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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

26 JANUARY 2017

Present: Councillors Webb (Chair), Howard (Vice-Chair), Bacon, Batsford, Cooke, Dowling, Rankin, Turner and Wincott

Lead Members in attendance: Councillors Chowney and Forward

Apologies for absence were noted for Councillor Charman and Atkins

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Councillors declared an interest in the minutes:

Councillor	Minute	Interest
Forward	2 – Draft Corporate Plan 2017/18 to 2018/19 and 3 – Consultation on the Revenue Budget 2016/17 (Revised) and 2017/18, plus Capital Programme 2017/18 to 2018/19	Prejudicial – she leases a property to the Social Lettings Agency. Prejudicial – she is a Trustee of the Foreshore Trust.
Dowling	3 – Consultation on the Revenue Budget 2016/17 (Revised) and 2017/18, plus Capital Programme 2017/18 to 2018/19	Personal – her wife is employed in the Community Contact Centre.
Howard	3 – Consultation on the Revenue Budget 2016/17 (Revised) and 2017/18, plus Capital Programme 2017/18 to 2018/19	Personal – he is a member of Unison.
Wincott	3 – Consultation on the Revenue Budget 2016/17 (Revised) and 2017/18, plus Capital Programme 2017/18 to 2018/19	Personal – he is a ward Councillor for Ore.

2. DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2017/18 TO 2018/19

The Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Manager presented the draft Corporate Plan 2017/18 to 2018/19. Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were invited to comment on the draft plan, as part of the consultation period.

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The committee commented that the refreshed layout of the corporate plan had improved the accessibility of the document. The council's activities had been grouped around 5 thematic areas of cleaner and safer, support when it's needed, driving economic growth, strategic planning and income generation. Iconography from the council's new website has also been used throughout the plan and the text has been written in plain English.

Discussion took place regarding opportunities which might attract new business to town. The Director of Operational Services commented that a wide range of measures contributed to creating a business friendly environment. These include a safe, clean town, cultural offer, good schools as well as specific business support measures. The council participated at County and regional levels to encourage investment and its planning policies were intended to provide opportunities to encourage business development

Consideration was given to potential performance indicator targets for income generation. The council had recently appointed an Income Generation Manager to lead and support income generation activities. The Income Generation Manager would work closely with the Income Generation Board to set appropriate targets and timescales for individual projects and the overall income generation programme. Staff across the council would be engaged in the council's new approach to income generation and encouraged to submit ideas and suggestions. The council would also look at examples of good practice from other authorities who have already developed similar income generation programmes.

The Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Manager added that the performance indicator targets for 2017/18 would be set in June 2017, once members have had the opportunity to consider the year-end performance information from 2016/17.

The draft corporate plan stated that the council would continue to support Higher Education provision in the town and the development of provision to succeed the University of Brighton. The Director of Operational Services advised that the College has set up a University Centre which was to be welcomed. The 3 local councils would continue to seek further growth and there were ongoing discussion.

The committee considered options to increase the supply of affordable housing in the town. The council continued to work with Housing Associations and developers on this issue. The committee were mindful of recent changes to planning legislation, in respect of the provision of affordable housing on new developments. Councillor Forward, having declared a prejudicial interest in the Social Lettings Agency, left the chamber when this matter was discussed.

RESOLVED that the comments of the Budget Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the council's draft corporate plan for 2017/18 – 2018/19 be referred to Budget Cabinet for consideration

The reason for this decision was:

To ensure the joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee comments can be considered by the Budget Cabinet, prior to final recommendations being made to the Full Council.

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3. CONSULTATION ON THE REVENUE BUDGET 2016/17 (REVISED) AND 2017/18, PLUS CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2017/18 TO 2018/19

The Assistant Director, Financial Services and Revenues, presented a report to consult members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the revenue budget and capital programme, as part of the public consultation process. The report noted significant ongoing reductions to the council's funding and ongoing uncertainty regarding the economic conditions the council would be operating in. Significant risks to the authority were also posed by the compensation claim in respect of Hastings Pier and business rate appeals. The council continued to pursue opportunities to achieve savings, efficiencies and generate additional income.

