

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of meeting held in Court Room at Eastbourne Town Hall, Grove Road, BN21 4UG on 10 June 2019 at 6.00 pm

Present:

Councillor Caroline Ansell (Chair)

Councillors Dean Sabri (Deputy-Chair), Helen Burton, Peter Diplock, Robin Maxted, Colin Murdoch, Pat Rodohan and Robert Smart

Officers in attendance:

Linda Farley (Head of Customer First), Peter Finnis (Assistant Director for Corporate Governance), Gary Hall (Head of Homes First), Jo Harper (Head of Business Planning and Performance), Millie McDevitt (Performance and Programmes Lead) and Nick Peeters (Committee Officer)

Also in attendance: none

1 Minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2019

Prior to agreement of the minutes, the Chair thanked officers for the training provided for Members and for details of the topics looked at by the Committee over the previous four years, adding that, the information provided would be used to inform the Committee's planning of its work programme.

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2019 were submitted and approved, and the Chairman was authorised to sign them as a correct record subject to the following amendments:

Minute 49 - Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) Policy 2019/2020.
Members noted that the discretionary payment for Eastbourne was £310,000.

Additionally, Members referred to minute 52 of the previous meeting – Council Budget Proposals 2019-20, and commented that the budget book had not yet been received, for consideration of its presentational layout by the Committee.

2 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies received.

3 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 received.

4 Questions by members of the public

There were no questions received from members of the public.

5 Quarter 4 Performance Report 2018/19

The Committee considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive regarding Quarter 4 2018/19 performance against the Corporate Plan priority actions, performance indicators and targets.

Prior to introduction of the report, the Chair expressed concern at the late publication of the report. The Chair said assurances had been received that further reports would be available at the time of agenda publication – a statutory requirement of five working days prior to the meeting, allowing Members to properly familiarise themselves with the data provided.

The Performance and Programme Lead apologised for the delay in the publication of the report, advising that it was not standard practice and every effort would be made to ensure it did not occur again. During discussion Members highlighted the following points:

- The Committee requested further detail on housing supply in the borough and how this related to the Council's Local Plan. Concern was expressed that the Council's Local Plan was in need of renewal and a question was raised over the annual target set for the supply of housing, as the Council was falling behind on the number of homes it was required to provide, and that number itself was increasing. Members were advised that it was within the Committee's gift to request a further report on housing supply and/or request that the appropriate officers attend a future meeting.
- It was further explained that, targets were a challenge due to restrictions in land supply and that the current figure will be met, albeit that the units would be built out in the following year (due to adverse ground conditions). The Committee suggested that neighbouring authorities be consulted on how they planned to meet their own targets.
- It was agreed that an update on the status of the Local Plan as well as the national, regional and local figures for housing targets/supply would be reported to the Committee's next meeting as part of the Q1 performance report.
- The Committee questioned the quality of the data provided nationally in relation to tourism (Cambridge Economic Impact Model). Members were advised that the method for capturing the data was highly respected and

nationally given a great deal of weight. The Committee suggested that estimates could be provided earlier in the year. Officers explained that, for the Council to collect this type of data itself, a significant increase in time and resources would be needed. The Committee suggested that performance data for other comparable authorities such as Bournemouth could be considered at a future meeting, although it was not considered to be time-critical. Officers advised that other authorities used the same model for collecting the data.

