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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

5 MARCH 2020

Present: Councillors Davies (Chair), Levane (Vice-Chair), Barnett, Battley, Beaney, Cox, O'Callaghan, Rankin, Turner, Beaver and Webb

41. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Foster, O'Callaghan and Roberts.

Councillor Beaver was present as substitute for Councillor Foster. Councillor Webb was present as substitute for Councillor Roberts.

42. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor	Minute	Reason
Webb	44. & 45.	Personal- East Sussex County Councillor

43. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

In the previous minutes proposed amendments to the draft corporate plan were as followed;

Under the heading 'Tackling poverty, homelessness and ensuring quality housing' on Page 10, add a new bullet point:

'Ensure that all council services are focused at narrowing the gap between communities most in need and the town as a whole'

This amendment to the corporate plan was accepted.

Under 'Delivery our major regeneration schemes', add to the list, as the first item:

- ***'Focused on transforming life opportunities for those with the greatest need'***

This amendment to the corporate plan was accepted.

Add to the 'Key Activities during 2020-21 section on Page 11:

'Publish a new Anti-Poverty Strategy in partnership with key local agencies'

This amendment to the corporate plan was not accepted due to a lack of capacity to pursue this. It was suggested that Overview and Scrutiny could use this as a line of enquiry for next year.

RESOLVED – (Unanimously) that the minutes of the meeting held on the 23 January 2020 be approved.

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The Chair proposed that the order of the agenda be changed and that the Financial Monitoring Quarterly Reports for 2019/20- Quarter 3 be considered first. The committee approved this.

The Chair intended to ask questions of the Lead members and not the Directors for item regarding Performance Monitoring Quarterly Report for 2019/20- Quarter 3.

The Directors gave an update on the Coronavirus situation. Directors advised that currently there were no cases amongst staff or members of public living in the borough. In the event of an outbreak, staff would be asked to backfill essential roles and the councils work would be prioritised. Staff would be able to self-isolate at home and continue working remotely through their laptops.

Contractors have been updating their business continuity plans for essential services such as waste collection to continue. The government is continuing to issue guidance on the situation which the council will appropriately action as necessary.

After no further updates or questions the Directors left the meeting.

The Chair acknowledged that this would be the last meeting for Councillor Chowney as Leader of the Council. Before starting the next item, the Chair thanked the Councillor Chowney for all his support to the committee during his time as Leader.

44. FINANCIAL MONITORING QUARTERLY REPORTS FOR 2019/20 - QUARTER 3

The Assistant Director Financial Services and Revenues presented a report that provided a financial summary of service expenditure at the end of December 2019 (excluding capital financing charges and recharges). Report highlights were given, and Councillors were advised that the projections could change further based on factors such as the impact of Coronavirus on income generation from visitors and staff absence.

Councillors were concerned by the levels of expenditure for homelessness. The council has been buying temporary accommodation and are looking at buying housing through the Housing Company. The length of time that we can borrow from the Public Works Loan Board is limited to 40 years when used to purchase housing. Recently their rates went up which have limited its financial viability.

Councillors also spoke about having a Housing Revenue Account in order to build housing. There were concerns about 'Right to Buy' and how this would affect housing we brought through the Housing Company or housing built through a potential Housing Revenue Account. Bought properties would not be subject to right to buy but built properties would.

Councillors discussed the Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). There had been an increase to this fund but there was still a significant underspend. The Leader, Deputy Leader and the Assistant of Financial Services and Revenues indicated that they had

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been in discussions to look at how to increase the number of people successfully applying.

Councillors raised ward issues they have experienced in relation to DFG. Some of the social housing is unable to be adapted and Councillors would like to see this taken into consideration when new social housing is designed and approved. Other residents are having their housing successfully adapted to meet their needs, but the surrounding landscape can leave residents trapped in their homes due to accessibility issues.

