

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

15 March 2021

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held at the Remote Meeting on Monday 15 March 2021 at 6:30pm.

Committee Members present: Councillors P.N. Osborne (Chairman), Mrs V. Cook (Vice-Chairman), J. Barnes, C.A. Clark, P.C. Courtel, B.J. Drayson (ex-officio), Mrs D.C. Earl-Williams, S.J. Errington, P.J. Gray (in part), C.A. Madeley, C.R. Maynard and M. Mooney.

Other Members present: Councillors C.A. Bayliss (in part), G.S. Browne, T.J.C. Byrne, G.C. Curtis, K.P. Dixon, K.M. Field (in part), K.M. Harmer, Mrs E.M. Kirby-Green, L.M. Langlands, G.F. Stevens and H.L. Timpe.

Advisory Officers in attendance: Chief Executive, Assistant Director Resources, Head of Service Acquisitions, Transformation & Regeneration, Head of Service Neighbourhood Services, Head of Service Environmental Services, Licensing and Community Safety, Environment and Policy Manager (in part) and Democratic Services Officer.

Also Present: Inspector Chris Varrall (in part) and 23 members of the public, via the YouTube live broadcast.

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### OSC20/1 **MINUTES**

The Chairman was authorised to sign the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 25 January 2021, at a later date, as a correct record of the proceedings.

### OSC20/2 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES**

There were no apologies for absence.

### OSC20/4 **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Declarations of interest were made by Councillors in the Minutes as indicated below:

P.C. Courtel	Agenda Item 6 – Personal interest in so far as he was a member of the Bexhill Environment Group and Greenpeace.
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### OSC20/5 **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE ROTHER COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP**

Members received the Head of Service Environmental Services, Licensing and Community Safety's annual report which provided information on the work of the Rother Community Safety Partnership [known as the Safer Rother Partnership (SRP)] for the Committee to review, scrutinise and make reports or recommendations to the responsible authorities of the SRP, in line with the Council's statutory responsibilities under the Police and Justice Act 2006.

The Chairman welcomed Inspector Chris Varrall to the meeting who drew Members' attention to the main points of the report. Members were advised of the key initiatives delivered during 2020/21 to reduce crime and the impact of crime and Anti-social Behaviour (ASB), which included: providing support for high and medium risk victims of ASB through multi-agency monthly meetings; a range of initiatives delivered by the Domestic Abuse Group and a pan East Sussex Violent Crime Group; reduce the occurrence and impact of young people involved in crime and ASB and as victims; road safety; and Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking.

The joint Board met quarterly to identify changes in crime and ASB of strategic significance to both areas, wider trends and review the work delivered against these priorities. The Board was co-chaired by Councillor Brian Drayson and his Hastings Borough Council counterpart (Councillor Paul Barnett).

The Rother Joint Action Group (an Officer group) met monthly to oversee the delivery of the local priorities for Rother which in 2020/21 included: ASB and youth crime; rural crime; County Lines; acquisitive crime within retail (which had been stalled because of the closure of businesses under the COVID restrictions and the associated reductions in this type of crime); White Ribbon campaign; continued Community Safety Partnership (CSP) funding for the Seaview Outreach Service and partners to identify, engage and support rough sleepers in Rother; Operation Thornhill (supporting young people onto a positive pathway); tackling modern slavery (project Discovery); ASB neighbour disputes; issues arising at beaches; safeguarding of both adults and children; COVID-19 compliance; and funded crime reduction equipment.

There were 5,376 crimes in Rother reported to Sussex Police during the 12 months to the end of December 2020, which was 644 fewer than in the previous year. There had been delays in receiving data since COVID working practices came into place, which meant that data was received at least three weeks after the end of the month. Reductions in crime since March 2020 had matched the patterns across most of Sussex.

Most crime types had seen decreases in the 12 months to the end of December 2020. However, the following had seen increases: criminal damage to a dwelling; racist incidents; racist crime; and domestic abuse incidents. However, the number of domestic abuse crimes reported started falling in April, which followed the national and local picture. Police, housing providers and support organisations predicted these figures would rise as victims felt safe to leave their homes after the end of lockdown, when victims perceived they would be able to access services and when victims had a reason to leave the home for a period of time e.g. to take children to school, go to work, attend the GP surgery etc. This situation was being monitored and planned for by the members of the Safer Hastings and Rother Domestic Abuse Group.