- An update on the situation in the Beacon following the recent announcement of the withdrawal of restaurants was also requested. Officers advised that an update would be provided following the meeting.
- The Committee questioned the absence of a report from the Sovereign Centre Task and Finish Group who had explored options for the development of the Centre and had been due to report to the June meeting. Officers confirmed that the TFG had undertaken the work but that a report was not yet available, adding that, cautiously there could be an update to the September meeting but that in all likelihood, a report would not be available until the Committee's December meeting. Members asked that any business case be provided at the earliest opportunity. Members asked that the business case for the chosen scheme be made available to them and also the past papers on options work.
- The Committee felt that the status of the Sovereign Harbour Community Centre project to serve the Sovereign Harbour Neighbourhood should be flagged as amber as the centre was not yet open.
- The Committee expressed concern over the 'red' status of the processing of major and minor planning applications. Officers explained that there were a number of contributing factors. There were a low number of major applications but they were often complex, with delays potentially being caused by negotiations over matters such as infrastructure and developer contributions. The small number could sometimes skew the quarterly measure, however, it was noted that the annual outturn against target was good. Officers added that, although the minor applications were slightly below target, there had been a number of new starters in the technical team, who had spent the previous year getting established and who were now working hard to recover the performance results and meet targets. The Committee was reminded that the Head of the Planning Service had attended meetings in the past to discuss planning indicators. Members requested officers provide sub set data in the commentary box to better reflect the progress made within major projects.
- The Committee expressed concern that the charges now being applied at East Sussex County Council (ESCC) waste and recycling sites could result in increased fly-tipping. Officers explained that, although the performance was slightly below target, the results were being monitored closely. Officers added that incidents of fly-tipping had in fact decreased

over the last 2-3 years and the direction of travel was a positive and again, the annual outturn was within target.

- The Committee expressed concern at the downward trend displayed by the household waste recycling figures. Officers advised that this was a national trend and it was hoped that the new household waste contract would re-energise the message to residents around recycling – reduce, reuse and recycle. The Chair felt there was an opportunity to look at how the trend could be reversed and that this was a piece of work that warranted inclusion on the Committee’s work programme and a discussion with the relevant service-lead and other expert voices.
- The Committee discussed the indicator for the inspection of licenced houses of multiple occupancy (HMOs) and questioned the low target set against the outturn figure for the year. Officers explained that the target was not based on a national figure and had been set with a degree of caution when the environment for HMOs was going through a period of change, and that it was due to be reviewed. It was explained that Eastbourne had a large volume of HMOs and while there was a statutory process that needed to be followed for their licensing, not every HMO required licensing. It was noted that the scrutiny of the process for licensing HMOs was a potential piece of work that fell within the remit of Scrutiny for later consideration, but that the Committee needed to recognise its ability to influence the situation. The Committee requested an outline be provided on how the scrutiny could be undertaken.
- The Committee was advised that, for 2019/20, the target for the numbers in emergency accommodation had been removed, adding that, following a number of discussions, it was agreed that an authority’s intention should be for no households to be in that position. Officers said the key to homeless practice was to have early prevention and processes for this were being put in place. It was confirmed that the performance reports would be data and commentary only.
- The Committee agreed that an update on the Council’s activities around HMOs, people in emergency accommodation and homelessness/rough sleepers in the borough, should be brought to a later meeting. Members expressed concern about the very high numbers and the length of time people were in emergency accommodation but recognised the latest positive impact new partnerships were having on the situation. The Committee agreed to keep a watching brief on the numbers and the direction of travel - at this point.
- The Committee discussed the indicators for call-handling and Members were advised that ‘A Good Time to Call’ was being advertised to customers and that the timing of large mail-outs was being carefully managed to avoid large numbers of calls being received at the same time. Officers also advised that FAQs were being provided online in advance of items such as an annual council tax billing, to reduce the need for calls to be made.

- Members questioned the indicator for staff long-term sickness and were advised by officers that, while it was an area that could be looked at by the Committee, it would not currently be possible to separate the figures for the two authorities, as it referred to one work-force. Details of data separating short term and long term absences could be provided.
- The Committee referred to the devolved budgets and was advised that the scheme started in 2007/08 and had been very successful.
- The Committee expressed its concern at the omission of the Quarter 4 Financial report from the agenda, as well as that of the quarter 3 performance report from a previous agenda. Officers explained that the minutes of the previous meeting confirmed the consideration of the Quarter 3 report by Members, and that the final audited report was historically reported to the Committee's September meeting, as part of the year-end reporting process. Officers added that, while draft figures could be requested at an earlier point, officers were heavily involved in producing year-end accounts. Officers agreed to clarify the question on the Quarter 3 financial report following the meeting.

