

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 JULY 2023

Present: Councillors Patmore (Chair), Sinden (Vice-Chair), Bacon, Carr, Cooke, Foster, Hay, Hilton and Webb

Officers: Coral Harding, Victoria Conheady, Kit Wheeler, Stephen Dodson, Amy Terry, Cameron Morley, Natasha Tewkesbury, Mary Kilner, Simon Jones

Members of Cabinet Present: Councillor Batsford, Evans, Roark and Rogers

## 140. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Councillor Roberts and Turner

## 141. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor	Item	Interest
Cllr Webb	4,5,6	Personal – ESCC Councillor
Cllr Hay	4,5,6	Personal – ESCC Councillor
Cllr Hilton	4,5,6	Personal – ESCC Councillor

## 142. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 29/03/23

**RESOLVED** - That the minutes of the meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2023 be approved as a true record.

## 143. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME (2022/23) UPDATE

The Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Officer updated the report is for quarter 4 2022/23. The Recommendations haven't been finalised and can be put in a report at the annual meeting later this month. They can then be forwarded to the Cabinet Portfolio holders. Some areas were not completed this included meeting Seachange and a constitutional change asking for a 6 monthly report to Full Council on Motions. Going forward the Equalities working group will continue and the committee will continue their work on financial monitoring and the asset management review.

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The Chair thanked Councillors Carr, Hay and Pragnell for the Finance Review and thanks were given to Councillors Carr and Arthur for their work on equalities work program. Thanks was given to Councillor Jobson for her work on living environment.

The Committee discussed to ask Southern Water to attend a meeting with Overview and Scrutiny. Councillor Batsford updated that he has had contact with Southern Water and will pass the details to the Chair

### **Resolved (Unanimously)**

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

**That the committee would like to give their thanks to previous committee members, Cabinet and Officers for their contributions and support with the work programme.**

### **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.

Overview and Scrutiny committee appreciates the support it receives within the organisation. The committee recognises that working together produces a better outcome for the council and the public.

### **144. PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTER 4 2022/23 AND UPDATE ON Q1 PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

The Chair explained this is to review January to April and gave thanks that moving forward the time between the data being collated and reviewed will be shorter and that Q1 for 23/24 will be available at the August meeting.

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

#### **Q: How will the Portfolio holders scrutinise their budgets this year?**

Cllr Batsford answered that there are regular meetings line managers and with the senior leadership team. There are also monthly monitoring reports coming to Cabinet. The committee requested a break down of what budget falls under which Portfolio. Cllr Rogers answered this work has already started and reviewing how and where climate change fits within their portfolios.

#### **Q: Can the Climate Change Targets be improved?**

Cllr Evans answered I have just taken on this portfolio and will be reviewing. However all Service Areas now have a Climate Change KPI and will be reporting from Q2 on how they are responding to the Climate Change Action Plan. The committee asked for

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what reason all targets are now amber in quarter 4. The Deputy Chief executive explained that the Climate Change Manager had left and work had to be paused.

**Q: Since the close of the Tourist information centre what provisions are in place for this summer?**

Cllr Batsford answered a few sites have been reviewed to provide a comprehensive service to tourists this summer.

The Committee asked if this too late for this summer. Councillor Batsford confirmed it would be better if the tourist information centre was already open. There is a workshop in October with all the attractions in Hastings coming together to look at 2024 tourism marketing campaign.

**Q: Is Carbon neutrality by 2030 a manageable target?**

Cllr Evans answered that the Government's target is 2050 and Hastings is reliant on government interventions this will be a major challenge and as retro fitting homes is the biggest challenge the target for carbon neutrality across Hastings will probably not be met. However, the council may be able to meet aspects of carbon neutrality by 2030 and work starting to change the waste collection fleet are being changed to HVO.

**Q: How many people presented as homeless? Out of these people how many were prevented from becoming homeless?**

The Deputy Chief Executive explained in quarter 4 of the last financial year, 118 households presented at threat of homelessness, 39 households prevented from becoming homeless, 145 household presented as homeless and 37 households relieved from becoming homeless. The Interim Head of Housing has offered to come and do a Q&A session for O&S.

**Q: Does the Strategic Housing KPI need changing to meet 500 homes by 2027?**

The Deputy Chief Executive explained Affordable housing target has been 75 homes per year for several years and that we have only hit that target once in the last five years. Whilst we are aspiring to reach our 500 Affordable Homes target, homes won't be developed out evenly across years and we are aware that some homes that were forecast to be delivered in this financial year will be delayed.

**Q: Can affordable housing be ensured on Harrow Lane playing fields**

Cllr Batsford answered that he is confident there will be. Orbit are the owners of the land and are one of Homes England's chosen organizations to deliver the affordable housing targets for the whole country.

**Q: Only 1 FPN has been issued. What are the reasons for this? Why is the target amber?**

Cllr Rogers answered that FPN's are not issued for anti-social behaviour as prosecutions are used. The Dog PSPO had run out and no FPN's have been able to

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be issued. The new dog PSPO is in place. The Committee asked for the public FPN description to be reviewed. The Head of Community and Regulatory Services stated the target should be red for quarter 4 but the target has been reviewed for the coming year.

