

# Public Document Pack

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 MARCH 2021

Present: Councillors Davies (Chair), Levane (Vice-Chair), Battley, Bishop, Cox, Edwards, Lee, Rankin, Turner and Webb

### 69. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Councillor Beaney

### 70. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None received.

### 71. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**RESOLVED – (Unanimously) that the minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021 be approved as a true record.**

### 72. FINANCIAL MONITORING QUARTERLY REPORTS FOR 2020/21 – QUARTER 3

The Chief Accountant presented a summary of the interim outturn position for services at the end of December 2020 (excluding capital financing charges and recharges).

This report is based on figures from quarter 3 (1 October to 31 December). Since then a budget has been set and figures have been revised. In future the Overview and Scrutiny meetings shall aim to be more aligned with updated figure.

Some of the large variances are as a direct result of COVID-19. The Chief Accountant highlighted to the councillors that main income streams have been impacted including car parking and the cliff railways. Homelessness and temporary accommodation costs are the largest overspend in the report.

The pandemic may continue to impact the budget in the next financial year, depending on the situation. There is hope that easing the restrictions and opening the town to tourism later this year would boost the local economy and improve the income.

The Chair thanked the Chief Accountant for the report and for the layout of the report being put into separate service areas. This had made the report more accessible.

The councillors discussed overspends and underspends. It pointed out that there appears to be no vast underspends which is a positive. The Chief Accountant informed the committee the large overspend was due to temporary accommodation the finance department are working closely with the housing department and the director of housing to identify future options, using external professional advice if and where appropriate.

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 MARCH 2021

There are currently over 230 families/individuals in temporary accommodation. The town needs a large amount of affordable housing. To drive down the rental market, around 400 new homes a year is needed. The average price of rent went up 40% in the last few years what makes the prices unaffordable for a large proportion of residents.

There was a surge of applications for accommodation last year. The government grants to cover temporary accommodation during the pandemic are much appreciated, but the best long-term solution for the town is building sustainable accommodation and secure long-term tenancies. The council is aiming to buy and build new properties to reduce the costs of temporary accommodation in the future. The Councillors agreed that the process would take time and generate costs.

Councillors commented that 2021 was always going to be forecast as a deficit year and asked about the increase to this. The Chief Accountant agreed that a larger deficit was forecast and that the figures in the report are in addition to any deficit we had. COVID-19 has impacted our income streams, not foreseen and that has added to complications. Capital schemes have had to have been put on hold. COVID-19 has impacted across the board on all forecasts. The rental income forecast is to try to recover any loss income and not write off any income or any deferral where necessary and can be impacted by the slowdown of the general economy.

The Managing Director informed the councillors that that some savings that had been planned had to be paused due to staffing the COVID-19 pandemic.

The councillors asked about the cliff railway shortfall. The Chief Accountant explained that though one of the railways was due to have maintenance. The cliff railways support the revenue budget and having them closed is lost income.

The Chair asked if the DSO (Direct Services Organisation) waste service underspend means that it has been value for money. The figures for the full financial year of work in the normal circumstances are needed to accurately evaluate the cost of the service and see if the change generated savings.

The Chair thanked the Chief Accountant for the report and his contribution.

### **RESOLVED (unanimously)**

**To accept the contents of the report, and the actions within the conclusion and management action 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 in the revised 2020/21 budget and the production of the 2021/22 budget.

### **73. PERFORMANCE MONITORING QUARTER 3 (2020/21) UPDATE**

The Managing Director submitted a report to the councillors with an update on progress against key activities and performance indicators outlined in HBC's corporate

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 MARCH 2021

plan during quarter 3 (1 October to 31 December), including new or changed activities (see HBC's recovery intentions) as a result of COVID-19.

The second part of the report outlined progress in terms of refreshed performance reporting arrangements.

Councillors discussed the housing renewal and the issue of meeting the housing target for the borough. There are currently 1444 families and individuals on the council waiting list. Over 360 of that number are families on the priority list, and only two houses on average are available each month. The pandemic had a significant impact on the situation. The council is actively working with local developers and housing associations to deliver affordable houses to meet the town's targets. There are currently new houses identified with housing associations. Hastings Borough Council is in active conversation with the County Council about the possible build sites and aims to develop a joint approach. Councillors discussed several possible build sites.

