

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 March 2022

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea on Monday 14 March 2022 at 6:30pm.

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

Other Members present: Councillors Mrs M.L. Barnes, P.C. Courtel, K.P. Dixon (remote) and G.F. Stevens (remote).

Advisory Officers present: Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Head of Environmental Services, Licensing and Community Safety (in part), Head of Housing and Community (in part), Community Safety Coordinator (in part) and Democratic Services Officer.

Also present: Claire Cordell, Rother Voluntary Action, Chief Inspector Sarah Godley and 4 members of the public, via the live webcast.

OSC21/49 **MINUTES**

The Chairman was authorised to sign the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 24 January 2022 as a correct record of the proceedings.

OSC21/50 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor B.J. Drayson (ex-officio), Chief Finance Officer and Director – Place and Climate Change.

OSC21/51 **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

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

Gray Agenda Item 7 – Personal interest as the Council’s appointed representative on the Board of the Rother District Citizens Advice Bureau.

Maynard Agenda Item 5 – Personal Interest as Chairman of the East Sussex Safer Communities Partnership.

OSC21/52 **ROTHER COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP**

Members received the Head of 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.

Members were advised of the key initiatives delivered during 2021/22 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 2021/22 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; 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.

The Chairman welcomed Chief Inspector Sarah Godley to the meeting who drew Members' attention to the main points of the report. There were 5,237 crimes in Rother reported to Sussex Police during the 12 months to the end of January 2022, which was 12 fewer than in the previous year. The Rother crime data reported to Sussex Police during 2021 saw the highest percentage reductions on the previous year in March 2021, with a 17.1% reduction 1,058 fewer reports. This mirrored the pattern of reports in Wealden, albeit a month later in Rother. Hastings had seen percentage increases in November, December 2021 and January 2022; East Sussex and the Force (Sussex wide) had only seen increases in December 2021 and January 2022.

Most crime types had seen decreases in the 12 months to the end of January 2022. However, the following had seen increases: theft from a vehicle (only started to increase in December 2021); racially aggravated crime; domestic abuse reports classified as crimes. Agencies providing services and support to victims of domestic abuse reported increases in cases of coercion and control and end of relationship violence and suicide; violent crime against a person; and harassment.

Reports of ASB to the Council, police and housing providers increased during COVID-19 as more people were at home, noticed more behaviour and whose tolerance reduced as they experienced more incidents.

In 2021/22, the SRP funded a range of projects to address priorities in Rother, namely: youth intervention; Sidley Recreation Projects; Our Time 2 Talk; enabling easy sharing of the Black Cat Radar Box (speed recording of vehicles in rural areas) by Parish Councils; Up Grade training; Statutory Safeguarding and Exploitation Training for Taxi Drivers in Rother.

The SRP Joint Action Group agreed the priorities for 2022/23 at its February meeting: ASB and Youth Crime; Rural Crime; and Drug Related Harm. Domestic Abuse and Road Safety would be included for specific focused work.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 required a review of Council and partner agencies' responsibilities under this legislation. This work had started and would be a focus for the multi-agency Domestic Abuse Group. Further work was also required to develop Council duties and practices for safeguarding adults and children in line with legislation and good practice. Work would be carried out through continued engagement with Adult Social Care (East Sussex County Council) structures, Police, the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner and partners to delineate between East Sussex, pan Sussex work and that required at a local level on a number of crime and safeguarding related issues.

Further training for Council staff and partners on a wide range of issues such as Prevent, Child Sexual and Criminal Exploitation, Modern Slavery, Domestic Abuse and changes in legislation would be considered a priority for 2022/23.

