

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Resources Agenda

Thursday, 12 June 2014 at 6.00 pm

Town Hall, Queen's Square, Priory Meadow, Hastings TN34 1QR

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## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR RESOURCES 24 FEBRUARY 2014

Present: Councillors Batsford (from 6.40pm), Corello, Davies, Howard, Martin (as the duly appointed substitute for Councillor Pragnell) and Webb (in the Chair)

Lead Members in attendance: Councillors Birch and Cartwright

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Pragnell and Sinden.

### **19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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

<u>Councillor</u>	<u>Minute</u>	<u>Interest</u>
Webb	21	Personal – member of the East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board

### **20. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2013 and the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Budget meeting held on 30 January 2014 be approved as a true record.**

### **21. QUARTER THREE 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 was updated on the ongoing refurbishment of the café area at St Mary in the Castle. An application for listed building consent, for the use of the premises as a café, had been submitted. It was hoped that the new café would be open by June 2014. The Council had committed twenty thousand pounds per year for the next three years, to contribute towards the maintenance of the building. Members noted that this was a significant saving on the previous running costs of the building.

Members welcomed the achievement of an unqualified audit opinion for the annual statement of accounts.

Discussion took place regarding the implementation of a council tax support scheme. The Council had worked with other East Sussex authorities to

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develop a scheme for council tax support, which would seek to minimise the impact of the changes on residents. It would be necessary to review the model for council tax support over the coming year, in light of the very significant budget reductions in 2015/16. The review would examine how many residents were likely to be affected by changes to council tax support, and the impact of amending the scheme on council tax collection rates. The committee wished to be kept up to date of progress with the review.

Members considered the administration of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHPs). The committee noted that the council had taken a proactive and flexible approach, including working in partnership with Amicus Horizon, to ensure that vulnerable groups were aware of the availability of DHP's. However, as the grant for DHPs was a fixed amount, payments must be administered to ensure that resources are available for the full financial year. The allocation of DHPs was monitored on a monthly basis, it was anticipated that the Council would spend close to the full allocation by the end of the financial year. The committee requested further information on the guidelines for administering DHPs, and the number of recipients over the 2013/14 financial year. It was suggested that the Head of Finance and the Revenue and Benefits Service Manager give an update at a future committee meeting on the review of the first year of allocations and to advise of plans for the administration of payments in 2014/15.

Members were pleased to note that income from industrial units at the Castleham Business Centre was above target.

Discussion took place regarding possible slippage on the annual audit plan, depending on the outcome of work to the Housing Benefit Grant Subsidy. The Head of Finance noted that the review of the Housing Benefit Grant Subsidy had been a lengthy process, but it was hoped that this target would be met.

Members noted the ongoing work of the Fraud Investigation Service. A number of high value serious cases had been investigated, and the Council had worked closely with other investigative authorities. Members thanked the team for their efforts.

The committee welcomed an update from the Head of Finance that the second phase of the Local Authority Mortgage Scheme, which was launched in March 2013, had now been fully committed. Information regarding the Local Authority Mortgage Scheme on the Council's website would be updated accordingly.

Discussion took place regarding preparations for the transition to Individual Electoral Registration. Members highlighted the importance of exploring funding opportunities, to facilitate the introduction of IER and to ensure that electoral registration was maximised. The committee reiterated the importance of targeting hard to reach groups, to ensure they are not disenfranchised by the changes. The Director of Corporate Resources

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responded that the Council would draw on learning from a number of IER pilots, which the government was holding with other authorities.

Members welcomed the continued work of the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), which acted as a forum for collaboration across a broad range of agencies. Members noted that service providers, community representatives and the voluntary and private sectors were represented on the Board. Members suggested exploring opportunities for further representation of BME and equalities groups.

Members were advised of the introduction of a new Strategic Leadership Board which would identify the vision, priorities, business model and culture of the organisation. The Board would also manage the Priorities Income Efficiency Review (PIER) process, to ensure that the Council's available resources were targeted to meet its corporate priorities. An Organisational Development Group had also been established to support the delivery of a refreshed customer first strategy and customer charter. The group would also explore opportunities to engage with staff, to ensure the organisation's existing knowledge base was fully utilised and the Council operated as one team. Members noted the performance indicators around staff sickness absence, and suggested that this matter be added to agenda for the next meeting of Scrutiny Steering Group.

Members noted that the voice recognition system would continue to be refined over time. Councillor Cartwright requested that this item be added to agenda of the next Equalities Steering Group meeting.

The committee noted the success of the recent Switched on Hastings campaign. 15% of registrants had switched to a new energy supplier as a result of the campaign, against a national average of 11%. Further work would be undertaken to evaluate the initial campaign, and to ensure the scheme targeted those who were most in need.

Consideration was given to preparations for the next round of council tax billing, in particular the role of the community contact centre in handling enquiries from members of the public. The Head of Corporate Services advised that extensive pre-planning work had been undertaken, drawing on monitoring of customer enquiries and feedback from the previous billing period. A further programme of training had been completed, to enable contact centre staff to take a flexible approach when dealing with enquiries. Efforts were also underway to reduce avoidable contact, by improving the accessibility of council tax bills and ensuring all explanatory information was easy to understand. The Head of Corporate Services advised that the number of enquiries received was expected to reduce for this billing period, as there were no changes to the council tax support scheme.

Members were pleased to note that the organisation was a living wage employer, with regard to all staff directly employed by the Council. The Council's contractors had been contacted regarding their current rates of pay. The response from the contractors would help to inform the approach in future.

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The committee noted the disruption to the revenues and benefits team, following a recent roof leak and heating leak at Aquila House, staff had been temporarily relocated to the Town Hall. Options to seek compensation for this disruption would be considered. The Director of Corporate Resources advised that the effective use of accommodation at Aquila House remained part of the Council's long term plan.

Members welcomed the move to enable more transactions to be carried out online. Paye.net had been rolled out through the Council. Members noted that this would enable the council to take a flexible approach when processing payments, and reduce avoidable contact.

### **RESOLVED that –**

- 1) the committee's comments on Quarter 3 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.**

## **21. 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.

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.

Members welcomed the introduction of the Overview and Scrutiny Charter.

### **RESOLVED – (unanimously) - that:**

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24 FEBRUARY 2014**

- 1) Members approve the Overview and Scrutiny Charter, and;**
- 2) the Overview and Scrutiny Charter be 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.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.25pm)

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**Agenda Item No: 4**

**Report to:** Overview and Scrutiny (Resources)

**Date of Meeting:** 12 June 2014

**Report Title:** Corporate Plan Part III -Year End Performance Information and Target Setting 2014/15

**Report By:** Jane Hartnell  
Head of Corporate Services

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## **Purpose of Report**

1. To advise Members of the year-end actual performance by the staff in the Corporate Resources Directorate against the targets and milestones set out in Part II of the Corporate Plan for 2013/14.
2. To consider the areas of shortfall in performance and the actions that will be taken to improve performance during 2014/15.
3. To seek Members' views on the performance indicator targets for the activities overseen by this Committee proposed for 2014/15.
4. To note that this information will be published in Part III of the Corporate Plan, to be agreed by Cabinet on 7th of July.
5. To also flag up current and forthcoming consultation in the first quarter of 2014/15.

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## **Recommendation(s)**

1. That Members consider the information that will form Part III of the Corporate Plan
2. That the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the proposed performance indicator targets for 2014/15 be referred to the Cabinet meeting on 7th of July 2014.
3. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee thank staff for their hard work in achieving the targets set out in the Corporate Plan.

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## **Reasons for Recommendations**

To assist with the approval process for the Corporate Plan Part III and assist Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members to undertake their Performance Management role.

## Introduction

1. The Council meeting on 26th February 2014 agreed Parts I and II of the Corporate Plan 2014/15 to 2016/17 – these documents set out the Council's work-plans for 2014/15.
2. Part III of the Corporate Plan contains a report back against the milestones and targets set out in Part II of the Corporate Plan relating to 2013/14 and sets out the performance indicator targets for the next year.
3. The 7th July Cabinet has been given delegated authority by the Council to agree Part III of the Corporate Plan prior to publication on the Council's website.

