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**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR RESOURCES**

**12 FEBRUARY 2015**

Present: Councillors Webb (Chair), Howard, Sinden, Roberts, Beaver and Davies (as the duly appointed substitute for Councillor Batsford)

Apologies for absence were noted for Councillor Batsford

**17. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 13 NOVEMBER 2014**

**RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2014 be approved as a correct record**

**18. QUARTER THREE PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT**

The Head of Corporate Services presented a report to advise Members of the performance against 2014/15 targets and performance indicators in part II of the corporate plan. The report included a summary of financial information.

Members noted that the new banking contract with Lloyds bank went live from 1 December 2014, efforts would continue to ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements by March 2015.

Discussion took place regarding the administration of Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). The Head of Finance advised that it was likely the 2014/15 budget for DHP would be fully committed by the end of the financial year. The grant the council received from the government for allocation as DHP would be reduced by 33% in 2015/16. At its meeting on 2 February 2015, Cabinet had agreed to write to the local Member of Parliament regarding the budget for DHP. In line with the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny review of changes to the welfare system, the Revenue and Benefits Service Manager had met with representatives of local advice agencies to discuss how the impact of DHP payments could be maximised. Consideration had also been given to supplementing the funding for DHP's from the council's budget.

Members were pleased to note that occupancy of the council's industrial units remained high, despite the challenging economic climate. Councillor Birch added that a new tenant had recently been found for one of the industrial units which had been refurbished using funding from the Answers in the Carbon Economy (ACE) programme.

The Head of Finance explained that increased emphasis had been placed on the checking process for this service, this had enabled the council to achieve positive feedback as part of its audit report. Whilst the targets for council tax collection rates and the average number of days process change in circumstance information for council tax and housing benefit payments had not been met in this quarter, it was not considered necessary to review the overall targets at this time.

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The committee thanked the Electoral Services team for ensuring a smooth transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER). The Head of Corporate Services acknowledged that this had been a challenging and complex project, and the team were continuing to refine their working practices. Members were keen to ensure that the changes to electoral registration did not adversely affect electors' entitlement to vote. The Head of Corporate Services explained that the council had been allocated an additional grant to maximise the registration of electors. The Electoral Services team had recently held an event to encourage local students and young people to register to vote. Members considered the use of social media to raise awareness of the changes.

Members welcomed the introduction of tablet, to improve the accessibility of committee documents and reduce the need to produce printed meeting papers. The committee thanked all those involved in implementing the changes.

Discussion took place regarding the Overview and Scrutiny work programme. Members noted that an ambitious programme of reviews had been undertaken in 2014/15, and thanked all those involved in supporting this process. The committee agreed that Scrutiny Steering Group meetings provided a valuable opportunity to review the work programme and plan future activities.

The Head of Corporate Services updated Members on the Switched on Hastings campaign. In Hastings, two hundred and eight residents had participated in the last auction, achieving approximately £190.00. Members commented that these savings were particularly impressive, given that energy prices had already fallen. The council's anti-poverty officer had also sought to ensure that the scheme was promoted amongst residents who may be at risk of fuel poverty.

Cabinet had recently considered a petition calling for the restoration of Bottle Alley. Members noted that £160,000 had been allocated in the council's budget for 2014/15 to refurbish the structure. As part of the planned improvements, LED lighting would be installed to enable Bottle Alley to become a safe thoroughfare. Members considered whether the new lighting scheme could include coloured lights, similar to those on the promenade. Members requested a briefing note from the Head of Amenities, Resorts and Leisure on the planned timescales for the works to Bottle Alley.

Consideration was given as to how the council's corporate priorities could be reflected by outsourced service. Councillor Birch said that the recent procurement exercise for a minor works contractor had included criteria regarding payment of the living wage. The Head of Corporate Services agreed to provide Members with a copy of a report which was submitted to the Equalities Steering Group regarding a review undertaken across all services to identify possible inequalities.

Members considered the possible impact of the changes to the welfare system on inward migration to the town from other areas Councillor Birch replied that the effect had not be as significant as first expected, however, the council had recently chaired a seminar of London and seaside authorities to agree a protocol for out of area placements.

**RESOLVED that: -**

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- 1) **The committees comments on quarter 3 performance be addressed by the relevant Lead Member(s) with appropriate action and report back;**
- 2) **Staff in the Corporate Resources Directorate be thanked for their hard work and achievements in this quarter**

The reason for this decision was:

To enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to undertake their performance management function.

### **19. FINAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REVIEW OF OUTSOURCED CONTRACTS**

Councillor Roberts, as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny review of outsourced contracts introduced the review team's findings to the committee.

The purpose of the review had been to examine whether the council was achieving best practice in procurement. Members had considered the possible impact of reforms to procurement legislation by central government. The review team had also explored the council's contract management arrangements, to ensure optimum results were received from outsourced services.

The Chief Auditor gave an overview of the review process. Throughout the review, Members had met with key stakeholders including East Sussex Procurement Hub, the Federation of Small Businesses and council officers with relevant contract management expertise to gather evidence and inform the recommendations arising from the review. Members also considered previous contracts which had been let, and good practice which could be applied to future procurement exercises.

The committee welcomed the recommendations from the review and thanked the review team for their report.

#### **RESOLVED that:**

- 1) **The sustainable procurement policy is updated and submitted to Cabinet for approval;**
- 2) **Procedures are embedded to readily assist transparency of social value built into procurement through the procurement initiation document template, and;**
- 3) **The Overview and Scrutiny committee are informed when training on public contracts regulations 2015 has been delivered**

The reason for this decision was:

To ensure that the review findings and recommendations are reported and will be followed up.

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## 20. UPDATE ON THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2014/15

The Senior Corporate and Democratic Services Officer provided an update on the Overview and Scrutiny work programme for 2014/15. Members continued to work on the two remaining reviews which had been identified as a high priority at the annual meeting in June.

(The Chair declared the meeting closed at. 7.15 pm)