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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 SEPTEMBER 2020

Present: Councillors Davies (Chair), Levane (Vice-Chair), Battley, Beaney, Beaney, Cox, Foster, Rankin, Webb and Bishop

Apologies for absence were noted for Councillor Turner

52. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Turner.

53. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

54. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

RESOLVED- (Unanimously) that the minutes of the meeting held on the 29 July 2020 be approved.

55. RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE UPDATE

The Chair commented that he and the Committee thought it premature to think about recovery, due to the pressure of the second wave of Covid-19 and the need to focus back on response.

Cllr Forward invited Jane Hartnell to outline the response and recovery efforts to date. The Leader thanked officers and Councillors for all their continued work and support during this period.

Jane Hartnell said we are 75% focussing on response and 25% on recovery. We are communicating with local people regarding the updates from Government, some are very difficult and hard to explain. Environmental Health deal with outbreaks on a regular basis and are out at weekends giving support and advice. Corporately we are preparing for winter, poor weather, a second wave of Covid, and the potential for staff to be ill. Staff have been told that they will continue to work from home for 6 months. Those who struggle at home are able to come into MMH in line with social distancing measures.

The Chair thanked the Environmental Health Team and all officers for their continued work on behalf of Hastings.

Cllr Foster asked a question about Track and Trace and whether we are offering free flu jabs for staff or encouraging them? Jane responded that everyone is encouraged to use the app. It doesn't give names and addresses and tracks the movement of the phone. Frontline staff have access to a flu jab and other staff are encouraged to get one. However, there is a shortage of the vaccine.

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Cllr Rankin asked what staff morale was like and what kind of pastoral care is there available to staff? 60 staff can be accommodated in MMH. The number does change over the week. There is a mental health training course available to staff, which they can take before coming into the office. Over the summer months there was a staff survey and morale were quite good. More staff are happier working from home, it is easier for some. A series of staff briefings is scheduled to take place to engage staff. Christmas will be a challenge, but we will do plenty to keep staff morale up.

Cllr Levane asked whether the work of the Hub would continue. East Sussex Chief Executive's met regarding the work of the Hub, concluding that the hub model is useful but does need to be funded appropriately.

Cllr Andrew Battley asked if staff are taking their time off to get some rest during this very stressful time. Jane issued an instruction earlier in the year that staff take a least a week's leave before end September. Staff were also given an extra day's leave with the agreement of the Leader and Deputy Leader. There is a suggestion that 12.30pm-1.00pm every day will be blocked out for a break. Meetings are running on, whereas there was time between meetings when at physical in the office. The Chair thanked Cllr Battley for the question and the systems that are now in place.

Councillor Fitzgerald said that staff have been working incredibly hard during the outbreak. A lot of small businesses have struggled during this time but have worked hard with the Council to ensure they are putting the measures in place that are required.

Councillor Chowney – Met with representatives from the language schools with Jane and Kevin Boorman. They would like to extend our discretionary scheme, so those working in the language sector could continue their work. There is a £500 grant for those who are isolating and on a low income. This will be administered by the council.

Councillor Forward said we will rise to the challenge and administer the grants to those in need. Continue to support the residents and businesses as we have done. We really have come together to work in partnership. We need to be properly funded and continue to lobby at the highest level. Our local MP has said she believes the council has been doing a great job and thanked us.

56. EQUALITIES

Councillor Levane updated on the workstream on equalities. This has largely been included in the work on the recovery themes and actions document destined for Cabinet.

Councillor Rogers had carried out some research prior to meeting with Cllrs Cox and Levane. In 2010 the council adopted a policy statement, work carried out by the LSP, officers and councillors at the time. Substantially there is a lot in it which is very good. Moving forward we need a clear policy statement that HBC can adopt and have as a background. Set up a monitoring and review of this on a 2-year basis. Equalities is not going to be a tick box exercise. It will be embedded into everything we do. The new corporate standards lend themselves perfectly to this. Sitting below the strapline would be some form of charter, something that local groups can engage with, as well

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as working with the LSP. The charter would incorporate the 3 'Cs': Capture, Commit and Celebrate. Capture the research, commit some action and then celebrate it as a town.

Councillor Rankin thanked Councillor Rogers for all the great work she is doing. We need to shine a light on what is going on in the education sector. Children from deprived background are not receiving the same opportunities as those from more educated backgrounds. The council needs to write to the Regional Schools Commissioners asking what they have been doing for those children who haven't been able to get to school and those who don't have tablets or laptops. Children need equality of opportunity. Councillor Rogers said we have the evidence, we can write to the Regional Schools Commissioner seeking the assurances we need. The Chair has prepared a letter to send. Agreed to meet with Councillors Rankin and Rogers by Thursday of next week.

57. PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTERLY REPORT FOR 2020/21- QUARTER 1

The Chair invited Mark Horan into the conversation.

Covid has impact on the availability of performance information. A snapshot of Performance Indicators only has been provided where available. It hasn't been through the usual robust measures in place. Work on corporate plan activities and performance continues to be pulled together. Subject to capacity and resurgence of Covid more full performance information will be brought to O and S for Quarter 2 in December. No financial information has been provided for the last two quarters. This will be made available for the next meeting. Council Tax showing as 'not met', but this is incorrect. The data is unavailable.

The Chair said they felt positive that the in-house street cleansing operation has been so robust and resilient compared to the one that had been outsourced. We can celebrate the excellent project planning and delivery of this inhouse service.

Councillor Barnett commented on Improved street cleanliness – stating that an independent inspection is held every year and the figures are good. These will be released in detail. One specific thing was that the cleanliness of the streets is the best it has ever been. We have been able to sustain recycling in the first three months of the pandemic. It shows that the people of Hastings have responded remarkably and still trying to do the right thing. There is a hope that the rate can be improved much further. Failed bin collections have more than doubled. Biffa responded very impressively during the pandemic. How do we challenge a contractor to do the best for the people of Hastings? It was agreed that we would challenge Biffa the same way we would challenge ourselves. Since April a whole street would be recorded if bins were missed, rather than just one bin. Hopefully things will improve, and the figures will decrease.

Councillor Cox sought explanation for the 3 red indicators (12, 18 and 19) relating to housing. Councillor Batsford responded that the figures reflecting activity during lockdown. Logistically getting into a derelict building and getting builders to do the work was difficult. As normality is returning (and the good weather), officers have

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found new ways to engage with those that they need to. Lack of evictions has been a positive for some tenants, but not so for landlords. Most of the homelessness applications in that quarter were family evictions, where family members just couldn't live with that extra person sleeping on the sofa, etc. 76 people were prevented from becoming homeless and 51 rough sleepers have been given accommodation thanks to the fantastic work of officers. Members of the Outreach Team and Seaview staff continued to work with rough sleepers and help them keep their place.

Councillor Rankin commented on the number of visitors to the White Rock Theatre. Going forward, the hospitality sector is going to be changed fundamentally. The contractual funding has been a hot item of debate. What will the relationship between the council and the theatre to look like?

Councillor Fitzgerald said it remains to be seen. We have a current contract in place. It is very difficult to predict what will happen. The theatre isn't reopening until January 2021. The Museum is doing really great work during this difficult time. Going forward the arts sector as a whole will be under immense pressure.

RESOLVED- (Unanimously)

1. That staff be thanked for their hard work and achievements to date.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions to the meeting.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 7.17 pm)