Homophobic crime had also increased, and drug possession reports rose with the highest in June, August, September and October 2020. This also followed a pattern seen during the COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions, where fewer people were about and drug dealing was more noticeable.

Reports of ASB across Rother had also reflected the impact of COVID-19 restrictions and lockdown. Across East Sussex, all districts and boroughs had seen percentage increases in reports of ASB, with the highest being in Wealden.

The SRP Joint Action Group was considering priorities for 2021/22 at its March meeting and would be using a new analytical product provided by the police to focus resources on those crimes and victims that had the highest risk, or behaviours that had the biggest impact on the community of Rother. The Domestic Abuse Bill, which was being considered by the House of Lords, would require a review of Council and partner agencies responses, and further work was required to continue to develop Council duties and practices for safeguarding adults and children in line with legislation and good practice.

Members had an opportunity to put forward questions and the following points were noted:

- project Discovery, a joint agency partnership set up to tackle modern day slavery (the second largest type of organised crime globally), consisted of 23 organisations available to be called upon to safeguard victims;
- data for fraud and scams, including those by email, text and telephone by district could be requested through the live chat facility on the Office for National Statistics website:  
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/contactus/generalandstatisticalenquiries>;
- it was suggested that the Council needed to play a more active part in encouraging crime to be reported;
- CCTV cameras were well publicised, with coverage in Bexhill and along the coastal strip being excellent. Cameras were monitored from a central point, but tended to be reactive;
- the central point for neighbourhood policing in the district was in Battle, with East Sussex Traffic Police officers based in Bexhill and a dedicated coaching unit for new recruits in East Sussex trained out of Bexhill, as well as Polegate. This was of benefit to Bexhill as it provided more police cover for the town in the forms of four police coaches and a constant turnover of new recruits, as well as traffic officers coming in and out of the town;
- scams were looked at by the Partnership, but could be difficult to manage, as victims were often too embarrassed to report;
- the Partnership was extremely effective at managing ASB, with all medium and high risk victims continuing to be supported through the multi-agency Hate ASB Risk Assessment Conference process;
- a partnership intelligence group met every two weeks to discuss all the various risks across the district, including repeat offenders and those offenders leaving prison;

- Integrated Offender Management was a national group looking at violent offenders and those causing the most harm to communities and how to manage those individuals; and
- criminality within Central Bexhill was much higher than in Battle and Rye, but due to a multitude of different factors, such as deprivation, poverty rates etc. The Partnership was working extremely hard to drive criminality down.

The Chairman thanked Inspector Chris Varrall for his update and praised the outstanding partnership working that was taking place.

**RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) the Council's work in relation to Anti-Social Behaviour and Community Safety be noted;
- 2) the Council's and partners' roles in dealing with resource intensive crime and Anti-Social Behaviour issues connected to COVID restrictions, lockdown and the return of traditional crime types be noted and planned for in 2021/22; and
- 3) cyber and telephone crime data be added to future reports of the Safer Rother Partnership.

OSC20/6

**PROGRESS ON THE ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY (2020)**

Members received the report of the Environment and Policy Manager, which outlined progress made on implementing the Environment Strategy (ES) since her appointment in August 2020. The Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) had been established by Cabinet in September 2019.

The priorities within the scope of the ES were: Air quality, active/sustainable transport; sustainable waste management; sustainable energy; protecting and enhancing biodiversity; construction and existing buildings; and environmentally friendly Council. The Key Performance Indicators (KPI) for the ES were: building environmental evidence/driving environmental improvements; and partnership working.

The ES had a dual focus, i.e. it was both internally and externally facing. Internally, linkages had been explored between the ES's priorities with existing Council activities and it was recognised that existing staff and functions were already delivering on aspects within the identified priority areas. Several resource gaps had been identified, representing risks for the organisation in terms of delivering the ES, which had been reported to the CCSG on 25 November 2020.