### Retrospective Performance Report Back – Appendix A

4. Appendix A provides a report back on performance during 2013/14 against the Corporate Plan targets and Performance Indicators for the Directorates and Services relevant to this committee.
5. The status of each target as at 31st March 2014 is described as either:
  - G = Green target achieved
  - A = Amber – target changed, affected by external circumstances or narrowly missed
  - R = Red - did not hit target – also includes description of how we will address this in 2014/15
6. The front-sheet of Appendix A details those part II exception targets. These flag those Part II targets that have not been achieved by year end and are classified as amber or red.
7. At the end of each service area in Appendix A the associated performance indicators are listed.
8. To show all changes to targets for performance indicators in one place, performance indicator tables for all services in this report are also shown at the end of Appendix A to present all the information together. Any targets that have changed from 2013/14 to 2014/15 are shown in bold and underlined.
9. Progress against Performance Indicator targets for the year is shown as either 'Met' or 'Not Met'.
10. 'Direction of Travel' shows whether performance for the year is Better, Worse or Same as the previous year. For different indicators better performance may be shown by higher or lower figures (e.g. recycling collection rates vs crime rates). All figures shown in the tables are for the full year from April 1st to March 31st.
11. These 2014/15 proposed performance indicator targets remain subject to Cabinet approval and comments from this committee on these targets will be forwarded to Cabinet for consideration.

## Current Consultation

12. To assist the Committees to undertake their Scrutiny role effectively and to enable Members to input into decision making at an appropriate stage, current or forthcoming consultations are highlighted at the link below:

[http://www.hastings.gov.uk/decisions\\_democracy/voting\\_petitioning\\_having\\_your\\_say/consultation/current\\_consultations/](http://www.hastings.gov.uk/decisions_democracy/voting_petitioning_having_your_say/consultation/current_consultations/)

## Financial Position

13. Work is ongoing to finalise the Council's year-end position in respect of both revenue and capital expenditure. There is an overall underspend and the final position will be presented to Cabinet in July.

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## Wards Affected

Ashdown, Baird, Braybrooke, Castle, Central St. Leonards, Conquest, Gensing, Hollington, Maze Hill, Old Hastings, Ore, Silverhill, St. Helens, Tressell, West St. Leonards, Wishing Tree

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## Area(s) Affected

Central Hastings, East Hastings, North St. Leonards, South St. Leonards

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## Policy Implications

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	Yes
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	Yes
Risk Management	Yes
Environmental Issues	Yes
Economic/Financial Implications	Yes
Human Rights Act	Yes
Organisational Consequences	Yes
Local People's Views	Yes

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## Background Information

Corporate Plan Part II 2013/14 – 2015/16

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## Officer to Contact

Officer Name Mark Horan  
Officer Email Address mhoran@hastings.gov.uk  
Officer Telephone Number 01424 451485



## APPENDIX A

### RETROSPECTIVE REPORT-BACK ON 2013/14 TARGETS AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS:

The following report reflects achievements against the annual targets and performance indicators set out in the Corporate Plan 2013/14 for the Directorates and Services relevant to this committee.

Status of annual targets at 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2014 is described as either:

**G = Green** Target achieved

**A = Amber** Target changed, affected by external circumstances or narrowly missed

**R = Red** Did not hit target, also includes (where relevant) description of how we will address this shortfall in 2014/15

Status of performance indicators at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 is shown for target as either 'Met' or 'Not Met.'

#### Exceptions

The following annual target in Part II of the Council's 2013/14 Corporate Plan has been identified as an exception that has not been achieved by year end.

<i>Target no./Service</i>	<i>Target Status</i>
6. Annual Audit Plan and reports to Audit Committee – Financial Services	<b>Amber</b>
9. Support the new operator of St Mary in the Castle – Financial Services	<b>Amber</b>
4g. Corporate Equalities, Living Wage Employer – Cross Cutting	<b>Amber</b>
5a. Accommodation and Smarter Working, Aquila House – Cross Cutting	<b>Amber</b>

Corporate Resources Directorate

Financial Services

2013/14 Targets/Milestones	Status (R/A/G)	Comments
<p><b>1. Achieve an unqualified audit opinion for the annual statement of accounts.</b> Measure: Unqualified audit opinion gained by 30<sup>th</sup> Sept (Quarter 2).</p>	<p><b>G</b></p>	<p>Achieved - Unqualified audit opinions were received in September 2013 on the Council's accounts and also those of the Foreshore Trust</p>
<p><b>2. Maintain the occupancy of industrial units against a background of an uncertain economic environment.</b> Measures: Percentage of void industrial units and actual income versus the budget.</p>	<p><b>G</b></p>	<p>Occupancy figures at the end of Q4 are shown below (the figure in brackets is the comparative position at end of Q4 12/13):</p> <p>Factory Units – 60 units let. 2 units vacant. 3.2% void (0% void) Both of the empty units have been or are being improved as part of the ACE project.</p> <p>Castleham Business Centre West – 15 units let. 5 units vacant. 25% void (85% void) The increase in the number of lettings is as a result of the building and units being refurbished.</p> <p>Castleham Business Centre East – 14 units let. 3 units vacant. 17.6% void (23.5% void)</p>
<p><b>3. Prepare for the phased introduction of the Government's new 'Universal Credit' commencing in 2013/14 and take appropriate action as</b></p>	<p><b>G</b></p>	<p>Universal Credit implementation across the country delayed. No plans for national migration before June 2015.</p>

<p><b>necessary.</b> Measure: Regular reports and updates to Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committees where there are implications for the Council and the community and action taken as appropriate.</p>		<p>The Council is maintaining a watching brief and will report to committee and Council as and when appropriate.</p>
<p><b>4. Review existing Council Tax Support Scheme (introduced April 2013) and implement new scheme for 2014/15 as necessary.</b> Measure: Scheme agreed by 31<sup>st</sup> January 2014.</p>	<p><b>G</b></p>	<p>Adopted 2013/14 scheme for 2014/15 (year 2)</p>
<p><b>5. Give priority within the shared Fraud Investigation Service to more serious cases, working within the Single Fraud Investigation Service requirements (commencing April 2013)</b> Measure: Number of serious cases investigated.</p>	<p><b>G</b></p>	<p>In July 2013/14, 41 serious cases totalling £594,156 have been completed that have resulted in sanctions being imposed. This compares with 46 cases worth £413,267 for the same period last year. This represents a good performance given that the number of staff employed in 2013/14 was reduced by 1 FTE (to 4 FTEs).</p> <p>Additionally, the Investigations team played a key role in Operation Grenville, a multi-agency investigation into organised crime. The team produced research and intelligence into 131 addresses. Other parts of the operation led by other agencies are leading to good referrals on benefit fraud for Hastings BC</p>
<p><b>6. Continue to deliver the annual Audit Plan and report outcomes to the Audit Committee.</b> Measure: Comparison of audits completed against those on the published audit plan reported in the annual audit report.</p>	<p><b>A</b></p>	<p>There were difficulties completing the Housing Benefit Grant Subsidy Claim which led to delays and the change in cash collections provider resulted in significant additional work. All the work on International Auditing Standards was completed on time.</p>

<p><b>7. Continue to improve the Council's procurement arrangements, working in collaboration with other local authorities, the East Sussex Procurement Hub and other partners.</b> Measures: Value for money contracts secured, savings achieved and procurement arrangements completed.</p>	G	<p>All tasks set out in the internally published Procurement Work programme 2013/14 achieved.</p> <p>Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Single Person Discount review leading to an additional £93,000 of income in 2014/15</li> <li>ii) Empty Property Review leading to 154 properties being identified in use generating £1,071,000 over six years</li> <li>iii) Joint procurement on insurance, banking, annual council tax billing and election canvass has taken place across all East Sussex authorities</li> </ul>
<p><b>8. Deliver a second phase of the Local Authority Mortgage Scheme within Hastings and St Leonards. The Council acting as guarantor on deposits for eligible first time buyers to help stimulate the local housing market.</b> Measures: Numbers of eligible first times buyers supported onto the housing ladder. Percentage of the £1m indemnity committed.</p>	G	<p>Achieved - The second phase of the scheme was launched in late March 2013. The scheme was fully subscribed by October 2013. In addition to the 37 completions in phase One there have been 30 completions and 2 awaiting completion.</p> <p>The third phase of the scheme which was to be funded by East Sussex County Council is not proceeding following the temporary hold put on the scheme by Lloyds Bank and the government's introduction of the Help to Buy scheme.</p>
<p><b>9. Support the new operator to fulfil the potential of St Mary In the Castle (SMIC)</b> Measure: SMIC fully reopened and restoration works undertaken.</p>	A	<p>St Mary in the Castle is being successfully operated as a venue and the number and variety of events has increased.</p> <p>On 6, 7 &amp; 8 Pelham Arcade the part English Heritage grant funded restoration works are nearly completed. Further internal refurbishment works are being undertaken</p>



		by HBC to enable the tenant to fit out the premises as a café. This is expected to be operational for the summer.
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**Corporate Plan Performance Indicators**

