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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

29 NOVEMBER 2017

Present: Councillors Webb (Chair), Howard (Vice-Chair), Bacon, Rankin, Turner, Cartwright, Davies and Dowling

Apologies for absence were noted for Councillor Charman and Fitzgerald

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following Councillors declared an interest in the minutes:

Councillor	Minute number	Interest
Forward	13 – Quarter 2 Performance and Financial Monitoring Report	Prejudicial (if social lettings agency is discussed) she owns a rental property which is leased to the social lettings agency
Rankin	13 – Quarter 2 Performance and Financial Monitoring Report	Personal – he owns rental properties

11. MINUTES OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 28 SEPTEMBER 2017

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 28 September 2017 be approved as a correct record of the meeting

12. BRIEFING ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF UNIVERSAL CREDIT

The Revenues and Benefits Service Manager presented an update on the implementation of universal credit. The council went live with a full service for universal credit in December 2016. Since then, there has been a 19% drop in the number of housing benefit customers. The grant the council receives from the government to administer housing benefits has also been reduced by a similar amount.

Discussion took place regarding the impact of the changes on the council's performance indicators. There has been a significant increase in workload for processing changes to council tax reduction claims and this performance indicator target has not been met. Customers need to contact the council more frequently since universal credit was introduced, to inform the team of changes to their income which may affect the amount of council tax support they are entitled to. The council has been working with other authorities in East Sussex to begin developing a new council tax support scheme, which will come into effect from 2019/20. It is likely that the new

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scheme will be based on a series of bands, this means that small changes in a customer's income are unlikely to affect the amount of council tax support they are entitled to. Extensive financial modelling will need to be undertaken to ensure the new scheme is fair for customers and affordable for the council. The proposed scheme will then be subject to a public consultation between June and August 2018.

It was noted that the rise in change of circumstances enquiries for council tax reduction also increased printing and postage costs, which will reduce the savings the council can achieve from its efficiency programme.

Universal credit is only accessible online, the council has therefore been working with Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) to develop a computer skills training programme. The programme ranges from group refresher sessions to one to one support. CAB also offers personal budgeting advice. Staff in the community contact centre have also been undertaking training with the CAB to help them provide advice to customers affected by changes to the welfare system.

The team have been working proactively with customers who may be at risk of falling behind with their council tax payments. This has significantly reduced the number of accounts which have been sent to the bailiffs for recovery.

13. QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

The Director of Corporate Services and Governance and Director of Operational Services presented a report on performance against targets set out in the corporate plan for 2017/18 and other key activities in 2017/18. The report also provided a summary of financial information.

The Director of Operational Services provided an update on street cleansing issues in the town. The council had been developing a recovery plan with the street cleansing contractor, Kier, to address poor performance earlier in the year. Performance after events at the end of the year, such as the Fish Fair and Frost Fair had improved. However, the waste team will continue to work closely with Kier to ensure standards are maintained until the end of the contract.

Discussion took place regarding street cleansing issues on social housing estates in the town. The Director of Operational Services added that the council would look at new ways of working with social housing providers on a range of estate management issues. An action plan was being developed between the council and the largest social housing landlord in the town.

It was noted that a second tendering exercise for a new visitor centre at Hastings Country Park had been unsuccessful. The proposed building was of straw bale construction. The project board recently met with the school of natural building and straw work to develop a new proposition, which would be considered by Cabinet in spring 2018.

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Members noted that two new temporary business units have been installed in the roundel at the town centre, and this had helped to disperse anti-social behaviour in the area. Work was underway to consider longer-term improvements in this part of the town.

The Director of Operational Services agreed to circulate an update on Letstart letting to the committee.

A master-plan for the White Rock area had recently been published. The Director of Operational Services noted that there had been extensive engagement with the local community to develop the plan. The council would need to carry out a review of its planning policy for the area, in order to bring the projects set out in the master plan forward.

Discussion took place about opportunities to attract investment to the area. The Director of Operational Services said that the council had been working with a number of other local authorities and the local MP to improve the rail connection between Hastings and London. He added that this was a very significant project involving improving the track at Ashford, investing in new trains and improving the line between Ashford and Hastings. The council has been working with partners at South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) to develop a focus on the specific challenges faced by coastal towns in the region. Key to supporting growth was increasing the job density in Hastings, which was currently below the national average.

A report on future options for the White Rock Theatre would be considered by Cabinet in December.

A range of cultural events had taken place in the town over the summer season. Members were pleased to note that a further Stade Saturday's programme would take place in 2018. It was noted that many events in the town had seen reductions in their funding over recent years. Consideration was given to the evaluation measures that could be applied after events, particularly to monitor outreach to deprived parts of the town and marginalised communities.

The committee were advised that the quarterly target for major planning applications had not been met. The planning team included three principal planner posts. Two post holders had left and one member of the team was on long term sick leave. It was therefore necessary for the team to employ consultants, while permanent members of the team could be recruited. The committee would need to continue to monitor this matter and be mindful of the likely impact on year-end performance.

The Director of Corporate Services and Governance updated the committee on the development of a new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system, which would replace the existing finance and Human Resources (HR) systems. She added that this project had created a significant additional workload for these teams.

The committee noted that the target for sickness absence had not been met. The HR team had recently trained as mental health first aiders. Periods of sickness absence have impacted on the overall capacity of the organisation, as teams across the council have reduced in size. This will need to be carefully monitored.

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RESOLVED that:

- 1. The committees comments on quarter 2 performance be addressed by the relevant Lead Member(s) with appropriate action and report back**
- 2. That staff be thanked for their hard work and achievements in this quarter**

The reason for this decision was:

To assist the council undertake performance management arrangements.

14. UPDATE ON OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

The Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Manager presented an update on the overview and scrutiny work programme for 2017/18. He noted that an inquiry day to consider the impact of the new homelessness reduction act had been scheduled for January 2018.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 7.54 pm)