

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

19 DECEMBER 2022

Present: Councillors Patmore (Chair), Jobson (Vice-Chair), Carr, Foster, Hay, Turner, Webb and Sinden

Officers: Coral Harding, Kit Wheeler, Stephen Dobson, Simon Jones, Andrew Palmer, Natasha Tewkesbury, Amy Terry

Members of Cabinet Present: Councillors Batsford, Cannon, Evans and Rogers

## 122. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Jane Hartnell, Councillor Roberts and Councillor Pragnell. Councillor Pragnell was substituted by Councillor Williams

## 123. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor	Item	Interest
Cllr Carr	4	Personal – Voluntary work for Age Friendly Project
Cllr Webb	4	Personal – ESCC Councillor

## 124. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**RESOLVED** - That the minutes of the meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2022 be approved as a true record.

## 125. QUARTER 2 WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT

Councillor Patmore as Chair gave an update. Four areas are being looked at Finance, Equalities, Living Environment and Follow Up on last years Work Programme.

Regarding the Finance theme Councillor Patmore updated that a meeting was held in November with the Senior Officers reviewing the Councils asset management plan. A more substantive report will be produced at the end of the financial year. There are plans for a meeting in January to discuss the Housing and Homelessness budget.

Councillor Jobson as the lead on the Living Environment theme gave an update. The main areas of concern are dog waste, potholes, and sea water quality. Flood risks in the town has been seen in recent weeks. Parts of the town had been subjected to flooding as a result of the unprecedented rain fall. Climate change risk data needs to be collected and Councillor Jobson asked for Councillor Barnett to work strategically

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with ESCC. The Waste department have been contacted and are working with Homegroup

Councillor Carr gave an update on the Equalities theme. There has been an update on the park safety with vegetation management and planting is now complete, lighting bollards have been purchased and are planned for installation immanently and CCTV is being installed.

There has been no update on the Equalities Charter and Councillor Carr has requested information on whether there is a plan for work to continue. The first meeting of the Equality Working Group is to be held on 18th January. Councillor Carr also highlighted the need for an Age Friendly Champion and without active engagement may result in the Council not achieving Age Friendly status.

The committee discussed ESCC having had a meeting with Southern Water and discussed asking Southern Water to attend a meeting (Advice on this needs to be sought from the Chief Legal Officer). The committee are also concerned by the impact of housing and homelessness on residents and the Council. They would like to focus on this area as part of their work.

### **RESOLVED (unanimously)**

**That the committee note the progress of the Overview and Scrutiny work programme for the 2022/23 municipal year and follow up actions.**

Reasons:

It is the responsibility of members serving on the Overview and Scrutiny committee to set their own work programme for each municipal year and complete the associated actions by the end of year.

### **126. QUARTER 2 FINANCIAL UPDATE REPORT**

The Chief Finance Officer gave an update on this report being for the end of quarter two. The Deputy Chief Finance Officer updated that the report now includes more information. The report shows a forecast year end net overspend of £1.4m with the most notable overspend in homelessness costs (£1.6m). There is an overspend of £282k in development management due some additional staff costs and the use of agency staff. Dangerous structures have an overspend of £122k due to Battle Road works, and a overspend in off street Parking of £100k due to the closure of Cornwallis car park and lower taking in the sports centre car parks. There is a overspend of £91k on the crematorium in relation to gas costs. These overspends are offset in part by an underspend of £639k on net interest and MRP charges.

The Deputy Chief Finance officer also highlighted some underspends in the Capital Programme these being the aborted Harold Place restaurant (£2.77m), Energy

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Generation (£363k) due to slippage in the scheme and the empty home strategy (£50k) which is unlikely to happen this year

The committee asked questions:

**Has there been an increase in expenditure on agency staff?**

The Chief Finance Officer will come back with a breakdown of expenditure in areas.

**How much has Cornwall's car park closing affected the parking income?**

The Chief Finance Officer will come back with the break down

Answer: Parking income for Cornwall's car park is down by £70k in the 2022/23 financial year. For a full year the lost income would be approximately £110k.

**What is the cost to cancel Harold Place Restaurant?**

The Chief Finance Officer answered the final cost of the demolition works with £73k excluding the VAT and a total of £67k was spent on the restaurant scheme.