Name	Improvement Direction	Actual Mar 2013	Direction of Travel	Actual Mar 2014	Status Mar 2014	Target Mar 2014	Yearend Target Mar 2015
6.1 % Council Tax collected in year	Bigger is better	96.7%	Worse	96.3%	Met	96.0%	96.0%
6.2 % Non domestic rates collected in year	Bigger is better	97.2%	Better	97.8%	Met	97.0%	<b><u>97.5%</u></b>
6.3 Average number of days to process new housing benefit claims	Smaller is better	13.3	Better	12.8	Met	15.0	15.0
6.4 Average number of days to process changes to housing benefit claims	Smaller is better	3.0	Worse	3.8	Met	5.0	5.0
6.5 Average number of days to process new Council Tax Reduction claims	Smaller is better			12.6	Met	15.0	15.0
6.6 Average number of days to process changes to Council Tax Reduction claims	Smaller is better			3.4	Met	5.0	5.0

## Corporate Services

2013/14 Targets/Milestones	Status (R/A/G)	Comments
<p><b>1. Support local democracy by the effective delivery of electoral services activities.</b> Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Successful management of the 2013 East Sussex County Council election.</li> <li>b) Preparation for the transition to Individual Elector Registration currently proposed for full introduction in 2014.</li> <li>c) Polling Places Review undertaken as a result of changes to Parliamentary terms (Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011).</li> <li>d) All statutory timetables met in line with Electoral Commission requirements.</li> </ul>	<p><b>G</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) 2013 ESCC elections successfully completed in Q1.</li> <li>b) Final preparations underway for transition to IER; 'go live' date has been confirmed by the Minister for June 2014. Core staff attended all relevant training events through Cabinet Office, Association of Electoral Administrators and Election Management System suppliers</li> <li>c) Polling Places Review completed to timescale in Q3, with input from the cross party review team. Full Council agreed the review on 19 February</li> <li>d) All statutory timetables currently being met in line with Electoral Commission requirements</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Facilitate the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP), to act as the principal strategic forum for collaboration between service providers, community representatives, the voluntary and private sectors.</b> Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) LSP Board is supported to work effectively; in partnership with key stakeholders to deliver services which respond to locally identified need and act as a collective voice with a shared vision for shaping the town.</li> </ul>	<p><b>G</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) During 2013/14 the LSP tackled subjects such as: the academisation of local schools, the issue of seawater bathing quality and the changing landscape in the health sector. It has been particularly useful for organisations (both public/private and community) to understand the impact of such changes on residents and partner agencies. More recently, LSP partners have been particularly supportive of regeneration initiatives, coordinated by HBC, which benefit the town such as Community Led Local Development and</li> </ul>

<p>b) With partners, undertake the biennial local 'Place Survey' and feed findings into the Council and partners decision-making processes to inform priorities and service developments.</p>		<p>Assisted Area Status.</p> <p>b) The Place Survey was completed to time, cost and quality in September 2013. The results were in line with findings from the 2011 survey suggesting satisfaction levels generally remain consistent.</p>
<p><b>3. Support the Council's transformation to a leaner, more resilient organisation which remains focussed on delivering outcomes for local people as well as supporting and valuing its staff.</b> Measures:</p> <p>a) Managers supported to implement actions in the refreshed Workforce Development Plan thereby ensuring the Council's workforce is equipped to meet new challenges and ways of working.</p> <p>b) Deliver an agreed 'organisational and cultural change' programme during 2013/14, building on commitments made at the end of 2012.</p> <p>c) Teams assisted to undertake service process re-design and to identify opportunities for efficiency, maintaining service quality and improving customer services.</p> <p>d) Engage and support staff throughout the change process by use of regular staff focus groups and a feedback survey.</p>	<p><b>G</b></p>	<p>a) Work was undertaken with services to deliver the workforce development plan (WDP), and underpinning initiatives such as practical management skills, agile working and change management. Managerial skills sets to meet the challenges facing the organisation longer term have been identified, and by working in partnership with other councils via the Sussex Training Consortium we have delivered accredited training programmes to a wider pool of staff at reduced cost. This work has enabled the organisation to meet challenges and start to bridge the gaps in skills between current and future requirements</p> <p>b) In support of the Council's 'One Council, One Team' programme, work was undertaken to: improve communications between service teams and the Community Contact Centre; provide guidance and advice on implementing change; review processes and giving support to managers and staff to adapt to new structures/ways of working, thereby enabling them to maximize efficiency and effectiveness of available</p>

		<p>resources.</p> <p>c) Customer First and Efficiency reviews have been undertaken with customer first, improved efficiency and staff engagement as fundamental components. The review of the Revenues service has been completed and an action plan is being prepared for implementation in 2014/15. Operational level reviews have been completed for Waste and Environmental Health. A detailed review of the Homelessness and Housing Options service has commenced and will complete in summer 2014.</p> <p>d) A Staff Commission was established and has met three times since November 2013. A number of the issues raised have been addressed and a draft action plan has been agreed and is currently being updated to include timelines and will be monitored by the Group. A SharePoint site has been set up and all documents are uploaded and available to all staff.</p>
<p><b>4. Support Members to effectively undertake their roles and responsibilities.</b> Measures:</p> <p>a) Annual work programme of Scrutiny Reviews completed to time, cost and specification.</p> <p>b) Progress against Corporate Plan targets reviewed quarterly by Overview and Scrutiny Committees to aid transparency about Council performance.</p>	<p><b>G</b></p>	<p>a) The scrutiny reviews on bathing water quality and the O&amp;S Charter were reported to the February 2014 Committees. The scrutiny review of the impacts of welfare reform will be submitted to the June meeting.</p> <p>b) Both scrutiny committees successfully reviewed Council performance at their quarterly meetings. The Scrutiny Steering Group also met quarterly to plan and monitor progress against the scrutiny</p>

<p>c) Comprehensive programme of Member training and briefings delivered according to priorities set by the Training and Development Group.</p>		<p>work programme.</p> <p>c) A comprehensive programme of training was delivered based on the priorities of the Members Training and Development Group. In addition, this group have overseen a successful iPad trial which will lead to the roll out of these devices to newly elected Members in May, the subsequent roll out to all other members will lead to significant savings. This group has also overseen the launch of online training for Members, facilitated through the Council's Learning Pool facility.</p>
<p><b>5. Review the Council's committee structures and Constitution with Elected Members, so these remain fit for purpose as the Council contracts</b> Measures:</p> <p>a) Systematic review of committee structures undertaken and findings reported to Cabinet by December 2013.</p> <p>b) Working Arrangements Group (WAG) convened and recommendations made for appropriate changes to the Council's Constitution arising from the review, legislative requirements, and to make it more user friendly.</p>	<p>G</p>	<p>a) The Working Arrangements Group decided that now is not the appropriate time to review the committee structure and that this activity would be more helpful at a later point when the future scale and shape of the council is clearer.</p> <p>b) The rolling programme of addressing constitutional issues is on-going with items being researched, reviewed and discussed at WAG prior to being brought forward for Council approval. Items included the Member-Officer protocol and protocol for a minutes silence.</p>
<p><b>6. Project manage the European-funded 'Future Cities' project to support climate change adaptation activities (extended in time until December 2013)</b></p>	<p>G</p>	<p>a) Following a successful bid for an extension last autumn, the Future Cities project was extended until December 2014. Ongoing activity has/will</p>

<p>Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Submit the final funding claim by October 2013 (claiming for activity up until 30<sup>th</sup> September 2013)</li> <li>b) Accept delivery of the Map Table and develop a staff and member training programme to maximise the application of the map table</li> </ul>		<p>focus on the implementation of the Adaptation Compass - a tool that allows the impacts of climate change on an area to be explored and taken into account in project and planning decisions, work is underway on this with other East Sussex authorities. The final paperwork for the Future Cites project will be submitted to the lead partner in October 2014, with final payment expected in spring 2015.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b) The Map Table was delivered in April 2013, and staff and member training took place in May 2013. The table has been used for a number of workshops e.g. BIG Local and FLAG (Fisheries Local Action Group) during 2013/14, and plans are underway for its use in 2014/15 e.g. by housing services</li> <li>c) Additionally, the Council ran a successful 'Switched on Hastings' campaign which promoted energy switching as part of the Big Community Switch. Locally, just over a 1000 local people registered their interest of which 15% switched (153) following receipt of their offer. Average savings locally for a dual fuel (gas &amp; electricity) household were £209.</li> </ul>
<p><b>7. Provide an efficient, customer-focussed contact and information service through the Community Contact Centre.</b></p> <p>Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Build on the establishment of the contact</li> </ul>	<p><b>G</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Significant work has been undertaken since the completion of the Community Contact Centre (CCC) review to implement the recommendations overseen by the Contact Centre Improvement Board. Focus has been on delivering a</li> </ul>

