



Lewes District Council

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Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Warren Room, Lewes House, 32 High Street, Lewes** on **Thursday 17 January 2013** at **10.00am**

Present:

Councillors S J Osborne (Chair), A Dean, P F Gardiner, S J Gauntlett, J V S Harris, I A Nicholson, E E J Russell and J Stockdale

Officers Present:

R Allan, Scrutiny and Committee Officer
L Frost, Director of Planning and Environmental Services
I Kedge, Head of Environmental Health
J Magness, Director of Finance

In attendance:

Councillor R Robertson

Minutes

25 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 November 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

26 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors S Adeniji and E C Merry.

27 Benchmarking – Environmental Health

The Committee considered Report No 12/13 which detailed the results of the benchmarking data on Environmental Health and made comparisons with the data available from other local authorities.

Benchmarking and Value for Money Studies could help to identify areas of activity and service delivery that had the potential to yield additional income or reduce costs. Value for Money was about obtaining the maximum benefit over time with the resources available. It was concerned with achieving the right balance between economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Value for

Money was high when there was an optimum balance between all three elements – when costs were relatively low, productivity was high and successful outcomes had been achieved.

The Head of Environmental Health took the Committee through the Report. He advised that Environmental Health was one of the very first functions of local government in its present form, arising from statutory duties set up under the Public Health Act of 1848. He added that today much of the early origins of the service were still recognisable, but that the range of duties and services had expanded considerably over the last 160 years. The majority of today's function was providing statutory services and currently the Department enforced over 120 different pieces of legislation.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Head of Environmental Health explained that Lewes District Council ranked 4th highest in terms of the costs of the Environmental Health service and 2nd highest in terms of cost per head of population within its benchmarking group. He added that the nature and volume of the service delivered differed according to the economic, residential and geographical nature of each District, and that these differences were reflected in comparative financial costs. He added that different Councils may calculate their benchmarking data differently which makes comparing data problematic.

The Head of Environmental Health advised that closer examination of the costs per head revealed some differences. When examining the overall cost, Lewes was below average for Food Safety and Health & Safety, but the Department was about average for Environmental Protection, Pest Control & Animal Control and Public Health. He also advised that there was a charge in place for the collection of stray dogs, but that it was difficult to enforce. Councillors expressed concern about the high cost of animal control to the Council. The Head of Environmental Health explained that savings in this area had been made since the figures in the Report had been produced, but that more income could be generated. He added that opportunities for joint working with other Councils or the voluntary sector was currently being explored.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Director of Planning and Environmental Services advised that some Section 106 money had been given to the Environmental Health Department as it undertook a significant amount of work on large scale planning applications, and added that more opportunities for funding were being explored.

The Head of Environmental Health drew the Committee's attention to the table on page 10 in Appendix 4 of the Report. He explained that the Environmental Health Department was continuing to look for efficiencies and savings, for example the new emerging licensing legislation may give the Council the ability to re-coop costs at a District level as the fees were, at present, set nationally.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Head of Environmental Health explained that the role District and Borough Councils would be asked to

play in enhancing and protecting the health and wellbeing of local communities was likely to increase. He added that Environmental Health was at the forefront of the delivery of those services and opportunities for the Council to become a service provider were potentially opening up, such as the commissioning of services and the potential to bid for contracts. Councillors questioned the minimal level of detail in Appendices 2 and 3 of the Report, and requested further data.

Resolved:

- 27.1** That Report No 12/13 concerning the Environmental Health Benchmarking be noted; and
- 27.2** That the Head of Environmental Health be requested to return to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to present further analysis of the comparative costs listed in Appendices 2 and 3 of Report No 12/13.

HEH

28 2013/14 Budget

The Committee considered Report No 13/13 which explained the context in which next year's General Fund Revenue Budget and the capital programme had been prepared.

The Director of Finance took the Committee through the Report. He explained that at its meeting on 13 February 2013 Cabinet would consider proposals for the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account budgets for 2013/2014 and a capital programme for the next three years. He added that Cabinet would make final recommendations on the budgets to Council for decision at its meeting on 27 February 2013.

In response to a Councillor's question, the Director of Finance explained the Business Rates Retention Scheme and advised that under the new system 50% of business rates collected from within Lewes District were allocated to the Government. The other 50% was known as the Local Share, and of that Local Share 2% was allocated to the East Sussex Fire Authority, 18% to East Sussex County Council, and 80% would be retained by Lewes District Council. He added that Lewes District Council was in a better financial position than some other Councils in respect of new business rates as properties, such as the incinerator, and the waste water treatment plant were additional to the system starting point assumptions He advised that the Council was examining the possibility of purchasing new software that would help to maximize business rates by using existing data sources to help assess the value of outstanding appeals and identify businesses that should be paying business rates but were not.

The Director of Finance took Councillors through the IT Replacement Equipment Reserve, as listed in Appendix D of the Report. He explained that this reserve would soon be used up. It would however still be required to cover future replacement IT equipment. The required annual amount would be quantified when the new IT infrastructure had been established.

