

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of meeting held in Court Room at Eastbourne Town Hall, Grove Road, BN21 4UG on 3 February 2020 at 6.00 pm

Present:

Councillor Tony Freebody (Chair)

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

Officers in attendance:

Jo Harper (Head of Business Planning and Performance), Millie McDevitt (Performance and Programmes Lead), Peter Finnis (Assistant Director for Corporate Governance), Oliver Jones (Strategy and Partnership Lead), Rebecca Wynn (Senior Specialist Advisor – Private Housing), Jessica Haines (Head of Commercial Business), Ola Owolabi (Deputy Chief Finance Officer (Corporate Finance)), Leigh Palmer (Interim Head of Planning), Sean Towey (Head of Environment First), Tim Whelan (Director of Service Delivery), Andrew Clarke (Deputy Chief Finance Officer (Financial Planning)), Homira Javadi (Chief Finance Officer) and Jane Goodall (Strategy and Partnership Lead, Quality Environment)

Also in attendance: Inspector Ed Ripley (Sussex Police)

22 Minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2019 were submitted and approved, and the Deputy-Chairman was authorised to sign them.

23 Apologies for absence / declaration of substitute members

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Murdoch and Maxted.

Councillor Taylor advised that he was a substitute member of the Committee in place of Councillor Murdoch.

24 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

The Chair, Councillor Freebody, declared a personal, non-prejudicial interest in item 10 on the agenda - Recycling in the Borough (improving recycling rates), as a board member of South East Environment Services Limited.

25 Questions by members of the public

No questions were received.

26 Urgent items of business

There was no urgent business

27 Right to address the meeting/order of business

There were no requests to address the meeting.

28 Annual Eastbourne Borough Community Safety Partnership Report

Oliver Jones, Strategy and Partnership Lead presented the Annual Community Safety Partnership Report. Detective Ed Ripley, Sussex Police, was also in attendance. The report provided a review of the Partnership's activities over the previous year. During discussion, the following points were raised.

Concern was expressed over the intimidating effect of aggressive begging on elderly and vulnerable residents. The Committee was advised that there were a number of issues involved. Support for homelessness in Eastbourne was being provided through multi-agency work, however, it was recognised that organised begging existed and intelligence-led work was being undertaken to tackle this. Members were also advised that, although initial incidents were being reported, there was then often reluctance by individuals to progress the complaint.

The £48,000 funding for the Partnership was based on a population and crime density formula and related to the current 2019/2020 financial year. Incidents of crime levels in the current year were similar to those in 2018/2019 and it was anticipated that a similar level of funding would be provided, although this had not been confirmed.

RESOLVED - To note the report and the achievements and activities of the Eastbourne & Lewes Community Safety Partnership in 2019/20.

29 Update on licensable HMOs - verbal update

Rebecca Wynne, Senior Specialist Advisor and Harry Williams, Service and Project Development Manager, provided a presentation on housing needs and standards with a focus on how Homes First deal with licensable houses of multiple occupation (HMOs). During discussion the following points were highlighted:

All HMOs in Eastbourne were rated under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, a prescriptive system as set out in the 2004 Housing Act. Hazards were inspected and banded; hazard bands a-c were classed as high risk and included hazards such as failing fire precautions, excess cold and falls on stairs and trip hazards.

The ability to control the areas where HMOs were sited came under planning provision. Licences for HMOs were not issued unless planning permission had been provided.

A register of the number of times the Fire Authority had attended false alarms in HMOs was not kept but could be a useful tool. Electrical inspections were carried out to ensure that only appropriate electric items were kept in rooms.

Fire alarm tests and emergency lighting tests were submitted on an annual basis and were part of ten standard conditions that had to be met. It was the responsibility of HMO owners, through the managers, to ensure that electric items on rooms were safe.

The Committee noted the usefulness HMOs had in addressing homelessness in the Borough but it was also felt that there was an impact on neighbours and on waste disposal. A process for the mapping of HMOs was considered to be a good idea and the Homes First team would look into this.

RESOLVED - to note the presentation.

30 Draft Budget proposals 2020/21

Homira Javadi, Chief Finance Officer, presented the Draft Budget report which provided detail on the updated forecast financial position for the Council in 2020/21. During discussion, the following points were highlighted.

Concern was expressed that the financial presentations for the second and third quarters had not been made available and that the 2018/2019 accounts had not yet been audited and that, without this, a financial base for the current year and 2020/2021 could not be set. It was confirmed that this did not affect the setting of the budget, and the budget report was before the Committee for comment prior to consideration by Cabinet. It was advised that the Finance Team was working on a management accounting presentation to supplement the information already provided.

The income from the crematorium was forecast to reduce and this reflected a national trend whereby the death rate was slowing. There was also increased competition from the new crematorium opened by Wealden District Council. Eastbourne Borough Council was projecting an increase to its revenue for civic burials by £100,000.

A question was raised on the percentage of increase on car parking charges. It was confirmed that the results of the East Sussex County Council (ESCC) consultation on parking charges would be needed before a thorough assessment could be made. In relation in Hyde Gardens in particular, there was an agreement in place with East Sussex County Council that both authorities had parking machines, with matched charges. It was confirmed that enforcement was undertaken by officers from Neighbourhood First rather than by a dedicated team, but that compliance in Hyde Gardens was not an

issue. A public consultation on how recycling rates could be driven up to the Council's target of 50 % was expected later in the year.

The Committee did not resolve to send any particular comments to Cabinet on the draft budget proposals for 2020/21.

