

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of meeting held in Ditchling Room at Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes, BN7 1AB on 6 February 2020 at 2.00 pm

Present:

Councillor Joe Miller (Chair)

Councillors Liz Boorman (Deputy-Chair), Robert Banks, Nancy Bikson, Christine Brett, Roy Burman, Isabelle Linington, Milly Manley, Christine Robinson, Adrian Ross and Steve Saunders

Officers in attendance:

Jo Harper (Head of Business Planning and Performance), Millie McDevitt (Performance and Programmes Lead), Philip Brown (Property Lawyer), Homira Javadi (Chief Finance Officer), Oliver Jones (Strategy and Partnership Lead), Catherine Knight (Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services), Ola Owolabi (Deputy Chief Finance Officer (Corporate Finance)), Sarah Roberts (Engagement Project Manager), Seanne Sweeney (Strategy and Commissioning Lead for Community and Partnerships), Jessica Haines (Head of Commercial Business), Ian Fitzpatrick (Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning) and Gary Hall (Head of Homes First)

Also in attendance: Chief Inspector Di Lewis (Sussex Police)

24 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 September 2019 were submitted and approved, and the Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

25 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

26 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Steven Saunders declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 6 on the agenda, Final report of the Scrutiny Seaford Health Hub Panel, as a member of the Wave Leisure Trust.

27 Urgent Items

There were no urgent items.

28 Written Questions from Councillors

There were no written questions from Councillors.

29 Final report of the Scrutiny Seaford Health Hub Panel

Councillor Robinson, Chair of the Scrutiny Seaford Health Hub Panel, Introduced and provided a summary of the Panel's work. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

A number of Members felt that the overall emphasis of the recommendations was too negative and it was suggested that a more positive recommendation should be included.

Members also felt that specifying where on the site the Hub should be sited was too restrictive and the recommendations should be amended to say that a revised design would be developed.

The Committee also felt that, whilst a 12 month review of the proposals was reasonable, it did not prevent further scrutiny at an earlier period, subject to the auctioning of the recommendations.

It was proposed that, to reflect the concern of some of the Committee members, the wording in the initial recommendation be changed to”The Scrutiny Committee’s recommendation is for the Council, **at this time**, not to progress the proposed development on the Downs Site of a health hub unless and until all the following conditions have been satisfied:”, and for recommendation b) to be as set out in the panel’s report, subject to the **deletion** of the words **“and relocates the new health hub building to the east of the existing leisure building”**.

RESOLVED by a majority of 8 in favour and 3 against to support the Panel’s recommendations as follows with the agreed amendments above:

The Panel’s recommendation is for the Council, at this time, not to progress the proposed development on the Downs Site of a health hub, unless and until all the following conditions have been satisfied:

- a) It is established within a reasonable timescale (i.e.12 months) by the NHS that there is no practical prospect of new GP premises being provided in Seaford through the redevelopment of the Seaford Medical Practice’s existing Dane Road site together with the Richmond Road car park. For this purpose the Cabinet should be satisfied that the NHS has diligently carried out a full analysis of the viability of this option which should include all necessary surveys.
- b) A revised design for the Downs Site is finalised, which excludes the residential and retail elements.
- c) The financial model for the revised design specified at point b) above must clearly demonstrate that the Council will make a suitable financial return commensurate with the risks involved, and that the required investment will

not prevent the Council from investing in higher priority capital projects to the benefit of the whole of the District, due to the impact of that investment on the Council's borrowing limits.

30 Eastbourne & Lewes Community Safety Partnership - Annual Report for Lewes.

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

The multi-agency team based at Saxon House, Newhaven, had been a success and as a result, a similar initiative was being set up in Lewes. A purpose-built van was being purchased to allow support to be provided in rural areas.

In terms of funding, the period detailed in the report was 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020. All of the funding had been allocated and part of the Partnership's work was to look at how funding would be used in the following year. There were no particular issues with the current funding level.

The criteria for providing speed cameras was initially based on killed, or seriously injured (KSI) figures. The cost for speed cameras was significant and would take up the majority of the funding allocation. A request for a Camera would be considered a capital bid. The Partnership had discussed strategic plans for the following year and in particular the refocusing of the impact of incidents of killed and seriously injured on local communities and whether there were low cost measures that could be used to support those communities.

Members requested that the relevant officer(s) from East Sussex County Council be requested to attend a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the use of speed cameras.

Concern was expressed over the increase in incidents of knife crime in Newhaven and more broadly across the district. It was noted that the Police and Crime Commissioner had made funds available for additional Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). The positive contribution of PCSOs to local policing was acknowledged and it was hoped that this would continue.

