

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 September 2018

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea on Monday 10 September 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.D. Elford, R.V. Elliston, J. Potts, Mrs S.M. Prochak and M.R. Watson.

Other Members present: Councillors Lord Ampthill (in part), K.P. Dixon, I.R. Hollidge (in part), Mrs J.M. Hughes, Mrs G.P. Johnson, C.R. Maynard (in part) and D.B. Oliver.

Advisory Officers present: Executive Director (AL), Assistant Director Resources, Head of Service Housing and Community, Head of Service Acquisition, Transformation and Regeneration, Programme Office and Policy Manager, Corporate Programme & Business Improvement Officer and Democratic Services Officer.

Also present: 1 member of press and 1 member of the public.

OSC18/17. **MINUTES**

The Chairman was authorised to sign the minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 23 July 2018 as a correct record of the proceedings.

OSC18/18. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S.H. Earl and G.F. Stevens and an Executive Director (MJ). The Chairman extended best wishes for a speedy recovery to Councillor Earl.

OSC18/19. **STRATEGIC OVERVIEW AND REGENERATION / CABINET** (5.1) **PORTFOLIO HOLDER OVERVIEW – LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

The Chairman welcomed the Leader of the Council to the meeting, who provided Members with an update on the main aims for regeneration across the region.

The Rother 2020 Programme had been presented as part of the Efficiency Plan provided to Central Government and assessed through the Rother Peer Review. The Programme sought to address budget challenges through:

- **Increasing income** - investigating opportunities and delivering activity to increase revenue income, which included a revised

investment strategy (approved to £35m of borrowing) overseen by a panel, for land and property disposal and acquisition and residential and commercial property investment.

- **Demand Management** - a project that sought to eliminate self-generated demand through poor quality communication.
- **Lean working and system reviews** - looked at how the Council delivered its functions and services and recommended ways in which waste could be eliminated.
- **Total deficit of £1.8m to be overcome by March 2021**, but with the ability to use earmark reserves to extend beyond that date if necessary.

The Leader advised Members that it was important to maintain public and private partnerships and that the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) had appointed a consultant (SQW) to review the Strategic Economic Plan. The review document was due to be completed before Christmas and Rother District Council (RDC) would be attending a final engagement session on 20 September. The suggestion from the Government LEP review was to create fewer but larger LEPs and remove overlap areas. It was hoped that the SELEP would remain in its current format as a partnership between East Sussex, Kent and Essex.

Team East Sussex had recently recruited new business representatives and would be appointing a new chair person in September 2018. The Team would be the lead in the development of the Local Industrial Strategy following the publication of the South East Plan.

Developers East Sussex had become fully self-funded, with developers paying an annual membership fee. Local Authorities had free membership and officers attended quarterly meetings as appropriate.

The new SELEP Skills strategy had been developed and those sections that were relevant to Rother and East Sussex would be driven forward by Skills East Sussex. Key aims of the strategy were to provide skills to those not currently in the employment market. Work had been taking place with education establishments to address the skills gap in key sectors such as tourism, agriculture and construction, to ensure courses offered matched local employment opportunities.

There had been a recent call for Local Growth Fund through the SELEP and RDC had put forward two bids:

1. East Parade Project and the Angling Club regeneration (£400k).
2. Renovation of a site at the Beeching Road industrial estate (£960k).

Funding awards would be determined in December 2018.

Members were advised that the Link Road and Gateway Road had been completed and Glovers House in North East Bexhill was fully occupied. The construction of High Weald House was progressing, the Marsden planning application had been submitted and discussions were taking place with Sea Change Sussex regarding employment

sites at the rear. The North Bexhill Access Road was on schedule for completion in spring 2019 and planning had been approved for 32,000 square metres of employment land and further housing. Significant money had come into the area through SELEP and bids by East Sussex County Council (ESCC), RDC and Sea Change Sussex had attracted more money into this area than in any part of the SELEP area.