Councillors were also unsure of Social Housing Associations responsibilities towards adapting residents' homes. It was suggested that a more joint way of working was needed. The Lead member would clarify the working arrangements and responsibilities of social housing for DFGs and report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Quarter 4 meeting.

DFG had been traditionally used to make adaptations in people's homes to allow patients to return home from hospital. Patients would then have the adaptations to help aid their recovery and enable them to live their day to day life's. Councillors felt that some patients were being sent home too soon as adaptations were not in place.

Others felt that delays to these works were significant and had contributed to continued ill health. Sometimes delays to adaptations meant that no works had been carried out before the resident's death. A pattern of slippage was causing risks to resident's well-being, and councillors wanted assurances that the council had the skills and capacity to deliver DFG.

Councillors continued to discuss the report included how funds have been allocated to the Bohemia development project through reserves rather than revenue. They also discussed the profit share the Council should be receiving from Blue Reef management. This is not occurring now as a new contract is currently being negotiated.

ACTION

- Lead member to report back and clarify the working arrangements and responsibilities of social housing for DFGs to the Overview and Scrutiny Quarter 4 meeting.

RESOLVED (Unanimously) that:

To accept the contents of the report and the actions within the Conclusion and Management section.

Reasons for Recommendations

To assist the council in understanding the financial position and particularly areas of over and under spend. This assists in identifying areas for review when looking for cost reductions in order to balance the budgets in future years.

45. PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTERLY REPORT FOR 2019/20 - QUARTER 3

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Councillors spoke of how the committee would like to do some more overview work and how reforms to the performance management could help enhance this. There was support for stream lining but acknowledged that this would need to be explored.

The committee would look more at exceptions reporting and looking at the variants for this. There is current work going on to find key performance indicators for this and for live tracking. This would enable Overview and Scrutiny to prepare more in advance. This would be on the website which would also make it more accessible.

Councillors were cautious as there is a value to performance indicators. Using a minimal number of indicators doesn't necessary give a clear picture of the situation, sometimes multiple indicators are needed.

Councillors asked about the organisational blueprint that had been part of this year's corporate plan. Within the corporate plan it advised that councillors would be involved in its development in quarter 2. This did happen but with cabinet members only.

Councillors felt that the Cabinet system of governance had pushed backbenchers to the sides. They felt that Overview & Scrutiny and Cabinet working together would utilise more skills. The hope was to have more productive outcomes for residents which would in turn inspire them to have more trust in their council. Councillor Forward offered to have a monthly meeting with Overview and Scrutiny for an ongoing conversation to help with this.

The committee asked for an update about the council's work concerning climate change. Councillor Fitzgerald reported that our recycling rates are very good, but the processing infrastructure is very poor. A lot of the processing infrastructure for plastics is in other countries which has environmental costs associated with the transportation of materials. There is a need for processing and recycling to work together in order to help the environment.

Councillor Evans updated the committee about her climate change portfolio work. Two new officer posts have been created to help with the work needed to help make Hastings carbon neutral, although the Chair noted that it would require all councillors and officers contributing to this agenda where they can. A Climate change strategy was being drafted. They are currently explored solar panels and looking for suitable roofs in Hastings for there installation. An agency is currently looking at our carbon emissions and ways of reducing these. Lots of local community groups want to engage and they are looing to do more community consultation. Councillor Evans has also been going into schools to talk to pupils about climate change. There had previous been a forum that engaged with local groups on this issue and it was suggested that this happen again.

ACTION

- After the publication of the climate change strategy a climate change forum should be convened to gather local views.

RESOLVED (Unanimously) that:

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1. That the committee's comments on 2019/20 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

Reasons for Recommendations

To assist the council to undertake performance management arrangements

46. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair went through the outstanding items from the work programme and the actions needed for this. There would be up coming meetings to finalise recommendations of reviews. Overview and Scrutiny would also be receiving updates on Sea Bathing Water Quality and the Country Park Visitor Centre.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 8.05 pm)

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