

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5 DECEMBER 2023

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

Officers: Jane Hartnell (Chief Executive), Kit Wheeler (Chief Finance Officer), Stephen Dodson (Head of Strategic programmes), Natasha Tewkesbury (Head of Community and Regulatory Services)

Members of Cabinet Present: Councillor Barnett

## 5. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Councillors Bacon, Roberts and Turner. Councillor Carr apologised for lateness.

## 6. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

| Councillor | Item | Interest                   |
|------------|------|----------------------------|
| Cllr Webb  | All  | Personal – ESCC Councillor |
| Cllr Hay   | All  | Personal – ESCC Councillor |

## 7. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 09/08/23

Councillor Webb requested reports regarding the Hastings Housing Company by resent to committee members.

**RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2023 be approved as a true record.**

## 8. QUARTER 2 WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT

The Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Officer presented the report. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee have had additional meetings since the last quarterly meeting. This includes a call in of the Land and Property Disposal Program, review of the Town Deal program update, a review of the LGA Finance Peer review and giving consultation on the proposed Budget Planning. The Overview and Scrutiny sent recommendations to Cabinet.

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The Chair thanked all the members for their time and input at these meetings.

Councillor Hilton requested for an update on the tourism and culture strategy to be brought to the committee.

## **Resolved (Unanimously)**

**That the committee note the progress of the Overview and Scrutiny work programme for the 2023/24 municipal year and follow up actions.**

## **Reasons**

To 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.

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

The Head of Strategic Programmes presented the report. The focus has been on Finance and Housing, but most services areas have imputed.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked questions.

The Chair asked regarding the redevelopment of Cornwallis Car Park and if it's still in the tendering process. The Chief Executive answered an update on the redevelopment of Cornwallis Street will be given soon.

The Chair asked regarding procurement of the 50 units of temporary accommodation. The Head of Strategic Programmes answered 12 homes have now been let and in addition by the 15th of November the Council has purchased 13 homes as part of the accommodation acquisition programme with 19 in conveyancing and a further 27 in the consideration for an offer given the initial cabinet approval for 50 homes, we'll be seeking further authority to add to the programme. The Committee discussed the Harrow lane site and Councillor Barnett gave an update that Orbit housing plan to have houses built by this time next year.

The Chair asked regarding how critical it is to reduce households in temporary accommodation to the 375 target. The Chief Finance Officer answered it is very critical and it is planned to have an updated finance report for quarter three soon.

The Chair asked regarding the way the target for number of affordable homes that have been built was reported? The Head of Strategic Programmes answered the target needs revising and will be updated.

Councillor Carr asked regarding the social housing allocation scheme and when a report or feedback will be available. Councillor Barnett answered the report is not ready yet but will be available soon.

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Councillor Hilton asked for an update regarding Community Safety Partnership. Head of Community and Regulatory Services answered the information that had been provided to councillors are the priorities for this year of the Community Safety Partnership. These are delivered by different agencies of the partnership and updates are provided at each quarterly meeting. The partnership does not have quantitative measures in place.

**Action:** Request further information to be collected from the Community Safety Partnership.

Councillor Cooke asked regarding homelessness cases prevented. The Chief Executive answered that officers have been employed to make home visits to assist with preventing homelessness.

Councillor Carr asked about FPN's and why the status is amber. It was requested the status be reviewed.

Councillor Hilton asked when the last crime reduction strategy was completed? The Head of Community and Regulatory Services explained it's a function of the Community Safety Partnership though this can be checked.

Councillor Cooke asked regarding climate change. The Chief Executive answered that a report is planned for early next year.

Councillor Carr asked regarding the delays to audited accounts. The Chief Finance Officer answered that the 20-21 accounts will be audited this year. Some Councils have managed to get the accounts signed off but there are also a lot of Councils who haven't had their accounts audited. It was highlighted a report from the External Auditor will be discussed at the Audit Committee on 7<sup>th</sup> December.

Councillor Hay asked regarding the staff pay offer. The Chief Executive answered that the pay level was agreed in November. The Unions will start discussions earlier next year.

The Chair asked if there will be new KPI's if the budget is agreed. The Head of Strategic Programmes answered the Corporate Plan will run from 2024 to 2028 and there will be new KPI's agreed in line with this.

Councillor Barnett highlighted that staff sickness has reduced and attendance at cultural facilities have increased over last year.

The Chair asked regarding why Cabinet do not review performance. Councillor Barnett answered that performance is reviewed before the report comes to Overview and Scrutiny.

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## Resolved (Unanimously)

1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review performance for statutory performance indicators for Quarter 2.
2. 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

## 10. QUARTER 2 FINANCIAL UPDATE REPORT

The Chief Finance Officer presented the report. The Financial position forecast has changed with a variance of £2.5m overspent. Temporary accommodation cost is still the greatest pressure on the organisation. The Chair thanked the Chief Finance Officer and highlighted the commercial property income as a positive.

The committee asked questions:

The Chair asked if the number of temporary accommodation clients have come down? The Chief Finance Officer answered that the latest figures have not been reviewed but to have a real impact there needs to be an increase in affordable housing.

Councillor Sinden asked regarding an underspend on disabled facility grants? The Chief Finance Officer answered the underspend is regarding the way staffing was budgeted. Councillor Barnett responded that the staffing levels have gone up to help residents access disabled facility grants.

Councillor Cooke asked regarding the Chief Finance Officer area overspend of £1.3m. The Chief Finance Officer explained the saving figures are held in the Chief Finance officer section and if the targets are not achieved it will show as an overspend. At the budget discussions it was discussed if only 80% is achieved this will equate to £1m. The total cost of temporary accommodation has increased.

Councillor Carr asked regarding the overspend in Revenues and Benefits? The Chief Finance Officer explained the restructure should be complete by the end of December but the overspend has happened from paying for agency staff.

Councillor Patmore asked regarding the Housing task force. The Head of Programmes answered the extra staff bought in has been successful and all posts have been completed.

Councillor Cooke asked regarding the overspend in the Environmental and Operations section. The Chief Finance Officer explained this was a use of earmarked reserves.

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Councillor Patmore and Councillor Carr asked regarding the cost of St Mary in the Castle maintenance. Councillor Barnett answered that there are additional costs and discussions are trying to be concluded as soon as possible. Councillor Carr highlighted if the equipment inside is not used they will become unusable. The Chief Executive explained health and safety checks are being completed.

### **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 2024/25 budget and the impact of the 2023/24 outturn on the reserves position.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 7.08 pm)