The Leader paid tribute to the Bexhill Town Centre Steering Group (BTCSG) who had delivered in several areas, from new signage in the town to support of section 106 money being allocated into projects. In addition, ESCC were due to replace the street lamps along the seafront with 'like for like'. The terms of reference for the BTCSG were to be reviewed to take a more strategic approach to the future of the Town Centre.

Members were then given the opportunity to ask questions. During discussions, the following points were noted:

- Members felt it was important that consideration be given as to how current imports into the area would be substituted post-Brexit, particularly concerning wood used in the construction industry.
- GCSE results had been very good locally and appropriate vocational courses were being offered.
- The possibility of a Unitary Authority was raised and it was felt that the savings achieved would not close the funding gap that the authorities in East Sussex were facing. Shared services with other districts had been working effectively with savings realised.
- Members thanked the Leader for his work in driving joint working with ESCC.

RESOLVED: That the presentation be noted.

OSC18/20. **CORPORATE PROGRAMME UPDATE**
(6.1)

The Council adopted its current Corporate Plan in 2014. Key to delivery of the priorities set out within the plan was a number of projects which had been agreed within a programme, referred to as the Corporate Programme.

To date 11 projects had been completed, two were currently in the planning phase with completion due 31 March 2021 and four projects were due for completion by end 2018/19; the remainder were all underway. All project and financial forecast information was detailed within Appendices 1 and 2 respectively, to the report. Members noted that it was anticipated that the cost to deliver all projects would amount to £57.8m, however not all funding had been secured. This was a £37.5m uplift from the previous year (£20.3m) which accounted for:

- a. The inclusion of £34m for the acquisition of commercial property to generate additional income, through the Property Investment Strategy, as part of the Rother 2020 programme.

- b. Blackfriars, Battle: The costs of the spine road, to be covered by the anticipated external grant of £3.24m.
- c. Development of the old Bexhill High School site: additional costs for land acquisition.

Members were played a brief video showing interviews with Cabinet Members and members of the public, who spoke about some of the key projects which formed part of the Programme.

Following the presentation, Members had an opportunity to put forward questions and the following points were noted during the discussion:

- The Chairman explained that the Firmstep customer relationship management system referred to in the report was a software package that aided customer interaction with the Council.
- Issues with the development of the old Bexhill High School site were still ongoing, but progress was being made.
- The Bexhill Chamber of Commerce were keen to continue with the Bexhill Jobs and Apprenticeship Fair held at the De La Warr Pavilion, which had been very successful in March 2018 with a higher footfall than had been expected due to inclement weather.

The Corporate Programme had proved a positive method of delivering the strategic progress against the Council's core aims and would be closely monitored and risk assessed to ensure continuous successful delivery.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) progress against the Corporate Programme be noted; and
- 2) the additional staffing resources required to deliver the Rother 2020 programme be noted.

OSC18/21. **PERFORMANCE REPORT: FIRST QUARTER 2018/19**
(6.2)

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Director on the Performance Report of the First Quarter 2018/19. Members were given the opportunity to scrutinise the progress towards the Council's stated aims, outcomes and actions in the Corporate Plan and make any necessary recommendations to Cabinet for future service delivery. Lord Ampthill, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance, Resources and Value for Money, was also in attendance.

The Head of Service Acquisition, Transformation and Regeneration led Members through a summary of the Council's performance against the selected indicators, giving the position at the end of the first financial quarter (1 April to 30 June 2018) for 2018/19. Three had met or exceeded their target and five did not meet their targets.

During discussion the following was noted:

New Affordable Homes Completed: The target for 2018/19 was 10 new homes. The target for quarter one was three new homes and the result was 36 new affordable homes. Members were concerned that the target for 2018/19 of 10 new homes seemed very low, particularly as this had already been exceeded with the completion of 36 new affordable homes at The Maltings scheme in Peasmarsh. It was explained that this development had been delayed from quarter four of 2017/18, reducing delivery for the last financial year, but increasing it for this year. The target set for 2018/19 had been as a result of reviewing all the housing sites due to commence during the financial year. Lengthy lead-in times in the past had often resulted in fewer homes actually being completed during the year, which accounted for the target set. The target could, however, be revised mid-year if necessary.