RESOLVED - To note the Draft Budget proposals for 2020/2021

31 Recycling in the Borough (improving recycling rates)

Jane Goodall, Strategy and Partnership Lead and Sean Towey, Specialist Services Manager, presented the report which detailed the Council's efforts to improve recycling rates in the Borough. During discussion the following points were highlighted.

In response to a question regarding recycling, it was confirmed that Tetra Pak cartons, made of composite materials, were difficult to separate and could not be re-processed in a standard recycling facility. Cartons were previously baled with low grade paper and card but paper mills were no longer willing to accept them, as markets become increasingly sensitive to the quality of recyclate. A dedicated plant in the UK, near Halifax, handles food and drink cartons. However, transporting material from the south coast to Yorkshire would be expensive and would have a prohibitively high carbon footprint and so cartons collected from households in Eastbourne go to the Energy Recovery Facility in Newhaven

Resident education and 'toolbox' talks with vehicle loaders was being undertaken to ensure that recyclables were kept as uncontaminated as possible.

The collection of food waste was subject to a Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs consultation, and this could be considered in future as part of a national scheme .

The Committee would be provided with detail on the take up of extra green-bins in the Borough following the meeting.

RESOLVED – To note the report.

32 Corporate Plan 2020-2024

Millie McDevitt, Performance and Programme Lead, presented the Corporate Plan 2020-2024 report which detailed the Council's commitments to its residents and businesses and outlined a programme of strategic objectives and the projects that would deliver those objectives. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- Concern was expressed at the level of detail in the Plan, particularly under 'Growth and Prosperity'. It was considered that there could be more information in relation to parking and conference facilities, and

less in relation to collection of the BID levy. A question was also raised around the population statistics and their accuracy.

- The Committee was concerned, when looking at monitoring retail vacancy rates in the Borough, that key areas outside of the town centre were not included in the Plan and this could impact on the Council's ability to provide intervention in those areas, in the future.
- Accessibility to the Council was also raised, in particular the ability for residents to access information, through easy-to-read documents and possibly through the webcasting of meetings. In addition, Members felt that taking meetings out to the community could improve openness and transparency.

Members were advised that, when forming the Plan, the current financial pressures faced by local authorities was acknowledged and officers were mindful of producing a catch-all document and that the focus should be on those areas which were a priority for the Council. However, it was for Members to consider whether there were other priorities that needed inclusion. It was confirmed that the population statistics used were provided by East Sussex in Figures and were the most up-to-date available. It was further confirmed that officers were actively looking at document accessibility and how access to Council information could be made more inclusive.

RESOLVED:

- 1) To note the Corporate Plan; and
- 2) To request that the focus on vacancy rates in retail areas outside of the town centre also be included in the Corporate Plan.

33 Quarter 2/3 Performance Report

Millie McDevitt, Performance and Programme Lead, presented the Quarters 2/3 performance report. This detailed the Council's progress and performance in respect of key projects and targets for the third quarter of the year. Members were advised that due to the purdah period following the snap-call for a general election in December, the report also included data on the second quarter. The Committee noted the report and no questions were raised.

RESOLVED - to note the report

34 The role of scrutiny in the community and improving resident engagement

Jo Harper, Head of Business Planning and Performance, presented the report to Members which considered how local residents could be more engaged in the Scrutiny process. During discussion the following points were highlighted.

Members felt the opportunity for Scrutiny Committee to visit communities, engage with stakeholders directly and discuss local issues was a positive step. Members also felt that a website page that allowed wide-ranging suggestions for topics would prove to be unmanageable. However, the opportunity for residents to input into a small focused number of issues would be beneficial. It was considered that engagement could also include other areas of social media that would improve communication with residents.

Members felt that public engagement was a Council-wide issue and not restricted to Scrutiny, and that the webcasting of meetings could be a useful engagement tool.

The Committee was advised that, in the past, patch committees had been held in the community to facilitate resident engagement but they had not made a great deal of difference. It was noted that the subject matter and its relevance to communities was key. It was explained that webcasting in principle had merit but there were cost and practical implications, as a dedicated room with an embedded system would be required and this was a decision for the whole Council. The option of an audio streaming system was a more practical solution. Members were advised that scrutiny reviews were a very useful and flexible process through which in-depth analysis outside of a formal committee environment could take place.

Members considered that a seafront walk by the Scrutiny Committee was a good example of how successful engagement could be done. It was recommended that the Chair, Deputy Chair and Monitoring Officer meet to discuss the issue further.

RESOLVED

- 1) To note the report; and
- 2) That the Chair, Deputy Chair meet with officers to progress opportunities for further community engagement.

35 Forward Plan of Decisions

Nick Peeters, Committee Officer, introduced the report which detailed decisions due for consideration by the Cabinet. There was no discussion on the item.

RESOLVED - To note the Forward Plan of Decisions.

36 Scrutiny Work Programme

Nick Peeters, Committee Officer, presented the Committee's work programme for consideration. During discussion, the following points were highlighted.

Southern Water had been approached regarding an incident involving untreated waste water. Southern Water suggested that a site visit and an informal briefing could be arranged.

An update from East Sussex County Council highways team regarding congestion on the A27 and proposals for dualling the road was still expected and Members suggested that Highways England also be approached for further information.

It was suggested that an additional Scrutiny meeting could be arranged should a report on the Sovereign Centre Business Case be included in the Cabinet work programme.

Officers agreed that the issues above would be progressed.

RESOLVED - to note the Committee's work programme, and make any required amendments as set out above.

The meeting ended at 8.10 pm

Councillor Tony Freebody (Chair)