

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 JUNE 2017

Present: Councillors Webb (Chair), Howard, Bacon, Charman, Cooke, Rankin, Turner, Atkins and Cartwright

Apologies for absence were noted for Councillor Davies and Dowling

12. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Councillors declared an interest in the minutes:

Councillor	Minute	Interest
Chowney	14 – Corporate Plan 2017/18 Retrospective Report Back on 2016/17 and Performance Targets 2017/18	Personal – he has been appointed as the council’s Director of the Business Improvement District (BID)
Forward	14 – Corporate Plan 2017/18 Retrospective Report Back on 2016/17 and Performance Targets 2017/18	Personal – she leases a property to the social lettings agency

13. MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 9 FEBRUARY 2017

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 9 February 2017 be approved as a correct record of the meeting

14. CORPORATE PLAN 2017/18 RETROSPECTIVE REPORT BACK ON 2016/17 AND PERFORMANCE TARGETS 2017/18

The Director of Corporate Services and Governance presented a report which updated members of the committee on year-end performance.

The Director of Corporate Services and Governance explained that, although the year-end performance target for sickness days per person had not been met, performance had improved compared to this time last year. Also, she had been advised through the recent Local Government Association peer review process, that the council continued to perform well in this respect, compared to other local authorities.

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Discussion took place regarding the freedom of information requests the council receives. Members were mindful that the council was keen to maintain a culture of openness and transparency throughout all its activities. However, the process of dealing with freedom of information requests generates a significant additional workload across the organisation. Some of the requests received are not in line with the original principals of the scheme. The committee recommended carrying out further research to compare the number of FOI's the council receives with those received by other authorities. The committee noted that the My Hastings online system would allow for more accurate recording of time spent responding to requests.

The committee were pleased to note that the year-end targets for the revenues and benefits service had been met. The Director of Corporate Services and Governance commented that there had been significant changes to the working practices of this team, following the introduction of Universal Credit earlier this year. Members were keen to understand how many households had been affected by the benefits cap, which had also been introduced recently. The Revenues and Benefits Service Manager was due to hold a briefing meeting for all members later in the year to update them on the changes.

Discussion took place regarding the roll out of My Hastings online. The Director of Corporate Services and Governance added that a key aim of the system would be to help create additional capacity within the community contact centre. By making a number of transactional enquiries available online, it was intended that staff in the contact centre would be able to deal with more complex enquiries and respond to the increasing demand in some service areas, such as housing advice. A marketing campaign would take place in the autumn to promote the My Hastings online service. In the meantime, members were encouraged to continue reporting any issues with the service to the team to ensure they could be addressed as part of the ongoing development of the service. The Director of Corporate Services and Governance also agreed to circulate additional customer contact monitoring information to keep the committee updated on progress with the channel shift to online services.

The committee noted the additional workload for the electoral services team, organising both the East Sussex County Council elections in May and the UK Parliamentary election in June. Discussion also took place about options to increase voter registration in the town. The Director of Corporate Services and Governance replied that the team had a limited amount of resources to carry out these activities, however, they continued to participate in existing events, such as the university's fresher's fair and promoting the annual canvass period each year. The committee requested an update on the number of votes who registered between the East Sussex County Council election and the UK Parliamentary election, which the Director of Corporate Services and Governance agreed to provide by email.

The Director of Operational Services presented a report on year-end performance. He commented that it was pleasing to note the improved performance across the planning services team. Members acknowledged that the year-end target to determine 85% of minor planning applications within 8 weeks, had been missed by a very narrow margin of 1%. He added that the team were confident the year-end target for 2017/18 for affordable homes built will be met.

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The committee were updated on progress to develop a masterplan for the White Rock area. The draft plan would be shared with Lead Members before being circulated more widely for comment. The council was continuing to work closely with East Sussex County Council on potential traffic calming options for the A259, which would also help to improve the area.

Discussion took place regarding the ongoing rise in homelessness in the town. The Director of Operational Services advised that this increase reflected national trends. The committee recommended carrying out research on the figures reported in other similar coastal towns, such as Margate, to compare with Hastings. The Director of Operational Services agreed to circulate this information by email to the committee. The council had recently hosted an event for a wide range of partners to continue to develop a co-ordinated approach to reducing homelessness. The Lead Member for Housing and Leisure added the requirements for recording homelessness preventions had changed and the statistics could no longer include preventions which had been secured using discretionary housing payments. Moreover, the council was also engaging with households who were at risk of becoming homeless at an earlier stage, before a formal notice of eviction was served. These interventions were also not included in the homelessness prevention statistics. Members requested information about the number of tenants evicted as the result of county court judgements, compared to high court judgements.