<p>centre and continue to improve the experience of personal and telephone callers using our services.</p> <p>b) Use intelligence gained from monitoring of customer enquiries and feedback to assist service improvements across HBC.</p>		<p>comprehensive training programme to give all staff the confidence and skills to respond to a wider range of queries efficiently and accurately. A key factor in the success of this training has been that it has been developed and delivered in consultation with service departments. Comprehensive planning and work with Revenues team enabled the teams to successfully cope with the huge increase in customer contact which occurs at the time of annual Council Tax billing. The CCC also worked closely with colleagues in Waste Services to successfully manage the customer contact for the switch-over to new waste and recycling arrangements in autumn 2013.</p> <p>b) Detailed feedback and data from front line experience is being used to inform the service reviews.</p>
<p><b>8. Promote a culture of transparency in everything the Council does.</b></p> <p>Measures:</p> <p>a) Details of Council assets, pay policy, senior management salaries, resources, decision making, contracts and spending published to aid transparency.</p> <p>b) Freedom of Information and other data requests responded to within legislative timescales.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>G</b></p>	<p>a) The council is fully complying with transparency legislation and guidance, e.g. we publish annually our pay policy and senior management salaries, our workforce profile and equality data as well as monthly details of financial transactions over £250.00.</p> <p>b) The Council is continuing to meet its legislative timescales for FOI and other data requests except in a small minority of cases (34/605 in 2013). The number of FOI requests has almost doubled over the last 5 years from 375 per year in 2009 to 605</p>

		in 2013.
<p><b>9. Deliver an effective Legal Service that plays a key role in delivery of Council priorities.</b> Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Provision of strategic legal advice for key projects, policies and procedures (including standards, Freedom of Information, Data Protection etc).</li> <li>b) Activity to support enforcement and secure prosecutions; robustly defend the Council against actions brought against it.</li> <li>c) Activity to ensure the Council is appropriately protected in terms of contracts and property transactions, and is effective at collection of debts and charges against property.</li> <li>d) Ensure effective Corporate Governance – appropriate legal advice given to all to support decision making, including quasi-judicial committees and boards.</li> </ul>	G	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Strategic legal advice has been given across a wide range of projects and activity, new Policies developed and approved by Cabinet have included the Enviro-Crime and Data Protection policy and the Corporate Complaints policy. The Chief Legal Officer continues to provide support in respect to FOI and Data Protection requests.</li> <li>b) 44 prosecutions have been conducted and 9 cautions have been formally administered for a variety of offences. We robustly defended all the appeals made against our decisions in Licensing and Housing Renewal matters and have been extremely successful.</li> <li>c) Over 60 contracts were drafted as well as 21 leases and 9 licences during this period. We achieved 67 final charging orders in respect of Council tax securing £210,000, we also issued 24 summonses and obtained 16 attachment of earnings orders in respect of overpayment of housing benefit. In regard to planning we have completed 9 Section106 agreements and various other planning matters which brought in over £19,000 in legal costs.</li> <li>d) To ensure effective Corporate Governance advise has been given at Cabinet, Charity and Council meetings, Planning, Licensing, Museum and</li> </ul>



		Environment and Safety. Two up-dates of the Council's constitution have been agreed by Council. In regard to the Charity Committee, 3 new members of the Grants Advisory Panel have been appointed and the Protector has been re-appointed for a period of three years. Legal services staff have trained over 50 wardens and police on issuing Fixed Penalty Notices and continue to provide Members with training on induction and throughout the year.
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#### Corporate Plan Performance Indicators

Name	Improvement Direction	Actual Mar 2013	Direction of Travel	Actual Mar 2014	Target Mar 2014	Status Mar 2014	Yearend Target Mar 2015
7.1 The proportion of working days/shifts lost due to sickness absence	Smaller is better	6.00	Worse	7.01	Not Met	6.25	6.25

#### Note

7.1 Sickness absence - the average number of days absence was 7.01, which was higher than last year's figure and did not reach the target of 6.25. Although levels are not as good as we had hoped for, compared with a few years ago they are still low, with over 12 days average for 2005/06, and levels did not fall to under 8 days until 2011/12.

## Cross Cutting Targets

**1. Delivering Services into the Future:** Prepare for further significant reductions in Council spending in the future whilst prioritising the activities and projects the Council has capacity to deliver.

2013/14 Targets/Milestones	Status (R/A/G)	Comments
a) Deliver a programme of consultation to test local priorities with local people and staff.	G	A total of over 2,200 people participated in the Place Survey that the Council and partners organised in Summer 2013.
b) Undertake a programme of service and efficiency reviews, prioritising those with the potential for biggest gains in efficiency, cost savings, and/or resilience.	G	The Minister for Local Government at the DCLG was extremely impressed with the programme of efficiencies and savings presented as part of our Efficiency Support Grant bid. The bid was successful, as was the further submission for an additional 25% (i.e. £243,000) reward grant.
c) Seek out and explore opportunities for new service delivery models, including shared services where this will provide efficiencies or resilience.	G	Discussions with potential partners in respect of shared services took place and it is hoped to bring forward some firm proposals in the near future.
d) Complete a Priority Income Efficiency Review process to inform the 2014/15 budget.	G	Completed.
e) Produce and publish a Medium Term Financial Strategy.	G	Approved by Cabinet in November 2013

f) Agree a Corporate Plan and Budget for 2014/15 onwards in February 2014.	G	Approved by Council in February 2014.
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**2. Corporate Risk Assessment:** To maintain an environment where risk management is an integral part of planning and performance management processes and the general culture of the Authority.

2013/14 Targets/Milestones	Status (R/A/G)	Comments
a) To maintain an overview of Corporate and Operational risks to the Council.	G	The Corporate Risk Management Group meets quarterly and reviews the Corporate and Operational risk registers, monitors insurance claims and procedures for mitigating risk.
b) To formally review the Corporate Risk Register and report to Audit Committee during 2013/14.	G	The Corporate Risk Register is reviewed quarterly and was reported to Audit Committee on 27 June 2013.
c) To formally review the Operational Risk Register and report to Audit Committee during 2013/14.	G	The Operational Risk Register is reviewed quarterly and was reported to Audit Committee on 27 June 2013.
d) To maintain an overview of the Council's Health and Safety Risk Management Policy and procedures.	G	The Health and Safety and Risk Management Policy and procedures are routinely reviewed throughout the year. The Fire risk management and Alert Scheme were reviewed during the year.

**3. Environment and Sustainability:** To provide strategic coordination and advice to the Council’s policy and forward planning processes, ensuring the Council is maximizing opportunities to tackle climate change and make Hastings more environmentally sustainable.

2013/14 Targets/Milestones	Status (R/A/G)	Comments
a) Oversee implementation of the 2013/14 actions in the HBC Environmental Policy Action Plan.	<b>G</b>	<p>During 2013/14 – the strategic environmental projects board has met regularly to oversee the implementation of the action plan. Key achievements in the year include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The launch of ‘Switch on Hastings’ campaign a collective energy scheme which saw over 1000 local residents sign up to a cheaper energy deal. Further switches are planned for 2014/15</li> <li>• CO2 emissions – Work has continued to reduce our CO2 emissions by using LED lighting and implementing office energy efficiency measures.</li> <li>• The Future Cities project successfully secured an additional years funding until December 2014. The Council took delivery of the Map Table and it has begun to be used in workshops and at events. Key areas of work for 2014 include the implementation of the Adaptation Compass and links have been made with other local authorities run</li> </ul>

		<p>summertime workshops.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Council Corporate Risk Register has been reviewed and updated to take account of climate change especially extreme weather events.</li><li>• Green Flags were retained for Alexandra Park, Hastings County Park and St Leonards Gardens and Ponswood was established as a Local Nature Reserve.</li><li>• Successfully secured Environmental Stewardship for Hastings Country park and nature reserve</li><li>• The Quality Coast Award was successfully achieved for Pelham and Marina beaches and applications for 2014 have been made.</li><li>• The Cleaner Seas Please campaign was launched in 2013 and will continue to run during 2014.</li><li>• A new office recycling scheme was established during the year – desk bins have been removed and small wheelie bins have been installed in communal areas and kitchens for dry recyclate (cardboard, cans, plastic and glass) Paper is collected separately and</li></ul>
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		<p>shredded prior to being recycled.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As part of the EU funded Answers to the Carbon Economy Project (ACE) – the eco-retrofit of an industrial unit on Theaklen Drive has been completed and funding has been secured for an additional building.</li> </ul>
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**4. Corporate Equalities:** Support the Corporate Equalities Steering Group to embed equality and diversity and take actions that contribute to the achievement of the Council’s Equality Objective i.e.

