

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of meeting held in Court Room at Eastbourne Town Hall, Grove Road, BN21 4UG on 3 September 2018 at 6.00 pm

Present:

Councillor Penny di Cara (Chair)
Councillors Dean Sabri (Deputy-Chair), Colin Belsey, Md. Harun Miah, Jim Murray, Pat Rodohan, Robert Smart and Steve Wallis

Officers in attendance:

Pauline Adams (Head of Finance), Andy Chequers (Head of Homes First), Katie Dawkins (Housing Needs and Allocations Lead), Peter Finnis (Assistant Director of Corporate Governance), Jo Harper (Head of Business Planning and Performance), Millie McDevitt (Performance and Programmes Lead), Lisa Rawlinson (Strategy and Partnership Lead for Growth and Prosperity) and Tim Whelan (Interim Director of Service Delivery)

11 Minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2018 were submitted and approved, and the Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

Members noted the following updates, pursuant to the minutes of the Scrutiny committee meeting held on 11 June 2018:

Homelessness - The Head of Homes First and the Housing Needs and Standards Lead delivered a presentation which covered the following topics:

- The Homeless Reduction Act 2018 and the Council's Duty to assess, prevent, relive and refer;
- Temporary Accommodation costs;
- IT systems;
- The number of households living in emergency (nightly paid) accommodation;
- The Homelessness Pressures Project and the recognition of homelessness as a council-wide priority; and
- A Landlord Reward Scheme.

Members commented on the impressive work of the team, especially when taking into account the national shortage of affordable social housing, and thanked the officers for attending the meeting and providing such an informative update.

Clear Futures – The Strategy & Partnership Lead (Growth & Prosperity) attended the meeting and clarified to members that Clear Futures was a Joint Venture set up between Eastbourne and Lewes Councils and Robertson and AECOM to deliver local energy and sustainability ambitions. Officers were assured that public transport was a key objective of the Joint Venture and carbon neutral alternatives such as cycling/walking routes were considered with all new projects.

Budget - Members noted that the request recorded in the minutes of the last meeting for further information in respect of recent capital asset acquisitions, revenue returns, and a breakdown of the corporate landlord cost centre, had not yet been circulated. This was acknowledged by officers as an oversight and the Head of Finance would circulate this information as a matter of urgency.

12 Apologies for absence

There were none.

13 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs) by members as required under Section 31 of the Localism Act and of other interests as required by the Code of Conduct

There were none.

14 Questions by members of the public

There were none.

15 Urgent items of business

There were none.

16 Sickness

Pursuant to the minutes of the meeting held on 11 June 2018, the Assistant Director of Human Resources and Transformation attended the meeting to provide a verbal update regarding sickness absence reasons for 2017/18, analysis of the sickness reasons, breakdown of absence by department and further discussion regarding and the Council's proposed sickness target for 2018/19.

Absence Reasons for 2017/18 – Member noted that stress was not the leading absence reason reported during 2017/18, and that the new Attendance Management policy and procedure encouraged line managers to analyse patterns of short-term illnesses and detect whether stress could be an underlying factor.

A breakdown of absence by department – The Assistant Director of Human Resources and Transformation was requested to provide a breakdown of absence by department and she confirmed that she would circulate further information.

Sickness target 2018/19 – Following feedback from the Scrutiny Committee regarding the proposed sickness target for 2018/19, the Corporate Management Team had revised the sickness target from 9 days to 8 days, with the view to it being reduced to 7 days next year. Whilst officers understood that this target was still higher than the historical average of Eastbourne Borough Council's sickness statistics, the averages of both Eastbourne and Lewes Councils were taken into consideration. Officers also reminded members that a significant factor was Lewes District Council's in-house waste service due to the physical nature of the job and the subsequent musculoskeletal injuries. The current target was also in line with the public sector generally and, specifically, local government.

Members were informed that having a sickness target was seen as organisational best practice for the management of staff absence; the purpose of the target was not for it to act as an entitlement figure, but rather as a figure to beat and to reduce over time.

Members thanked the Assistant Director of Human Resources and Transformation for attending the meeting.

Resolved:

That members noted the update regarding sickness and that further breakdown information would be circulated in due course.

Reason:

To comply with the minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 11 June 2018; that Assistant Director of Human Resources and Transformation attend the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 3 September 2018 and provide more information regarding Sickness.

17 Corporate Performance Report - Quarter 1 (Part A)

The Scrutiny Committee considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive regarding Quarter 1 2018/19 performance against the Corporate Plan priority actions, performance indicators and targets.

Key discussions and officer actions arising from the report were detailed below:

Wish Tower Restaurant – Members requested an update regarding the contracts in development and were informed that the final draft lease was with Bistrot Pierre for signing.

Household Waste – Members queried the missing data from East Sussex County Council, officers responded that this was due to personnel constraints, such as vacancies at East Sussex County Council which was causing a delay.

Disabled Facility Grants – Members were informed that not all officers had permission to approve grants, and therefore due to key officer absences in Quarter 1, the time taken from receipt of fully completed applications to grants being approved had been delayed.

