

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 October 2021

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held at the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea on Monday 18 October 2021 at 6:30pm.

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

Other Members present: Councillors Mrs M.L. Barnes, C.A. Bayliss, P.C. Courtel, K.M. Field, S.M. Prochak, MBE (in part) and G.F Stevens.

Advisory Officers in attendance: Director of Place and Climate Change, Head of Service Neighbourhood Services (in part) and Democratic Services Officer.

Also Present: 14 members of the public, via the YouTube live broadcast.

OSC21/22 **MINUTES**

The Chairman was authorised to sign the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 13 September 2021 as a correct record of the proceedings.

OSC21/23 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor C.A. Clark and the Principal Regeneration Officer.

OSC21/24 **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

There were no disclosures of interest.

OSC21/25 **FORGOTTEN PLACES - A PRESENTATION BY TREES FOR CITIES**

The Chairman welcomed Kate Sheldon, Suzanne Simmons, Kate Sparrow and Danielle Hill from Trees for Cities, who gave Members a presentation on their project 'Forgotten Places'.

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

- the Trees for Cities programme 'Forgotten Places' was an 18 month programme of community tree planting and tree-related activities in seven coastal towns and cities with high deprivation, low canopy cover and lack of investment towards tree programmes;
- the programme was split into four stages – a mapping exercise to identify areas to plant; a review and research into ways tree planting could stimulate the local economy; production of a guidance document; and creation of a tree planting strategy;

- 150 trees would be planted in Bexhill between October 2022 and February 2023;
- at least one Tree Planting Supervisor volunteer would be trained;
- a Queen's Green Canopy planting event would be organised for November / December 2022 to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee;
- tree planting should be focused on street verges, involving negotiations with East Sussex County Council highways;
- areas such as Sidley with existing community projects could also be encouraged to take part in projects such as 'Incredible Edible', which would involve planting fruit trees;
- the initial funding period was for 18 months and Trees for Cities would maintain the trees for three years, at which point responsibility would be handed over to landowners and communities. Training would be provided; and
- hedge planting could also be incorporated.

The Chairman thanked the representatives from Trees for Cities for their presentation and excellent work on the 'Forgotten Places' project.

OSC21/26 **PROGRESS ON THE ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY (2020)**

Members received the report of the Head of Service Neighbourhood Services, which outlined progress made on the Environment Strategy (2020) since the last report to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 March 2021.

The role of Environment and Policy Manager, which was currently vacant, was under review to take into account the general restructure of the Council's staffing and to explore working in partnership with neighbouring authorities to allow greater flexibility and efficiencies of scale. It was expected to have appropriate staff in place by no later than 31 March 2022.

Work continued on the Bexhill i-Tree Study, data from which would inform a tree planting strategy and other local planning. The charity Trees for Cities had secured funding of £143,000 for the Rother area from the second round of the Government's Green Recovery Challenge Fund as part of their 'Forgotten Places' project. The project would specifically focus on increasing tree cover in smaller coastal cities and towns with lower than average tree canopy cover and high levels of socio-economic deprivation. The Trees for Cities team delivered a presentation to Members elsewhere on the agenda.

Carbon Literacy training had been delivered by the Director of the Climate Emergency Support Programme of the Centre of Sustainable Energy to Councillors and members of the Corporate Management Team on 22 April.

Hester Management had facilitated a workshop for the Joint Waste Committee Members, Biffa and relevant partnership executive officers to review the existing carbon footprint of the vehicles and equipment used to deliver the Waste Collections and Street and Beach Cleansing service and to look at various proposals to reduce carbon emissions.

Work was in hand to develop a more detailed, evidence based and costed proposal.

Work was in progress with Idverde Grounds Maintenance to include the possibility of variations in the two year extension to the grounds maintenance existing contract that would facilitate increased bio-diversity, reductions in carbon emissions through the increased use of electric vehicles and equipment, and alternatives to some pesticides.

Energy consumption for the three Freedom Leisure Centres had been significantly reduced as compared to the same month in 2020 and in 2019, achieved through numerous minor operational changes that together added up to a substantial saving.

The piloting of areas of longer grass (environmental grass) to promote the growth of wildflowers and grasses and provide habitat for invertebrates had been extended to additional sites over the year. Sites would be reviewed by officers taking into account customer feedback, alongside input from officers and the grounds maintenance contractor.

The Off-Street Car Parks Task and Finish Group had recommended the implementation of three, 'long stay' car parks across the district to both support people who needed to park all day and to reduce congestion and therefore carbon emissions in town centres, by encouraging people to park on the outskirts in these lower daily tariff car parks. This had been supported by Cabinet and subsequently implemented.

Interventions through planning policy were essential to support the delivery of the Environment Strategy, and the Local Development Scheme (March 2021) anticipated that the Council would adopt a new Local Plan by December 2023. The potential to draft a Net Zero Supplementary Planning Document in tandem with the Local Plan Review process was also being explored. Some of the environmental evidence that underpinned the Environment Strategy sat within the Council's Planning Policy and vice versa, so dialogue with Planning Policy colleagues would continue to be developed and strengthened.