*“To provide high quality services that meet the needs and improve the quality of life of all our citizens, promoting equality of opportunity through a culture of openness, fairness and transparency, enabling local people to hold us to account”*

In working to achieve this objective we will:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people in our town.
- Foster good relations.
- Identify priority actions for each year.

2013/14 Targets/Milestones	Status (R/A/G)	Comments
a) Continue to work with partners in accordance with Hastings & St Leonards Equalities and Human Rights Charter and produce an Annual Equality Charter report to the LSP.	<b>G</b>	a) Annual Equality Charter Report 2013/14 was presented to the Local Strategic Partnership Board on 28th April 2014. The report lists key achievements from a range of partners (including HBC), grouped under the themes of the

		Community Strategy (2010 -2026). It provides a useful evidence base of case studies and good practice demonstrating how equalities underpins the work of all partners and their collective vision for shaping the town.
b) Ensure all key Council decisions are informed by consideration of equalities impacts and are 'Poverty Proofed'.	G	b) A programme of Equality Impact Assessments was completed during 2013/14 including the Hastings Play Strategy and Phase II of the Regeneration Plan for St. Leonards.
c) Collate and publish our equality data by the deadlines set by the Equality Act 2010 (i.e. by 31st January each year) ensuring the data we record is as accurate as possible, and is used appropriately to inform service improvements.	G	c) Information was collated as at 31st December 2013 and published on HBC website. Comparative data provided to identify any trends with previous years.
d) Ensure Hastings Borough Council is an attractive employer to all sections of the community.	G	d) Examples of our offer includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family friendly working policies, equalities based policies and procedures accredited by liP, Stonewall, and two ticks disability rating.</li> <li>• An employee assistance programme – the new provider will also shortly be offering Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.</li> <li>• Work with local schools to offer work placements for pupils in year 10 and attendance at local employment fairs.</li> </ul>
e) Work with Stonewall and our staff, residents and local support groups to continuously improve lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans equality.	G	e) We participated in the workplace equalities index 2014. This year there were more participants and despite our best endeavours we achieved the

		same scoring as the previous year. However, we did receive recognition of the good practices we have developed.
f) Continue to work with Disabled-Go to provide accurate information about accessibility in our town on the on-line accessibility guide. Enhance the guide with updates and include details of a further 100 premises following audit.	G	f) Work with 'Disabled Go' is ongoing to increase annually the number of premises included in the on-line guide, setting out clear access information for residents and visitors to make the most of our town.
g) Seek accreditation as a 'Living Wage Employer' and following an assessment of our contractor's performance develop an action plan to assist them to work towards achieving the status over appropriate time periods.	A	g) All permanent HBC employees are paid above the recommended level by the Living Wage campaign. Work is underway with contractors to understand the gap between their current pay levels and the living wage level and identify what steps we can take to bridge the gap over time.

**5. Accommodation and Smarter Working:** To deliver continuous improvement to the quality and value of our interaction and communications with customers and the community at large. To rationalise and consolidate Council services in fewer larger buildings, maximise the efficient use of floor space and develop fit for purpose, efficient, flexible and resilient administrative support processes. To maximise opportunities for flexible, mobile and home-working in support of these objectives.

2013/14 Targets/Milestones	Status (R/A/G)	Comments
a) Consolidate all operational staff into Aquila House.	A	Most operational staff were located in Aquila House but due to the flooding and imminent refurbishment the top floor has been vacated and other staff will need to move out temporarily.



b) Maximise the efficient use of floor space in Aquila House through the introduction of additional hot desking facilities, rationalisation of team locations and the promotion of flexible, home and mobile working.	G	Fourth floor accommodation reviewed and rearranged to accommodate partner agencies in Community Safety Hub
c) Release floor space in Aquila House for sub letting to partner organisations to further reduce accommodation costs and develop efficiencies through partnership working.	G	Part of the Upper Ground floor of Aquila House has been sublet to SEAP.
d) Complete improvement to accommodation in the Town Hall to provide additional meeting and democratic facilities.	G	Members room and new committee room completed. Alterations to Contact centre completed Further work planned for Front office.
e) Implement new building support services arrangements for Council buildings and introduce more efficient and cost effective administrative processes.	G	The new Business Support Model has bedded in and is proving effective. The existing resources were refocused and the new structure now provides flexibility and a more appropriate balance between Business Support and service areas. The new structure has realised efficiencies due to the streamlining of the Support Services Team through a reduction in administrative posts and Town Hall Attendants
f) Extend electronic document and records management systems to all services to provide cost effective	G	The existing document and records management software (Idox) has been upgraded and has gone live in Planning. Work has begun on introducing the system into Environmental Health Services.

g) Maximise the level of electronic transactions, payments and communications through the Contact Centre, website, text messaging etc.	G	Paye.net has now been rolled out through the council. An implementation team has been drawn together and the products finalised. Three new payment methods are being introduced. Paying bills from the Council by internet and paying for goods and services ordered from the Council over the internet and internet direct debits.

**6. Anti Poverty and Welfare Reform: To Coordinate HBC and partnership activity in response to the impact of welfare reform on our local residents.**

2013/14 Targets/Milestones	Status (R/A/G)	Comments
a) Building on research undertaken in 2012, agree and implement 2013/14 actions in the Hastings and St Leonards Anti Poverty Strategy Action Plan.	G	Multi Agency Anti Poverty Group established and meeting quarterly. Anti Poverty Strategy Action Plan agreed by Cabinet in Jan 2014. Dedicated Officer now in place to take forward the Action Plan with partners.

## CORPORATE PLAN PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

To show all changes to targets for performance indicators in one place, performance indicator tables from the pages above are also shown here to present all the information together, and any targets that have changed from 2013/14 to 2014/15 are shown in bold and underlined.

### Financial Services

Name	Improvement Direction	Actual Mar 2013	Direction of Travel	Actual Mar 2014	Status Mar 2014	Target Mar 2014	Yearend Target Mar 2015
6.1 % Council Tax collected in year	Bigger is better	96.7%	Worse	96.3%	Met	96.0%	96.0%
6.2 % Non domestic rates collected in year	Bigger is better	97.2%	Better	97.8%	Met	97.0%	<b><u>97.5%</u></b>
6.3 Average number of days to process new housing benefit claims	Smaller is better	13.3	Better	12.8	Met	15.0	15.0
6.4 Average number of days to process changes to housing benefit claims	Smaller is better	3.0	Worse	3.8	Met	5.0	5.0
6.5 Average number of days to process new Council Tax Reduction claims	Smaller is better			12.6	Met	15.0	15.0
6.6 Average number of days to process changes to Council Tax Reduction claims	Smaller is better			3.4	Met	5.0	5.0

### Corporate Services

Name	Improvement Direction	Actual Mar 2013	Direction of Travel	Actual Mar 2014	Target Mar 2014	Status Mar 2014	Yearend Target Mar 2015
7.1 The proportion of working days/shifts lost due to sickness absence	Smaller is better	6.00	Worse	7.01	Not Met	6.25	6.25

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**Agenda Item No: 5**

**Report to: Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Date of Meeting: 12 June 2014**

**Report Title: Final report of the Scrutiny review of changes to the welfare system**

**Report By: Andrew Palmer**  
Head of Housing and Development

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## **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of the Review was to evaluate the effects of changes to the Government Welfare System on vulnerable local residents so as to help inform the Councils Anti-Poverty Strategy Action Plan for the Borough.

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## **Recommendation(s)**

The key recommendations from the review are set out under a separate heading at the end of the report. The Overview and Scrutiny committee are asked to consider the report and the recommendations in paragraphs 54 to 64 with a view to it being submitted to Cabinet for an executive management response.

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## **Reasons for Recommendations**

The review group fully support efforts to minimise the financial impact of the welfare benefit changes on vulnerable residents as set out in the Hastings Anti Poverty Strategy. The key recommendations in the report are intended to further strengthen this work and draw attention to particular issues identified by Councillors and key stakeholders locally.