The Committee commented on the statistics for recorded 'incidents of crime' in Newhaven. It was not felt that all incidents were being recorded and an updated record was requested. Members were advised that putting staff back in to communities was a positive initiative and the additional funding was welcome. Both prevention and response officers worked in the Lewes and Newhaven areas and prevention enforcement units, and a newly formed tactical enforcement unit would be undertaking high visibility patrols. These teams would be increasing in numbers to allow PCSOs to be resourced more locally. Members were also advised that the wait-time for those reporting

crime, which may have previously been a deterrent, had reduced over the last eight months and there was an online facility for recording crime.

RESOLVED to

- 1) Note the report; and
- 2) Note the achievements and activities of the Eastbourne & Lewes Community Safety Partnership.

31 Meeting the Housing Needs of the District's Young People

Oliver Jones, Strategy and Partnership Lead, and Gary Hall, Head of Homes First, presented the report which responded to a request by the Scrutiny Committee to look in more detail at the barriers young people in the District faced accessing and securing suitable housing options.

It was clarified to the Committee that the report could be considered as a stand-alone informative or used as a platform to consider further scrutiny. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

There was concern that a number of large developments in the district had been granted planning permission with the condition that 40% of the units would be provided as affordable home. Some of those developers had then challenged the requirement for the affordable homes element and successfully reduced and in some cases completely removed the obligation. It was felt that efforts were needed to stop this being the case as it impacted significantly on the provision of affordable homes. There was also concern by Members at the under occupation of larger properties. It was noted that in cases where elderly people moved in to smaller properties, they were often the same properties that are in demand by young people in the district. Members were advised that, on a regular basis, there were approximately 1000 people on the housing waiting list in the district with a very low turn-over of Council stock. It was explained that the Council's 30 Year Plan for the Housing Revenue Account was due to be presented to the Cabinet and the Plan included proposals to increase the Council's housing stock by up to 40% which equated to approximately 1400 properties.

Members were advised that the provision of houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) was a consideration as part of the overall mix of options, however, caution was taken as the condition of some of the properties was not always up to standard. The Homes First team was looking at all opportunities to respond to the need for housing such as companies who could afford to buy properties on the open market which they could then lease to the Council at affordable Local Housing Allowance rates, and working with the YMCA to provide holistic solutions to housing for young people. The major obstacle for young people when trying to access housing was affordability and employment opportunities was a key factor also. The Council was looking to provide truly affordable social housing.

Members felt the focus at the planning stage should include smaller units, such as one bedroom flats that were suitable for young people. Members

were also keen to see more engagement with young people from diverse backgrounds to discuss the issues. It was confirmed that school visits to discuss homelessness issues had been undertaken and there was a broader strategy involving partners, both in the district and neighbouring authorities, to tackle homelessness.

Officers suggested that a separate work stream as part of the Homelessness Strategy could be set up to consult with young people and access to housing. It was confirmed that work on the Council's Housing Strategy would be underway in the next few weeks and could also include a panel that focused on the issues affecting young people.

The Committee noted that the age at which individuals bought or rented property had increased significantly and that difficulties in both providing a deposit and assuring that mortgage or rental payments could be sustained existed.

RESOLVED to

- 1) Note the report; and
- 2) Note that officers would include a focus on the needs of young people in both the Housing and Homelessness strategies.

32 Voluntary sector support

Jo Harper Harper, Head of Business Planning and Performance, and Seanne Sweeney, Strategy & Corporate Projects Officer, presented the annual report which provided an overview of how funding provided by the Council in 2019/20 has been used by funded organisations. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

There was discussion around the funding given to Brighton Housing Trust, provided to support residents around Universal Credit, and how the support would continue after the grant period finished. Officers advised that this may in part be mitigated by the services provided by Lewes Citizen's Advice Bureaux (also funded by the Council) who also support people with issues around Universal Credit.

Members were advised that the allocation for Brighton Housing Trust was for a two year period only and there would not be any additional funding beyond what had been recommended. The current grants policy did not include a bidding process but part of the review of the policy would be to look at how other authorities, some of which used open bidding, managed the process. The organisations that currently received funding were those that aligned with the Council's priorities and were critical to the overall wellbeing of the voluntary sector in the Borough.

Officers confirmed that the current three year agreement did not include inflationary uplift and this element could be included as part of a review.

It was confirmed that the funding for Action in Rural Sussex related to the service offered by the organisation to village hall and community centre management committees. Those smaller organisations did make extensive use of volunteers and therefore the criteria for the funding was met.

