

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR SERVICES

16 NOVEMBER 2015

Present: Councillors Westley (Chair), Fitzgerald (Vice-Chair), Scott, Turner, Charman and Clarke

Apologies for absence were noted for Councillor Edwards

## 17. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 3 SEPTEMBER 2015

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2015 be approved as a correct record**

## 18. QUARTER TWO PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

The Director of Corporate Services and Governance submitted a report to advise members of the performance against the 2015/16 targets and performance indicators in the corporate plan during quarter 2. The report also provided a summary of financial information.

The Director of Operational Services provide an update on performance during this quarter and significant areas of activity outside the corporate plan targets.

Discussion took place about efforts to support community safety during this quarter. The Director of Operational Services explained that addressing public and semi-public drug related crime remained a priority for the council and the police. Following requests from local residents and businesses, the council had closed the public toilets in Cross Street which were considered to be a focus for this type of activity. The police had also carried out a range of activities to tackle drug related crime. The Home Office was due to carry out a peer review of gang culture in Hastings. The review would benefit from expertise from a range of national partners on this issue and good practice developed in a number of other seaside towns, including Margate. The Director of Operational Services commented that crime rates in Hastings had continued to decline over recent years, and it was important promote Hastings as a safe place to live, work and study. As part of their 2015/16 work programme, a group of overview and scrutiny members had also begun a review of community safety.

The committee was advised that a new Development Control Manager had been appointed and was due to begin work with the authority in January 2016. Initial indications were that performance in this service was improving.

Consideration was given to issues around the levels of homelessness in the town. Homelessness applications had increased during quarter 2, however, the committee welcomed the fact that there had also been a rise in homelessness preventions. The Director of Operational Services commented that changes to the local housing market had created additional challenges, as the cost of rent in the private rented sector had increased.

Discussion took place about a recent publication of the index of multiple deprivation, which had shown areas of the town where these issues were particularly acute. The

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Director of Operational Services said that the causes of deprivation varied from area to area within the town, which reflected issues shared with a number of other areas elsewhere in the country. It was important that Hastings remained a priority for investment within East Sussex, to support engagement with hard to reach communities to support economic and social inclusion. The council was also in the process of refreshing its anti-poverty strategy, which co-ordinated partnership activity to alleviate deprivation.

The Assistant Director for Housing and Built Environment advised the committee of efforts to establish a social lettings agency. He explained that progress in acquiring properties from the scheme had been slower than expected, and it was unlikely that the year-end target for the minimum number of units of accommodation leased would be met. This was principally due to changes in the local housing market, which had created increased competition for properties in the private rented sector. However, 5 units of accommodation had been leased during quarter 2. The team would continue to explore options to promote the scheme, particularly to landlords with a larger portfolio of properties and those who are based outside of Hastings. A high standard for the condition of properties leased as part of the scheme had been set, which had limited the cost of maintenance to the council. It was also pointed out that a substantial element of the staffing costs for the leasing scheme to date would still have been accrued under the existing Letstart scheme.

The Director of Operational Services updated members on progress with significant capital projects, including the refurbishment of the White Rock Baths and the development of a new visitor's centre at Hastings Country Park. He added that the local building market was becoming increasingly competitive, and this had resulted in an increase in costs for this type of project. The initial tenders received for the construction of the visitor's centre at Hastings Country Park were above the projected budget. The team were re-evaluating the project, including the proposed construction methods as well as exploring potential sources of additional funding before seeking new tenders.

Consideration was given to options to improve visitor facilities at Hastings Castle. The Assistant Director for Regeneration and Culture noted that a number of short term improvements will be carried out at the site. In the longer term, the council had commissioned the University of Brighton to carry out a study which would explore the significance of the castle to the UK's history and culture. The Marketing and Major Projects Manager explained that the results of the study would help to inform a bid to the Heritage Lottery Funding to support a more comprehensive programme of improvements at the site.

The Assistant Director for Regeneration and Culture updated the committee on plans to implement projects supported by the Coast Communities Fund. The projects allowed for both physical improvements to the seafront in the White Rock area, but also the recruitment of a Sea Escapes Business Advisor, who would mentor new start-up businesses in the tourism sector. The Assistant Director for Regeneration and Culture added that the council had previously been able to support business in the arts and culture sector through the SUCCESS initiative. However, there had been a reduction in the number of external funding streams to support economic

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development, which created additional challenges supporting this type of activity in the future.

Discussion took place regarding the waste management arrangements. The Assistant Director for Environment and Place said that the council continued to work closely with its contractor Kier to pursue improvements to the service, particularly in respect of reducing the number of missed collections. As part of the organisational transformation programme, the council was also developing improved systems for reporting missed bins.

**RESOLVED that: -**

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

The reason for this decision was:

To assist the council enhance performance management arrangements in the context of broader organisational transformation.

### **19. BATHING WATER QUALITY UPDATE**

The Assistant Director for Environment and Place provided an update on bathing water quality in the town. He explained that the bathing water quality at both Hastings and St Leonards beach had met the new, higher, EU standard. He explained that the achievement had been due to successful partnership working between the council, Southern Water, the Environment Agency, Hastings Voluntary Action and a range of other agencies to deliver the necessary investment in infrastructure and broader community engagement to bring about the required improvements.

Members were advised that activities were planned to improve bathing water quality further. This included additional funding from the Environment Agency to the council, to continue works which improved the water quality of the Alexandra Park stream. Southern Water were also due to carry out further surveys of the former private sewer network, which was likely to identify further missed connections, which would then be addressed in partnership with the council's environmental health team. Hastings Voluntary Action would also continue aspects of their Clean Seas Please campaign to promote positive behavioural changes amongst local residents and businesses. An executive delivery group of partners would continue to meet to co-ordinate these activities.

Members welcomed the update; they added that it was essential that bathing water quality in the town continued to meet the high standards required. The committee thanked officers for their efforts in working with partners to secure the improvements

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to bathing water quality, particularly Virginia Gilbert, the council's former Head of Amenities, Resorts and Leisure, for her efforts in co-ordinating these activities.

### 20. **FINAL REPORT OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP TO REVIEW SCRUTINY FUNCTIONS, PROCESS AND POTENTIAL STREAMLINING**

The Director of Corporate Services and Governance submitted a report which put forward recommendations from the scrutiny task and finish group which had been reviewing existing arrangements for overview and scrutiny.

Councillor Howard, as chair of the task and finish group presented the recommendations to the committee. He explained that the task and finish group had considered good practice from a number of other local authorities.

The task and finish group were seeking an in principle agreement from members of both committees, to create a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee from June 2016, which would replace the current services and resources committee. The task and finish group considered that the proposed structure better reflected the organisational structure of the council and would optimise the expertise of members and officers.

It was intended to reconvene the task and finish group after the quarter 2 committee meetings to refine the details of the proposal, including the proposed number of seats of the committee and to make recommendations on the allocation of allowances. The new structure, together with any associated constitutional changes, would then be considered by Cabinet and Full Council.

The committee supported the findings of the task and finish group. Members were keen to retain capacity within the overview and scrutiny function to continue to carry out a full work programme of activities in the future.

### **RESOLVED that the committee endorse the recommendations set out in the task and finish groups report**

The reason for this decision was:

To ensure that scrutiny review and refresh existing arrangements in line with broader transformation efforts underway within HBC.

### 21. **UPDATE ON THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16**

The Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Manager submitted an update on the overview and scrutiny work programme. Members had begun work on all the areas of work identified as high priority at their annual meeting.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 8.45 pm)