

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

23 July 2018

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea on Monday 23 July 2018 at 6:30pm.

Committee Members present: Councillors P.N. Osborne (Chairman), M. Mooney (Vice-Chairman), J. Barnes, G.S. Browne, C.A. Clark, S.H. Earl, S.D. Elford, R.V. Elliston, J. Potts, G.F. Stevens and M.R. Watson.

Other Members present: Councillors Mrs M. L. Barnes, J.J. Carroll, K.P. Dixon, Mrs D.C. Earl-Williams, A.E. Ganly (in part), Mrs J.M. Hughes and Mrs G.P. Johnson.

Advisory Officers present: Executive Director (AL), Executive Director (MJ), Assistant Director Resources, Head of Service Housing and Community (in part), Head of Service Acquisition, Transformation and Regeneration, Programme Office and Policy Manager (in part), Planning Policy Manager (in part), Economic Development Manager (in part), Regeneration and Tourism Officer (in part) and Democratic Services Officer.

Also present: 6 members of the public.

Prior to the formal commencement of the meeting, the Chairman welcomed Joe Powell, Head of Service Housing and Community and Ben Hook, Head of Service Acquisition, Transformation and Regeneration who had both recently joined the Council.

OSC18/11. **MINUTES**

The Chairman was authorised to sign the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 11 June 2018 as a correct record of the proceedings.

OSC18/12. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor J.M. Johnson (ex-officio) and Mrs S.M. Prochak.

OSC18/13. **FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE HOUSING ISSUES TASK AND FINISH GROUP** (5.1)

Following a presentation in November 2017 by Opinion Research Services on findings from Rother's Strategic Housing Research Project and a Housing Overview report, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) agreed that a Housing Issues Task and Finish Group (HIT&FG) be set up to consider the following subject areas:

- land supply issues / development options;
- affordable and social housing delivery;

- homelessness; and
- managing the impact of welfare reforms.

Members of the HIT&FG had received and considered officer reports and heard presentations from relevant external organisations, which detailed the issues and provided scope for discussion, before agreement was reached in terms of recommendations going forward.

The circumstances which had led to the housing issues were summarised in terms of high demand (for houses and housing services) and low supply (lack of suitable and affordable housing).

Three areas of work were proposed in order to reduce homelessness, with each setting out a number of actions leading to the recommendations.

After some discussion, the following points were noted:

- The amended National Planning Policy Framework due imminently would have implications on the Local Plan and future planning policy.
- Concealed homelessness (ie those that the Council were not always aware of who were 'sofa-surfing', or grown up children living at home, unable to access housing of their own) were as much of a problem as those individuals living on the streets.
- Members wished to acknowledge the good work of the Housing Department, in particular in identifying temporary accommodation for rough sleepers, which was not always accepted.
- The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing, Welfare and Equalities confirmed that during the severe weather earlier in the year, the Council's Housing officers made contact with all those sleeping rough in Bexhill to offer temporary accommodation. It was the Council's policy that where temporary accommodation was offered, if the person was unable to get to the accommodation the Council organised and paid for a taxi to ensure they are able to access the accommodation.
- Land owners should be encouraged to release land for building.
- Members requested an additional recommendation to promote the higher efficiency of buildings and it was agreed that officers would provide an appropriate form of words.
- The Committee wished to pass on their thanks to the Chairman, all members of the HIT&FG and all officers involved in developing the final recommendations.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet be requested to approve that:

Recommendation 1: A Housing and Homelessness Strategy be developed which includes the following actions in respect of reducing homelessness:

- a. Consider establishing a regular local multi partner homelessness forum to develop and deliver the homelessness strategy.

- b. Engage with partners to reduce costs by preventing duplication of services.
- c. Establish protocols and procedures with social landlords and letting agents operating in Rother.
- d. Consult on options for additional homelessness prevention measures, to include setting up and managing a social lettings agency and securing access to more private rented properties through closer partnerships with local landlords.
- e. Work with the voluntary sector to explore options for creating a street homelessness centre/hub in Bexhill, with outreach available to rural areas of Rother.
- f. Update the criteria for Discretionary Housing Payment by April 2019 to better reflect the needs of households affected by welfare reforms.
- g. Develop a communications plan, to include training, to ensure front line officers, partners and Members are aware of the support available.

Recommendation 2: A Housing and Homelessness Strategy be developed, as per recommendation 1, which includes the following actions in respect of affordable housing delivery:

- a. Create a delivery vehicle or vehicles such as a Local Housing Company and/or public/private partnerships with the following objectives:
 - To acquire emergency and temporary accommodation through the purchase of accommodation for conversion or delivering new build temporary accommodation; and
 - purchasing accommodation for those in housing need – ‘street purchases’ for market or to meet temporary accommodation needs.
- b. Purchasing and developing ‘stalled’ sites that are vital to the delivery of affordable housing through negotiation or Compulsory Purchase Orders where other options have failed (see also recommendation 3e below).
- c. Strengthen partnership working with Registered Providers by expanding the number of preferred partners to work with and developing a joint framework/protocol agreement incorporating streamlined planning processes with realistic timeframes and clear guidance notes.
- d. Working with Registered Providers to explore the opportunity of introducing affordable warmth methods and modern and innovative methods of construction, for

example timber framed kits, for all affordable housing developments.