Externally, the ES had a strong commitment to working with partners in order to meet its goals. The core stakeholders included local environmental groups, local volunteer environmental officers, Rother parish and town councils and Rother Association of Local Councils (RALC). It represented a core group of circa 250 stakeholders.

The ES set out partnership working as a key approach to its delivery and ten partnership projects had been initiated within the first six months of the ES's delivery, which met the ES's KPIs. Projects included four short 30-day placements that were part of MSc courses at University of Brighton, benefiting from the Council's membership with the Clean Growth Hub. Two were large scale projects of up to 12 months duration: Bexhill i-tree study and tree planting strategy, and the Electric Vehicle (EV) charging project for Council-owned car parks. An overview of the projects and activities was detailed at Appendix A to the report.

An external communications specialist had been appointed to create a framework and a plan for communication and engagement, working closely with the Communications Team at East Sussex County Council. A progress overview was contained within Appendix B to the report.

The draft timetable for the new Local Plan saw adoption towards the end of 2023 and a dialogue with Planning Policy colleagues was already underway, aiming to develop robust linkages between the ES and the environmental evidence underpinning the new Local Plan. Two of the projects which had already been initiated under the ES would inform the new Local Plan, notably the Bexhill i-tree study and the MSc placement on onshore and offshore wind mapping.

Discussions with Democratic Services and the Corporate Management Team had been initiated to modify the report template used to draft reports for committee meetings, to include Environmental and Sustainability Implications. A clear guidance for staff with respect to these sections of the report template would be developed to ensure that all proposals being put forward were robust and aligned with the Council's climate emergency commitments and the visions and aims articulated within the ES and any other relevant strategic and policy documents.

Improved green spaces were specified as outcomes under the draft Corporate Plan, to maximise carbon reduction effectiveness. The Council's grounds maintenance 10-year contract was nearing its end and the Environment and Policy Manager had given advice to Neighbourhood Services on the contract review and attended a meeting with the external contractor on 28 January 2021. A soft market analysis was being carried out by the Neighbourhood Services team and time would be required to understand the various schemes available and how they aligned with the ES. The role of the Council within the process would need to be reviewed following the establishment of the Bexhill Town Council and discussions on devolvement of services.

Members suggested, and agreed, that if it was not possible to set up a working group to review management of green spaces within Rother at the current time, that Cabinet be recommended to add the work to that of the CCSG.

The ES's budget for 2020/2021 had been spent on Solar Together Sussex, Bexhill i-Tree study and the external communications specialist support. Criteria would be developed on how ES funding would be spent in subsequent years. The CCSG and local environmental organisations would advise Cabinet on what initiatives the ES budget would support.

The progress made in the first six months was a testament to the commitment to the climate emergency agenda within the Rother District. It showed that partnership working was possible and that it was the right approach for the ES's delivery.

**RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) the progress made against the Environment Strategy (2020) included in the Appendices A and B to the report be noted;
- 2) future progress reports on the Environment Strategy would include reporting from Services of the Council measured against the Key Performance Indicators, as the Strategy was embedded throughout the organisation;
- 3) a review of the Environment Strategy be undertaken annually; the review completion to coincide with the Strategy's adoption date in September 2020 and consideration be given to changes to the vision as recommended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and
- 4) Cabinet be requested to consider adding a review of the grounds maintenance contract to the work of the Climate Change Steering Group.

(Councillor Courtel declared a Personal Interest in this matter in so far as he was a member of the Bexhill Environment Group and Greenpeace and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the meeting during the consideration thereof).

OSC20/7

**REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING - QUARTER 3 - 2020/21**

Members received and considered the report of the Finance Manager on the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring Quarter 3 2020/21, that had been considered by Cabinet at their meeting on 1 March 2021. The report updated Members on the Council's finances as at the end of December 2020 and projected a provisional outturn for 2020/21.

Since the Quarter 2 Monitoring Report, there had been two reportable virements regarding a transfer of the property valuation contract budget from Acquisitions, Transformation and Regeneration to Resources and an £18,000 saving in additional staff hours within the Resources department.