### **Q: Will that the White Rock Theatre will run without subsidies?**

Cllr Batsford answered he is confident in the future of the White Rock Theatre. It is being marketed for lease now. There are bookings now going past February 2024 working in conjunction with the current operator, which will be novated across to the successful future tenant.

### **Q: Why has audit got all red indicators?**

The Chief Finance Officer explained that due to staffing levels targets were not being met. At the next Audit Committee, the new Internal Auditors will set out their plan for the year with the intention to meet the kpi's for the year. The Chair highlighted that Overview and Scrutiny and Audit can work together with the Chair and Vice chair of Audit being on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee requested a meeting to review the key performance indicators. The Head of Strategic Programmes suggested adding this as an agenda item at the next meetings.

### **Q: Is the new ChurchFields Business Centre in use?**

The Deputy Chief Executive answered that the Centre opened in April and 12 of the 29 units are full.

### **Resolved (Unanimously)**

- 1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review performance for Quarter 4 2022/23**
- 2. To note that the report provides performance information one quarter behind actual quarters.**
- 3. That O&S are content with the agreed Q1 and ongoing quarters PI's for 23/24, subject to review at the following O&S meeting.**
- 4. 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.

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4. That due to committee cycles the data provided to O&S is for Q4 but Q4 has been completed therefore some data may not represent the up-to-date information on performance.
5. That O&S are sighted on and agree performance indicators for Q1 and ongoing quarters for 23/24.

### **145. FINANCIAL MONITORING OUTTURN REPORT FOR 2022/23 - TO END OF MARCH 2023 (PERIOD 12)**

The Deputy Chief Finance Officer introduced the report. The budget for total expenditure was 16.85 million and the draft outturn is 18.14 million, leading to a 1.29 million overspend. The largest area of overspend is homelessness, where an overspend of £2.384m is reported. This is due to the rising cost of temporary housing coupled with the increase in the number of clients presented as homeless. It is hoped the Housing and Homelessness task force will be able to reduce this over the next year. Revenues and benefits service was overspent by £264,000 due to a delay in the planned restructure of the service, leading to an increase in the use of expensive agency staff. Housing benefit payments overspend of £454,000 which is due to lower than budgeted income from the housing benefits overpayment recoveries. Dangerous Structures overspend of £407,000 was for safety work at Battle Rd. Debt repayment costs are under spent by £1,787,000, and that's due to a lower MRP charge, reduced borrowing and increased investment income. Total expenditure was therefore overspent by £1.289 million at the year end.

The Chief Finance Officer explained there is a new appendix included in each monthly report. If the savings actual achievement percentage of last year is met this year, there would be an impact of additional savings of £300k being required to be found in year to remain on line with current forecasts.

Questions were asked by the Committee:

#### **Q: Will any of the savings continue into 2023-24?**

The Chief Finance Officer explained that MRP saving will be seen into the new year.

#### **Q: Is the asset management plan anymore ready than last year?**

The Chief Finance Officer answered it has progressed. Consultants have had meetings with the Estates team and further meetings to be had this week with the Finance team.

#### **Q: Why is there an underspend in Street Cleaning?**

Cllr Roark explained that this had been discussed with the Head of Environment and Operations and the underspend was due to vacancies within the Street Cleaning team. Thanks were given to the team who continued the service through this time and the vacancies have now been mostly filled.

#### **Q: Why is there an underspend on protection works for the reservoirs?**

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The Head of Strategic Programmes explained there are still a few more works to be completed.

### **Q: Is there concerns with underspends in the Capital Budget?**

The Chief Finance Officer explained that though understands are seen as a good thing these resources could have been used elsewhere within the council.

The Committee highlighted that the report states that if the temporary accommodation expenditure and budget cannot be controlled then a Section 114 notice would have to be issued. Councillor Evans explained an asset review is taking place.

### **Q: How many properties have been purchased in the housing acquisition programme?**

The Deputy Chief Executive answered that 14 properties are under offer.

### **Q: Is there a conflict of interest having officers on the board of Hastings Housing Company?**

The Chief Finance Officer explained that he is not on the board, so he represents the major shareholder which in this case is Hastings Borough Council and is responsible for holding the Directors to account. The council requires directors to sit on the board and plans will be brought forward to explain the future plans of the Housing Company by the directors, a lot of whom are new in their roles on the board.

### **Q: Are lack of interest payments not received a loss of income?**

The Chief Finance Officer explained that the Hastings Housing Company was loaned money by the Council and are seen as a good payer. The Hastings Housing Company has not met all their payments and are behind. There have been several discussions between the housing company directors and the managing agent in terms of sorting out a repayment plan.

### **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 outturn financial position for the year end and particularly areas of over and under spend. The outturn position for 2022/23 can be used to inform budget monitoring for the 2023/24 financial year.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 7.41 pm)