



### OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 November 2023

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held at the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea on Monday 20 November 2023 at 6:32pm.

Committee Members present: Councillors P.N. Osborne (Chair), Mrs V. Cook (Vice-Chair), S. Burton, T.M. Killeen (MBE) and S.B. McGurk.

Committee Members present remotely: Councillors J. Barnes (MBE), Mrs M.L. Barnes, C.A. Clark, B.J. Coupar, C.A. Creaser, M.C. Legg and C.R. Maynard.

Other Members present: Councillors K.M. Field (in part) and A. Rathbone Ariel (in part).

Other Members present remotely: Councillor J. Stanger.

Advisory Officers in attendance: Chief Executive, Interim Deputy Chief Executive, Director - Place and Climate Change, Head of Digital and Customer Services (in part), Head of Service Environmental Services, Licensing and Community Safety (in part), Head of Service Housing and Regeneration (in part), Head of Service Neighbourhood Services (in part), Corporate Programme, Risk and Improvement Manager (in part), Revenue and Benefits Manager (in part), Environment Strategy Officer (in part) and Democratic Services Officer.

Also Present: 11 members of the public via the live webcast.

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#### OSC23/33. **MINUTES**

The Chair was authorised to sign the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 16 October 2023 as a correct record of the proceedings.

#### OSC23/34. **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES**

There were no apologies for absence.

#### OSC23/35. **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

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

Clark                      Agenda Items 6 and 7 – Personal Interest as a Member of East Sussex County Council.

Field                      Agenda Items 6 and 7 – Personal Interest as a Member of East Sussex County Council.

Maynard                  Agenda Items 6 and 7 – Personal Interest as an Executive Member of East Sussex County Council.

OSC23/36.    **PERFORMANCE REPORT: FIRST AND SECOND QUARTERS 2023/24**

(5)

Consideration was given to the report of the Corporate Programme and Improvement Manager on the Performance Report of the First and Second Quarters 2023/24. Members were given the opportunity to scrutinise progress towards corporate operations and service delivery and make any necessary recommendations to Cabinet for future service delivery.

A summary of the Council's performance against the selected 26 Key Performance Indicators (KPI) broken down into eight service areas was included at Appendix A to the report. Performance was compared to the previous quarter result and to the same quarter the previous year.

**Environmental Health:** During quarters one and two, both measures had not met their target (Percentage of scheduled food inspections that were carried out; and Percentage of service requests completed in the required timescale).

**Housing:** During quarters one and two, all measures had met their target (Number of households either prevented from or relieved from homelessness; Average cost of placing household in temporary accommodation (TA); and Average weeks a household was in TA before placement). Officers advised that verbal updates could be provided at future meetings concerning further property acquisitions for TA. The Council was on target to reach 50 units by the end of the financial year and a report would be taken to Cabinet in due course to request further funding to acquire more units. The property acquisition target would then be increased accordingly.

**Customer Services:** During quarters one and two, one measure was not on target but improving (Telephone calls answered) and three measures had met their target (Percentage of enquiries that were resolved on the first contact; Average call waiting time; and Total number of customer contacts to the Council).

**Neighbourhood Services:** During quarters one and two, all measures had met their target (Missed bins per 100,000 collections; Percentage of public land found with unacceptable levels of litter when surveyed; Percentage of public land found with unacceptable levels of detritus when surveyed; Fly tips recorded each month, cleared from public land; and Number of fly tip fines issued).

**Estates:** During quarters one and two, the measure met its target (Income from all assets).

**Corporate Core:** During quarters one and two, the measure met its target (% of freedom of information requested answered in 20 days).

**Planning Development Management:** During quarters one and two, all measures had met their target (Percentage of major development applications determined in 13 weeks or agreed extension; Percentage of minor development applications determined in eight weeks or agreed extension; Major development planning appeals allowed by the Planning Inspector; Minor development planning appeals allowed by the Planning Inspector; and Total number of PS1 and PS2 planning applications).

**Revenues and Benefits:** During quarters one and two, two measures had met their target (Percentage of council tax owed for the year that had been collected; and Average calendar days to process a new housing benefit claim), one measure was improving towards its target (Percentage of business rates owed for the year that had been collected) and one measure had not met its target (Average calendar days to process a change to an existing housing benefit claim).