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

- to distinguish between reported/perceived crime and actual crime, an engagement officer within Sussex Police regularly monitored comments and reports made on social media and compared with crime data;
- reports could be made on the Sussex Police website (www.sussex.police.uk) of any areas where residents felt vulnerable;
- Members were concerned that in many areas, such as Sidley, CCTV cameras were not being used correctly and suggested that an email reporting system be set-up in order for residents to alert camera operators of an incident taking place. Banks of cameras from across Sussex were monitored by three operators in a central control room, but due to a lack of resources it was not possible to observe all constantly. Any incidents reported through 999 or 101 calls would be focused on. Members commented that a residents' alert system be further investigated;
- Members were concerned that not all computer and telephone fraud was being reported accurately, as fraud data was very low in the report;
- Members suggested that more focus be given to rehabilitation of offenders in the report;

- Members requested that there be more police presence in rural areas of the district. Members were advised that, due to the size of the area, Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) targeted areas where they were most needed, but requests for a presence could be made on the Sussex Police website. Sussex Police also made contact with councils to determine priorities;
- graffiti, tagging and egg throwing had become a problem in some areas. Emergency situations should be reported using 101 or 999, otherwise parish and town councils should email Sussex Police to report incidents, in order that patterns and emerging risks could be identified;
- residents were encouraged to report incidents of ‘cuckooing’ and there were multi-agency arrangements in place to help support victims, who would not automatically be charged with an offence;
- Members were concerned that the lack of police presence in Rye had led to an increase in crime. Sussex Police were aware and one individual had recently been charged with 19 burglary offences in the town. It was acknowledged that there was still work to be done; and
- Members were requested to encourage their residents to report any instances of crime to Sussex Police.

The Chairman thanked Chief Inspector Sarah Godley for her update and praised the outstanding partnership working that was taking place.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) the Chair of the Safer Rother Partnership be requested to consider the issues raised from the report;
- 2) the Council’s work in relation to Anti-Social Behaviour, crime reduction and Community Safety be noted; and
- 3) the possible impact of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 be noted.

(Councillor Maynard declared a Personal Interest in this matter as Chairman of the East Sussex Safer Communities Partnership and in accordance with the Members’ Code of Conduct remained in the meeting during the consideration thereof).

OSC21/53 **DRAFT ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY**

It was agreed by the Chairman to vary the order of the Agenda and for Members to discuss Item 8 after Item 5.

Members received the report of the Head of Housing and Community which gave details of the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy to go out to consultation with key stakeholders and the wider population of Rother. The Chairman welcomed Claire Cordell, Chief Executive Officer Rother Voluntary Action (RVA), to the meeting.

In January 2020, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee approved the formation of an Anti-Poverty Task and Finish Group (APT&FG), with the aim to investigate the effects of income, health and housing poverty

on local people and the local services that support them. In June 2021, the APT&FG made recommendations to Cabinet that an Anti-Poverty Strategy be developed for Council approval, for statutory and community services operating in the Rother district to work together to reduce levels of poverty. It was also recommended that the development and delivery of the strategy be coordinated through existing partnership structures such as the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).

On 4 November 2021, a multi-agency event was held at The Pelham, led by the Council in partnership with RVA. The purpose of the event was to review the recommended objectives and identify the high level aims and actions that would support the Council to achieve these. Attendees were presented with feedback and case studies that had been secured by RVA, in addition to the findings of the APT&FG based on the evidence gathering sessions it had undertaken. The objectives were reviewed and supported by those present at the event with a series of high level aims and actions also identified. The actions had been captured within the draft Action Plan appended to the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy at Appendix A to the report.

The group also identified that the aims and actions identified within the strategy and its action plan need to be delivered by a multi-agency Anti-Poverty Strategy Steering Group (APSSG) to ensure objectives remain achievable, with progress reports on the action plan fed to the Rother LSP who would support and monitor progress.

The consultation plan was attached at Appendix B to the report which set out the groups to be consulted with and the methods to be used. The majority of the consultation would take place via an online questionnaire; however, telephone and written consultation responses would be accepted. The consultation questionnaire was attached at the end of Appendix B to the report which related to the draft document and proposed strategy objectives and action plan.

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

- Members thanked the APT&FG, the Head of Housing and Community, officers and the RVA for their work in creating the Strategy;
- Members acknowledged that poverty was difficult to resolve at a local level;
- the APSSG would report regularly to the LSP as well as to this Committee;
- any future comments from Members could be fed through Councillor Coleman as the Council's spokesperson for Young Persons and Child Poverty; and
- Members were invited to contact the Head of Housing and Community with details of any charities to be included in the consultation who were not already on the list.

