (arrived at 6.40pm), Davies, Poole (in the Chair), Rogers, Scott and Wincott (as the duly appointed substitute for Councillor Turner)

Lead Members in attendance: Councillors Birch, Chowney, Forward, Kramer (until 7.00pm) and Westley

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Turner.

22. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

<u>Councillor</u>	<u>Minute</u>	<u>Interest</u>
Rogers	24	Pecuniary – consulted on the revised HLF bid for Hastings Castle Personal – trustee of St Mary in the Castle

23. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 21 November 2013 and the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Budget meeting held on 30 January 2014 be approved as a true record.

24. QUARTER THREE PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

The Senior Corporate and Democratic Services Officer presented a report to advise Members of 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.

Members noted an under spend against the 2013/14 budget for employability. The Head of Regeneration and Planning advised that additional funding had been secured from the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP), the budget was therefore being re-profiled to ensure that this initiative could continue into the next financial year.

Discussion took place regarding estate income. Income from Priory Meadow was higher than originally budgeted, but this was partly due to a timing issue based on rent free periods and timing of occupancies. Councillor Birch

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agreed to provide an update on efforts to encourage take up of vacant units in Priory Meadow, following a meeting with the Leaseholder's agent.

The committee considered the issue of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPN) to maintain and improve streetscene. 167 FPN's had been issued for environmental crime and dog offence, the Council was also working in partnership with Sussex Police to ensure robust action was taken to tackle this issue. Indeed, the Council's wardens would shortly begin joint patrols with Sussex Police. Members requested further information on the number of persistent offenders, who had repeatedly been issued with FPN's.

Members noted the results of a recent place survey and objective survey, which had shown a reduction in public satisfaction with street cleanliness. The Director of Environmental Services was due to meet with the Council's street cleansing contractor, Kier, to address the results of the survey and discuss an improvement plan in the areas with high levels of failures. Members were mindful of the importance of effective communication with the Council's contractors, and wished to be kept up to date with the implementation of the improvement plan. Members may also wish to invite a representative of Kier to attend a future committee meeting.

Members were advised that Hastings had been selected as local alcohol action area; the Council had previously expressed an interest in this initiative in 2013. Under this initiative, the Council would receive specialist communication support, and guidance on developing partnership working to tackle the causes and effects of alcohol abuse. The committee welcomed this update, but commented that the promotion of this campaign would need to be handled sensitively. Councillor Kramer agreed to circulate a copy of the press release for this campaign to Members of the committee.

Discussion took place regarding the process for setting performance indicators for crime rates. The Safer Hastings Partnership (SHP) was currently reviewing the targets, and their findings would be reported back to the committee. Councillor Kramer, as Chair of the SHP, was also due to meet with the Police and Crime Commissioner.

The committee noted that the Council had recently supported a large East Sussex County Council (ESCC) exercise to test readiness and response to pollution incidents. The exercise had gone according to plan, and a full debrief would follow.

Members noted that efforts were ongoing to develop a stand alone web page for Hastings Museum. It was considered that separating the museum's web page from the main Council site would improve accessibility and give the service a distinct identity. Members suggested developing the online educational resources for the museum, to improve understanding of the collection. The committee suggested that efforts to develop online resources would be complimented by reviewing some of the labelling of the artefacts.

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The committee were advised that contributions from Hastings Borough Council and ESCC had enabled repair works to be undertaken at the William Parker Community Athletics track. Ark academy would continue to oversee the general maintenance of the track, for the remainder of the current lottery agreement.

Members acknowledged the Council's continued partnership working with other agencies to tackle homelessness. Members noted that the target for homelessness preventions had been exceeded in December 2013, which had contributed to a reduction in homelessness acceptances for this period. The committee were advised that the Ranger service had also been used to monitor rough sleeping around the town, and to refer those at risk to appropriate advice services.

The Head of Communications and Marketing reported that the Heritage Lottery Fund bid for over two million pounds had been submitted by the December deadline, and they were now awaiting a decision on the application, due at the end of March. In the meantime, given the tight timetable, architects and project management staff were being recruited 'at risk' to ensure that work could start on the scheme if the bid were successful.

The committee discussed performance indicators to monitor the effectiveness of the Council's website. Members requested further information on the number of visitors who had gone straight to their destination from the new landing page.

RESOLVED – (unanimously) - that:

- 1) the committee's comments on Quarter Three performance be addressed by the relevant Lead Member(s) with appropriate action and report back, and;**
- 2) staff in the Environmental Services and Regeneration Directorates be thanked for their hard work and achievements in this quarter.**

25. UPDATE ON THE WHITE ROCK THEATRE

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

Members welcomed Michael Cross, who had recently been appointed as Manager of the White Rock Theatre, to the meeting.

The committee had received a report on the White Rock Theatre by the Head of Amenities, Resorts and Leisure at an earlier meeting. Members had sought further information on the scope of the theatre's outreach programme to the local community and the role of the venue within the wider cultural offer of the town.

