

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

29 MARCH 2023

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

134. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Councillor Roberts and Councillor Turner

135. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor	Item	Interest
Cllr Webb	4	Personal – ESCC Councillor
Cllr Hay	6	Personal – ESCC Councillor

136. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 26/01/23

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 26th January 2023 be approved as a true record

137. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME UPDATES QUARTER 3

The Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Officer updated that there has been a slight delay to work due to the Councillors being involved in the Budget process. The Councillors had still made significant process and gave a brief oversight of their activities. Additionally, to this there is a meeting planned to follow up on Park safety and relook at the motions recommendation review as there has been progress on the process that was recommended in that report. Any parts of the work programme not completed are for reasons outside of the committee's control.

Councillor Patmore explained the finance team are awaiting an update regarding the asset management plan. The Chief Finance officer updated quotes have gone out for the asset review with June being a target date for Part 1 of the review.

Councillor Carr updated there have been two Equalities group meetings. The group has reviewed how other council's work. There was an update that the council has become an inclusive employer with future training being planned. There is also going to be an internal audit of some of the Councils practices. Councillors are also reviewing the census data to help identify the potential needs of different groups of

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residents. Councillor Carr gave thanks to the Councillors that have been attending the meetings.

Councillor Jobson updated that there has been an increase in dog waste and an increase in dog ownership. Members are asked to encourage the use of the My Hastings Report It app. Some potholes that have been filled but there are now issues on crossings and footpaths. There has been a report from Clean Water Action with one day having 22 hours of sewage spillage. There have been eight serious alerts for sewage spillages at Bulverhythe. Some feedback from residents for future work are promoting active travel and reducing short car trips. Fly tipping issues have been noticed with some housing associations and noise complaints were highlighted as an area of concern.

Councillor Batsford responded that East Sussex County Council have a new highways contract starting in June and the handover has reduced current performance of pothole repairs and hoped that the new contractors would be able to reduce the backlog. Cllr Patmore also noted that potholes must have been reported if a claim for damages was to be made. This can be done through [Pothole in road - Report a problem \(eastsussexhighways.com\)](https://www.eastsussexhighways.com) There is going to be a cross party active travel group set up. A meeting has been held with Stagecoach who are looking to provide reliable bus timetable information to residents.

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.

138. PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTER 3 2022/23

The Head of Strategic Programmes reported to the committee that this is the performance review for Quarter 3 although we were in effect looking at them at the end of Q4 due to committee cycles. This will be addressed going forward but it was to be noted that all Performance Indicators will be being reviewed considering the updated Corporate Plan 23/24.

Members of the Senior Leadership Team and Lead Councillors were present to answer questions. The committee asked questions

Q: Strategic housing tracker is missed every quarter. Is it fit for purpose?

A: This does not reflect the hard work being done by the Housing team. Targets will be reviewed and will be updated.

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Q: Long term empty properties returned to use. Why are figures so high?

A: A detailed response will be circulated to the committee.

Update from The Head of Strategic Programmes: The figures are derived from Council Tax which capture data on properties that were empty and now returned to use

Q: Is there an update on households living in temporary accommodation for Q3?

A: A lot of work is happening. Saving targets agreed in the budget are starting to be implemented but will take time and no reduction has been achievable in this quarter.

Q: How critical is it to fill the Housing Manager role?

A: Being a Senior role it may take up to three months due to notice period. The new role is focused purely on homelessness and housing renewal to allow a laser like focus. In the meanwhile, all members of the Senior Leadership Team will be focusing on this priority area.

Q: Why is CHART delivery red every quarter?

A: There will be a CHART celebration on 30th March to mark the end of the program with an evaluation report being published. In terms of the reason as to why the programme has been shown as red, this is due to the programme outputs not being met. However, though all targets haven't been met Hastings has managed to do a lot better than other areas.

Q: Land charge searches within ten working days has decreased. Is this due to not using consultants?

A: This is not due to using consultants.

Update from The Head of Strategic Programmes: The target of 10 days isn't achievable with current resources. Effectively the volume of work is too great to realistically achieve the 10-day target. This will be picked up as part of the planning services review.

Q: Why is the staff sickness target not met?

A: A detailed response will be circulated to the committee.

