

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

6 MARCH 2024

Present: Councillors Patmore (Chair), Sinden (Vice-Chair), Batsford, Carr, Collins, Cooke, Evans, Foster, Hay, Webb and Rogers

Officers: Jane Hartnell (Chief Executive), Kit Wheeler (Chief Finance Officer), Stephen Dodson (Head of Strategic Programmes), Coral Harding (Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Officer)

Members of Cabinet Present: Councillors Hilton, Haffenden and Barnett

15. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Councillor Bacon (Substituted by Councillor Rogers)

16. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

17. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 05/12/23 & 05/02/24

RESOLVED - That the minutes of the meeting held on 5th December 23 and 5th February 24 be approved as a true record.

18. QUARTER 3 WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT

The Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Officer presented the report. The Overview and Scrutiny committee has provided feedback for the budget planning and budget. The Equality theme and a review of food waste collection will be handed over to the new committee. The living environment theme will need a new lead. There is a new corporate plan coming and the performance dashboard will be set in line with the new corporate plan and the committee can then review the performance indicators. The committee have requested to speak with Southern Water though no date has been confirmed.

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.

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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.

19. QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT

The Head of Strategic Programmes presented the report. Setting out performance information up to the end of quarter 3, i.e. 31st December 2023.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked questions.

Cllr Patmore asked when the East Hill Cliff Railway issues will be addressed and when it will re-open? Cllr Hilton agreed to respond with a written answer.

Cllr Foster asked regarding apprentices employed per a quarter. The Chief Executive answered a response was given regarding apprentices in November, the council currently has 3 and others will be considered when possible.

Action: The committee asked for the performance indicator to be reviewed.

Cllr Patmore asked regarding Audit and if there is an update on accounts being audited. Cllr Barnett answered the accounts from previous years haven't been completed and this is a national issue. The Chief Finance Officer explained that the 20/21 accounts will go to the April Audit committee. There should be a 23/24 value for money audit available in the summer.

Cllr Carr asked regarding Housing Strategy and why the performance indicator is green when the Housing Strategy was meant to be available for pre-scrutiny. Cllr Hilton answered the work on the Housing Strategy is ongoing and that she would be happy for the Housing Strategy to be available for pre-scrutiny. The target was still Green as of December 23 but by year-end is likely to be red.

Action: The committee requested for the tracker to be moved to Housing Strategy

Cllr Patmore asked regarding a drop in social media interaction. Cllr Hilton answered an update would be requested. The Chief Executive explained data from twitter is no longer available.

Cllr Carr asked when the dog PSPO's will be commenced. As there is a deleted post in the warden service, will the target be reviewed? Cllr Haffenden answered there should be an update regarding dog PSPO's next week.

Action: The committee request the PSPO target to be reviewed

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Cllr Patmore explained it is difficult reviewing figures from December in March. The housing figures do not seem to have plateaued as has been suggested elsewhere. Cllr Barnett answered the demand for housing has plateaued, but the cost has continued to increase.

Action: The Committee asked that cost figures, separate to the demand figures are included in the performance dashboard

Cllr Patmore asked regarding the performance indicator for ending rough sleeping and what is being measured. The Head of Strategic Programmes answered this will be reviewed with the Head of Housing and Cllr Willis. The Chair highlighted that some figures are as whole number percentages and others are there as fractions.

Action: The Committee asked for figures to be uniform throughout the performance indicators

Resolved (Unanimously)

- 1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review performance for statutory performance indicators for Quarter 3.**
- 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. That O&S and the public can review performance and highlight both achievements and areas of concern

20. QUARTER 3 FINANCIAL UPDATE REPORT

The Chief Finance Officer presented the report. The Council is still in an overspend position but is better than the earlier predictions. Areas highlighted is the closure of the East Hill Lift and the financial impact this has from a reduction in income. There is an £81k reduction in the costs of housing, but overall there is still a overspend in Housing.

The committee asked questions:

Cllr Batsford asked if there is an update on Shared Services that was agreed at Full Council? Cllr Hilton answered that there an officer experienced in supporting shared services work creating an assessment matrix for each service area to be assessed against. Cllr Batsford highlighted it is unfortunate that there was not a response to a request sent by the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny. The Chief Executive answered that a response was sent on 14th February.

Cllr Webb asked about Hasting Housing Company and why a report has not yet been produced? The Chief Finance Officer answered a report will be produced after May.

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Cllr Carr asked when the budget allocation for supporting the review of the Council's governance system was withdrawn and who made the decision. Cllr Hilton answered that due to the Council's financial challenges and capacity the review was put on hold. There are some constitutional changes coming to the next full council. The Chief Finance Officer explained that the report should read there has been no expenditure this year.

Cllr Foster asked regarding works at Battle Road being completed but there being a difference since quarter 2. The Chief Finance Officer answered that expenditure may have been on another dangerous structure which would be covered by the same budget, but that this narrative will be reviewed.

Cllr Sinden asked regarding staff pay rises. The Chief Finance Officer answered that this year 5% rise is built into the budget.

Cllr Carr asked about progress with the culture and tourism strategy. Cllr Hilton answered there will be two tourism campaigns coming up. There is a plan to restart the cultural leadership group and there is a strand of funding that the Town Board will be able to spend. Cllr Carr asked regarding international tourism. Cllr Hilton answered that overseas work will be undertaken on behalf of the council by 1066 Country. Cllr Patmore asked for confirmation that the Council has left 1066 Country but are now paying them to do work. Cllr Hilton confirmed payments are made to 1066 Country to cover the international market.

Cllr Collins asked about the additional election officer being employed to assist with voter ID. The Chief Executive will update with an answer from the elections manager. Also requested was information regarding how the council is assisting hard to reach residents to understand about the new ID rules. Cllr Haffenden answered there have been social media updates regarding voter ID and assistance available from the Council and there is advertising going out on bus stops.

Action: Request update from Elections Manager

Cllr Collins asked about the insurance budget for the Council. The Chief Finance Officer answered there is an insurance risk reserve. The insurance budget is not published but it is reviewed annually. Cllr Carr recommended a review of how emergencies are dealt with and how the Council works with other agencies.

Cllr Carr asked regarding the green investment fund and what is the plan for it. Cllr Hilton answered that climate change is affecting the town and a proper climate adaptation strategy needs to be created. Cllr Batsford expressed the need for all Council buildings to be fit for purpose and the lowest possible carbon emissions. Cllr Hilton expressed a hope that a cross party climate change group can be established after the election.

Cllr Patmore highlighted EV charging points and that they should be making money. There was some confusion about the information available regarding the total and costs of EV charging and electricity costs. Cllr Haffenden committed to getting a clear update and responding to the committee.

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Action: Clarification and update re: costs of EV electricity and future proposals to be circulated to the committee.

Cllr Carr asked regarding St Mary in the Castle and what state the building is in and if the lights and sound equipment has been maintained? Cllr Hilton answered that only health and safety checks are being completed.

Cllr Evans spoke regarding the green investment fund and the need for a specialist to review solar panels and review the decorative lighting. Cllr Hilton will request an update regarding the decorative lighting. Cllr Evans highlighted there is opportunities to apply for external funding being missed due to staff capacity. Cllr Barnett highlighted that there has been funding secured for an urban drainage specialist.

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. 7.10 pm)