- e. Continue supporting and working with Action in Rural Sussex, Parish and Town Councils and community groups in identifying suitable sites and delivering community led housing.

Recommendation 3: Measures to ensure a sufficient, continuous supply of housing land be promoted, which includes the following actions:

- a. Giving priority to completing the Development and Site Allocations Plan and the production of Neighbourhood Plans, taking account of revised National Planning Policy Framework.
- b. An early review of the Local Plan (Core Strategy) be prioritised, taking account of revised National Planning Policy Framework especially given Government's likely expectation of substantially more housing.
- c. Consideration be given to allowing exception site planning policy to allow for an element of market housing to cross subsidise where viability is an issue, taking account of revised National Planning Policy Framework.
- d. Identification of more "small site" development opportunities, including for custom and self-build housing, possibly working with smaller developers within a public/private partnership.
- e. 'Unblocking' of sites where physical infrastructure and/or ownership factors present a major constraint to development including by:
 - working to find strategic drainage, utilities and digital broadband solutions to support major developments, working with utility companies and respective developers;
 - seeking financial support from Homes England and other Central Government growth funds;
 - working proactively to bring forward development on sites where the Council has a landholding interest;
 - proactively negotiating with developers and landowners to bring forward key development sites; and
 - consideration, as a last resort, of pursuing Compulsory Purchase Orders, being mindful of local sensitivities.
- f. Continuing to invest in strategically important infrastructure projects that boost the market attractiveness of places where growth is planned,

potentially including, for example, the development of GP surgeries.

- g. Promoting higher water efficiency standards through the Local Plan as well as exploring the opportunity of introducing 'recycled water' within planning applications, subject to consistency with national requirements and viability considerations.
- h. Promoting higher standards of energy efficiency in new homes through future planning policy and guidance and working with developers.
- i. Introduce and deliver a Landowners Forum, to take place once every two years, to encourage communication and promote housing development.
- j. Prepare a housing delivery "Action Plan" in response to the new Housing Delivery Test and taking full account of the above, in light of revised National Planning Policy Framework.

(Councillors J.J. Carroll, Earl, Elford, Ganly, Osborne and Mrs G.P. Johnson each declared a personal interest as a landlord and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the room during the consideration thereof).

OSC18/14. TOURISM TASK AND FINISH GROUP TERMS OF REFERENCE
(5.2)

The Economic Development Manager led Members through the report of the Executive Director concerning the establishment of a Tourism Task and Finish Group (TT&FG,) to consider and review the support given to the tourism sector by the Council. Attached to the report were the draft Terms of Reference (ToR) for the TT&FG, which set some background to the review, some suggested areas for detailed consideration and a timescale of meetings to enable the group to report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 29 April 2019.

Members considered the fact that the environment of tourism had changed in recent years, particularly in respect of access to information and the spending habits of consumers. It was noted that the ToR aimed to take account current and future trends in tourism and anticipated challenges in the context of the District's activities, marketing and availability of information and accommodation.

After some discussion, the following points were noted:

- Councillor Mrs Hart as Cabinet Portfolio Holder was unable to attend the meeting and had circulated a paper to Members to consider alongside the ToR.
- As tourism was one of the District's largest forms of income, Members felt it was important to consider value for money, particularly concerning marketing.

- It was suggested that the ‘downsides’ of tourism also be taken into consideration, i.e. possible negative effects on residents.
- Members agreed to add ‘green tourism’ to the review of Marketing, to take account the historical and educational aspects of the District.

It was noted that at its first meeting on the 15 August the Group would plan the review and determine which stakeholders and other interested parties would be invited to give evidence and feedback to the Group as part of the review. In accordance with standard practice for Task and Finish Groups, meetings of the Group would not be held in the public domain, however all minutes would be publically available and all findings of the Group would be presented and considered at a formal meeting of the OSC in the public domain.

RESOLVED: That;

- 1) the Terms of Reference be agreed, as amended and attached as Appendix A;
- 2) a Tourism Task and Finish Group be established comprising of the following six Members – Councillors Mrs Barnes, Dixon, Mrs Earl-Williams, Elford, Stevens and Watson; and
- 3) meeting dates set for 15 August and 19 September confirmed.

OSC18/15. **PROVISIONAL REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME**
(5.3) **MONITORING QUARTER 4 2017/18**

Members received and considered the report of the Executive Director on the Provisional Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring Quarter 4 2017/18 which had been presented to Cabinet on 4 June 2018. The report detailed the significant variations of the Revenue Budget and updated Capital Programme.

Overall the cost of services demonstrated an underspend of £0.490m. This was attributed to underspends / savings across the service areas as detailed in the report.