Councillors wanted to know the scale of the council services and projects being affected by the activities in response to the pandemic. The pandemic affected most of the regular services provided by the council with some of the projects being paused. Those services are being slowly restarted where capacity and resources allow.

Councillors discussed the increase in pollution, including dog fouling and litter across the town in the last few months and the measures that could be put in place to improve it. The council strategy is to send clear communication via social media and website to remind the residents about their duty to keep the town clean and report any pollution. The council cleaning services are responding to any reports promptly. The Councillors raised a concern about the ongoing issue with litter pollution in certain areas. The situation has not changed despite multiple reports.

### **ACTION**

The Managing Director will follow up on the matter and report to the committee at the next meeting.

The Managing director had a collection of questions that had been submitted to her by the committee.

### **1: What impact the national road map has local pandemic response and recovery intentions.**

The council is still in a major incident although the statistics and facts are getting better every day. We may come out of a major incident very shortly and we still have significant work dealing with the pandemic. There's still potential for surge testing, and the pandemic still impacts on partners ability to cope because although things are improving, its fragile as things reopen. The next phase is transition and then into recovery. Data must be monitored carefully. Regarding our own services outside leisure and the cliff railway will be open on 29<sup>th</sup> March. The museum will open in Stage 3.

The community hub is still supporting people, the COVID secure and compliance officers are preparing for businesses re opening safely. The activity of the council is

# OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 MARCH 2021

currently focusing on the tasks dedicated to the pandemic response. The majority of the staff is working remotely and may be gradually coming back to the office from June 2021. Track and trace will now be handled by our environmental health officers.

## **2: Hastings vaccination update**

The Managing director informed the committee that unfortunately NHS are unable to share data regarding vaccine uptake. The council would like to be involved and has offered to work closely with the NHS. It was noted that the largest local vaccination centre is in Eastbourne.

This was discussed by the councillors and it was mentioned that the vaccination of people who were house bound has been a problem. There appears to have been a lull in the program of getting the vaccines out but that has hopefully been corrected. Tribute was paid to recognise the work of Cllr Turner in helping a constituent who hadn't received their vaccination.

## **3: Progress on COVID safe Election**

The Managing Director stated it will be a COVID-19 secure election. Risk assessment are being carried out, we are working closely with environmental health and safety. The polling stations have been mapped out to one-meter segments to work out the maximum numbers allowed inside, there will be a flow inside the polling station for voters where possible. PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) will be available at polling stations, air vents cleaned, allocated booths. This election will be using over three hundred staff.

## **4: When can Overview and Scrutiny Committee be given an overall assessment of the damage of the pandemic**

The Managing Director explained that the information would be coming gradually. Some financial information was already mentioned in this meeting. It will also take time to identify the lost opportunities and the impact on the council staff. Some positive changes were mentioned, including the development of the new ways of remote working that allowed wider participation and may bring savings in the future.

## **5: Can Overview and Scrutiny Committee be updated on Areas that will red on the performance dashboard by quarter 4**

The areas that are currently performing well are all expected to meet their targets. The teams are working to improve the services that fell behind to meet the final targets. They might be some variables in the areas of the council tax collection due to the new policy that is being prepared.

## **6: A deeper understanding of the impact of the pandemic on local communities**

It will take some time to understand the impact of COVID on the Hastings community. The council is working to encourage the University of Brighton and similar local institutions to prepare comprehensive research.

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 MARCH 2021

The councillors discussed the effect of the pandemic on deprived areas. The Deputy Leader informed the committee of the direct correlation between indices of multiple deprivation and urban classification and infection rate. The councillor is hopefully having a meeting with Clinical Commissioning Group soon.

The Leader of the Council informed the committee that there had been virtual staff briefings at which she was able to give thanks the staff for their work over the last year from the councillors. The Leader of the Council also thanked the Managing Director for the report and the council officers for their hard work and effort to deliver the essential services in exceptional circumstances.

### **RESOLVED (unanimously)**

- 1. That the committee's comments on performance for the quarter specified be addressed by the relevant lead councillors 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

*(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 7.50 pm)*

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