In order to focus on priorities, the narrative concerning performance against target was now reported by exception and a commentary from the relevant Service Manager included when the performance was significantly above or below the target. Two Service Area commentaries were included for Members' information:

**Environmental Health:**

Percentage of Scheduled Food Inspections that were Carried Out: the target was 90% completed; the result in the first quarter was 81% and in the second quarter was 79%. By the end of quarter two, 2,128 food premises inspections had been carried out, the introduction of Idox (software) had greatly delayed the roll out of the alternative enforcement questionnaires, there were high numbers of applications for new food business registrations which slowed down the programme of work, 85 complaints had been received and investigated concerning food businesses and there were the usual pressures of annual leave during the summer months. The department was currently fully staffed, but there had been additional Health and Safety accidents to deal with, causing further impact.

Percentage of Environmental Health Service Requests Completed on Time: the target was 90%; the result for the first quarter was 88.2% and in the second quarter was 71.04%. Quarter two had been the busiest period for the number of pollution complaints; officers would be able to resolve outstanding cases during quarter three.

**Revenues and Benefits:**

Average calendar days to process a change to an existing Housing Benefit Claim: current performance was not within target and could

continue to dip in quarter three due to being 2.5 officers down. This was being addressed, however recruitment would take time and therefore performance was likely to continue to be affected in the meantime.

A Senior Leadership Team led Performance Board was established in July as part of the new Governance arrangements. This sat alongside the (officer led) Risk and Programme Boards to improve performance management, risk management and accountability in the Council. The Board brought together Heads of Service and relevant Service Managers to discuss performance and service risks collectively and individually across the Council.

Members were asked to consider recommending a change to the target for major planning applications determined. The current target was 95% and the proposal was to reduce this to 80%, which was higher than the national target. Members were also requested to consider a change to the target for minor housing development determined in eight weeks to 80%; on this basis, the service was currently operating above those set targets.

Members were happy to recommend that Cabinet give consideration to both targets being amended accordingly; performance should not fall below 80%, the baseline minimum where customers do not experience a significant delay.

The Government had created a new Office of Local Government (Oflog) as part of the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, tasked with understanding and supporting local government performance. It was in the process of creating the Local Authority Data Explorer, a dashboard or online tool with sets of key measurements. The sections for waste management and finance had measurements relevant to district councils and the published data for Rother District Council was attached to the report for Members' information. Future updates would be colour coded to indicate how the Council's performance compared to the other published data.

**RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) Cabinet be requested to agree that the target for processing all types of planning applications be 80%; and
- 2) the report be noted.

OSC23/37. **REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING AS AT QUARTER 2 - 2023/24**

(6)

Members received and considered the report of the Interim Deputy Chief Executive on the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring as at 30 September 2023. The report contained details of the significant variations of the Revenue Budget and updated Capital

Programme and included a brief update on the Collection Fund performance.

The forecast outturn for the 2023/24 financial year was based on the position as at 30 September 2023 and indicated a forecast deficit position of £2.961m at 31 March 2024, against a budgeted deficit of £2.221m, which was a variance of £0.74m. The updated Medium Term Financial Strategy was looking to address the financial position of the Council. The Interim S151 Officer would work closely with Heads of Services and Members to reduce areas of overspend and the impact on reserves.

The Council's Net Financing Costs had reduced due to a review of several schemes within the Capital Programme to ensure deliverability of anticipated outcomes and affordability. As a result of the review, the anticipated borrowing had not been required and interest due to be paid was lower than expected by £471k. Interest income from investments was expected to yield an additional £730k, of which £530k was in respect of an increased focus on treasury management activity and higher interest rates since the budget was calculated and £200k due in interest on loans to the housing company.

The revised 2023/24 Capital Programme budgets had been derived from reviewing the project cashflows and assessing the expected position at this time. There were a number of additions to the Capital Programme including unexpected replacement boiler costs at the Town Hall; the refurbishment of five tennis courts at Egerton Park as part of grant acceptance conditions; potential payments in respect of contributions towards dilapidations at Rye Swimming Pool and Bexhill Leisure Centre and Pool; an additional Disabled Facilities Grant allocation and changes to the Changing Places Toilet schemes approved previously. The current budget for the Capital Programme's for the year was £28.4m, with the forecast outturn for the year as at Quarter 2 being £19.9m, a variance of (£8.5m) or 30% of the programme. It was however noted that this was due to the intentional pause and review of the capital programme and not as a result of general slippage.