The council tax collection rate as at 31 March 2018 was broadly comparable to the previous years and the total collectable was above the original estimate. The Council Tax element of the Collection Fund was in surplus at year end by approximately £964,889. Rother’s share would be £122,720.

Overall the Council’s underspend was £1,718,000 as less was needed to be drawn from reserves than was budgeted for and this surplus would be transferred to earmarked reserves.

Members were pleased to note that the Council’s reserves remained healthy and able to support the Council deliver on its Rother 2020 ambitions.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

OSC18/16. **WORK PROGRAMME**
(5.4)

Consideration was given to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme.

It was noted that the 'Housing Benefits Scheme' item for 26 November 2018 should read 'Housing Benefits Performance Update'.

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme, attached at Appendix B, be agreed as amended.

CHAIRMAN

The meeting closed at 7:25pm

OSC180723/lh

TOURISM TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Terms of Reference

Aims and Origin

- Within the Corporate Plan (2014 – 2021) there are a number of actions set out under the Core Aim ‘Sustainable Economic Prosperity’ relating to sustainable tourism and town centre improvement, of relevance these include:
 - successfully market 1066 Country accommodation and attractions.
 - support events which will increase visitors.
 - champion the world class aspirations of the De La Warr Pavilion.
 - promote Bexhill, Battle and Rye as places to visit.

Rother’s Economic Regeneration Strategy highlights the support the Council provides to the visitor economy through key activities that sit within the strategy:

- by promoting the area to visitors;
- by providing visitor information services that meet customer requirements;
- by maintaining and improving the range and quality of tourism offered, including attractions, accommodation and customer service;
- by aligning business development and support services with potential tourism growth areas;
- by working in partnership to develop new products and services.

Members have requested a review of the Council’s activity in support of the visitor economy in the light of the economic, social and technological changes that have occurred since the adoption of the Economic Regeneration Strategy.

Scope

The Task and Finish Group will produce a revised visitor economy chapter within the Economic Regeneration Strategy detailing how the Council can best use its resources to support and develop the tourism sector in the district and to create conditions for growth within the sector.

The suggested areas to be reviewed in detail include:

- a) Future opportunities and trends within the tourism sector
 - consideration as to how the Council and its partners will capitalise on new and emerging opportunities within the tourism sector.

- b) Marketing
 - 1066 Country.
 - cultural tourism offer.
 - brochure distribution service.
 - Green Tourism.
- c) Events
 - review the current events policy.
- d) Visitor Accommodation
 - consider the opportunities and threats within the accommodation sector in Rother (e.g. Airbnb and second homes).

Approach

- a) Review the current support to the tourism sector including a summary of available visitor research across the district.
- b) Agree areas of work within the four areas identified above.
- c) Consult relevant identified partners and key stakeholders to inform discussions.
- d) Produce a draft revised visitor economy chapter within the Economic Regeneration Strategy.

Desired Outcomes

- a) Review and inform Rother's visitor economy chapter within the Economic Regeneration Strategy.
- b) Present a draft revised visitor economy chapter within the Economic Regeneration Strategy to Cabinet following the review.

Timescale

- Preliminary meeting and review – 15 August 2018.
- Four focused meetings:-
19 September 2018,
October, November and December 2018 – dates TBC.
- Analysis, draft strategy preparation – January - February 2019.
- Consideration of Draft Strategy – March 2019.
- Report back to Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 29 April 2019.

Membership

- Councillors Mrs Barnes, Dixon, Mrs Earl-Williams, Elford, Stevens and Watson.

Officer Lead

- Emma Wray, Regeneration & Tourism Officer.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WORK PROGRAMME 2018 – 2019		
DATE OF MEETING	SUBJECT – MAIN ITEM (Capitalised)	Cabinet Portfolio Holder
10.09.18	CABINET PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW – LEADER OF THE COUNCIL <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Corporate Programme Update Performance Progress Report: First Quarter 2018/19 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring to July 2018 	Ampthill
15.10.18	TECHNOLOGY AND INFRASTRUCTURE <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Medium Term Financial Strategy 2019/20 to 2023/24 Council Tax Reduction Scheme Consultation Report 	Hollidge Ampthill
26.11.18	ROTHER PUBLIC REALM STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK PROGRESS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance Progress Report: Second Quarter 2018/19 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring to September 2018 Housing Benefits Performance Update 	Hart Ampthill
28.01.19	DRAFT REVENUE BUDGET PROPOSALS 2019/20 KEY PERFORMANCE TARGETS 2019/20	Ampthill Maynard
18.03.19	CRIME AND DISORDER COMMITTEE: TO RECEIVE A REPORT FROM THE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Performance Progress Report: Third Quarter 2018/19 Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring to January 2019 	Ampthill Kirby-Green
29.04.19	TOURISM TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Call-in and Urgency Procedures Draft Annual Report to Council Review of Task and Finish Groups / Outcomes 	Hart
ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing Allocations Policy 		