At the end of Quarter 3, the Council was predicted to incur a deficit of £2.594m of which £1.677m was unplanned. This represented an

improvement of £193,000. The costs of services showed a deficit of £3.696m and non-service budgets increased the forecast overspend to £4.041m. This was reduced by £2.363m mainly due to additional grant income from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

All forecasts included inherent risks, and these were exacerbated by the level of uncertainty surrounding the pandemic. Quarter 2 report estimated the cost of the Council's pandemic response to be approximately £1.109m after the additional funding from the MHCLG. Quarter 3 forecast showed a net reduction of £197,000 to £912,000.

Overall, the deficit on the cost of services was attributed to various overspends/deficits including staff restructuring, consultancy advice, grants, increased planning fees and land charges income, increased Community Infrastructure Levy funding, salaries, increased garden waste income, supporting leisure services, housing benefit overpayments and other minor variances.

Interest income from investments was expected to be below budget (an improvement of £38,000 on the previous forecast). The pandemic had slowed progress on several capital schemes which would reduce the borrowing requirement in 2020/21. As a result, the interest payments forecast had reduced by a further £68,000 and the amount of revenue funding for capital projects by £628,000.

The Council had received £170,000 from MHCLG to assist with administration costs during the pandemic; in total £2,567,000 had been received. The reimbursement from the MHCLG for the loss of income from sales, fees and charges was anticipated to increase by £25,000 which was attributed to the reduction in car parking income.

The net impact on Reserves was forecast to be a reduction of £3.805m against the planned figure of £2.276m; an improvement of £821,000 on the previous quarter.

The Council Tax part of the Collection Fund (CF) was currently 2.50% lower than the same point last year and Business Rates was 1.85% lower. These represented a significant improvement of 2.74% from the Quarter 2 forecast. Based on the current collection rates, it was expected that the CF would be in deficit by the end of the financial year. Cabinet was advised that the Government was allowing councils to spread deficits over a 3-year period, so impact on the Council's financial position in 2020/21 would be limited.

A summary of spend by capital project for 2020/21, financing sources and overall five-year programme was shown at Appendices A and B to the report.

In December 2020, the Council had made a joint application to Sport England's (SE) National Leisure Relief Funding with Freedom Leisure (FL) to support the operator through December 2020 to 31 March 2021. The outcome of the application was still awaited and if successful, funding would be received before 31 March 2021 and an

open book basis would be applied and a grant agreement required with FL.

Should the SE funding be approved, Cabinet had agreed that the Council entered a grant agreement with FL to ensure compliance with any conditions to ensure that costs not properly incurred were recovered.

**RESOLVED:** That: the report be noted.

OSC20/8

**PERFORMANCE REPORT: THIRD QUARTER 2020/21**

Consideration was given to the report of the Head of Service Acquisitions, Transformation and Regeneration on the Performance Report of the Third Quarter 2020/21. 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.

A summary of the Council's performance against the selected Key Performance Indicators (KPI) areas (Housing and Homelessness, Waste and Recycling, Asset Income and Other Income) was set out in the report. Performance was compared to the previous quarter result and to the same quarter the previous year.

**Housing and Homelessness:** During quarter three, all seven measures had not met their target (Affordable Homes Built (gross) Supply target, (Affordable Homes Built (gross) Local Plan target, New Homes Built (net) Supply Target, New Homes Built (net) Local Plan Target, Homelessness Prevention Cases per 1,000 homes, Number of all Households in Temporary Accommodation [TA] and Average Weeks in Temporary Accommodation). There was a concern that once restrictions on evictions were lifted, the Council would be likely to see an increase in requests for assistance with TA. Current figures for those in TA were high due to a slow-down in the movement within the private rental market, therefore restricting the number of individuals who could be moved from TA.

**Waste and Recycling:** Two of the indicators had not met their targets (Re-use, Recycling, Composting: East Sussex County Council and Re-use, Recycling, Composting: Contractor) and one had met its target (Missed Bins per 100,000 Collections).

**Asset Income:** A review of rental income had been undertaken to ascertain the full impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Council's revenue stream. It was predicted that there would be £120,000 of unpaid rent in this financial year, and whilst some of this would be written off at a future point in time, officers would continue to work with tenants to recover this lost rental in the 2021/22 financial year once the longer-term effects of the pandemic were better understood.

