

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17 October 2022

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held at the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea on Monday 17 October 2022 at 6:30pm.

Committee Members present: Councillors P.N. Osborne (Chair), Mrs V. Cook (Vice-Chair), J. Barnes, J.J. Carroll, C.A. Clark, S.J. Coleman, P.C. Courtel, Mrs D.C. Earl-Williams, P.J. Gray, K.M. Harmer (ex-officio), C.A. Madeley, C.R. Maynard and M. Mooney

Other Members present: Councillors Mrs M.L. Barnes, A.E. Ganly (remote) (in part), L.M. Langlands (remote) (in part), G.F. Stevens and H.L. Timpe (in part).

Advisory Officers present: Director – Place and Climate Change, Chief Finance Officer, Head of Housing and Community Services (in part), Head of Neighbourhood Services (in part) and Democratic Services Officer.

Also present: Rachel Fowler, Managing Director – Strategic Leisure Limited (in part), six members of the public in the Council Chamber and 27 members via the live webcast.

OSC22/23. **MINUTES**

The Chair was authorised to sign the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 29 September 2022 as a correct record of the proceedings.

OSC22/24. **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES**

There were no apologies for absence.

OSC22/25. **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

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

Barnes J Agenda Item 5 – Personal Interest as Vice-Chair of Etchingam Trust for Sports and Recreation.

Maynard Agenda Item 5 – Personal Interest as Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health, East Sussex County Council.

Agenda Item 6 – Personal Interest as Executive Member of East Sussex County Council.

OSC22/26. **ROTHER HEALTH, WELL-BEING AND LEISURE FACILITIES STRATEGY**

Members received the report of the Head of Neighbourhood Services which outlined the draft Rother Health, Well-Being and Leisure

Facilities Strategy for Members' consideration, prior to public consultation and final approval by Cabinet and full Council.

Cabinet, in July 2020, had approved the suspension of the project in the Corporate Plan 2014 to develop the former Bexhill High School site as a leisure destination, which consisted of building a new leisure centre including a swimming pool and residential housing, given the COVID-19 pandemic, its impact on leisure facilities and future use, and uncertainty surrounding Council finances. It was agreed that a new contract to maintain existing leisure services up to 31 March 2024 would be procured.

The new leisure management contract for Bexhill Leisure Centre and Bexhill Leisure Pool, operated by Freedom Leisure (FL), commenced on 1 April 2021 and was due to expire on 31 March 2024. The separate Rye Sports Centre contract, also operated by FL, was due to expire on 31 March 2026. The buildings in Bexhill were in need of major refurbishment or replacement and it was therefore important that a strategy was agreed for the provision of appropriate leisure facilities for the future.

On 10 January 2022, Cabinet approved the appointment of a leisure strategist to complete market research on residents' use and requirements from leisure facilities across the district and on health and well-being in general to inform a draft Health, Well-Being and Leisure Facilities Strategy that was realistic and achievable, and supported an active and healthy lifestyle. The draft Rother Health, Well-Being and Leisure Facilities Strategy was attached at Appendix B to the report for Members' consideration and amendments prior to public consultation. Members were led through the Strategy by Rachel Fowler, Managing Director, Strategic Leisure Limited who completed the independent market research and drafted the Strategy report

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

- leisure facilities were part of an overall health and well-being strategy and Members felt that the current title of the Strategy was misleading. Members therefore recommended and agreed that Cabinet consider amending the title of the Strategy to 'Rother Health and Well-Being: Leisure Facilities Strategy';
- Members suggested consideration be given to adding dancing into the Strategy as a known popular activity amongst the residents of Rother, with both physical and social benefits;
- there was no mention of concessions for residents on low incomes, young people or of any local membership options in the Strategy. Members suggested consideration be given to incorporating these into the Strategy;
- the research provided a representative sample of the population of Rother and the detailed data could be found in the appendices to the Strategy;
- East Sussex Public Health had been consulted with and were very supportive of the Strategy. Working locally with GPs would be challenging and would need to form part of the implementation plan;

