

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

11 JULY 2019

Present: Councillors Davies (Chair), Barnett, Battley, Beaney, Foster, O'Callaghan, Rankin, Turner and Roberts

13. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Levane, Charman and Cox. Councillor Roberts substituted for Councillor Cox

14. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor	Item	Interest
Barnett	16.	Personal- has had previous experience of dealing with Disabled Facilities Grant

15. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillors raised issue that part of their discussion was missing. It was to do with inviting someone in to talk about the committee systems. It was advised that this discussion was recorded in the Scrutiny Steering Group minutes and was part of the work programme that would be later discussed.

RESOLVED – that the minutes of the meeting held on 13th June 2019 be approved by the Chair as a true record.

16. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL WORK PROGRAMME 2019/20

The Chair presented the report and asked the committee for any issues arising from it.

Councillors raised issues concerning Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG). The DFG is a form of financial assistance that enables people to make adaptations to their homes. The DFG budget is underspent. Hastings Borough Councils scheme currently means tests applicants. Some councils do not do this as part of their process. Councillors were also concerned about the time it can take for an applicant to be successful and what could be potential delays in the process. Councillors questioned if this was the potential cause of the underspend. Councillors are keen to find the root cause of the delays to DFGs underspend and other services especially in times of austerity

ACTION: To ask housing about DFG's means testing and potential delays. To ask for a DFG process map for the Q2 meeting and to continue to monitor it.

Councillors have recently received updated Section 106 (S106) information. S106 are conditions on planning applications that mean developers make financial contributions to improve the local area such as playgrounds or widening pavements. Councillors thanked officers for providing S106 information. Councillors are still keen to monitor this and would like the new information explained to them. Councillors would also like

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clarified what funds could be rolled forward to the next municipal year and which ones disappeared if they were not spent.

ACTION: To invite the Chief Auditor to the next Scrutiny Steering group meeting

The Councillors looked at last year's work programme and discussed the remaining items that needed finalising for the year. They were still waiting on a response to the Overview and Scrutiny submission for the Bohemia area consultation, a management response to the Regeneration Funding Review report (this should be submitted to the September Cabinet meeting) and continued S106 information.

ACTION: Democratic Service Officers to chase outstanding actions on last year's work programme

Councillors spoke about the new work programme. They spoke about wanting to start working with Cabinet members such as starting the corporate plan early and trying to close the gap with Homelessness. They wanted to work with Cabinet as part of critical collective collaboration. It was suggested that they look to working collaboratively with ESCC which could help with an enhanced scrutiny review. It was suggested that scrutiny could collect questions and put them in formally to get a formal answer.

The next steps for the work programme will be setting up the meetings and using the government's statutory guidance scoping each thing properly.

Councillors felt that the mid-term finance strategy was missing from the work programme. The Assistant Director Financial Services and Revenues will be holding a briefing session for Councillors in September.

During this discussion Councillors raised concerns about the impact of funding if we leave the European Union (EU). A large proportion of the money the council receives is grants for specific projects from the EU. Councillors were concerned that there was no contingency in place. Councillors were told that officers are planning for this and Overview and Scrutiny can pick this up in a meeting with Cabinet members.

There were concerns about what the financial support offered by the national government would be should we leave the EU. Previously the government had said it would match lost funding but this doesn't seem likely now. The funding from the EU had been used for projects that helped the more vulnerable communities in the borough. There were concerned at where the money would be found to continue this work.

Councillors also pointed out that this potential funding deficit might not occur immediately as grants already allocated by the EU will be paid after we leave the EU. The Regeneration funding review looked at the issue of EU funding and is expecting a management response to this.

Councillors spoke about the waste contract. Originally Overview and Scrutiny were going to look in depth to the contracts performance after it had been operational for several months. Some councillors felt that we should be looking at them sooner. Some councillors also wanted a distinction between the council run street cleansing

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operation and the Biffa household waste collection contract for when they review the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Councillors had raised at a previous meeting concerns about if our recycling is sent abroad and wanted to find out where it ended up. This action had been sent to the relevant officer who will respond in due course.

Councillors were keen to get an update on the bid put in for future high street funding. They wanted to know why we bid for the grant initially, why the bid was unsuccessful and how Councillors were involved in this process.

ACTION: Democratic services officers to ask the relevant officer for information about the future high street bid

Councillors would like to look at our environmental commitments. Colleagues are currently working on this and this would be reviewed in September. Councillors would like to start engaging with the corporate plan and helping to develop this.

The Regeneration Funding review talked about CHART. Councillors would like to have CHART officers updating them with decisions. They wanted to get information about who saw the applications, who was involved in reviewing the bid and what the priorities were for the bids. Councillors would like to see help for more vulnerable residents.

Some Councillors raised the need to distinguish between micro managing and scrutinising our bidding process. There is a need to make sure the grants we bid for fit in with our corporate priorities. We need to seek out the grants we need rather than just taking what's available. Other councillors felt that looking at something in depth would give the overview needed in order to understand what was going on in particular processes.

Councillors raised issues with the bathing water review due to concerns with the quality of the data used. They had concerns with the performance of the water management provider and used one example of them not knowing where filters were in the park. Councillors were keen to celebrate the achievements of the past work as it did see a better quality of bathing water which could be clearly linked to the work done in Alexander Park a few years. The review of bathing water could also be used to look at water poverty and access in the borough through the introduction of water meters.

Councillors discussed how grants are awarded to groups within the local community. Councillors believed that larger groups were more inclined to be successful in bids rather than smaller groups. The Regeneration Funding review was looking at ways this could be monitored to get the outcome and transparency communities expect. They spoke about different models used that make it more accessible such as making the breaking down the money into a series of smaller grants. The councillors felt that currently the amounts were too big for local businesses.

They discussed how there were organisations in the town that can help with this such as Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA). HVA already give good advice to local groups

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and might be able to help a collective of small groups bid for a larger fund. Presently larger groups bidding are being successful frequently due to their experience of bidding and not having more groups to compete with. Councillors felt these larger groups were worthy of the funding but would like to see a more diverse range benefitting.

Councillors could also benefit to access to lower amounts to hold small events that would bring together members of the local community in their wards and other relevant organisations such as the police. This would increase wellbeing and strengthen relationships.

The councillors all saw benefits to smaller groups getting access to grants and they felt would have a positive impact in changing the many areas of deprivation experienced in the borough. Statistics for these had been getting worse rather than better.

ACTION: At the next Scrutiny Steering Group the agreed work programme will be looked at and activities will be planned

RESOLVED that:

- 1. To update the status of the 2018/19 Scrutiny work programme.**
- 2. To summarise ideas received for the 2019/20 Scrutiny work programme and to propose next steps for progressing these.**

Reasons for Recommendations

It is the responsibility of Members serving on Overview and Scrutiny to set their own work programme for each municipal year at the Annual Meeting, whilst taking into account the advice of officers present.

17. INVITATION TO LEAD MEMBERS 2019/20

Overview and Scrutiny are keen to build their relationship with Cabinet members. When they are planning the work programme they will look to ways of actively engaging with them on this.

18. AOB

The Chair of the committee wanted to give thanks to the great work programme the committee had put together. It was good to see political differences being put aside so they can work together to make a positive impact for local people. This committee is about the people of Hastings and making sure that this organisation meets and thinks about their needs.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 7.27 pm)