

Briefing Note



Subject: Operational Services Directorate – 2016/17 review of performance exceptions

Submitted to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Introduction

1. At the end of the year it is pleasing to report that the overwhelming majority of targets have been achieved and increased performance in crucial areas like planning and waste. There are also other areas where staff have achieved outcomes against significant challenges in ways that are a credit to them and the council.
2. As always there are some concerns for the future given the increased pressure on services and the challenges in achieving a sustainable budget position.

Areas where targets are not met

Planning Performance

3. Although targets for planning were not fully met the service has been performing to target for the bulk of the financial year and was only held back by legacy of low performance from Q1. The Asst. Director and Planning Manager anticipate this performance will be consolidated in 2017/18. Members should also be encouraged by the performance against new targets set by national government which shows little risk of the council not being considered as high performing. The strongest congratulations are due to Eleanor Evans and all the development management team for this achievement.

Chalet Beach Huts

4. It had been intended that 12 new chalets beach huts would be in situ for the council from the beginning of this financial year. This has not been achieved primarily because of the sickness of the responsible manager who has now subsequently left. It is anticipated these will be installed by the end of June and thus available for the bulk of the summer season.

White Rock Area Masterplan

5. There has been a delay of 2-3 months in the production of the masterplan for the White Rock area due to Academy of Urbanism work. The draft identifies key development options which will inform the production of the Area Action Plan Issues and Options document later in 2017/18. There has been a delay in the production of the Area Action Plan document because of the need to undertake transport modelling studies. The quality of the proposals are of crucial importance and colleagues have been right in putting the timescale back to allow this

Cultural Strategy Action Plan

6. There has been a delay in distributing the cultural strategy action plan. This is because the Cultural Leaders Group has spent a significant period considering the issues and particularly how an action plan can be delivered that embraces both Hastings and 1066 Country. It became clear during the Root 1066 Festival how useful this kind of partnership is in developing and projecting a strong cultural product. Additionally, the senior manager was significantly diverted by the Festival – which was a very considerable success for the Borough.

Town Centre and White Rock Area Action Plan

7. The development of the town centre and White Rock area action plan has been rescheduled. It has become apparent through the work of the team that a radical rethink of the future of this part of the town requires a significant study of the transport issues. It is only through this that we and the county council in its role as highways authority will know (for example) if it is possible to restrict traffic flow or even cut off traffic from parts of the seafront. The county council will commission the study and has indicated it will part fund it. This study is likely to be available at the end of the calendar year and impact on the town centre as well as White Rock. However, it seems entirely rational to understand these issues before proceeding further.

Affordable Housing

8. No new affordable housing completions occurred during the year. This is disappointing and is explained by several factors. Partly it is a feature of housing development that building contracts will often span more than one year making annualized targets problematic. The target was exceeded in the previous year and is likely to be exceeded in 2017/2018 given the housing programmes currently in development. However Housing Association finances, site viability and reduced funding programmes by government are all impacting upon new supply. Officers will be redoubling their efforts in 2017/2018 to ensure that more affordable housing can be achieved in future years.

Homelessness

9. The upward trend in homelessness applications and acceptances has continued and risen sharply during 2016/2017. The reasons are multiple and complex but would include the impact of the welfare benefit reforms, higher rents in both the social and private rented sectors and an overall lack of supply in terms of new lets. More worryingly a number of families approaching the council are on the

increase resulting in much higher temporary accommodation costs. Funding arrangements for temporary housing measures have been changed by central government and options for revising our current approach are being considered. This would include for example an option to acquire property directly for this purpose. This will be subject to a future cabinet report if considered viable. It should also be noted that the government is to extend Councils responsibility for homelessness to many single people not presently statutorily protected in 2017/2018. The council is exploring ways in which it can promote a 'Housing First' approach for entrenched rough sleepers, utilising funds recently secured through a central government bidding round and health authority monies.

Social Lettings Agency

10. The acquisition of further leases was put on hold early in the year pending a review of the funding arrangements announced by central government. Funding for 2017/2018 will now form part of the temporary housing grant referred to above. A review of the impact of this on the scheme is underway and conclusions will be presented to Cabinet in July.