- nationally, leisure centres had seen a return of approximately 75% of their users from before the COVID-19 pandemic. Habits had changed and many users were continuing to exercise at home or outside, rather than choosing to go back to indoor centres;
- the largest proportion of returning leisure centre users were to swimming pools, with gym users being second;
- Members were keen to ensure that high quality, accessible to all wet facilities would be a priority, as the need had been demonstrated by the results of the research;
- Members did not consider the Council's role in the Strategy to be purely one of an enabler and sign-poster to opportunities to be physically active, as implied in the key principles of the Strategy. Members recommended that Cabinet consider rewording this principle to the Council being a deliverer as well as an enabler and sign-poster;
- Members were keen to ensure that the Gullivers site in Sidley be incorporated into the Strategy;
- references to the use of technology may attract more young people to leisure facilities and increased physical activity, such as virtual reality and video games;
- Members paid tribute to the Council's Community Grants Scheme in developing rural communities, which had enabled partnership working with parish councils to deliver leisure facilities such as the community pools and outdoor gym in Etchingham. This was a scheme that Members felt played an important role in the Strategy;
- Members requested consideration be given to adding the wording '...and be as energy efficient as possible' to key principle 6 in the Strategy, as achieving carbon neutrality in all new leisure provision was not enough;
- FL had recently announced the temporary closure of the swimming pool in Rye due to rising utility costs. Members recommended and agreed to explore the reasons further. Swimming was important for both physical and mental health and was the most requested activity in the market research survey, particularly lane swimming which was offered at the Rye pool. Representatives from FL and Rye Town Council would therefore be invited to the next meeting of the Committee to discuss further.

The Chair thanked Rachel Fowler for her detailed presentation of the Strategy and the Committee for their comments, which would be reported to Cabinet.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) Cabinet be requested to amend the name of the Strategy to 'Rother Health and Well-Being: Leisure Facilities Strategy';
- 2) Cabinet be requested to reword Key Principle 2 of the Strategy to 'The Council's role is one of deliverer as well as enabler and sign-poster to opportunities to be physically active';
- 3) Cabinet be requested to reword Key Principle 6 of the Strategy to 'All new provision should be designed to achieve carbon neutrality and be as energy efficient as possible';

- 4) Cabinet be requested to approve the draft Health, Well-Being and Leisure Facilities Strategy prior to public consultation commencing in November 2022, taking into account points raised by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee; and
- 5) representatives from Freedom Leisure and Rye Town Council be invited to the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee scheduled to be held on 21 November 2022 to discuss the temporary closure of Rye Swimming Pool.

(Councillor J. Barnes declared a Personal Interest in this matter as Vice-Chair of Etchingam Trust for Sports and Recreation and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the meeting during the consideration thereof).

(Councillor Maynard declared a Personal Interest in this matter as Lead Member for Adult Social Care and Health, East Sussex County Council and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the meeting during the consideration thereof).

OSC22/27. **EAST SUSSEX TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION POLICY**

Members received the report of the Head of Housing and Community which gave details of the East Sussex Temporary Accommodation Policy that had been written by the operational housing managers across all five districts and boroughs. The Policy outlined the standards applied to the size and location of Temporary Accommodation (TA) as well as the processes and procedures to follow. The Policy applied both within district or borough, and outside of the placement authority area. The Policy was appended at Appendix A to the report.

The Policy covered both interim placements made under Section 188 Housing Act 1996 (as amended), during the relief duty and while homelessness enquiries were undertaken, and longer-term TA placements for households accepted as homeless under Section 193 of the Act. 4.

The East Sussex Housing Officers Group had identified that a more consistent approach to the placement of households in TA was needed across East Sussex. The new policy would lead to a more efficient process and procedure for making placements between local authorities and the various private providers of TA within East Sussex.

The Policy did not cover the standard of TA used, with these standards being dictated by the national Housing Health and Safety Rating System overseen by the different local authority housing teams. The Policy was relatively limited in its scope, focusing on the suitability standards for the size and location of TA, as well as the processes and procedures local authorities would follow when placing households in TA.

The main areas of the Policy were: what constituted suitable TA, in terms of its size and location; to provide a more consistent approach to the amount of money working households were expected to contribute;

and that the districts and boroughs did not accommodate pets in TA and how breaches of licence conditions would be addressed.

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

- the number of households in TA over recent months was 130, which was 90 more than at the current time the previous year;
- an increase in households requiring TA was expected, due to the current cost of living crisis;
- employment considerations and households with a child or children due to take public examinations within the current school year should be given higher priority when looking at TA placements;
- the policy reflected best practice, which the Council already had in place; and
- the number of verified rough sleepers in the district was currently three, the annual count was three or four. Members would be alerted if the number increased in the quarterly performance review reports.