Property re-let time – Members questioned if the failure to meet the re-let time key target was because of delays caused by previous tenants damaging the property. Officers responded that during June, 18 properties were re-let, 2 of which needed major works including extensive repairs and adaptation installations.

Contact Centre – The Director of Service Delivery informed members that in addition to there being a 32% average vacancy rate in the contact centre, there had been a 49% increase in calls, 14% increase in emails and 93% increase in web enquiries. Due to the high staff turnover within the contact centre, the Council had recently held an open day at which they handed out 60 job packs to interested parties with the intention of creating a Staff Bank to back-fill posts. Officers were however pleased to report the increased number of new sign-ups to the Council's social media channels, as this proved a positive step with regard to the Council's channel shift strategy.

Crime – Officers advised on the advantages of the current performance management system regarding crime, including the benefit of being able to continually compare the Council's crime statistics with other authorities with similar demographics and geographies. Members noted that at the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 3 December 2018 they would receive the Annual Community Safety Partnership Report.

Devolved budgets – Members were informed that there was no limit to how often an organisation could apply for funding from any of the wards, however the funding would only be allocated with regard to specific projects rather than ongoing general funding support.

Resolved:

That the Scrutiny Committee note the achievements and progress against Corporate Plan priorities for 2018/19, as set out in the report.

Reason:

To demonstrate the discharge of the Scrutiny Committee function to monitor all aspects of performance management activities, as required by Part 3 section 2.2 (7) of the Constitution of the Council.

18 Corporate Performance Report - Quarter 1 (Part B)

The Scrutiny Committee considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive regarding the Council's Financial Performance for Quarter 1 2018/19.

The Head of finance reported that it was too early in the financial year to draw any conclusion from the quarter 1 monitoring figures and that spending is generally in line with expectation for the quarter. The outstanding business rate appeals are still the biggest risk to the collection fund.

The Head of Finance reported that the Council was being proactive and continually monitoring interest rates for opportunities which allowed them to offset long term borrowing costs with short term borrowing.

Members questioned whether there was enough staff to ensure that contracts were being paid correctly and on-time. Officers responded that the finance department acts on behalf of service departments, and therefore all capital expenditure was processed by the appropriate project team and signed off by the service department and budget manager. Levels of delegation were in place to ensure that large capital sums could only be authorised at the necessarily senior level.

Resolved:

1. That members note the General Fund, HRA and Collection Fund financial performance for the quarter ended June 2018, as set out in the report;
2. That the committee note the amended capital programme as set out at Appendix 3;
3. That the committee note the Treasury Management performance as set out in Section 6 of the report; and
4. That the committee note the Final outturn for 2017/18 as set out in Section 7.

Reason:

To demonstrate the discharge of the Scrutiny Committee function to monitor all aspects of performance management activities, as required by Part 3 section 2.2 (7) of the Constitution of the Council.

19 Safeguarding Policy and Update

The committee noted the report of the Director of Service Delivery regarding the proposed joint Safeguarding Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy.

Members noted that the amendments incorporated in the proposed policy were following the self-assessment of the Council's compliance with current legislation and guidance, as well as an internal audit.

Resolved:

That the Scrutiny Committee endorse the proposed Safeguarding Policy.

Reason:

To enable the previous policy to be updated and brought into line with the recommended practice and with current pan-Sussex policies and procedures.

20 Scrutiny Annual Work Programme 2018/2019

The Committee noted the report of the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services. The report detailed the draft Annual Work Programme for Scrutiny which enables the process for the committee to review proposed policies of the Cabinet, the outcome of such decisions and the call-in of alleged unlawful decisions in accordance with constitutional rules.

The Committee was pleased to note that an officer from the Strategic Economic Infrastructure team at East Sussex County Council would once again be attending a Scrutiny Committee meeting on 3 December 2018 to give an update on progress re the A27 improvements, and that all members of the Council would be invited to attend that session.

Members also noted the inclusion of the Cabinet's forward plan of key decisions as a standard item on the agenda; with permission from the Chair this was to be trialled to allow members to regularly scrutinise the Forward Plan, and indicate whether they would like to invite officers to future meetings for clarification regarding any items.

Members were reminded that if they wish to submit a Scrutiny Review Request the deadline would be 30 September 2018.

Resolved:

1. That the Annual Work Programme be **recommended** to Council on 14 November 2018.
2. That the proposed Scrutiny Review re Eastbourne's night time economy, as attached at Appendix B of the report, be declined on the grounds that the committee did not consider it to be of sufficient community impact to warrant a full scale review.
3. That any further proposals for scrutiny reviews be submitted on completed scoping documents to the Scrutiny Officer by the end of September and that their addition to the programme be subject to liaison with the Chair and Deputy Chair.

Reason:

To discharge scrutiny procedure rule 7.1 to prepare and submit an Annual Work Programme to the Full Council.

21 Forward Plan of Decisions

The committee received the Forward Plan for the period from 1 September 2018 – 31 December 2018.

Resolved:

That the Forward Plan of the Council for the period from 1 September 2018 – 31 December 2018, be noted.

Reason:

To demonstrate the discharge of the Scrutiny Procedure Rule 13.2 that the Scrutiny Committee will have access to the Cabinet's Forward Plan.

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

Councillor Penny di Cara (Chair)