The Manager of the White Rock Theatre advised that community involvement with the theatre would continue to be encouraged. Indeed, the theatre's

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business plan for the coming year focused on opportunities for community re-engagement. The proportion of audience figures made up of local people was currently estimated at between 48% and 64%, depending on the genre of the production. Consideration had also been given to options to encourage return visits. Members noted that the theatre was both as a resource for local people, and attracted visitors from outside the town.

Outreach work had been undertaken with residents from disadvantaged backgrounds. Subsidised places had been made available on the theatre's summer school and discounted tickets had been offered at the recent pantomime. Although the availability of subsidised tickets may be limited, depending on the production, the theatre would continue to engage with residents from a variety of backgrounds.

Discussion took place regarding outreach to community groups and organisations in the voluntary sector. There were currently two community groups who regularly used the Sussex Room, and it was hoped that this could be increased over time. Members were invited to suggest groups who may be interested in utilising the space.

The committee considered the wider cultural offer in the town. The Manager of the White Rock Theatre stated that the theatre would aim to attract a broad range of productions, to compliment the existing offer in the town. Research had been undertaken regarding the existing offer, to avoid duplications and conflicts in scheduling. In the future, it may be possible to develop a clash diary with other venues in the town. The committee acknowledged the restrictions in attracting productions to the theatre, but highlighted the importance of the cultural offer to the wider regeneration of the town.

Members thanked the Manager of the White Rock Theatre for attending the meeting.

26. FINAL REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF BATHING WATER QUALITY

Councillor Rogers, as Chair of the Scrutiny Review, presented the report to summarise the finding of the review group.

A new European Bathing Water Directive would be introduced in 2015, which effectively doubled the current quality standard that bathing waters must reach to be considered sufficient or excellent. It was anticipated that the bathing beach at Hastings would fail to meet the new standard, if actions were not taken to improve the bathing water quality. The review acknowledged that this could have a very significant detrimental impact on tourism in the town.

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The review team had met with key agencies with responsibilities for improving bathing water quality, including; the Environment Agency, Southern Water and representatives of the Clean Seas Please campaign. The Alexandra Park stream and outfall had been identified as the most significant cause of contamination to the bathing water and Members had considered a number of options to address this issue. Members noted that the solution to improve bathing water quality was multi faceted, including technical, infrastructure and community activity.

The work of the review team had run in parallel to the Bathing Water Quality Executive Group, which had been formed to monitor the work of key agencies. The Executive Group had adopted a partner's action plan to improve bathing water quality. It was recommended that the review team be re-convened later in the year, to review the 2014 bathing water season and to monitor progress against the action plan.

The Chair thanked all those who had contributed to the review.

RESOLVED – (unanimously) - that:

- 1) the review team recommendations contained in this report are endorsed by the Scrutiny committee;**
- 2) the review participants are thanked for their contributions;**
- 3) the Bathing Water Quality executive Group is supported in ensuring that the commitments in its action plan are delivered;**
- 4) the review team meet again in November 2014 to assess whether the actions of Southern Water, the Environment Agency, the Borough Council and the Clean Seas Please campaign during 2014 have produced the desired improvements in bathing water quality and to determine what further actions are necessary in 2015.**

Reasons for Recommendations

A new, more stringent, European Bathing Water Directive replaces the existing water quality standard in 2015. Hastings Beach is at risk of failing to meet the new standard. Although water quality has improved steadily over recent years, the monitoring results for the 2014 and 2015 bathing seasons must demonstrate significant further improvements. Scrutiny members wish to satisfy themselves that everything possible is being done by the relevant agencies and the Council to meet the new standard.

27. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY CHARTER

The Senior Corporate and Democratic Services Officer presented a report which invited Members of the committee to sign up to an Overview and Scrutiny Charter.

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A working group of Members had drafted an Overview and Scrutiny Charter which was intended to make it clear to committee members, the Council's partners and the public what they can expect from the Overview and Scrutiny function. The draft charter had been based on best practice, and examples of Overview and Scrutiny Charters from other authorities.

The charter would also raise awareness of the work already undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny function, by including web links to previous reviews. Members noted that the charter may also form a useful learning resource, as it included web links to related content.

The charter had been considered by a recent meeting of Scrutiny Steering Group. The comments made by the group had been incorporated into a revised draft charter, which had been appended to the report.

RESOLVED – (unanimously) - that:

- 1) Members approve the Overview and Scrutiny Charter, and;**
- 2) the Overview and Scrutiny Charter is published on the Council's website.**

Reasons for Recommendations:

The Overview and Scrutiny Charter sets out the principles of the Overview and Scrutiny function, and its impact on key stakeholders.

28. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2013-14 QUARTER THREE UPDATE

The Senior Corporate and Democratic Services Officer presented an update on the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme. Members had completed two of the three reviews they had selected at the Annual Joint Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees. The Scrutiny review of changes to the welfare system was underway.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.00pm)