**Other Income:** All three indicators had not met their targets (Car Park Income, Garden Waste Income and Planning Income) due to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Projected car park losses had increased to £192,000 for the 2021-year outturn; this was to be



reviewed as the full impact of the current lockdown and winter snow became known. The income for garden waste was performing well against target despite the £5 reduction in the subscription charge due to COVID-19 service disruption. It was anticipated that income would increase further as officers worked to incentivise new subscribers to the service to achieve a minimum of 20,000 subscribers by March 2021, to reduce the cost per household charged by the contractor. The number of households subscribing reached 20,137 as of 31 January 2021. Planning income had picked up in Quarter 3 but was still heavily dependent on how the economy reacted to COVID-19 during the forthcoming spring period, and how that impacted or stimulated the development and construction industry.

The Committee were pleased to note that a report on the KPIs for 2021/22 would be brought to the meeting scheduled for 26 April 2021, for the Committee to make further suggestions.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic had adversely affected performance levels in quarter one for all KPIs reported and continued to do so in Quarter 2. The Committee had previously agreed that the KPIs should remain the same to provide a baseline for the overall impact of COVID-19 in the current financial year.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

OSC20/9

#### **WORK PROGRAMME**

Consideration was given to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme, and the following additions/amendments were made:

- an additional meeting had been arranged for 12 April 2021 to discuss the Town Hall Redevelopment Proposals;
- Key Performance Targets 2021/22 be added to 26 April meeting;
- Review of the Disabled Facilities Grant Policy moved to 7 June 2021; and
- East Sussex County Council Nurseries in Bexhill, currently under 'Items for Consideration' could feed into the work of the Anti-Poverty Task and Finish Group.

Members were concerned that once the pre-election period had commenced for the elections taking place on 6 May 2021, issues to be discussed in the upcoming meetings would contravene the pre-election rules, in which case consideration should be given to those meetings being postponed. The Chief Executive would consider and advise Members in due course.

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

#### **CHAIRMAN**

The meeting closed at 8:10pm

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## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

<b>WORK PROGRAMME 2020 – 2021</b>		
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>SUBJECT – MAIN ITEM IN BOLD</b>	<b>Cabinet Portfolio Holder</b>
12.04.21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Town Hall Redevelopment Proposals</b></li> </ul>	
26.04.21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Report of the Off-Street Car Park Task and Finish Group</b></li> <li>• <b>Report of the Anti-Poverty Task and Finish Group</b></li> <li>• Call-in and Urgency Procedures</li> <li>• Draft Annual Report to Council</li> <li>• Key Performance Targets 2021/22</li> </ul>	Field Byrne Dixon
<b>WORK PROGRAMME 2021 - 2022</b>		
07.06.21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance Progress Report: Fourth Quarter 2020/21</li> <li>• Annual Work Programme</li> <li>• Review of the Disabled Facilities Grant Policy</li> </ul>	
19.07.21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring Quarter 4 2020/21</li> </ul>	
13.09.21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance Progress Report: First Quarter 2021/22</li> <li>• Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring – Quarter 1 2021/22</li> </ul>	
18.10.21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 to 2026/27</li> </ul>	
22.11.21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Performance Progress Report: Second Quarter 2021/22</li> <li>• Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring – Quarter 2 2021/22</li> </ul>	
24.01.22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Draft Revenue Budget Proposals 2022/23</b></li> </ul>	
14.03.22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Crime and Disorder Committee: to receive a report from the Community Safety Partnership</b></li> <li>• Performance Progress Report: Third Quarter 2021/22</li> <li>• Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring – Quarter 3 2021/22</li> </ul>	
25.04.22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call-in and Urgency Procedures</li> <li>• Draft Annual Report to Council</li> </ul>	
<b>ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regeneration incl Leisure Centre, Fountains, Skate Park and Accessibility of Green Spaces across the district</li> <li>• Corporate Plan review – referred back by Cabinet</li> <li>• Review of the Tourism Strategy</li> <li>• Review of the Economic Regeneration Strategy</li> <li>• Peer Review</li> <li>• East Sussex County Council Nurseries in Bexhill</li> <li>• Post-COVID Recovery Plan</li> </ul>		

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