Discussion took place regarding options to retain staff within the authority, given the limited increase in pay across the public sector. Members were mindful that retaining key staff was key to the council's income generation activities. The committee were advised that staff were engaged with the income generation programme, as a way of improving the long-term sustainability of council services. The council continued to develop the training and career progression opportunities it offered for staff.

Members noted that demand for council services were likely to increase over the coming year. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were due to receive an update from the Corporate Customer Services Manager on the channel shift in customer enquiries, as an increasing number of council services were made available online.

Discussion took place regarding the social lettings agency. Councillor Forward, having declared a prejudicial interest in this matter, left the chamber during the debate. Members were advised that the social lettings agency was not accepting any new leases until the government's review of homelessness payments. The social lettings agency was a key initiative for addressing homelessness in the town, and the council would review the scheme once the government had clarified future grant arrangements.

Members noted that the selective licensing scheme had achieved a small surplus over the past year. The Assistant Director, Financial Services and Revenues, advised that this surplus would be used to repay the reserves used when the scheme was operating with a deficit. The initiative was still forecast to break-even over the life of the scheme.

The East Sussex Procurement Hub had undertaken an exercise on behalf of the council in respect of the publication of public notices. Although a limited number of companies could meet the required criteria, the Hastings Independent Press had won the tender. The paper was published fortnightly and had a circulation of around 14,000.

Discussion took place regarding the proposed closure of public conveniences in Ore Village. A suggestion had been put forward during the consultation period to introduce

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a charge for using the toilets, although it was difficult to estimate whether the income from the charge could cover the cost of maintaining the facilities.

A saving was proposed by removing a council tax exemption period for properties undergoing structural alteration. Concerns were raised that this may discourage residents from improving neglected properties. The Assistant Director, Financial Services and Revenues, responded that the proposal reflected the council's financial position, a council tax support scheme had already been approved which was intended to protect vulnerable sections of the community.

Members were mindful that the budget setting process included the deletion 8.9 full time equivalent (FTE) posts. A number of the posts identified for deletion were already vacant. The Director of Corporate Services and Governance explained that the council sought to minimise the number of compulsory redundancies by exploring options to re-deploy staff where possible. A comprehensive programme of service reviews was also underway across the council, which would engage teams across the organisation.

Discussion took place regarding the impact of changes to interest rates on the council's investment strategy. The Assistant Director, Financial Services and Revenues, commented that interest rates were expected to remain low for some time, and any increases would happen gradually. The council would continue to monitor its approach to investment to reflect broader economic conditions.

It was noted that members were issued with parking permits to assist them with carrying out their duties; consideration was given as to whether parking scratch cards would be a cheaper alternative. The committee requested that revised guidance be circulated to members and staff on the use of car parks around the town, to ensure parking remained available in the town centre. The committee were advised that routine works would be undertaken in the car park at Rock-A-Nore to remove pot holes. Councillor Forward, having declared a prejudicial interest in this matter left the chamber during the debate.

Members noted an item in the capital programme to introduce a new ERP system, which would replace the council's existing financial, income, and HR systems. The project was being delivered in partnership with Rother District Council.

The committee discussed the council's property disposal programme. The Assistant Director, Financial Services and Revenues, explained that each disposal was considered on a case by case basis, the council was also exploring potential additional income generation opportunities from the land and assets it owned.

Consideration was given to ongoing cultural regeneration of the town. Members commented that the events to mark the 950th Anniversary of the Battle of Hastings, including the ROOT1066 festival, had attracted around 75,000 visitors to the town and approximately 4,000 local people had participated in the events. The festival had also developed the profile of Hastings as an exciting place to visit.

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Members were advised that the additional income from investment properties outlined in the budget, included rental income from the industrial estate the council recently purchased.

RESOLVED that members comments will be reported back to the Budget Cabinet on 13 February 2017

The reason for this decision was:

Members views are sought as part of the consultation process.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 7.32 pm)

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