It was noted that the collection rate as at the 30 September 2023 for the Council Tax and Business Rate parts of the Collection Fund was 57.10% and 58.62% respectively of the collectable debit, which was 0.21% and 0.43% lower respectively than the corresponding figures in 2022/23. It was considered that the collection rates had held up well despite the squeeze on finances following the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, but a future decline in collection rates would have an adverse impact on the Council's income.

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

- Temporary Accommodation (TA) costs would have been far higher without the Council's TA purchase scheme, as the budget had tripled over the last few years. This was a pressure being experienced nationally;
- the budget consultation had already received 400 responses to date and the Council had undertaken more online engagement;
- the Capital Programme was a work-in-progress and was currently under review;
- the Financial Stability Programme (FSP), which had been underpinned by the devolution of services, would not achieve the anticipated savings. The updated Medium Term Financial Strategy removed the current FSP and replaced it with a new 'Fit for the Future' financial resilience programme;
- increased investment income was based on relatively high interest rates and additional availability of resources due to the pause and review of the capital programme;
- funding had been set aside in the Capital Programme to meet potential payments in respect of contributions towards dilapidations at Rye Swimming Pool and Bexhill Leisure Centre and Pool;
- an application had been submitted and awarded for revenue to contribute to increased running costs of the swimming pools and the leisure centre due to the rise in energy prices and a second application had been made for capital in order to invest in green technology and energy saving schemes;
- funding for the Changing Places Toilet scheme at Camber was to be moved to a scheme to be established within the grounds of Bexhill Museum in Egerton Park, Bexhill due to timescale restrictions on its delivery and drawdown deadlines for the grant. Bexhill Museum would be responsible for its ongoing maintenance;
- further funding was being sought for the Camber Sands Welcome Centre which would bring the toilets scheme back in due course if successful;
- savings from closing some of the public conveniences for the current financial year would be limited. The annual budget was approximately £300k, with a further £200k for support services, therefore the current closures would give an annual saving of approximately £0.25m;
- the impact on the community of the public convenience closures would be assessed and consideration given to the best way forward to deliver the service within the current financial constraints;
- officers had begun discussions with neighbouring authorities about the possibility of further shared services; and
- the Barnhorn Green GP Surgery was experiencing a delay due to available revenue funding no longer being able to cover the cost of the build.

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

(When it first became apparent, Councillors Clark, Field each declared a Personal Interest in this matter as Members of East Sussex County Council and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the meeting during the consideration thereof).

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

OSC23/38. **CLIMATE STRATEGY 2023**  
(7)

Members received the report of the Environment Strategy Officer, which summarised the work of the Climate Strategy refresh and provided the resulting draft Climate Strategy (CS) to be considered for onward approval and adoption.

In 2022/23, in partnership with stakeholders and the local community, a review of the Council's strategy to reduce emissions and create a cleaner, greener, more equitable district was completed, alongside a review of the Environment Strategy 2020. The resulting CS detailed how the Council would use its powers and influence to make the district carbon neutral and reduce its operational emissions to Net Zero by 2030.

The report before Members detailed the findings of the Environment Strategy 2020 review, the additional evidence base required for the strategy refresh and stakeholder engagement information. The draft CS was attached at Appendix A to the report. The layout / design of CS would be professionally completed by a graphic designer and copy editor.

The review of the Environment Strategy 2020 highlighted the following areas for improvement: Emissions evidence-based – District and Organisational; Changes to national policy – Environment Act 2021; Rother-specific climate risks and opportunities; and Climate Action Plan – to direct delivery.

Both Rother district and operational greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions were included in the evidence base for the CS, attached at Appendices B and C to the report. Other Council strategic documents, including the Anti-Poverty Strategy, the emerging Local Plan, annual Air Quality Assessments, and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, also formed part of the evidence base for the CS. Appendix D to the report contained the CS Engagement Tracker, which listed all occasions when the Environment Strategy Officer had presented, discussed or otherwise engaged with stakeholders on the refresh, but did not include discussions via email.

The aim of the CS was to enable, encourage and accelerate the reduction of GHG emissions across the district to net zero by 2030. The CS outlined its five objectives with five action areas (Buildings and Energy Efficiency, Transport, Resource Consumption and Waste, Biodiversity and Land Use and Energy Generation), which detailed the challenges and the Council's approach. A three-year Climate Action

Plan had been produced to direct delivery of the CS and was attached to the report at Appendix E; this was a working document.

