

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

13 September 2021

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea on Monday 13 September 2021 at 6:30pm.

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

Other Members present: Councillor Mrs M.L. Barnes, P.C. Courtel and A.E. Ganly.

Advisory Officers present: Director of Place and Climate Change, Finance Manager, Corporate Programme and Policy Officer and Democratic Services Officer.

Also present: 13 members of the public, via the YouTube live broadcast.

OSC21/16 **MINUTES**

The Chairman was authorised to sign the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 19 July 2021 as a correct record of the proceedings.

OSC21/17 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M. Mooney, the Chief Executive and the Assistant Director Resources.

OSC21/18 **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

There were no disclosures of interest.

OSC21/19 **PERFORMANCE REPORT: FIRST QUARTER 2021/22**

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Place and Climate Change on the Performance Report of the First Quarter 2021/22. 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 Communities, Economic Development and Poverty, Waste Collection, Additional Income and Planning Processing) was set out in the report. Performance was compared to the previous quarter result and to the same quarter the previous year.

Housing and Communities: During quarter one, one measure had been flagged as a warning (Affordable Homes Built (gross) Supply target) and four did not meet their target (Number of all Households in Temporary Accommodation, Average Weeks in Temporary Accommodation, Number of Households on the Housing Register and Net Additional Homes Provided Supply target).

Economic Development and Poverty: During quarter one all three measures met their target (Number of Council Tax Reduction Claimants, Council Tax Collection Rates and Business Rates Collection Rates).

Waste Collection: During quarter one, this measure (East Sussex County Council (ESCC) Waste re-used, composted and recycled) did not meet its target. ESCC had advised that the recycling rates for the districts and boroughs were under review due to discrepancies between ESCC figures and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' for some authorities and were subject to change.

Additional Income: During quarter one, both measures did not meet their targets (Net Income from all Investment Assets and Additional Income Generation). The property team was actively looking to improve revenues from existing assets, primarily through scheduled rent reviews as well as ensuring any outstanding arrears were collected.

Planning Processing: During quarter one, both measures did not meet their targets (Major Applications days to process and Minor Applications days to process). This centred around limited capacity in the service due to vacant posts, long-term sickness, significant upturn in workload and challenges faced with COVID which had impacted on officers' ability to deal with all applications in a timely fashion.

Members had the opportunity to ask questions and the following points were noted during the discussion:

- the number of Council Tax Reduction Scheme claimants was better than expected, which may have been as a result of the Government's furlough scheme;
- the Council had purchased five properties to date to be used as Temporary Accommodation (TA), one of which was made up of four flats; the programme was progressing well with further properties in the pipeline;
- there had been a stall in the private sector rental market due to the non-movement of tenants during the pandemic and the increase in house prices;
- Members praised the Council's waste collection operator, Biffa, for maintaining their service over the pandemic, despite staffing issues;
- £1.7m had been spent on purchasing TA to date, £400,000 of which was grant funding, so the net cost to the Council was £1.3m. £1.7m of the original £3m budget therefore remained;
- build-out rates appeared to be very low across the district;

- Members raised concerns about fly-tipping and rubbish accumulating at Bring Sites. Officers were working with the Communications Team to inform the public that household waste sites were back in use and to provide information about recycling and the Council's bulky waste collection service. Members suggested that this information could also be included with Council Tax bills; and
- Members were concerned that many blocks of flats in the district did not appear to have recycling facilities; officers would raise with the Head of Neighbourhood Services to consider options.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

OSC21/20 **REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING QUARTER 1 - 2021/22**

Members received and considered the report of the Finance Manager on the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring Quarter 1 2021/22. The report contained details of the significant variations of the Revenue Budget and updated Capital Programme.

Since the detailed budget had been approved by Cabinet in February 2021, there had been one reportable virement. Staff turnover of £288,000 was originally budgeted centrally but had since been consolidated into departmental salary budgets.

The revenue forecast showed a deficit of £144,000, against the approved budget drawdown from Reserves of £2.7m. The main reasons for the variations were detailed in the report, which included planning appeal costs, the procurement of support from Capita for the Planning department, the delayed drawdown of the £50,000 grant by the Sussex Wildlife Trust for the development of the community wildlife garden at Rye Harbour, a forecast shortfall in car parking income resulting from the recent lockdown and a shortfall of £474,000 in the Financial Stability Programme's savings target.