**Have vacancies in Regeneration been filled?**

The Chief Finance Officer answered that some vacancies are being held due to a recruitment freeze. The regeneration manager will come back with further information.

**How will the overspend be paid for?**

The Chief Finance Officer answered it would come from the general reserve if it cannot be saved in the last two quarters. The Assistant Director Housing & Built Environment gave an update regarding the Housing overspend with the primary cost being temporary accommodation.

**Will the 23-24 Budget factor in the housing overspend?**

The Chief Finance Officer answered they have worked with Housing to discuss forecasts for next year.

**At Harrow Lane would the first house be for sale or for rent?**

The Assistant Director Housing & Built Environment will investigate this but will certainly be pushing for the rented unit to come first. The site is 100 percent affordable housing with a mixture of properties available to rent and available to buy.

**Will any of the new Housing be through the Council as a housing association**

The Assistant Director Housing & Built Environment answered it is a good idea to use other people's investment if we can, rather than use the Council's investment, which obviously carries forward a cost. The other housing associations have the capacity to bring these sites forward in a way that the council will not.

**RESOLVED (unanimously)**

**To note the contents of the report, and the actions within the conclusion and management action section.**

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## Reason

To assist the council in understanding the financial position and particularly areas of over and under spend. Early indications of emerging overspends can allow management action to be targeted to those areas. This monitoring assists in identifying areas for review in the production of the 2023/24 budget.

## **127. QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT**

The Transformation and Programmes Manager updated the committee on the Quarter 2 Performance monitoring.

The committee asked questions:

### **Is there further information regarding the red in legal and amber in constitutional?**

Councillor Rogers answered that there is a meeting this week regarding the constitutional review and there have been vacancies in Legal that are yet to be filled.

### **Is there an update regarding the performance of Audit?**

The Chief Finance Officer answered there will be an update at the January Audit meeting. The aim is to sign off the 2021 accounts by March, this is delayed because of the impact of COVID. There will also be a best value report from the auditors at this meeting.

### **Is there an update on the Asset Management Plan?**

The Chief Finance Officer answered that the plan has had a lot of work put in by staff, but extra resources are now needed to take it further.

### **Are fixed penalty notices targets set correctly?**

Councillor Rogers answered the wardens engage with members of the public with a FPN as a last resort. The Transformation and Programmes Manager answered the targets can be reviewed and changed to monitor engagement.

### **What is in place to ensure schemes start and complete when they should?**

The Transformation and Programmes Manager answered all projects are analysed before they go ahead, and the council is trying to enforce good project and program management throughout.

### **Are the sickness targets correct? Would homeworking assist with the targets?**

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Willis will get back with an answer.

### **CHART has missed its target. Is there an update?**

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Barnett will get back with an answer

### **Are homeworkers checked if they are working safely?**

The Transformation and Programmes Manager answered all staff have completed a homeworking risk assessment and provided with the equipment needed.

### **Is there and update on the Housing Strategy?**

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The Assistant Director Housing & Built Environment answered that staff capacity has been an issue and there hasn't been the capacity to move forward with the housing strategy.

### **How many of the 500 affordable homes have been delivered? Will the quarterly target be adjusted?**

The Assistant Director Housing & Built Environment explained a table can be brought forward to explaining when sites are thought to be developed. The targets can be reviewed.

### **Are there the figures on evictions? Do we note the reason for a section 21 notice?**

The Assistant Director Housing & Built Environment explained this is the biggest reason for homelessness in Hastings. People who present to the council will have the reason for eviction logged but there is no exact figure available on how many people have been evicted in the Borough.

### **Will the LHA rate be reassessed?**

The Assistant Director Housing & Built Environment answered that it is not looking like it will be reviewed soon. Councillor Evans answered that it has been highlighted to the MP and asked her to take forward.

### **What is happening with the climate change targets?**

The Transformation and Programme Manager answered that all the climate targets are being reviewed.

### **RESOLVED (unanimously)**

#### **1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review performance for Quarter 2 2022/23 (July– September)**

#### **2. That staff be thanked for their hard work and achievements to date.**

Reason

1. To assist the council to undertake performance and financial monitoring arrangements.
2. That Overview and Scrutiny and the public can review performance and highlight both achievements and areas of concern.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 7.58 pm)