RESOLVED to

- 1) Note the planned allocation of funding to voluntary organisations for 2020/21;
- 2) Note the proposed review of the Council's grant policy in line with the new corporate plan; and
- 3) Note that any alteration to the grants policy would not impact on current 3 year funding plan, so as to minimise impacts on planned activities by Council's funded partners.

33 Lewes District Council 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:

It was confirmed that, in terms of business rates retention, the assumptions in the figures were based on what was currently being achieved. There were a number of factors that impacted on the Council's ability to forecast business rates growth, other than inflationary increases.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) Note the Draft Budget Proposals for 2020/21; and
- 2) Note that there were no recommendations to the Cabinet.

34 Lewes District Council 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:

It was confirmed that an update on the Council's and its partners' commitment to the Lewes Living wage would be provided following the meeting.

RESOLVED to

- 1) Note the Corporate Plane; and
- 2) Note that there were no recommendations to the Cabinet.

35 Portfolio Progress and Performance Report 2019/20- Quarter 3

Millie McDevitt, Performance and Programme Lead, presented the Quarter 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. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

It was confirmed that officers would attempt to obtain detail on the renewable energy schemes that should accompany each planning application. Members were advised that the information had been difficult to obtain figures in the past.

Members expressed concern at the use of the word 'robustly' in the report when referring to improving the average number of days lost to sickness, as it was felt it was a harsh term. Officers noted the comments and confirmed that the Council's policy was to actively support staff in returning to work by understanding the nature of the sickness and ensuring that a safe and supportive environment was provided to minimise incidents of sickness.

The Chair noted that a programme used by other authorities allowed staff to speak directly to healthcare professionals when a period of sickness commenced. Officers confirmed that staff were encouraged to speak in person to colleagues and managers.

Members requested updates on the following items in the report:

- The devolution of open spaces in Newhaven
- Increase in overall tenant satisfaction
- Devolution sites in rural areas (East Chiltoningon, Hollycroft Field including play space)

It was confirmed that there would be an opportunity to input into the performance indicators for 2019/20

RESOLVED to note progress and performance for Quarter 3 and Quarter 2.

36 Scrutiny Emergency Climate Change Panel - verbal update

Councillor Adrian Ross, Chair of the Scrutiny Emergency Climate Change Panel, provided an update on the Panel's work following its first meeting. The Committee was advised that the Panel's remit had been amended to better reflect the work to be undertaken and the wider role of scrutiny in supporting policy development and performance measurement. The Panel had also agreed to look more broadly at sustainability. It was further confirmed that the Cabinet member for sustainability would be invited to the next meeting to discuss how the Council's sustainability strategy would be developed. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

The Panel felt that there was a wealth of local knowledge and expertise on the issue and agreed with the Panel's programme of engagement.

The Committee proposed to delegate responsibility for the final wording of the Panel's remit to its Chair, Councillor Ross.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) Note the update; and
- 2) Delegate responsibility to the Chair of the Panel for agreement of the final wording of the Panel's remit.

37 Forward Plan of Decisions

Nick Peeters, Committee Officer, presented the Plan, which detailed the items due for consideration by the Cabinet. Members were advised that the Plan was a standing item on each of the Committee's agendas and provided the Scrutiny Committee with an opportunity to scrutinise the decision making process. During discussion the following items were highlighted:

Members requested that proposals for affordable housing on the former Police and Fire stations be reviewed and in particular the timescale involved. The Committee was advised that the item was due for consideration by the Cabinet on the following Monday and within his role, the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee would be able to attend and speak on the item.

Members requested that the following item be included in the Committee's work programme:

- The Council's Commercial Investment Strategy, due for consideration by the Cabinet on 23 March.
- East Sussex College Group Partnership Working (subject to the report including detail on the University Technology College)

Members were reminded that the new change of governance proposals and frequency of meetings would allow for greater scrutiny of Cabinet decisions. The Committee was also advised that a peer review challenge was taking place in March 2020.

RESOLVED to note the Forward Plan of Decisions.

38 Scrutiny Work Programme

Nick Peeters, Committee Officer, presented the Committee's work programme which included items due for consideration at the Committee's next meeting. During discussion the following items were highlighted:

The Committee requested that, as well as the items requested under item 14. Forward Plan of Decisions, the 'approach to development on small sites and sustainability' item be included. Members also requested that representatives

from East Sussex County Council be invited to the next meeting to discuss 'Sustainable Transport and Supporting the Economy - cross-border work looking at park-and-ride, the A259 and A27'.

RESOLVED to note the Committee's work programme.

The meeting ended at 4.30 pm

Councillor Joe Miller (Chair)