## Terms of Reference & Methodology

1. The Review group consisted of Cllr Andrew Batsford, Cllr Simon Corello, Cllr Warren Davies (Chair), Cllr Nigel Sinden and Cllr Trevor Webb.
2. The review group were supported by Andrew Palmer, Head of Housing & Planning Services, Jean Saxby Revenue and Benefits Manager, Jennie Perkins Housing Needs and Enabling Manager, Mark Horan Senior Corporate and Democratic Services Officer and Michael Courts Corporate and Democratic Services Officer.
3. Members of the Committee, under the chairmanship of Cllr Warren Davies, established at the outset that the review should not duplicate work already being undertaken by the Council but that it should add value by focusing in some detail upon the experiences of those groups and individuals directly effected by the changes
4. In agreeing Terms of Reference for the review, 3 main work strands were identified
  - i) Consideration of the main impact of the changes locally
  - ii) The role of the Council in helping to mitigate the impact of the changes
  - iii) The impact of the reforms on partners agencies.
5. A total of 8 meetings took place between 14<sup>th</sup> October 2013 and completion of the review in May 2014.
6. Early in the review the group received presentations of the key baseline data and the policy approach of the Council towards mitigation measures from Jennie Perkins and Jean Saxby. Each was followed by an extensive question and answer session.
7. The Head of Housing and Planning Services presented the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy Action Plan to the group prior to its adoption by Cabinet in January 2014.
8. Fact finding visits were planned and members of the group visited the food bank in February 2014
9. Key stakeholders were invited to give evidence to special meeting held at the Town Hall on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2014. These included representatives from the major social housing landlords AmicusHorizon (Angela Prickett and Suzanne Foreman) and Orbit Housing (Carl Lewis and Craig Atkins). Oakfield Properties one of the larger letting agencies in the town (Neil Newstead), Hastings Advice and Representation Centre (Jacky Everard) and Brighton Housing Trust (Joanna Wilson) were also represented. Kim Goodhall attended from the Department of Works and Pensions. Invitations were also extended to The National Landlords Association who were unable to attend.

10. In the latter stages of the review an invitation to contribute to the review was extended to Marylynn Fyvie-Gauld from Brighton University who could offer academic expertise in social policy and welfare reform.
11. The group agreed that it was necessary to agree a working definition of fairness in order to evaluate the impact of welfare benefit changes on different service users. A 'fairness square' (appendix A) was adopted which sought to measure the impact of the changes in terms of fair outcomes (fair share), fair process (fair play), fair opportunity (fair go) and fair participation (fair say). A Members of the group felt that such an approach was helpful in framing the review and might be more widely adopted within the Council as a means of prioritising the use of limited resources

### Scope of the Review

12. At a preliminary meeting held on the 14<sup>th</sup> Oct 2013 it was noted that the Council was preparing an Anti-Poverty Strategy Action Plan with a view to its adoption by Cabinet in 2014. It was agreed that the work of the review group should not duplicate any work already undertaken in preparing the action plan, but that it should suggest ways in which this might be strengthened and improved.
13. Members of the group were advised that a dedicated member of staff was being recruited to co-ordinate delivery of the action plan amongst partners. The action plan would also be further reviewed in 2014/15 to take account of any emerging issues thrown up by incremental implementation and 'impact lag' associated with the welfare reforms. It was proposed that learning form the scrutiny review could be incorporated into a revised action plan.
14. There was acknowledgement at the outset that the welfare reforms originated from central government and that the ability of the Council and its partners to influence their application was limited. The review group would therefore, necessarily, concentrate on those areas where the Council might influence their application and help mitigate any negative impact more locally.
15. In particular the group were keen to monitor how the changes in welfare benefits were impacting upon individuals and group in particular localities and what additional pressures were being placed upon the Council and its partners in terms of service delivery.
16. The review team were keen to consider the role of the Council in monitoring the impact of the welfare reform, facilitating communication between agencies and the administration of discretionary housing benefit
17. A particular concern was how welfare reforms might impact upon inwards migration to the town and the additional burden this might place upon existing services such as housing, education and healthcare.
18. The review was to build upon the findings and recommendations of the 'Hopkins Review' undertaken in late 2012, many of which had been incorporated within the Council's Anti-Poverty Strategy Action Plan.

19. The review started from the premise that the Council was committed to 'narrowing the gap' and to tackling issues of poverty within the borough. This was made explicit within the Council's corporate plan and targets where monitored by both the Council and the Local Strategic Partnership.

#### Impact of the changes and current mitigation measures

20. At the 26<sup>th</sup> November meeting, The Revenue and Benefits Manager and the Housing Needs and Enabling Manager presented the position on the impact of welfare benefit reforms as it was understood at the end of October 2013.
21. Key statistics at the time included an unemployment rate of 10.3% (Nat. Av. 7.8%), a Child poverty rate of 28% (Nat. Av.20%), A JSA claimant rate per job vacancy of 12.1 (Nat Av. 3.1) . It was noted that Hastings had the highest unemployment rates in the South East and that the number of HJSA claimants per vacancy was 4 times the national average. The group were keen to understand better how Job Centre Plus were supporting those looking for work and undertook to consider this matter further at a future meeting.
22. The group were advised that responsibility for council tax support was devolved to local authorities and that the Council had adopted a scheme for 2013/14 and 2014/15 in line with other East Sussex Councils. This was largely based upon the previous council tax benefit scheme. It was noted that any radical changes to the provision of council tax support would likely have significant impact upon council tax collection rates. The group were advised that post 2014/15 it was likely that the scheme would need to be reviewed in line with any reductions to the Councils overall budget.
23. In terms of mitigating the initial effects of the housing benefit reforms, in particular the impact of overall cap on benefit, and the so called 'bedroom tax', £340,000 had been awarded to the Council by government in 2013/14 for use as discretionary housing payments (DHP). The group were later notified that a similar level was being made available to the Council in 2014/15. The group were advised that regular reports were submitted to Councils Directorate and Corporate Management Team meeting and the budget position was being monitored closely.
24. The Revenue and Benefit Manager explained that when allocating funding, account was taken of an individual household's income and expenditure, together with any exceptional circumstances. Roughly half those applying were rejected on the grounds that they had sufficient income. A particular problem identified was the disproportionate impact of the benefit reforms on young people and those in low paid employment who relied on benefit to support their households.
25. In the first half of the year take up had been slower than was anticipated. Concern was expressed that this money was not getting to those who needed it and there was a risk that an under spend might be reclaimed by Central Government. The group were advised that all those directly affected by the benefit reductions had been contacted and visited by the Councils staff. The Council had also been working closely with the main social housing landlords to



identify those in arrears and maximise take up amongst those who might potentially qualify for assistance. Additional funding was being made available in terms of rent deposits for those at risk of losing their current accommodation. The group were subsequently advised that take up significantly increased in the second half of the year and the budget spent in full by year end. Over the full year 1083 DHP applications were received and in 697 cases assistance was granted (64%).

26. The group did express concern about how well the DHP policy was understood by individuals and advocates. This also came up subsequently in discussion with stakeholders, including private sector landlords and advice agencies in the town. Brighton Housing Trust submitted case studies to highlight the issue. There was concern expressed that the existing policy was too vague and therefore lacked transparency. As such there was a risk that potential applicants might be deterred and that interpretation by officers risked being far too subjective when applied. The group recommended that greater effort was made to publicise the policy, particularly in relation to its access through Councils web site which was identified as an issue by several consultees and members of the group. Also, that whilst acknowledging that it was necessary in the first year of the scheme to ensure that there was sufficient flexibility to allow for the budget to be managed effectively, the Council now had a much clearer understanding of the numbers of people directly affected by the changes. It was possible therefore for the Council to adjust its policy and be more explicit in how money was allocated for 2014/15.
27. The group also acknowledged the important role that discretionary payments administered by ESCC played in emergency situations. An element of crisis loan funding previously allocated to the Department of Work & Pensions [DWP] was now administered by the County Council through the DESS scheme. This was used to provide access to a range of goods and services and included money for rent deposits administered by HBC. A problem raised in the stakeholder review was the issue on eligibility. Where peoples benefit had been temporarily suspended for any reason (often in the case of job seekers allowance) access to Discretionary East Sussex Support Scheme [DESSS] was also withdrawn. The DWP advised that they were aware that ESCC were planning to review eligibility but that DHP funding might be considered as an alternative means of support. The review team were advised that financial support for DESSS would no longer be made available by Central Government beyond 2014/15. This was considered extremely regrettable by the group and discussion took place as to how this might be mitigated by the County Council.
28. In terms of the impact of the reforms on other Council services, the primary concern was the risk of people losing their accommodation and applying to HBC for assistance with housing as homeless. The Housing Needs and Enabling Manager advised that homelessness presentations were considerably up on the previous year, but that none were directly attributable to the impact of the benefit changes implemented to date. Homelessness presentations appear to have increased in line with the economic downturn after a long and sustained period of reduction in recent years. Historically acceptances were still quite low and were being held at bay by proactive preventative work, the number of preventions having increased significantly in the last few years. Extensive use of rent

deposits was playing an increasingly important role in preventing homelessness by securing households access to accommodation in the private rented sector.

