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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

9 AUGUST 2023

Present: Councillors Patmore (Chair), Sinden (Vice-Chair), Bacon, Carr, Cooke, Foster, Hay and Hilton

Officers: Jane Hartnell (Chief Executive), Kit Wheeler (Chief Finance Officer)

Members of Cabinet Present: Councillor Barnet, Batsford and Rogers

151. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies received from Councillors Roberts, Turner and Webb

152. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor	Item	Interest
Cllr Hay	4,5,6	Personal – ESCC Councillor
Cllr Hilton	4,5,6	Personal – ESCC Councillor

153. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2023/2024 - QUARTER 1

The Continuous Improvement and Democratic Services Officer updated that meetings are being set up so that the committee can gather information. The LGA Finance Peer review meeting has been set for the 19th September. The Head of Environment and Operations will be speaking with the living environment group at the end of August. Other meetings around tourism and cultural strategy are also being arranged.

Resolved (Unanimously)

That the committee note the progress of the Overview and Scrutiny work programme for the 2023/24 municipal year and follow up actions

Reasons

It is the responsibility of members serving on the Overview and Scrutiny committee to set their own work programme for each municipal year and complete the associated actions by the end of year.

154. PERFORMANCE MONITORING 2023/2024 - QUARTER 1

The Chair explained the period under o review is April to June. The Chair gave thanks to all staff that have helped to make the performance monitoring dashboard available.

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Members of the Senior Leadership Team and Lead Councillors were present to answer questions. The committee asked questions:

Q: Regarding Community Safety KPI is activities delivered to time cost and quality. This is too vague. What evaluation is in place to assess where money is spent and whether it achieves an increase in community safety?

Cllr Rogers explained the targets are Hastings based. Gating of alleyways has happened to assist to reduce anti-social behaviour. Night time taxi marshals have been paid for over Christmas. Cllr Hilton asked a follow on questions of how is success measured. Cllr Rogers explained this is hard to monitor and overall levels of crime data are not always matched with perceptions of crime

Q: The second KPI is street and community safety ASB but again no measurement to indicate why it's green?

Cllr Rogers explained she will ask if the crime figures can be shared which may help with measuring success.

Q: Regarding FPN's how can 2 for the quarter be amber?

Cllr Rogers explained she would speak with the Head of Community and Regulatory Services and ask for the KPI's to be updated.

The Committee noted that the same question was asked at the quarter 4 meeting and requested a explanation at the next quarter 2 meeting.

Q: On the Enforcement KPIs it states meeting appropriate performance indicator measures but there appears to be no definition of what these are so how can we assess them?

Cllr Rogers explained she will review how these measures are recorded and if they are reflecting the crime figures. The committee requested that The Safer Hastings partnership to be asked how they measure success.

Q: Will the council revise its EV charging usage target now a fee is being applied? And if so, how will the target be calculated?

Cllr Barnett answered the base line has changed and the new KPIs may take longer due to the capacity of staff. Cllr Barnett suggested that new KPI's start at the beginning of the next finance year. The committee asked how performance is to be measured? Cllr Barnett answered that Housing and Finance KPI's will be updated this year.

AGREED: The Committee agreed to delay the review of all KPIs whilst officers deal with the housing crisis and financial challenges, with the caveat that the Housing and Finance KPIs would be reviewed and as necessary updated and be the focus of O&S monitoring for 2023/24.

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Q: Will the portfolio holder be revising the affordable homes target or modifying the performance indicator? It would be more helpful if the performance indicator indicated how many of the 500 affordable homes have been delivered so far?

Cllr Barnett answered that the KPI was to achieve 500 affordable homes by 2027. The homes that were to be built on the land that is planned to be sold will be built, just not by the council. The Committee requested to have regular updates on how many affordable homes have been delivered.

Q: Why is the asset management plan KPI green

Cllr Barnett explained the asset management plan has been green once the work was commissioned. The target is a whole-year one.