Members also considered the fact that developers were often able to reduce the number of affordable homes provided on a site if they were deemed not viable. It was agreed more explanation be offered at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

It was noted that the target for new affordable homes set was based on reality and not an aspirational one.

New Housing Benefit Claims on Time: The end of year target was 35 days. The result for the first quarter was 41.51 calendar days, which was not on target as lower was better. The Assistant Director Resources reported that, as previously advised to Members through the housing benefit improvement plan, the Capita resilience contract had continued to provide only limited additional resources to the team and a contract had been entered into with another authority to provide additional support. The backlog of work was being processed, but reported processing time would increase further in the short term before reducing in the longer term. Members noted that the outlook was positive.

Public Land and Highways with Unacceptable Amounts of Detritus: It was explained to Members that Kier staff had been taken off street cleansing duties to assist with refuse collection, which had resulted in a negative impact on the amount of detritus on streets. It was suggested that this may also have been due to a hot summer and therefore more visitors to the area and a request was made for an update on this target at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This was agreed to if an exception. Members noted that the Council were continuing to attend weekly operational team meetings with the contractor in an attempt to manage the contract performance and to sustain a positive relationship with the contractor, so that performance did not deteriorate further.

Assurance was given that all KPIs currently not on target would be continuously monitored.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) the report be noted; and
- 2) an update report on the performance of public land and Highways with unacceptable amounts of detritus be made to the next meeting, if the performance had not met its target again.

OSC18/22. **HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY - CONSULTATION**
(6.3)

The Programme Office and Policy Manager outlined the report which detailed the draft Consultation Plan and Consultation Document for the Rother Housing and Homelessness Strategy. Councillor Mrs Hughes, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing, Welfare and Equalities was also present.

The consultation plan and next steps were explained to Members. It was noted that the majority of the consultation would take place via an online questionnaire, however, telephone and written consultation responses would be accepted. Press releases, Social Media and My Alerts would also be used.

The consultation questionnaire set out three proposed priorities based on the outcomes of the Homelessness Review (available to view online), the Strategic Housing Research report and recommendations from the Housing Task & Finish Group. The consultation exercise was due to start on 15 October and last for six weeks, the deadline for completion being 26 November.

The outcomes of the consultation exercise would formulate a final Housing and Homelessness Strategy, which would be used to steer the direction of Housing Services, including the homelessness and housing options services, over the next five years (2019-24) and be in place for April 2019.

After some discussion it was agreed that Members would talk to their Parish Councils and the Bexhill Town Forum about the consultation document and use their own networks to further cascade the questionnaire. Details of any additional organisations to be included could be forwarded to the Head of Service for Housing and Community. The questionnaire would be piloted before general circulation.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee were supportive of the proposed questionnaire and approach and agreed to recommend to Cabinet.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet be asked to approve the draft Consultation Plan and Consultation Document in respect of a Housing and Homelessness Strategy to allow a six week consultation on the priorities for the development of a final Housing and Homelessness Strategy.

OSC18/23. **WORK PROGRAMME**
(6.4)

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

It was agreed that the timing of the Tourism Task and Finish Group (TT&FG) report, currently on the programme for 29 April 2019 (pre-election period), would be discussed at the next meeting of the TT&FG and would be reported back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 October.

RESOLVED: That the Work Programme, attached at Appendix A, be agreed.

CHAIRMAN

The meeting closed at 8:02pm

OSC180910/lh

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WORK PROGRAMME 2018 – 2019		
DATE OF MEETING	SUBJECT – MAIN ITEM (Capitalised)	Cabinet Portfolio Holder
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