The Director of Place and Climate Change outlined the proposed next steps for driving forward carbon reduction across the district, including proposed use of the budget and resources to focus on two key areas: employment of a Projects Officer and funding to better inform the development of a Local Plan. The Climate Change Steering Group would be reconvened to agree next steps.

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and the following points were noted during the discussions:

- Members were keen for a baseline of the Council's carbon footprint prior to the COVID-19 pandemic to be established, to include the Town Hall and other Council-owned buildings. The baseline figures should be compared with figures for the current time taking into the effects of the pandemic;

- alternative forms of energy to electricity to be considered to alleviate pressure on the National Grid;
- all new buildings should be suitably insulated and more timber construction to be considered, which could be sourced locally;
- retro-fit of existing buildings to be encouraged in addition to collecting-heating schemes, such as the use of solar panels. Funding for retro-fitting was available and Optivo had recently submitted a bid;
- Members and officers of the Council to act as role models in the reduction of the carbon footprint; and
- Members were interested to look at the projects of other authorities to aid carbon footprint reduction, but with a limited budget, careful consideration of projects would be required.

RESOLVED: That the progress made against the Environment Strategy (2020) be noted.

OSC21/27 **ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN UPDATE**

Members received the report of the Principal Regeneration Officer outlining the Council's post-COVID recovery plan.

In November 2020, Cabinet approved the Council's Economic Recovery Action Plan, setting out the actions that the Council would take to support local economic recovery in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic; this was subsequently adopted by the Council in December 2020.

A copy of the Economic Recovery Action Plan was attached at Appendix 1 to the report. The Plan set out six broad ambitions: thinking local, acting local; building skills, creating jobs; fast-forwarding business; better places, fuller lives; cleaner energy, greener transport; and the future is digital. A summary was provided of the progress and activity against each:

- Supporting business – a total of £236,675 in Government funding had been allocated to Rother to support temporary measures to ease businesses back after lockdown.
- Skills and Workforce – The Hospitality sector saw issues around filling vacancies which were still continuing, Social Media for Business workshops were offered to businesses across Rother by Let's Do Business to help reach customers and develop brand awareness and events were supported with an online training programme to support event organisers and promoters in Rother delivered by 18 Hours.
- Tourism and Culture – 1066 Country had been working to a COVID Recovery Plan, updated as Government guidelines changed. The summer of 2021 had required a fine balance between encouraging staycationers to the area, against the problems of 'over tourism'; the campaign sought to encourage visitors away from the tourist 'honey-pots' whilst also guiding people to the safest lifeguarded beaches. The Sussex Modern campaign had continued to promote Sussex, celebrating its modernity, culture, wine and landscape in partnership with its 36 partner organisations and the 1066 Country Walk had re-

launched bringing new life to the 31-mile footpath, with its bespoke sculptures and new signage, seating and information boards.

- Improving Places – The De La Warr Pavilion’s (DLWP) vision to level-up Community, Creativity and Skills in the region was a basis of the Council’s £17m Levelling Up Fund application. Building on its legacy of culture-led regeneration, the DLWP’s capital project centred around a series of objectives for the Pavilion which, if met, could dramatically impact the local landscape.
- Low Carbon – The impact of staff working from home had been a significant boost to carbon reduction targets. The Council quickly established new working practices to facilitate this change, which continued to be used.
- Connectivity – Information on the Government’s Rural Gigabit voucher scheme continued to be rolled out to parish councils across the district.

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

- consideration should be given to an affordable childcare model in light of changes in workplace practices, i.e. increase in homeworking, to avoid childcare providers not being used as a result;
- in order to encourage people back into town centres, consideration should be given to converting empty retail units into residential buildings;
- high streets in the district had fared well over the course of the pandemic with their small, individual shops rather than the large chain stores seen in high streets in other districts. Consolidation of Bexhill town centre could be considered as it appeared too large now for the shops located within it;
- the most recent French Market in Bexhill had taken place in the De La Warr car park rather than Devonshire Road as it had been previously, which had proved popular. Sackville Road traders were keen to be able to hold markets in the road and a report was being taken to the Licensing and General Purposes Committee for consideration to designate Sackville Road as a consent street for markets;
- leisure facilities should be encouraged to move into the high streets as well as central points for deliveries from companies such as Amazon to encourage people back to town centres;
- Members suggested promoting the two-hour free parking available in towns. The Chamber of Commerce had previously produced a map of free parking, which could be re-printed; and
- shop keepers in Rye had felt well supported by the recent poster campaign to encourage shoppers back to the centre.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

OSC21/28

WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee’s Work Programme. Members agreed that the meeting scheduled for 25

April 2022 should be kept light to allow space for any upcoming reports or items to be added from the Items for Consideration.

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

CHAIRMAN

The meeting closed at 8:15pm.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WORK PROGRAMME 2021 – 2022		
DATE OF MEETING	SUBJECT – MAIN ITEM IN BOLD	Cabinet Portfolio Holder
22.11.21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Review of the Homelessness Strategy • 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 	Byrne 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' 		

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