29. The group were informed that whilst loss of privately rented accommodation, and parents or friends unwilling to accommodate, were still major factors in the number of homeless presentations, the biggest single reason now for homelessness was relationship breakdown. The group felt strongly that money worries and debt could be major factors contributing to this trend.
30. The group noted that many reforms had yet to be implemented and the full social impact of the changes was still to be felt. In particular it was noted that there had been significant delays to the planned implementation of Universal Credit. It was also acknowledged that it was extremely difficult to attribute social outcomes in terms of poverty in Hastings directly to the changes being introduced by the welfare reforms.
31. The group were advised that the Council had been liaising with Sheffield Hallam University who had been commissioned by the Government to undertake a review of the impact of the welfare reform national, including benefit driven migration between areas. The study was informed by data collected by the DWP which was not in the public or academic domain. The group were advised that the leader of HBC along with a number of other coastal local authorities had written to the Minister requesting that the data be retained and updated so that the situation could be monitored over time.
32. The review group also suggested developing further links with the University of Brighton in order to continue to monitor the social impact of the welfare reforms more locally
33. The issue of inward migration of households in poverty into the town came up in a number of discussions, partly stimulated by sporadic press interest in the subject both locally and nationally. The Head of Housing and Planning Services advised that in October 2013, 28 households were known to have been assisted directly by London Councils into accommodation in Hastings. Very limited information was being provided by London Councils and initial assessments of numbers had only been attained through freedom of information requests.
34. Whilst the numbers were relatively modest it only included those households moved under a statutory homelessness duty. Those who found their way to Hastings through other forms of homeless prevention or assistance provided by London boroughs would not be identified. Nor would those who elected to move from one area to another of their own volition in order to avoid the impact of benefit caps or reductions.
35. However, meetings had subsequently been held between a number of coastal authorities experiencing similar issues, Senior Government Officials for the Department of Communities & Local Government [CLG] and DWP, academics, and representatives from London Councils to discuss the impact of reforms on coastal towns. As a result the London Councils had agreed a set of guiding principles for authorities placing households outside their areas. Whilst not preventing Councils from placing outside London they did establish ground rules

for doing so and ensured that as minimum, receiving councils were notified of placements. The group noted over the period of the review that there was no significant escalation in the number of placements being made by London Boroughs, with the numbers remaining constant at around the 30 household mark. The group also noted that further meetings were planned with London Councils to develop a shared understanding of the impact of benefit migration and extend cooperation between authorities in mitigating the impact of such moves. A local joint protocol regarding placements has been agreed across East Sussex through the Chief Executives and Leaders Group and discussions were also taking place with other public sector agencies making placements such as health, adult social care and probation.

36. The group were keen to seek input into the review from other agencies in order to more accurately measure the wider social impact of the welfare reforms. Members of the group undertook to visit the Food Bank and Atos Healthcare in January 2014. Regrettably Atos, who are undertaking Personal Independence Payment assessments (replacement for Disability Living Allowance) on behalf of the Department of Work and Pensions, declined the visit.
37. Cllrs Davies, Howard and Webb visited the Food Bank at the Hastings Centre accompanied by Natalie Williams the Food Bank Coordinator. The group were advised that 5000 people had used the Food Bank. Surprisingly over 50% of those that had done so were in paid employment. the highest number of service users came from Central St Leonards (18%) followed by Castle (12%) and Baird (10%), The group noted that many of the wards with the highest number of Food Bank users were characterised by higher levels of privately rented accommodation. Two potential explanations were offered. Firstly that access to the Food Bank was partly determined by its location, this necessarily made it less easy for social housing tenants to obtain, particularly in areas of concentration such as Ore. Secondly that because social housing tenants had their housing benefit paid directly to their landlords, money management was simplified and there was less risk that they would accrue rent arrears that would result in them forgoing expenditure on basic items such as food.
38. The group were advised that the Food Bank operated via a referral system, which allowed for up to 3 visits. On the fourth visit the Food Bank would liaise with the referring agency in terms of a way forward. The group was assured that mechanisms were in place to limit food assistance and prevent abuse. The group concluded that the Food Bank provided an important service for local residents who were facing hardship. The review team recommended that the Council should consider further how it could facilitate further donations or otherwise help ensure the sustained supply of items to the Food Bank. It should also encourage further partnership working between the Food Bank and other agencies in the town so as to ensure that the service was reaching all those who required assistance wherever they were located.
39. A stakeholder meeting took place on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2012.
40. Invitees were asked collectively to address 6 set questions and were given the freedom to elaborate and highlight areas of particular concern to their organisations. The following questions were asked by the review group:

- i) What effect have the changes to Housing Benefit had on your organisation?
  - ii) How far have rent arrears and debt increased since the changes were introduced? How has your organisation responded to these changes? What strategies are people using to cope?
  - iii) Is there a likelihood that landlords in the private rented sector will refuse to accept tenants on benefits, due to increased uncertainty regarding payments? If so, what effect would the potential impact be on demand for social housing?
  - iv) How extreme is the impact upon your service users to date? What form is it taking? How is your organisation responding?
  - v) Is there any additional or informal evidence that the welfare reforms are impacting seriously upon your service users? Are you able to give any anonymous case studies which illustrate the effects of the changes?
  - vi) In terms of different forms of benefit, the Council provides a number of services. How aware are you of the services the Council offers?
41. Both AmicusHorizon and Orbit Housing Associations gave an overview of the impact of the reforms on their organisations. Both Associations had or were in the process of restructuring their services so as to respond more flexibly to the challenges posed by the reforms. A significant number of home visits had taken place and considerable efforts had been made by both Orbit and AmicusHorizon to address under occupancy by encouraging tenants to consider downsizing. However, it was noted that the limited availability of smaller units of accommodation prevented some residents from moving. In addition policies that required tenants to clear any rent arrears before moving was an acknowledged barrier. Orbit confirmed that they had set aside a fund to assist but that this had now been spent in full. In terms of the overall impact upon the Associations tenants, the picture was mixed. Orbit confirmed that rent arrears had increased significantly amongst the 12.5% of their tenants under occupying property. Whilst AmicusHorizon confirmed that rent arrears had reduced overall in the previous 12 months, although this was not broken down in terms of those who have been directly affected by the benefit reductions. They also reported that overall the number of evictions was down on the previous year. Orbit supported their comments with written submission detailing the impact of the benefit reforms on their tenants.
42. Both HARC and BHT drew attention to the fact that many residents in work were finding it more difficult to assimilate the benefit reductions than those in receipt of full assistance.
43. Oakfield stated that arrears had increased in the private rented sector, particularly amongst the under 35s. As a result the number of court proceedings had increased. Staff at Oakfield were proactive in dealing with rent arrears and did refer tenants to advice agencies such as BHT for assistance. However, there was acknowledgement that many tenants required education and advice regarding budgeting, and that tenants were not always clear where to seek advice within the town.

44. Considerable discussion took place regarding a perceived increase in reliance on unaffordable borrowing from door step or pay day loan providers as means of dealing with arrears and other financial pressures. The advice agencies confirmed that loan shark activity was also a concern. The group noted that potentially this could have implications for personal and community safety. AmicusHorizon had undertaken an initiative with the illegal money lending team to help address the issue.
45. Digital exclusion was identified as a possible barrier to accessing benefits and advice as well as finding employment. The DWP confirmed that they were undertaking a mapping exercise to examine how easy it was to access IT facilities in the area. AmicusHorizon had appointed digital exclusion champions to help address the problem amongst their tenants and Wi-Fi internet connections were being made available at their offices and within their 'Older Persons Schemes'.
46. In terms of access to private rented accommodation for those affected by benefit changes, Oakfield confirmed that there had been an increase in the number of landlords refusing to accept tenants on housing benefit. 9 out of 10 lettings agencies now refused to let to tenants on benefits.
47. Demand for privately rented accommodation had increased significantly with many employed households being priced out of higher rental value areas of the country. Landlords could afford to be choosy and now insisted on guarantors before letting to those on benefits. It was noted by the group that as a result of changes to the council tax support scheme, landlords were under increased pressure to fill their accommodation quickly.
48. Increasing demand for private rented accommodation was also likely to impact upon demand for social housing, particularly as many risked being priced out of the private market. This in turn might also increase pressure upon the Council's Homelessness and Housing Options Services. The group acknowledged that smaller accommodation in both the private and social sectors was at a premium.
49. Oakfield stated that a significant barrier to accepting more tenants into privately let accommodation was the issue of direct payments of HB to landlords. It was also the case that many tenants preferred their HB to be paid direct to the landlord. This view was acknowledged and supported by some members of the group. There was recognition that the Council's hands were tied by Central Government regulation in this matter but that the Council's Revenue and Benefits team should exercise discretion where possible. The debate centred on definitions of vulnerability. The DWP advised that a Universal Credit pilot in Oxford was showing surprising results. It appeared to show that social housing tenants in receipt of direct payments were less likely to get into arrears than those receiving in - work benefit top ups.
50. The condition of priority was raised as an issue given the significant levels of public money being spent on housing benefit in support of private renting tenants. Members noted that the introduction of a flat rate Local Housing Allowance in 2008 had removed the need for an independent valuation. The review team supported the possible introduction of a Hastings Borough Council



social lettings agency, proposals which were due to be considered by Cabinet later in the year. Members believed this, together with property licensing and action to tackle rogue landlords would enable the council to regulate conditions more effectively.