The strategy proposed had been developed between key local partners to ensure that the objectives identified were relevant and that the

actions proposed ambitious, while being achievable within the resources available locally. The Strategy would be regarded as an important first step towards developing a more comprehensive response to tackling poverty locally.

The Chairman thanked Claire Cordell for attending the meeting and praised the work of the RVA.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet be requested to approve the draft Anti-Poverty Strategy for consultation with key stakeholders and the wider population of Rother.

OSC21/54 **PERFORMANCE PROGRESS REPORT: THIRD QUARTER 2021/22**
Consideration was given to the report of the Director – Place and Climate Change on the Performance Report of the Third 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) at the end of the third financial quarter (1 October 2021 to 31 December 2021) 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 three, one measure had met its target (Number of affordable homes delivered (gross) (supply target)) and four measures did not meet their target (Number of all Households in Temporary Accommodation (TA), Average Weeks in TA, Number of Households on the Housing Register and Net Additional Homes Provided Supply target).

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

Waste Collection: The reported figures were for quarter two as the data received was one quarter in arrears from Waste Data Flow. This measure (East Sussex County Council (ESCC) Waste re-used, composted and recycled) did not meet its target, largely due to contamination at bring-sites. 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 three, 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. Work had commenced with

Heads of Service to identify proposals that would be presented to the Financial Stability Programme Board in due course. As a result of the continuing pandemic, this work and the subsequent implementation of proposals had been delayed and therefore it was unlikely that the target for 2021/22 would be met.

Planning Processing: During quarter three, both measures did not meet their targets (Major Applications days to process and Minor Applications days to process). However, there was a marked improvement in the third quarter, compared to the second quarter, for processing of both major and minor applications. Work was continuing on processing improvements and the impact would be clearer with the fourth quarter results.

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

- the Housing and Communities indicators that did not meet their targets were of concern. The length of time in TA was a helpful indicator, but TA was in the process of being transformed into a supportive scheme to prevent rough sleeping or returning to abusive situations; and
- performance in planning processing was disappointing, but Members were reassured that work was on-going and performance had continued to improve, although the rate had slowed. Performance figures were reported to the Planning Committee on a monthly basis.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

OSC21/55 **REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING QUARTER 3 - 2021/22**

Members received and considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer on the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring Quarter 3 2021/22. The report contained details of the significant variations of the Revenue Budget, updated Capital Programme and a brief update on the Collection Fund performance.

There had been two reportable virements since the previous financial update to Members. The first related to the Audio-Visual system maintenance (£13,000), which had been transferred from the Corporate Core budget to the Acquisitions, Transformation and Regeneration budget. The second was the transfer of a property from Acquisitions, Transformation and Regeneration that was no longer used as a commercial let, but was instead used as storage space by Housing, Community and Neighbourhood Services.

The Revenue Budget forecast indicated a surplus of £128,000, against the approved budget drawdown from Reserves of £2.7m; this represented an improvement of £222,000 since the Quarter 2 forecast. The main reasons for the variations since the previous monitoring report were detailed in the report, which included a reduction in the cost of support from Capita Business Services to clear the planning applications backlog, reduction in potential judicial review costs,

additional income from the administration of Community Infrastructure Levy receipts, additional salary costs, small increase in cost of Housing Benefit claims, additional IT systems operations costs, predicted overspend of the Housing Needs and Rough Sleeping Initiative budgets now anticipated to achieve a 'break even' position, car parking income expected to exceed the budget and receipt of further Central Government grants.

Members raised concerns that there had been no changes to the Financial Stability Programme since the last forecast. A report would be taken to Cabinet in due course.

The Capital Programme forecast as at 31 December 2021 was £15.348m, which was £47.345m lower than the approved revised budget. As previously reported, this was mainly due to the continued impact of the pandemic. The position was summarised in Appendix B to the report, the main change related to the purchase of the Mount View site. Where schemes were forecast to underspend, it was still expected that they will be completed in future years. A revised programme was approved by Cabinet on 7 February 2022 as part of the Council's Capital Strategy and future cashflows would continue to be monitored and reported until scheme completion.