Achievements

It is truly difficult to highlight every area of work during 2016/17 that needs to be recognised because there are so many of them. Despite increased pressures the council's staff continues to deliver with enthusiasm and commitment and nearly every major activity involves colleagues from a variety of operational and corporate teams. In addition to the area highlighted above I draw members attention to:

Waste Contract

11. The performance targets in the corporate plan have been achieved and this reflects the hard work of the waste team, contract centre staff and the efforts of the service managers to develop decent working relationships with Kier for the remaining period of the contract. In terms of missed bins the target of 130 missed bins per 100,000 has been exceeded with an end of year performance of 110. This is largely due to really good performance in the latter part of the year after a poor start.
12. In terms of street cleaning overall the year-end average was only 4% failures against our target of no more than 5%, so this target was achieved. This means that the pass rate was 96%, which is actually good. However, it is clear that in a number of times and places the service needs to improve and the waste team have recently agreed an improvement action plan which includes an additional barrow operative working in Central St Leonards. Following some poor street cleansing and bin emptying along the seafront in early April, additional seasonal resources have been deployed resulting in good standards over the Easter and May Day weekends. We are monitoring Kier's performance in this area during some of the busy weekends over the remainder of the summer season.
13. There are still issues requiring to be addressed in relation to the collection service, in particular with the garden waste. The number of customers has

increased and the rounds need rebalancing, staff are working with Kier to address this. Customers will be given 4 weeks' notice of changes and Kier have funded an additional free 3 months subscription for a small number of impacted customers.

Selective Licensing

14. Extremely good progress has been made with the implementation of the selective licensing scheme. Close to 4,500 licence applications were received at year end and over 2,750 licenses issued. The number of private sector dwellings brought into line with the statutory standard has as a result well exceeded the annual target.
15. As reported previously the early bird discounted offered at the start of the scheme will require the 5 Year Business Plan to be adjusted over the life of the project. Officers are now clearing the backlog of application and officers are redoubling their efforts to pursue enforcement against the owner's properties that remain unlicensed, to ensure that all properties are licensed and that the project is self-funded over the life of the scheme.

Additional Licensing Scheme

16. The existing additional licensing scheme ended in September. Consultation is currently being carried out on proposals for a replacement additional scheme to be considered by Cabinet in the autumn.

Coastal Space

17. The success of the coastal space programme continues with national recognition in the way of several regeneration awards:

2015 Place-making Award for Using Public Sector-Owned Land and Property and shortlisted for the Housing Innovation Award for Most Innovative Refurbishment Schemes.

2016 National Homes Improvement Council – Home improvements with Community Benefits

18. Phase 1 has been completed and Phase 2 at Winchester house is now on site. SELEP has recognised the importance of the project regionally and confirmed funding to match that being provided by the Council through a planned 3rd Phase. The Housing Finance Institute has awarded the Council their Business Ready Accreditation partly in recognition of the work the Council has undertaken in this area. A report on Phase 3 will be presented to Cabinet in July.

Housing Company

19. Cabinet approval was given in principle for the establishment of a Local authority owned housing company in December. Officers are currently developing the business plan for the first acquisitions in 2017/2018 which will be presented to Cabinet in the summer.

Community Safety

20. Work around community safety and the street community which has involved work at both strategic level to develop an approach that reflects the needs of those sleeping rough or having health/drug/drink issues and the need for a town that is and feels safe and secure for shoppers, visitors and business. Additionally, the practical work in generating physical proposals for the York Gardens roundel and drafting new public space protection orders has been highly significant for those involved
21. Work is continuing with partners to develop a clear “offer” to those facing issues and the Deputy Leader chaired a conference for agencies and community groups involved in this which offers a significant partnership base. Additionally, the council will be augmenting its warden team with a commercial company for a trial of one year with a heavy focus on street cleanliness. Nothing can mean issues “go away” but it is intended that a mix of support and enforcement will help manage issues increasingly faced in both major cities and other coastal towns.

Country Park and Visitor Centre

22. In quarter 4 we received the excellent news that our 2 applications for Interreg and Heritage Lottery grant funding for the new straw bale visitor centre project, had both been approved. The grants amount to about £1.5m over the next 3 years. We are also applying for an additional £170,000 in applications to other funders this summer. The next step is a procurement process to identify suitable contractors, and Officers are progressing this now with the East Sussex Procurement Hub.

Venues

23. 12% increase over the annual target for the numbers of people attending performances at the White Rock Theatre and for the number of visitors to Hastings Museum and Art Gallery. The annual attendance figures for our Leisure Centres was exceeded by over 14,000 (3.5% increase)!
24. Successful bid for a second stage Resilience study to further develop Hastings Museum and Art Gallery.

Funding

25. The Council led the preparation and submission of a third successful application to the Coastal Communities Fund. The grant of £812,770 will fund a range of initiatives to further improve the local economy and promote the seafront as a visitor destination.
26. The Council lead another successful bid (£800,000) for FLAG funding to promote and sustain the fishing industry and associated supply chain.

Sea Defences

27. Successful completion of major beach groyne works to improve our coastal defences. Further work to the Harbour arm will commence shortly.

ROOT 1066

28. ROOT1066 programme, generated very considerable local, regional, national and international publicity for the town. A lot of staff were involved in these events, and I would like to acknowledge the contribution they made to their undoubted success as well as the input of many partners in Hastings, Bexhill and Battle.

Simon Hubbard