The Council had considered continuing with the existing Environment Strategy, but the evidence base included in the CS refresh demonstrated the need to focus the Council's resources on supporting emission reductions in the five action areas. The CS was a well-researched, evidence-based document that would guide the Council's climate action and enable the Council to meet its pledge to do what was within its powers to make Rother a carbon-neutral district.

Councillor Field, Chair of the Climate Change Steering Group (CCSG) and Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Environmental, Licensing, Community Safety, Climate Strategy and Joint Waste Contract thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee, and the Environment Strategy Officer for her hard work in developing the refreshed CS. The CS proposed the Council's first Climate Action Plan and a lot of engagement had taken place with stakeholders throughout its development.

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

- Members were pleased to note that the CS was clear, easy to read and understandable;
- Members raised concerns about green issues for older properties across the district, in particular listed buildings and those properties owned by Southern Housing;
- climate friendly initiatives were central to new housing within the Local Plan;
- carbon literacy training was being rolled out to all Council officers and was being delivered in-house. Further opportunities would be available for Member training also. It was not possible for officers to deliver training within schools as the training toolkit required the trainer to be based in the school, but discussions were taking place with neighbouring authorities to deliver to their Members and officers;
- reducing transport emissions was key;
- the action plan had been written with the current financial situation in mind. Funding had already been secured for some actions, but others would require additional funding to be applied for;
- an adaptation report, detailing how the Council was dealing with the current impacts of Climate Change would be forthcoming;
- East Sussex County Council had commenced discussions about adaptations for the county and initiatives would be coming forward from Central Government in due course, which the Council had already expressed an interest in;
- the objectives and action plan focused on factors that the Council could directly influence and would be monitored by the CCSG;
- the CS would remain a living document, to be adapted and amended as new research and technology emerged;



- a 'green directory' could be developed which gave details of individuals / organisations that provided 'green' goods or services; and
- the CS should ensure connectivity between rural and urban communities and address the differing dynamics.

**RESOLVED:** That Cabinet be requested to consider that the draft Climate Strategy be recommended to Council for approval and adoption.

(When it first became apparent, Councillors Clark, Field each declared a Personal Interest in this matter as Members of East Sussex County Council and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the meeting during the consideration thereof).

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

OSC23/39. **WORK PROGRAMME**  
(8)

Consideration was given to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme. Members were reminded that any Councillor could make a request for an item to be placed onto the Council's Scrutiny Committee Work Programme.

No additions or amendments were made.

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

**CHAIR**

The meeting closed at 8:25pm.

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

<b>WORK PROGRAMME 2023 – 2024</b>		
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>SUBJECT – MAIN ITEM IN BOLD</b>	<b>Cabinet Portfolio Holder</b>
<b>22.01.24</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Draft Revenue Budget Proposals 2024/25</b></li> <li>• Key Performance Targets 2024/25</li> <li>• Allocations Policy</li> </ul>	<b>Jeeawon McCourt</b>
<b>19.02.24</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft Local Plan Consultation (Reg 18)</li> </ul>	<b>Prochak</b>
<b>18.03.24</b>	<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 Report: Third Quarter 2023/24</li> <li>• Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring as at Quarter 3 - 2024/24</li> </ul>	<b>Field Jeeawon</b>
<b>22.04.24</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call-in and Urgency Procedures</li> <li>• Draft Annual Report to Council</li> <li>• Review of progress against the recommendations of the Health and Well-Being Task and Finish Group</li> <li>• Report of the Digital and Customer Services Task and Finish Group</li> <li>• Impact of Airbnb and second homes in Rye / Winchelsea / Camber</li> </ul>	<b>Coleman Byrne Timpe</b>
<b>ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regeneration inc. Leisure Centre, Fountains, Skate Park and Accessibility of Green Spaces across the district</li> <li>• Review of the Economic Regeneration Strategy</li> <li>• Litter Strategy</li> <li>• Review of the Tourism Strategy and the impact of Airbnbs</li> <li>• Review of the Financial Stability Programme</li> <li>• Update report from the Local Strategic Partnership</li> <li>• Update report from the Health and Well-Being Board</li> <li>• Review of progress against the recommendations of the Health and Well-Being Task and Finish Group (Year 3)</li> <li>• Development of new Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy</li> <li>• Development of new Corporate Plan</li> </ul>		

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