RESOLVED: That the East Sussex Temporary Accommodation Policy be recommended to Cabinet and full Council for adoption.

(Councillor Maynard declared a Personal Interest in this matter as Executive Member of East Sussex County Council and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the meeting during the consideration thereof).

OSC22/28. **ROTHER DISTRICT COUNCIL OWNED/LEASED ACCOMMODATION COMPLAINTS HANDLING POLICY**

Members received the report of the Head of Housing and Community which gave details of the Rother District Council Owned/Leased Accommodation Complaints Handling Policy. In 2020, Rother District Council became a Registered Provider of accommodation and thus far, owned 24 units of accommodation and one unit of accommodation that the Council leased and managed. The number of units of accommodation the Council owned and leased was set to rise further as the scale of the Temporary Accommodation Support Scheme and leasing scheme were increased.

The Policy was the first that the Council was statutorily required to have as part of the emerging Social Housing White Paper, which included a range of improvements to the safety and management standards of social housing following the tragic events of Grenfell. A suite of further policies was presently in development as preparations were underway for the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill to progress through its readings in Parliament. These policies would include, but not limited to, a Reasonable Adjustments Policy, Rent Setting Policy, Tenant Involvement Policy, Anti-Social Behaviour Policy, Unacceptable Behaviour Policy and Domestic Abuse Policy.

The Complaints Handling Policy would apply to all activity undertaken by Council staff or contractors that might be involved in property

management and support of tenants. The Policy was appended at Appendix A to the report.

There were a range of benefits to be gained from having an effective and efficient complaints policy. After consulting with the Council's Complaints Team, it was felt that a separate complaints policy was needed as the standards required by the Housing Ombudsman for housing tenant complaints were higher than the Council's complaints standards. To complement the Policy, a leaflet that would be given to all tenants at tenancy sign-up to ensure the tenant was aware of the complaints process and standards to expect.

The Council would be required to complete an internal self-assessment of the complaints handling performance annually and report the outcome to Members of the Audit and Standards Committee when standards related matters were considered at the December meetings, commencing in December 2023. The outcome of the assessment would be published on the Council's website and made accessible to residents and the self-assessment would be included in the annual report to tenants.

RESOLVED: That the Rother District Council Owned/Leased Accommodation Complaints Handling Policy be recommended to Cabinet and full Council for adoption.

OSC22/29. **WORK PROGRAMME**

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

- since publication of the Agenda, the meeting to discuss the Town Hall Renaissance Project report had been moved to 24 October. Following the decision of the Planning Committee to reject the planning proposal, the report had subsequently been withdrawn and the meeting therefore cancelled. Officers would reconsider alternative options to the scheme and bring back to the Committee for consideration and onward recommendation to Cabinet and full Council. The Director – Place and Climate Change would circulate the results of the public engagement on the Town Hall Renaissance Project to all Members of the Council;
- representatives from Freedom Leisure and Rye Town Council to be invited to the 21 November meeting to discuss the temporary closure of Rye Swimming Pool; and
- an update on the Environment Strategy added to the 21 November meeting.

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

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 8:43pm

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

WORK PROGRAMME 2022 – 2023		
DATE OF MEETING	SUBJECT – MAIN ITEM IN BOLD	Cabinet Portfolio Holder
21.11.22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2027/28 • Performance Report: Second Quarter 2022/23 • Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring – Quarter 2 2022/23 • Bexhill Town Centre Conservation Area TAN Task & Finish Group • Closure of Rye Swimming Pool • Environment Strategy Review 	Jeeawon Timpe Field
23.01.23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Draft Revenue Budget Proposals 2023/24 • Annual Review of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2019-2024) • Final Built Leisure Facilities Strategy • Key Performance Targets 2023/24 	Jeeawon Byrne Timpe
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 • Recommendations of the Off-Street Car Parks Task & Finish Group 	Jeeawon Field
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 inc. Leisure Centre, Fountains, Skate Park and Accessibility of Green Spaces across the district • 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 – date TBC • Impact of Airbnb and second homes in Rye/Winchelsea/Camber • Effectiveness of 'MyAlerts' • Update report from the Local Strategic Partnership • Update report from the Health and Wellbeing Board • Corporate Plan review – to be referred back by Cabinet – date TBC • Review of the Financial Stability Programme – date TBC • A review of Mental Health across the district – date TBC 		

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