Q: Regarding the Cornwallis Street hotel, have the lengthy delays had a cost implication to the council? i.e. interest rate rises, inflation rises and the loss of revenue from the car park. When will the tendering process be completed and presented to Full Council?

Cllr Barnett answered that the hotel had to be retendered and yes there have been increased costs to the council as with all construction projects. A report is hoped to be brought forward soon.

Q: Regarding staff sickness. Are these industry standard performance indicators, are they set too high and, if not, why are they consistently high?

Cllr Barnett answered that the council is very close to achieving its target. He will have a meeting with HR next week. The committee asked for a follow up.

Q: Does the Council still aspire to take on apprentices or is this policy on hold in the current financial situation? Can the RAG indicators be corrected?

Cllr Barnett answered that there are three apprentices within the council. The KPI needs to be updated. Officers to be asked to add more detail to KPI's

Q: Click rate is amber. Has this been happening for more than one quarter? Do we any sense of the reason why click through might be down?

Cllr Barnett answered that clicks were anticipated to be down after covid when there had been an increased need for information from trusted sources like the council.

Q: With the ending of funding for visit 1066 country what are our Tourism KPI's going to be going forward?

Cllr Batsford answered that Hastings Borough Council are still members of 1066 Country until October. Going forward there will be workshops with cultural leaders and groups. The KPI's will monitor attraction usage and car parking attendances. Cllr Barnett explained that tourism figures can show trends but they will not be available

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until next year. Cllr Hilton asked if the council is working with East Sussex County Council. Cllr Batsford explained conversations have been planned and that the foreign student visits has risen to nearly 70-80 percent of pre covid attendance.

Q: What is the plan for the Shared Prosperity fund? We can't assess the KPI if we don't know the planned programme.

Cllr Batsford answered that work is progressing on the Greening project in areas around Broomgrove. Work is taking place to increase employment of residents in walking distance of the industrial parks. Work is also continuing with the Broomgrove Centre and looking to instal a GP surgery. There are targets that must be met to receive the money from government. The Committee explained how some text next to the KPI's would have helped. Cllr Barnett explained he will ask for the communications regarding the Shared Prosperity Fund to be reviewed.

Q: Regarding Leisure facilities KPI is lessons learnt and strategy applied. Where is the strategy? What are the lessons learnt?

Cllr Batsford answered that the new joint playing pitch and built facilities strategy will be published as part of the documentation that forms the draft new Local Plan.

Q: Council leisure centre attendance. Says to be agreed but is given Green RAG rating. On what basis?

Cllr Batsford explained that against last years KPI's attendances are up.

Q: Regarding Business rates collection what is being done to ensure improvement on the amber rating?

The Chief Finance Officer explained the KPI reporting needs to be revised as the collection is above the target. A new legal firm has been engaged to procure outstanding debt.

Q: Regarding Housing allocation due in July August is there a revised time scale?

Cllr Barnet answered that Cllr Willis is looking at a whole range of housing strategies that need to be revised and updated, the allocations policy is just one of those. A timetable will be brought forward for introducing new policies.

Q: There are now 127 targets instead of 199. How will this be brought back up.

Cllr Barnett answered the plan is to refine the targets to more quality than quantity.

The Committee discussed having targets that are also meaningful to the public.

Q: Would it be possible to have mandatory comments?

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The Chief Executive explained the targets need to be profiled properly. There needs to be a balance with the inclusion of meaningful and helpful information balanced with a focus on exceptions.

Q: Regarding Finance why is HBC financial statement of accounts for previous financial year KPI red?

The Chief Finance Officer explained that there are delays due to an audit backlog. Cllr Barnett explained this is a nationwide issue.

The Chief Executive highlighted that not all work completed by officers is measured by KPI's and explained how a large group of housing officers and other staff have been working that afternoon and evening to prepare to house eight individuals with complex housing needs and a further ten tenants also living in a property which had been at risk of being prohibited. A lot of work is completed like this by officers but not recorded by KPI's. Thanks was given by the Chair to the staff involved.