Since the budget was approved, the Council had received further additional grant funding of £317,000 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to offset partially the over spends and the slowing of the Council's capital investment programme due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic is forecast to reduce financing costs by £688,000.

The Capital Programme forecast as at 30 June 2021 had increased by £1m against the approved budget; the position was summarised in Appendix B to the report. The biggest change since the Capital Programme had been approved in February 2021 was the North East Bexhill Office Development scheme, which had been removed from the programme due to the high degree of uncertainty surrounding it. This had reduced the estimated outturn by £15.737m. Other changes included an approved increase of £6 million to fund the purchase of further Temporary Accommodation units and scheme slippage from 2020/21 totalling about £9 million.

The Council had been successful in securing additional grant funding from the MHCLG and Homes England to support its existing Housing First (HF) Project as part of the wider East Sussex Rough Sleeper Initiative (RSI). The grant award was for £391,050 and would support the purchase of a further four units of HF accommodation to add to the four existing units already in operation, further reducing the cost to the Council of temporary accommodation. The remainder of the capital funding (approximately £320,000) would be secured from the £6m approved for the purchase of temporary accommodation. The capital grant was supported by a total revenue grant allocation of £84,000, covering the period 2021/22 and 2023/24, to fund the RSI Housing First workers who would support the former rough sleepers living in the accommodation.

The forecast impact on Reserves was a reduction of £4.282m against the planned use of £3.319m, an increase of £963,000. The amount of Reserves required to balance the revenue budget was forecast to increase by £144,000. Several capital schemes originally planned to be funded from revenue reserves in 2020/21 had slipped into 2021/22; the additional drawdown was £819,000 and was shown in Appendices B and C to the report.

The collection rate at the end of Quarter 1 for the Council Tax part of the Collection Fund was 29.92% of the collectable debit, which was 1.46% higher than the corresponding figures in 2020/21.

The collection rate at the end of Quarter 1 for the Business Rates part of the Collection Fund was 33.61% of the collectable debit, which was 0.91% lower than the corresponding figure in 2019/20.

The Assistant Director, Resources and the Finance Manager would work closely with Heads of Services and Members to reduce the forecast overspend and its impact on reserves.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) the report be noted; and
- 2) Cabinet be recommended to approve a grant offer of £391,050 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to support the purchase of further accommodation units as part of the East Sussex Rough Sleeper Initiative.

OSC21/21 **WORK PROGRAMME**

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

The following amendments were made to the Work Programme:

- Annual Review of the Homelessness Strategy – 18 October 2021, main item;
- Key Performance Targets 2022/23 – 24 January 2022; and
- Effectiveness of 'MyAlerts' – Items for Consideration.

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

CHAIRMAN

The meeting closed at 7:45pm

This page is intentionally left blank

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WORK PROGRAMME 2021 – 2022		
DATE OF MEETING	SUBJECT – MAIN ITEM IN BOLD	Cabinet Portfolio Holder
18.10.21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Review of the Homelessness Strategy • Review of the Environment Strategy • Post-COVID Recovery Plan 	Byrne Field Bayliss
22.11.21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium Term Financial Plan 2022/23 to 2026/27 • Performance Report: Second Quarter 2021/22 • Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring – Quarter 2 2021/22 • Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2022/23 Consultation Response 	Dixon
24.01.22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Revenue Budget Proposals 2022/23 • Key Performance Targets 2022/23 • Report of the Off-Street Car Parks Task and Finish Group 	Dixon Field
14.03.22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime and Disorder Committee: to receive a report from the Community Safety Partnership • Performance Report: Third Quarter 2021/22 • Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring – Quarter 3 2021/22 • Draft Anti-Poverty Strategy Proposals 	Dixon Byrne
25.04.22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call-in and Urgency Procedures • Draft Annual Report to Council 	
ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regeneration incl Leisure Centre, Fountains, Skate Park and Accessibility of Green Spaces across the district • Corporate Plan review – referred back by Cabinet • Review of the Economic Regeneration Strategy • Peer Review • Draft Corporate Customer Services Strategy Proposals • Litter Strategy • Progress on the Environment Strategy • Review of the Tourism Strategy and the impact of Airbnbs – Spring 2022 • Impact of Airbnb and second homes in Rye/Winchelsea/Camber – Spring 2022 • Effectiveness of 'MyAlerts' 		

This page is intentionally left blank