He added that he was currently examining the possibility of starting the budget process earlier in the year for the 2014/15 budget.

The Committee felt that the balance in the major applications reserve may be insufficient. However, as the general level of uncommitted reserves and the working balance were healthy, it concluded that there was no immediate need to earmark further funds, but that the position should be regularly reviewed by Cabinet.

The Director of Finance guided Councillors through the movements on the revenue equalisation and asset maintenance reserve, as listed on page 50 of the Report. The Chair questioned whether the Residents Priority Survey was required, and advised that Cabinet had just agreed to undertake a Housing Needs Survey throughout the District. Councillors suggested that money no longer needed for the local economy reserve could be used on initiatives to promote the District by the Economic Regeneration Team.

The Director of Finance took the Committee through the detailed reserves data in Appendix D of the Report. A discussion followed, and Councillors made suggested changes to the level of reserves the Council currently held.

Resolved:

28.1 That Report No 13/13 concerning the 2013/14 Budget be noted;

28.2 That a vote of thanks be accorded to the Director of Finance and other officers in the Finance Department at the Council for their astute financial planning;

28.3 That the Head of District Services be requested to attend a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee with information regarding whether the Leisure Buildings Repairs Reserve had significant funds attached to it;

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28.4 That the Director of Finance be requested to return to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee with an explanation of the narratives in Appendix D of Report No 13/13 concerning the Wave Leisure Trust Reserve and the Leisure Trust Building Maintenance Reserve; and

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28.5 That the Director of Finance be requested to return to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee in order to present more information on the Private Sector Leasing/Homelessness Initiatives Reserve, as detailed in Appendix D of Report No 13/13.

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and it was further

Recommended:

28.6 That the proposal to freeze Council Tax in 2013/14 be supported;

SCO

28.7 That the need to deliver of the savings target in order to rebalance

SCO

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| | the budget, as detailed in Report No 13/13 be supported; | |
| 28.8 | That Cabinet be requested to agree the level of the Council's Reserves and Balances, as detailed in Appendix D of Report No 13/13, subject to recommendations 28.9 – 28.17; | SCO |
| 28.9 | That Cabinet be requested to agree the Capital Programme Outlook; | SCO |
| 28.10 | That Cabinet be requested to agree the Housing Revenue Account draft budget; | SCO |
| 28.11 | That Cabinet be requested to use part of the money in the Service Priority Reserve, as detailed in Appendix D of Report No 13/13, to invest in a Council Service which would provide a regular income stream for the Council; | SCO |
| 28.12 | That Cabinet be requested to use £25K of the money in the Housing Benefit Standards and Improvement Reserve, as detailed in Appendix D of Report No 13/13, to pay for the Business Rates Retention software required; | SCO |
| 28.13 | That Cabinet be requested to end the Concessionary Travel Reserve, as detailed in Appendix D of Report No 13/13, because the risk of claims arising has passed and use the balance to contribute to the Recycling Reserves; | SCO |
| 28.14 | That Cabinet be requested to use the amount transferred from the Concessionary Fares to the Recycling Reserve to contribute to the use of collection and drop off sites in areas that do not have cardboard recycling. This could include site acquisition or leasing, as detailed in Appendix D of Report No 13/13; | SCO |
| 28.15 | That Cabinet be requested to end the Housing Development Reserve, as detailed in Appendix D of Report No 13/13, and transfer any funds left to the General Housing Capital Programme; | SCO |
| 28.16 | That Cabinet be requested to consider if there are adequate funds in the Major Planning Applications Reserve, as detailed in Appendix D of Report No 13/13, and to keep this Reserve under review; | SCO |
| 28.17 | That Cabinet be requested to remove the budget allocated for the Residents Priority Survey, as listed on page 50 of Report No 13/13; | SCO |
| 28.18 | That Cabinet be requested to transfer the balance of the LBGI money in the REAM reserve to the Economic Development Team for initiatives to support business; and | SCO |
| 28.19 | That Cabinet be requested to ask Lewes Town Council to confirm in writing that a project will be identified and commenced before 31 March 2014 that will use the earmarked sum for the Pells area (The | SCO |

Town brook Charity), which is held in the REAM reserve.

29 How the Council works with the Voluntary Sector Scrutiny Review

The Scrutiny and Committee Officer advised Councillors that an officer in the Property, Regeneration and Enterprise Department had been identified to assist with the Voluntary Sector Scrutiny Review and requested that Councillors nominate members for the Panel, subject to Group Leader's approval.

Resolved:

- 29.1** That the Scrutiny and Committee Officer be requested to arrange a meeting in February 2013 of the Voluntary Sector Scrutiny Review Panel to consist of three Councillors, the names of which are to be nominated by the Group Leaders.

SCO

30 Date of Next Meeting

Resolved:

- 30.1** That the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to be held on Thursday 7 March 2013 at 10.00am in the Warren Room, Lewes House, 32 High Street, Lewes be noted.

All to note

The meeting ended at 12.30pm

S J Osborne
Chair