The forecast impact on Reserves was a drawdown of £3.118m against the planned use of £3.319m. This was a decrease of £277,000 from the previous forecast.

The collection rate at the end of Quarter 3 for the Council Tax part of the Collection Fund was 84.51% of the collectable debit and 87.14% of the budgeted yield. Both figures were higher than the corresponding figures for 2020/21 by 1.35% and 1.20% respectively.

The collection rate at the end of Quarter 3 for the Business Rates part of the Collection Fund was 77.72% of the collectable debit, which was 0.49% higher than the corresponding figure in 2020/21. This represented a considerable improvement from the previous quarter when the collection rate was 6.30% down on the 2020/21 figure.

The Council currently provided funding of £85,00 per annum to Rother District Citizens Advice (CAB). This had been agreed from 1 April 2020 for a four-year period with a review after two years. Members were keen to retain the Council's connection with the CAB and it was recommended and agreed that it would be appropriate to continue the funding for a further one-year period while the arrangement and service levels were reviewed following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Council also provided funding of £8,500 per annum to Bexhill Museum, which had also been agreed for a four-year period from 1 April 2020, with a review after two years. Discussions were ongoing with Bexhill Town Council over services they might wish to provide, therefore it was recommended to continue with the funding for a further one-year period to allow those discussions to develop. Members raised concerns that as the Museum was of considerable importance to the district that the Council should continue to provide funding.

Currently, the £8,500 grant per annum was funded from the Bexhill Special Expenses; the Council provided additional funding to the Museum through other means.

The revenue forecast for Quarter 3 showed a deficit of £2.571m, which was £128,000 lower than the approved planned use of Reserves. The Chief Finance Officer would continue to work closely with Heads of Services and Members to reduce further the planned drawdown from Reserves.

The Council's Capital Programme was forecast to underspend by £47.345m in 2021/22, but this was due to timing differences and the approved five-year programme was still on target to be delivered.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) the report be noted; and
- 2) Cabinet be requested to approve the continuation of two Service Level Agreements in respect of Rother District Citizen's Advice and Bexhill Museum, and agree to the extension of funding of £85,000 for Rother Citizens Advice and £8,500 for Bexhill Museum for a further one-year period.

(Councillor Gray declared a Personal Interest in this matter as the Council's appointed representative on the Board of the Rother District Citizens Advice Bureau and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the meeting during the consideration thereof).

OSC21/56 **WORK PROGRAMME**

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

- Update report from the Local Strategic Partnership to be added to the 'Items for Consideration'; and
- Update report from the Health and Wellbeing Board be added to the 'Items for Consideration'.

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

CHAIRMAN

The meeting closed at 8:28pm

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WORK PROGRAMME 2021 – 2022		
DATE OF MEETING	SUBJECT – MAIN ITEM IN BOLD	Cabinet Portfolio Holder
25.04.22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Report and Recommendations of the Constitution Review Steering Group • Call-in and Urgency Procedures • Draft Annual Report to Council • Progress on the Environment Strategy 	Oliver Field
WORK PROGRAMME 2022 - 2023		
06.06.22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Report: Fourth Quarter 2021/22 • Annual Work Programme 	
18.07.22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Outturn 2021/22 	
12.09.22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Report: First Quarter 2022/23 • Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring – Quarter 1 2022/23 	
17.10.22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2027/28 • Annual Review of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2019-2024) 	
21.11.22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Performance Report: Second Quarter 2022/23 • Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring – Quarter 2 2022/23 	
23.01.23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Revenue Budget Proposals 2023/24 • Key Performance Targets 2023/24 	
13.03.23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crime and Disorder Committee: to receive a report from the Community Safety Partnership • Performance Report: Third Quarter 2022/23 • Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring – Quarter 3 2022/23 	
24.04.23	<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 • 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' • Town Hall Renaissance Project • Update report from the Local Strategic Partnership • Update report from the Health and Wellbeing Board 		

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