Members were advised that the social lettings agency had been affected by the recent changes to the funding arrangements for temporary accommodation made by the government; a report on the future proposals for this initiative would be brought to Cabinet shortly.

Members received an update on the development of 38 new beach huts on the seafront at Hastings and St Leonards. The Director of Operational Services advised that a tendering exercise had recently been completed. Although the quotes received had been higher than the projections set out in the original budget, it was considered that the scheme was still viable; he would therefore be seeking delegated authority from the Cabinet and Charity Committee to proceed.

The Director of Operational Services advised that staff in the council's waste team continued to work closely with the waste and street cleaning contractor to monitor performance. The team were also considering future arrangements for the service; the Director of Operational Services commented that the council would need to develop a responsive solution for street cleansing. The committee expressed some concern at litter bins overflowing on the seafront. The Director of Operational Services replied that an additional 49 litter bins had been installed on the seafront during the summer season. Members were encouraged to continue reporting overflowing bins via the MyHastings online system. The committee were also keen to ensure that appropriate enforcement action was taken to address street cleaning and fly tipping issues outside the town centre, including on the social housing estates around the town.

The committee were advised that the original property identified for phase 3 of the Coastal Space Project was no longer considered to be suitable; however, a replacement property had now been found which would enable the initiative to

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continue. The scheme had been recognised for a national award and complimented as part of the Local Government Association peer review process.

The Director of Operational Services advised that the council and its partners were in the process of developing a package of support and enforcement measures which would help to address anti-social drinking in the town. The installation of new retail kiosks in the town had also helped improve the situation. Members may also consider requesting an update from the District Commander on community safety issues as part of their 2017/18 work programme.

Consideration was given to efforts to secure the economic regeneration of the area, and in particular the work of Locate East Sussex to attract new business to the area. The Director of Operational Services advised that Locate East Sussex report their activities in each district and he agreed to share this information with the committee by email. The committee also received an update on plans for the Business Improvement District (BID). Members considered the impact of assisted area status in attracting new investment to the area. The Director of Operational Services said that whilst many partners had been disappointed the assisted area status had not impacted on decision making by the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), it was nonetheless a useful tool in securing funding to encourage businesses to relocate to the area.

Discussion took place regarding the development of a cultural strategy. Members were keen to explore options to encourage and develop the local music scene, including new music venues. The Director of Operational Services added that consideration would need to be given as to what type of venue would suit the local music scene best, this matter was also being explored as part of the development of a master plan for the White Rock area.

Discussion took place regarding the proposed performance indicator targets for 2017/18.

The Director of Operational Services explained that the performance indicator target regarding attendances at the White Rock Theatre had been removed because the day to day running and organisation of the theatre was managed by a contractor, and therefore achieving the target was largely outside the council's control. However, a member of the committee proposed reinstating the target, as the contractor received a subsidy from the council. This proposal would be submitted to Cabinet for consideration.

Members of the committee thanked staff across the organisation for their efforts during the past year.

RESOLVED that:

- 1. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee thank staff for their hard work in achieving those key activities set out in the corporate plan;**
- 2. The comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the proposed performance indicator targets for 2017/18 be referred to the Cabinet meeting on 10 July 2017, and;**

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3. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee continue to assist the council enhance performance and review arrangements

The reason for this decision was:

To assist with the approval process for the corporate plan and assist Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members to undertake their performance management role.

15. REVIEWING CURRENT SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS

The Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Manager presented a report following the recent review of the council's current scrutiny arrangements. Following the recommendations of a task and finish group undertaken as part of the 2015/16 work programme, the council had adopted a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee in May 2016. Members had also committed to review the effectiveness of the new arrangements one year after their implementation.

Councillor Howard, as Chair of the review, presented the teams recommendations to the committee. Many of the review team's recommendations focused on exploring opportunities to increase the capacity of members across the overview and scrutiny function and optimise the officer support available. This included piloting new ways of delivering work programme activities, based on good practice from other authorities, and planning key lines of enquiry at committee meetings.

The review team were mindful of the key role overview and scrutiny plays as a critical friend to Cabinet decision making and also exploring areas of local concern. Members had made recommendations about changing the way the recommendations of overview and scrutiny reviews and task and finish groups are processed after their adoption by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee approve the recommendations set out in paragraphs 60 to 66 of the review team's report

The reason for this decision was:

Recommendations have been made with a view to continuously improve the HBC scrutiny in line with the council's transformation intentions.

16. YEAR-END UPDATE ON THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17

The Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Manager presented a year-end update on the key work programme activities for 2016/17.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 8.07 pm)