51. Both Orbit and AmicusHorizon confirmed that as a result of the uncertainty around welfare reforms they had to look to diversify their portfolios in order to support their long term business plans. Both were looking to do so in order to support their core business activity. Both Associations also acknowledged that it was now necessary to charge tenants extra for many services that were once included within their rent. This was an additional financial pressure upon household finances.
52. The group noted that local charities had fewer options and resources to respond to the increase in the demand for their services. BHT had been hit hard by a reduction in funding from the Ministry of Justice and they had exceeded the number of legal aid cases they were being paid for this year. The preventative work BHT had previously undertaken to avoid court action against tenants had also been stopped as they were no longer contracted to carry out this work.
53. The Councils budget position and its potential impact upon service delivery was also raised. The review team highlighted the pressure the Council was under and its very limited capacity to compensate for the loss of support from other funders. 2015/16 was going to be extremely challenging for the Council and would result in difficult funding decisions having to be made.

## **Recommendations**

- 54 To endorse the Borough Anti Poverty Strategy and to ensure that the recommendations of the review assist with the further development of the Anti Poverty Strategy Action Plan. Particularly within the context of improving educational and lifestyle choices for young people and financial capability and planning for vulnerable groups
- 55 To support efforts to secure a continuation of the Discretionary East Sussex Support Scheme (DESSS), and to consider options if DESSS funding can not be extended beyond the current financial year. Members were advised that East Sussex County Council (ESCC) were currently collating data on the impact of DESSS grants.
- 56 To ensure that arrangements are made for the longer term monitoring of the impact of the welfare reforms locally on vulnerable households. Possibly working with the University of Brighton (UBH) to facilitate this.
- 57 That a review of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) be undertaken. The review group noted that this had been raised by a number of key stakeholders including the local advice agencies. The review to take into account :
  - i) The fact that funding for DHP's may be reduced in future years.
  - ii) The need to ensure that future guidance on eligibility and the appeals process for DHP's is made clear and transparent to applicants and advocates
  - iii) That DHP guidance it made readily accessible on the Council's website

- iv) The need to establish quarterly meeting with advice agencies and other stakeholders regarding the application of DHP policy locally.
  - v) The need to increase communication with potential recipients and to ensure that there is fair access to DHP between tenants in both the social and private rented sectors.
58. To facilitate increased dialogue between the Council and its partners in the voluntary and advice sectors. To include the promotion and signposting of relevant agencies to potential service users through flyers, letterheads etc. in standard council communications.
  59. That given the limited resources available to the council, future policy decisions with welfare and poverty implications are clearly framed within a context of 'fairness' to vulnerable groups. Mindful of the increasing problem of debt, particularly where this might relate to council tax and rent arrears, Cabinet should specifically commit to undertaking fairness impact assessments when considering future policy formulation in this area. In this respect the group wished to recommend the use of the Fairness Square approach utilised within the review.
  60. That the Council should work with other agencies in Hastings to limit the growing impact of loan sharks and pay day lenders charging exorbitant interest rates.
  61. To continue to monitor and resist any unplanned inward migration into Hastings and St Leonards resulting from the welfare reforms. To work with others to ensure that where local authorities are forced to make place households out of area they take greater responsibility for the longer term welfare and housing needs of vulnerable households
  62. To support the early introduction of further licensing proposals for rented accommodation in the town and the development of a social lettings agency aimed at improving access to and the quality of local housing stock
  63. Aid and complement the work of the FoodBank by promoting other forms of community support including the use of allotments and communities gardens. Crucially to work to relieve the effects of poverty by supporting sustainable approaches by partners that help tackle the root causes of poverty.
  64. To recommend that the Council supports the National Landlord's Association in their efforts to secure a change in legislation which would enable housing benefit payments to be made direct to landlords, where tenants would prefer this option.

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### **Wards Affected**

Ashdown, Baird, Braybrooke, Castle, Central St. Leonards, Conquest, Gensing, Hollington, Maze Hill, Old Hastings, Ore, Silverhill, St. Helens, Tressell, West St. Leonards, Wishing Tree

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### **Area(s) Affected**

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## Policy Implications

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	Yes
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	Yes
Risk Management	No
Environmental Issues	No
Economic/Financial Implications	Yes
Human Rights Act	Yes
Organisational Consequences	No
Local People's Views	Yes

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## Background Information

Hastings Anti Poverty Strategy xxxx

Hastings Ant Poverty Action Plan

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## Officer to Contact

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## Appendix A

### **Reaching agreement on what we mean by “Fairness” and how to make it work for our community: A Fairness Square**

We all have an intuitive sense of what we know as being fair or unfair. “Fairness” is therefore a fundamental principle on which our social morality is based.

Our sense of what is fair or unfair is for most, formed in childhood, and provides the intuitive guide as to how we treat others and how we wish to be treated in accessing the material and cultural assets for a rewarding life.

In plain language the basic proposition we are socialised to ask is:

**“Are we all getting a fair share of the cake?”**

The economic crash of 2008, the formation of the Coalition government in 2010, and this administrations response to the long-wave cycle, particularly the proposed reforms of the welfare system has brought the “fairness” debate into sharp relief.

“Fairness” is a contested concept and hence it’s importance. It is a challenge to local government to arrive at a working definition, which can inform and test decision-making in hard times and beyond. A fair Hastings will be a successful Hastings equipped for the post-austerity future.

It is therefore imperative to ensure that our corporate approach towards the potential impacts of Welfare Reform is objectified within a common “Fairness Framework. The judgements made by one section of society applying their understanding of fairness at the expense of another’s access to what is considered their fair share endangers community cohesion.

Widening disparities of wealth, opportunity and life expectancy have the potential to drive increasing social conflict: The concept of “Fairness” can, if misapplied, exacerbate rather than ameliorate these tensions.

Therefore it is necessary to lift the concept of “Fairness” out of personal value systems and find a methodology that can be readily applied to the choices facing Hastings and St Leonards.

To progress it is necessary to agree a conceptual framework for a Borough wide understanding of “Fairness” to be used objectively to test the decisions and choices we make against a set of “Fairness Principles”

### **“Fairness Square”**

**The “Fairness Square” is designed to meet this need;** building a consensus around the concept of fairness which can be easily and rigorously applied to help inform the choices we make, as a community, and as a conceptual toolkit for improving the quality of life for all.

**The “Fairness Square” is about a fair process to reach fair outcomes** within and between our diverse and overlapping communities; we hope for and engage in seeking our fair share of the common wealth.

The potential impact of Welfare Reform on our Borough makes the duty of defining “Fairness” compelling and urgent. This review provides us with an opportunity to explore how we can define the concept of fairness in a way that can have a practical effect, informing our understanding of welfare reform, our future choices, and endorsed by the widest cross-section of the citizens of our Borough.

This review does not exist in isolation by definition this review operates across all aspects of the work of Hastings Borough Council and such our model of “fairness” has the potential to lend coherency and a clear story to the separated aspects of our work informed by the anti-poverty strategy and cutting across the different the corporate plan and budgetary considerations.

Can we make Hastings famous for “Fairness”?  
Using a Fairness Square

<p>Principle 1: Fair Outcomes (Fair Share)</p> <p>1a – Those who need more should get more...</p> <p>1b – Privilege should not bring priority but need might deserve it...</p>	<p>Principle 2: Fair Process (Fair Play)</p> <p>2a – There is nothing inherently unfair about making choices...</p> <p>2b – It is fair to balance current need against future benefit, including to future generations...</p>
<p>Principle 3: Fair Opportunity (Fair Go)</p> <p>3a – Ability should be able to access opportunity regardless of circumstances</p> <p>3b – Benefit for all should be contributed to by all and hardship caused by none should be shared by all, according to their ability and resources...</p>	<p>Principle 4: Fair participation (Fair Say)</p> <p>4a – Perception of fairness is as important as the substance of it...</p> <p>4b - It is fair to expect civic responsibility from all....</p>

**Using the Fairness Square**

The OS Welfare Reform Review is part of this process of applying the concept of “Fairness” to the hard decisions Hastings Borough Council will have to make.

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