RESOLVED:

1. To note the Council's progress and performance for Quarter 4 of 2018/19 and that updates on the following items be considered further by the Committee:
 - the status of the Local Plan, and of national, regional and local figures for housing supply, and affordable housing;
 - the work of the Sovereign Centre Task and Finish Group;
 - the unit occupancy in the Beacon;
 - the Council's process for the inspection of licensed HMOs and how targets are managed;
 - targets for people in emergency accommodation and homelessness/rough sleepers; and
 - the improvement of recycling figures, with presentations provided by experts and relevant officers to brief the Committee.
2. That the Cabinet be requested to consider the following changes to the Council's performance indicators for 2019/20:
 - the project for the Community Centre to serve the Sovereign Harbour Neighbourhood be flagged as amber; and

- the commentary within the processing of planning applications performance indicators include more detail.
- the target for the Number of number of Licensed HMO's Inspected per Quarter be reviewed/reconsidered; and
- understood the points made in relation to the change on reporting and targets in emergency accommodation, and felt that it would be sufficient if the figure instead reported how many helped in relation to how many qualifying for help was given and trend over time was clear.

6 Urgent items of business

There were no urgent items of business for consideration.

7 Right to address the meeting/order of business

There were no requests to address the meeting.

8 Forward Plan of Decisions

The Assistant Director for Corporate Governance presented the Cabinet's Forward Plan of decisions to Members.

The Committee discussed the reporting timelines for the Forward Plan and were advised by officers that, other than the call-in process, there were not opportunities to input into the decision-making process once the Cabinet decisions had been made. Officers added that the Forward Plan was published every four weeks and notification provided to all members of the Council, and the Committee should flag any forthcoming decisions that it wished to look at. Officers suggested that the informal and internal Cabinet schedule seen by the Corporate Management Team could be circulated to the Committee and this was accepted.

RESOLVED to note the Forward Plan and request that the Cabinet schedule be made available to the Scrutiny Committee.

9 Discussion of Future work programme for 2019/20 (Discussion / Verbal Update)

The Committee discussed its work programme for the year ahead. During discussion the following points were raised:

- The Committee asked that recycling rates in the borough be included in the work programme and that opportunities to maximise the levels of recycling be explored.

Additionally, the following items were suggested for inclusion in the work programme:

- Maternity cover at Conquest Hospital – this had been included on the Committee’s work programme in 2017 and it was felt that a two year review would be beneficial. However, the committee was reminded that, in 2017, the decision to undertake the survey was an executive one to which Scrutiny were then invited to receive and comment on the report outcome on behalf of the Council. Any new survey would also need to be an executive decision.
- The A27 – it was felt that an initial discussion on this issue might provide an opportunity for further scrutiny.
- Homes First – it was felt that a broad review of the organisation would be beneficial to the Committee and the Council. Officers suggested that an all-member briefing the hour prior to the start of the Committee’s September meeting could focus on this item.
- The Chair referred to the information provided by the Centre for Public Scrutiny and suggested that looking at how scrutiny was done in other authorities would be a useful exercise and this should be taken forward in the New Year as a piece of work, with a focus on how residents in Eastbourne could be engaged with and given a voice through the scrutiny Committee. The Chair cited Northampton as a good example of how concerns over local issues were successfully taken through the scrutiny process, The Chair requested that officers investigate how Eastbourne’s Scrutiny Committee might open up its work programme to residents as had been successfully done in Northampton.

RESOLVED that:

- The Committee’s work programme be noted;
- A work programme be developed to include the suggestions made during discussion on this and other items on the agenda;
- A Member-briefing be scheduled prior to the next meeting of the Committee in order to receive an update from the Head of Homes First; and
- Work be undertaken in the New Year to strengthen the role of scrutiny in the community and improve the ability of residents to engage with the Council.

10 Date of the next meeting

RESOLVED: that the date of the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee is scheduled for Monday, 2 September 2019 in the Court Room, Eastbourne Town Hall, Grove Road, Eastbourne, BN21 4UG.

The meeting ended at 8.10 pm

Councillor Caroline Ansell (Chair)