The committee discussed to change the recommendations as they are not content with the agreed ongoing quarters performance indicators for 23/24. The committee highlighted that they want to see at least new KPIs for housing and finance and for this to be assessed at the Quarter 2 meeting in November.

Resolved (Unanimously)

- 1. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review performance for statutory performance indicators for Quarter 1 and public indicators for remaining quarters 2023/24.**
- 2. That staff be thanked for their hard work and achievements to date.**

Reasons

1. To assist the council to undertake performance and financial monitoring arrangements.
2. To ensure that senior management, officers, and Portfolio Holders (Lead Cllrs) have ownership of performance of the service areas under their responsibility.
3. That O&S and the public can review performance and highlight both achievements and areas of concern.
4. That Portfolio Holders have agreed performance indicators against the updated corporate plan and agreed delivery plan for 23/24.
5. That O&S are sighted on and agree statutory performance indicators for Q1 and ongoing quarters for 23/24.

155. FINANCIAL MONITORING - VERBAL UPDATE

The Chief Finance Officer explained there had to be a delay to the report due to further scrutiny of the data. This combined with some staff leave has delayed the report. The report will be ready for the future meeting in September.

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156. LGA FINANCE PEER REPORT DISCUSSION

The Chair explained there will be specific meeting regarding the LGA Peer Review report on September 19th.

The Chair highlighted a significant part of the report:

‘The peer challenge team reviewed the Council's finances, budget reports and financial monitoring information. Having reviewed these documents and discussed them with interviewees, the peer challenge team are very concerned about the Council's financial sustainability, the low level of unallocated revenue reserves and the record on achievements of savings and overspends in housing. Unless the revenue budget position is addressed as a matter of urgency, with savings promptly realized, then the Section 151 officer will be left with little choice but to issue a section 114 notice to the Council at some point during the financial year of 2023/24’.

The Chair asked with the focus on temporary accommodation what could have been done in the past that were doing now. The Chief Executive explained that all the tools of the past have changed over time. The council does not have its own housing stock. The main route was to discharge people in temporary accommodation is into private rented sector which has collapsed in terms of size and affordability for many people. Cllr Batsford explained a lot of councils have found themselves in the same position. Accommodation that was previously let for bed sits etc have been purchased and changed into family houses and rents have increased significantly. The Council has employed more housing officers to assist with the crisis. A lot of the suggestions in the report are work that has been completed by the council for years, but now there is a large increase in volume. Cllr Barnett explained the temporary accommodation crisis is a national crisis.

The committee requested a timeline of how and when the recommendations will be actioned to be provided at the September meeting.

Cllr Carr requested if documents mentioned in the LGA Report can be made available for the meeting in September.

- The documents that set up the housing company
- The senior leadership's detailed delivery plan for the use of resources, focus and time.
- The 15 recommendations and the report from the LGA Housing Advisory Program.
- The financial sustainability program action plan
- The Housing Improvement Program Action plan
- The current housing allocations policy (available on the council's website)

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Cllr Barnett answered that most of the documents are available. It was requested the documents are shared to all Overview and Scrutiny members.

The committee requested an update regarding the phase 2 restructure to be given at the September meeting.

The Committee discussed CIPFA training. The Chief Finance Officer explained there is training planned and a date needs to confirm.

Cllr Carr asked if the East Sussex procurement hub for temporary accommodation had been signed up to. The Chief Finance Officer explained that there were some areas in the report that the Council and the LGA have different views on. There is no joint contract or framework to join at the moment, but that work was underway with a range of local councils to try to improve the costs of temporary accommodation procured by them all.

Cllr Carr asked how has learning from working with other councils been collated and what has been learnt. The Chief Executive explained that not all councils work in the same way. Working with Newham Council has helped identify if area have been missed and looking at ways to identify any further savings.

Cllr Hilton requested an update to be provided on the Capital Strategy and the Asset Management plan to be provided at the September meeting and for the Medium-Term Financial Plan to be available.

The Chair requested that a detailed update on progress from March when the recommendations were first suggested be presented at the September meeting

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 7.57 pm)

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