Update from The Head of People and Business Support: The top 5 sickness reasons over the quarter shown were

1. Psychiatric/Stress with 194 days lost (25% of all sickness this period)
2. Colds/Flu/URTI with 75 days lost (10% of all sickness)
3. Confirmed Covid Virus with 69 days lost (9% of all sickness this period)
4. Lower Limb with 65 days lost (8% of all sickness)

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5. Back/Spinal with 60 days lost (7% of all sickness this period)

Additional detailed information has been provided to the committee

Q: Climate change strategy has ambers. Is this due to the climate change officer leaving?

A: The Climate change tracker has many targets achieved by the whole council and does not review the work of one officer.

Resolved (Unanimously)

1. **That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review performance for Quarter 3 (Oct-Dec) 2022/23**
2. **To note that the report provides performance information one quarter behind actual quarters.**
3. **That staff be thanked for their hard work and achievements to date.**

Reasons

1. To assist the council to undertake performance and financial monitoring arrangements.
2. To ensure that senior management, officers, and Portfolio Holders (Lead Cllrs) have ownership of performance of the service areas under their responsibility.
3. That O&S and the public can review performance and highlight both achievements and areas of concern.
4. That due to committee cycles the data provided to O&S is for Q3 but Q4 has now almost complete therefore some data may not represent the up-to-date information on performance.

139. FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT FOR 2022/23 - TO END OF DECEMBER 2022 (PERIOD 9)

The Chief Finance Officer introduced the report. Moving forward there is plans to have the reports to the committee nearer the end of each quarter.

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer explained that the total service expenditure was forecast to be overspent by £2.7 million at the end of Q3. The largest single area of overspend is homelessness, where an overspend of £2,030,900 is forecast. This is due to the rising cost of temporary accommodation and with increase in the number of clients presented as homeless. The Revenues and Benefits service is forecasting an

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overspend of £213,360 and this is due to a delay in the restructure and the use of agency staff. Car parking is forecast and an overspend of £186,200 this is due to reduced fee income at the sports centres, closing of the Cornwallis Car Park and the reduction in season tickets income. Development management is forecasting an overspend of £323,700 this is due to an underachievement of income, additional staffing post and agency staff used to cover vacant posts. Dangerous Structures has a overspend of £196,200 and this is for safety works at Battle Rd. Debt repayment costs are forecasting an underspend of £628,850 and this is due to a lower MRP charge reduced borrowing and increased investment income. The total expenditure is therefore forecast to be overspent by £2,071,600 at the end of December.

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer gave an update from the end of February which shows that direct service expenditure overspend has increased by a further £546,700 with an additional overspend on Homelessness of £212,000. An additional £124,700 overspend on Properties & Estates is also forecast due to increased repairs expenditure and reduced rental income due to rent free periods negotiated. There is also an additional £185,500 overspend on dangerous structures. This takes the total forecast overspend on Battle Road to £381,700.

The change to the MRP strategy which was agreed at Full Council on the 8th of February has saved £787,000 and further improvements in investment returns and interest rates is estimated to generate an additional £185,000 in investment income.

The capital budget for the year was set at £21.7 million, and then revised for carry forwards and budget adjustments and set at £18.08 million. The forecast underspend for the year end is £3.855m

Members of the Senior Leadership Team and Lead Councillors were present to answer questions.

The committee asked questions:

Q: What state will the reserves be in at the end?

A: The reserve usage has been set out in the 23/24 budget and has taken account of the forecast that was available in December 2022.

Q: How is the financial position changed since September 2022?

A: The financial position has deteriorated due to housing costs from the forecasts in September 2022

Q: How are we going to rectify the use of agency staff?

A: We do not wish to rely on agency staff but there are occasions when this is necessary. Capacity shortages have affected the Revenues and Benefits area due to the additional government grant schemes they have been required to administer –

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some of this has been funded by government. The essential nature of the service, i.e. supporting the most vulnerable people in our town, meant we needed to fill the gaps with temporary staff. A restructure will be completed shortly which will set the establishment for the team moving forward.

Q: Why has there been a lack in income from sports centre car parks?

A: Income from the car park has fallen but the sports centres attendance is up. This is to be reviewed.

Q: What are we doing as a Council to consider the changes and the increased cost that we're likely to face with refuge?

A: This has been flagged as a significant financial risk and there is a meeting planned for Friday to understand the details and enable our planning.

Q: Can Cornwallis car park be reopened on a temporary basis?

A: No, this is not possible.

Q: Will there be money from Government for the changes to green waste?

A: There is a Government allocation for communications but additional work may need to be funded.

Resolved (Unanimously)

To note 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. 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.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 7.15 pm)