

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

27 JULY 2022

Present: Councillors Patmore (Chair), Jobson (Vice-Chair), Arthur, Cannan, Collins, Foster, Hay, Pragnell, Roberts, Turner and Webb

Officers: Jane Hartnell, Stephen Dodson, Coral Harding, Cameron Morley, Natasha Tewkesbury, Kit Wheeler

107. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received

108. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

109. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 8th March 2022 be approved as a true record.

110. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PROPOSED WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE 2022-23 MUNICIPAL YEAR

The Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Officer reported that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as well as monitoring key decision making and performance within the council, they identify areas for improvement and development.

The committee has decided to pursue 4 themes this year; Finance, Equalities, Living Environment and Follow up 2021. They have prioritised 2 reviews within each theme to begin with and hope to explore other areas identified within the municipal year.

The Chair explained that he will be taking the lead on the finance work area. The group plan to review the disposal of council assets and what it means for the council and how to get best value. Project prioritisation and an a spend review are also planned later in the year.

The Councillors highlighted reviewing schools and the standard of education in the Borough and how nothing seems to have changed since it was reviewed. The Chair explained the follow up work will look at previous themes and what actions have taken place. The councillors discussed the Disabled Facilities Grant and making it more accessible and user friendly.

The Councillors discussed and highlighted a planned 'Meet the Leader' session. The chair answered that a Question and Answer meeting the Council Leader.

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Councillor Arthur as the Lead on the Equalities working group introduced their plans for the year. The previous year's Overview and Scrutiny work programme included a review piece on equality and Women's safety. The next steps to their work were to meet with relevant local groups to gather their views but this was unable to happen due to COVID. A meeting was had with the Equalities portfolio holder. Going forward this year; plans are made to have meetings with relevant local groups. The committee discussed reviewing the Equalities Charter this year.

Councillor Jobson will be the lead on the Living Environment work group. The themes will be waste, recycling and street cleansing. There is a planned cleansing review and looking at the My Hastings app and how user friendly it is. Another area of interest will be dealing with fly tipping hot spots. The group will also be working on the relationship between the council, residents, and Southern Water. There is also a planned meeting with Biffa.

Councillor Foster will be the lead on the Follow up work group. The committee agreed a meeting with Sea Change is still needed.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

That the Annual Meeting reach agreement on their key lines of inquiry for the Overview and Scrutiny work programme for the 2022/23 municipal year

Reasons

It is the responsibility of members serving on the Overview and Scrutiny committee to set their own work programme for each municipal year at the Annual Meeting.

111. FINANCIAL MONITORING QUARTERLY REPORTS FOR 2021/22 – QUARTER 4

The Chief Finance Officer gave an update there are plans for reports to be more meaning full, easy to understand and frequent.

The position in quarter 4 is an underspend. The council spent less and made more than had been budgeted for. The underspend was against the revised budget and not the original budget.

Problem areas to highlight are the costs associated with the homelessness issues and that is this is a focus area for the Council. The Homelessness task force has shown that joined up working has helped highlight cost savings. Asset disposal is also being looked at to make sure this is done in the correct way.

The accounts for 2019-20, 2020-21 or 2021-22 have not been signed off by the auditors. Until the accounts are signed off these are draft figures.

The committee asked questions to the Chief Finance Officer

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How likely and what type of variance is likely from these accounts and the Audited accounts?

The Chief Finance Officer answered it depends on if any errors are found. The 2019-20 accounts appear to have no errors. The Auditors have yet not started on the 2021-22 accounts.

The Finance Portfolio holder spoke to the committee and expressed the need for the accounts to be signed off by the auditors. He also highlighted the need to tackle the homelessness spending and the Councils deficit.

The Leader of the Council spoke to the committee and highlighted the breakdown of each services end of year target.

Are Adverse or Negative variance the same as a overspend?

The Chief Finance Officer answered that the report should say the same thing throughout. He explained the thinking 'a underspend is a good thing' is something that needs to be moved away from. An underspend means budget could have been used in another area.

Parking has a payment to the Fisherman's Protection Society?

The Chief Finance Officer answered a contribution is paid to the Fisherman's Protection Society every year for their share of the parking income. The exact amount will be shared after the meeting.

St Mary in the Castle will be returning to the council in November. Will there be a cost to maintain the building?

The Chief Finance Officer answered that the details haven't been finalised.

The Councillors discussed the good work by the waste department with positive variance in refuse collection and the DSO.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

To accept the contents of the report, and the actions within the conclusion and management action section

Reasons

To assist the council in understanding the financial position and particularly areas of over and under spend. This assists in identifying areas for review in the next financial year and in the production of the 2023/24 budget.

112. PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTER 4 2021/22 AND QUARTER 1 2022/23

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The Transformation and Programmes Manager apologised for the lateness of the Quarter 4 report.

The Committee asked questions to officers and Portfolio holders.

Why does Audit have a lot of red ratings?

The Chief Finance Officer answered that over the last couple of years one of the auditors has had to be used in another area of the council. There has been a lot of extra Covid Grant work put onto the Audit department.

Housing Options and Strategic Housing both have red ratings. Is this because of tackling homelessness?

The previous Housing portfolio holder answered that housing options is temporary housing and rough sleeping side of the Councils work. A key issue is the rise in rents across the whole borough. The building of more affordable homes in the borough is needed.

Why haven't the Council bought more accommodation?

The previous Housing portfolio holder answered explained a lot has been spent on the Councils own housing stock but with Covid happening there has been a rise in people coming into the housing system but with not so many exiting it. The Current Housing Portfolio holder spoke to the committee of the concerns with the current housing crisis and the cost of living crisis. The funding from Government has ended for the 'Everybody in Scheme'.

Are the Planning targets correct?

The Transformation and Programmes Manager answered that the report has been reviewed and is believed to be correct. There may be some more tweaks to the dashboard going forward.

The Planning Portfolio holder addressed the committee and explained there is a shortage of Planners in East Sussex. There has been a recruitment drive to fill vacant posts.

Why has Estate assets management has been red for all last year?

The Estates portfolio holder answered that asset management has been urgently addressed. The Chief Finance Officer informed the committee that a working party has been formed to review assets.

Were there less fixed penalty notices issued due to less staff?

The Portfolio holder answered there are vacant positions that need to be filled in the Warden service. The new Sussex Police Acting District Commander has agreed there will be foot patrols of Police officers in the town centre between 13:00-20:00.

How are the targets set for Communications?

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The Customer Services, Communications and Emergency Planning Manager answered that they are based on previous increases and the standards across similar organisations.

How are electric vehicle charges monitored?

This will be updated after the meeting.

Are all green status targets correct for Climate change?

The Portfolio holder explained the targets are being reviewed and plan to be updated.

RESOLVED (unanimously)

- 1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review performance for Quarter 4 (Jan-March 2021/22 and review performance for Quarter 1 2022/23 (April – June)**
- 2. That O&S be invited to comment on the draft performance indicators for 2022/23**
- 3. That staff be thanked for their hard work and achievements to date.**

Reason

To assist the council to undertake performance and financial monitoring arrangements

113. AOB

The committee discussed the help available to paper users for the energy rebate.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 7.44 pm)