

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

8 SEPTEMBER 2021

Present: Councillors Battley (Chair), Patmore (Vice-Chair), Arthur, Bishop, Carr, Edwards, Fernando, Roark and Turner

85. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Councillor Beaney, Pragnell

86. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor	Item	Interest
Roark	Battle Road Arches	Personal

87. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

RESOLVED – (Unanimously) that the minutes of the meeting held on 28th July 2021 be approved as a true record.

Covid Update

The Managing Director gave a covid update. In July there were 204 Cases per 100,000, but cases are now fluctuating at 400 per 100,000. Though there are large numbers of people vaccinated, there are still a significant number that have not, especially in younger age groups. This is fuelling spread in our community. The infection rates are also a concern because they are already high going into the autumn winter period when health professionals expect levels to rise even further. The Council are aware that the NHS are concerned and are planning for more challenges this winter with the combined impact of staff shortages, already high COVID case numbers and concerns about flu and other respiratory diseases. The Council's response is still significant for several of our teams. Examples are still delivering the self isolation payments. Submitting the regular detailed returns to government as well as undertaking the required assurance work to confirm that those who have received money of the last year and half were entitled to it.

The transfer of the track and trace work from the national scheme to local means that the Council are continuing to identify and support individuals who need to self-isolate. In addition, the number of settings of interest i.e. Places where outbreaks have occurred are notified to colleagues daily and then they support the businesses or workplaces to review their working practices. They then give advice to help them to reduce the likelihood of further incidents.

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Colleagues and councillors continue to play an important role in securing and highlighting the availability of pop-up clinics for people to receive their first or second dose vaccines in our town. The rollout of the third phase of vaccination program will begin shortly and the Council have secured the use of Community contact centre as a vaccination hub for the winter period. This is in addition to the Kings Church site, the regular popups are continuing and we're also seeking a location for a hub in St. Leonards. There is a walk and drive through mobile testing unit on Falaise Rd Car Park. The rates for testing and Hastings are still pleasingly very high and the positivity rates are also going up one in 10 people who take PCR test kind that they're now positive.

Now that the busiest summer months are coming to an end, will be undertaking review of the experience of our local shops, restaurants, attractions and accommodation providers to understand how they have fared. And we will also be undertaking winter preparedness work to ensure we're ready to respond as and when the need arises.

Finance Update

The Assistant Director Financial Services and Revenues gave an update. Covid has impacted the finance teams and financial accounts from 19/20 need to be signed off by our external auditors. The budget deficit for this year is already forecast to be large and the first quarter results indicate 38% extra spend for the year. Battle road cost is a one-off payment that is coming from reserves. The first 3 months of the year car parking income is down. Cliff railway has been closed since April. There has been a loss of income as well as repair costs. Rough sleepers is also a large overspend. There are grants that are being applied for sales fees and charges. Green waste is up, cemetery and crematorium income has levelled off, some Council expenditure is saved on travel. Unit factory rental is seeing some rental increases, but Priory Meadow income is down.

Last year's income from claims made to government should come September 20th. This will show if the car park income has been able to be claimed
Council tax collection rate is 51.6%, business rates is 10% below target rate. Another member of staff has been added to the debt recovery teams.
Capital budget was underspent last year. Programs are due to start like Buckshole reservoir, Church Fields business park and a catch up on the homeless accommodation.

Committee members put questions to The Assistant Director Financial Services and Revenues.

Is the 20th September when the council is told they can claim? All the car parking income has been claimed for. The figure has not been given to the council yet. Later in the year a reconciliation and insurance program is being started by government.

Can he Battle road safety works could have an insurance claim made against it?

The Assistant Director Financial Services and Revenues informed the committee that this is work being undertaken as the owners are not doing so. Some moneys may be recoverable from the owners.

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Have hospitals been paying their business rates? The Assistant Director Financial Services and Revenues informed the committee there was a reduction in the rateable value of the Conquest hospital, but he is not aware of any issues with payments from the local hospitals.

Why is Priory Meadow income being down? The Assistant Director Financial Services and Revenues updated the committee that foot fall is down. The Town deal has some propositions to help increase footfall

88. PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTER 1 (2021/22) UPDATE

The Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Manager reported to the committee the Quarter one 2021-2022 performance Monitoring. Each of the service areas within the council has their own part on the dashboard with targets. The targets for the year should be reviewed by the committee as this was not able to be completed at the Q4 meeting. All red or amber targets will have an explanation on their performance.

The Committee members asked questions with the Portfolio Holders, Managing Director and the Assistant Director Financial Services and Revenues available to answer.

Why in 2020-21 there were 175 measures and now 193 measures in 21-22?

The Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Manager informed the committee that the dashboard has been reviewed and some areas have been added to make the performance monitoring clearer to the public.

Why the performance indicator for long term empty properties 17.5 in Q4 has changed to 10?

The Leader of the Council gave the answer that a realistic target had to be made due to staffing issues. A lot of long-term empty properties have already been actioned.

Major planning applications has in the past underperformed but now is 100% complete. Does as much need to be spent on consultants?

The Leader of the Council said she will speak with the planning manager and report back.

Providing a Sustainable procurement policy hub, can it be brought inhouse?

The Assistant Director Financial Services and Revenues updated the committee that Procurement did used to be inhouse but due to the complexity it is now outsourced to a hub managed by Wealden Council with close work with the Audit manager. Wherever possible local procurement is undertaken. The Financial Portfolio Holder highlighted social value in procurement and environmental issues within the procurement of goods.

Planning failing official land searches within 5 day, will the target be modified?

The Leader of the Council informed the committee that the statutory target is being met. The target for quarter two should be met through recruitment

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Housing emergency accommodation, how to accommodate 17 Afghan families?

Housing Portfolio Holder informed the committee that he had been asked before if people would be jumping ques. He reassures the committee that this was not the case and property are found through the private market with help from the Home Office.

Enforcement, does it include planning?

Organisation Portfolio Holder explained it is regarding civil enforcement. There has been a staffing issue that has now been rectified and fixed penalty notices target will be changed going into the next quarter.

Community safety, are there hate crime figures?

Organisation Portfolio Holder said there is a new hate crime department, and the figures will be circulated to the committee in due course.

Is there an update on West Marina deliverability?

The Financial Portfolio informed the committee that Generator group and County Gate need to sign the development agreement. The Council has already signed the agreement.

The Estate budgets, has it been removed?

The Assistant Director Financial Services and Revenues Procurement informed that each estates area has been separated.

Church fields estate is amber should it be green?

The Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Manager informed the committee that would be reflected in the quarter two as the mover from amber to green happened then and not in quarter one.

Estate Assets management plan, why is it red?

The Assistant Director Financial Services and Revenues answered is difficult to update due to Towns Deal and it's a fluid situation.

Looking forward, where is of greatest concern?

Managing Director highlighted the capacity of the organisation to achieve what there is to do now and what needs to be caught up on.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

- 1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review performance for Quarter 1 and associated performance indicator targets for the year ahead.**
- 2. That staff be thanked for their hard work and achievements to date.**

Reasons for recommendations

To assist the council to undertake performance and financial monitoring arrangements.

Any other Business

Reviews going forward

Seachange – Led by Cllr Patmore with Cllr Turner, Edwards, Bishop, Carr & Roark

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Equalities and Women's Safety – Led by Cllr. Arthur, with Cllr. Carr, Bishop, Roark
Motions – Led by Cllr. Battley

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 7.20 pm)