

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of meeting held in Court Room at Eastbourne Town Hall, Grove Road, BN21 4UG on 29 November 2021 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Tony Freebody (Chair).

Councillors Steve Wallis (Deputy-Chair), Josh Babarinde, Helen Burton, Peter Diplock, Jane Lamb and Robert Smart.

Officers in attendance:

Philip Brown (Property Lawyer), Linda Farley (Head of Customer First), Homira Javadi (Chief Finance Officer), Ola Owolabi (Deputy Chief Finance Officer (Corporate Finance)), Tim Whelan (Director of Service Delivery) and Nick Peeters (Committee Officer).

Also in attendance:

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30 Minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2021

Councillor Smart referred to matters arising from the previous minutes and it was agreed that those would be dealt with later on the agenda.

Resolved that the minutes of the meetings held on 13 September 2021 were submitted and approved and signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

31 Apologies for absence / declaration of substitute members

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Morris.

32 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.

33 Questions by members of the public

There were none.

34 Urgent items of business

There were none.

35 Right to address the meeting/order of business

There were no requests,

36 Corporate performance - quarter 2 - 2021/22**Part A - Portfolio Progress and Performance**

Tim Whelan, Director of Service Delivery, introduced the report. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- Recruitment was an issue across all sector. Changes had been made to working patterns with more flexibility to encourage interest from as diverse a range of applicants as possible. Relevant courses were in place with links to local colleges in order to invest in new staff
- The highlighting of fly-tipping as an issue in the Devonshire ward reflected the transient nature of the population and that the area included a number of unadopted ally-ways in between properties. Safer Streets funding had been used to gate some of the ally-ways and prohibit access. Proactive 'overt' cameras were also being used.
- The increase in home DIY during lockdown periods had contributed to the number of fly-tip incidents and the type of materials left. Part of the work in reducing the number of incidents and the volume of fly-tipping was around educating residents and encouraging ownership of the areas affected.
- The contact-centre call responses data also included the length of time that customers waited for a response and the wait-time had improved significantly between quarters 2 and 3. A number of staff were undergoing training and as a result of the nature of the calls received had become more complex, and involving multiple issues. The standard email response time was 10 working days. However, emails were currently being responded to within 3 working days. Technology was being looked at that would allow signposting via text to dedicated, self-serve web pages. The Council's website was under review and part of the work would be to provide more accurate signposting and responses to a broad range of enquiries. Reports were produced that identified and allowed analysis of the types of calls being received.
- The target for the inspection of licensable houses of multiple occupancy (HMO's) was cumulative and details of the licenses were published on the Council's website. Details of high-risk HMO's could be made available separately.
- The contract for with Mears was 7 seven years old and due for renewal in 2023. An action plan had been provided to drive the performance of the service and weekly meetings were being held with the company directors. The moving of the hosing repair calls back in-house was being looked at as part of a broader look at a different model for providing the service to residents. The final recommendations would form a report to the Cabinet.

- The majority of discretionary housing payments (DHP's) were used for vulnerable tenants in the private housing sector who potentially faced the threat of homelessness. Funds were still available and the Council's own tenants were being focused on for providing support. Software had been used to identify the most at-risk tenants and as a result, the rent arrears level had been reduced.
- An action plan was in place to target recruitment including school visits and recruitment days. Apprenticeships were being offered also. Plans were in place to attract people from different backgrounds and specialist recruitment websites were being used. The focus was on applicants having the right attitude and behaviours as well as the relevant skill sets.
- An action plan was being worked on for recycling and the 2021 Environment Act would impact on potential changes such as the suggestion for food waste collection and a free garden waste service. A significant amount of communications was available on the Council's website on recycling best practice. Communication was a key area for supporting improvements in recycling levels.
- Sickness levels in the Waste Service was historically higher than office based services. Additionally, staff had been operating in 'bubbles' and there was a direct impact if staff contracted Covid. There was an emphasis on working closely with operatives in the Waste Service to identify areas where injuries and illness levels could be reduced.

Part B - Financial Performance

Homira Javadi, Chief Finance Officer and Ola Owolabi, Deputy Chief Finance Officer, presented the report. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- The Budget assessment focused on the key areas that had been affected post-Covid which included Regeneration and Planning. Plans were in place to look at areas with a significant variance.
- The Council's Capital Programme was funded through borrowing and there was an obligation to ensure that any commitment could be justified. A significant reduction in income had reduced net expenditure and impacted overall on the Budget. The income headline had also been affected by changes to the categorisation of services. A number of savings from the 2019 Budget had been delayed and consolidated into the Recovery and Reset savings target. The figures in the report were intended to provide a high-level overview of the Budget. A more detailed, line-by-line analysis could be provided.
- It was noted that all investment and expenditure decisions by the Council had an additional consideration of the Council's carbon footprint and the commitment to its 2030 Carbon-Neutral programme.

Resolved to note the report.

37 Levelling Up Fund

Tim Whelan, Director of Service Delivery, introduced the report. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- East Sussex County Council, as the highways authority, would be supporting the pedestrianisation work at Victoria Place. The Band Stand was not suitable for the funding as it was a Council asset and the funding was intended to create jobs, employment and learning opportunities.
- The details of the governance arrangements and membership of the Stakeholder Oversight Board were due to be finalised.
- Members considered that streamlined and transparent governance arrangements were needed as part of the programme.

Resolved:

- 1) To note the report; and
- 2) Request that the Cabinet consider that clear streamlined and transparent governance arrangements for Levelling up Funds are circulated at the earliest opportunity to all Council members and key stakeholders, whilst retaining any commercial sensitivities.

38 Forward Plan of Decisions

The Chair, Councillor Freebody, introduced the Forward Plan of the Cabinet.

Concern was expressed that a number of reports that were originally included on the Forward Plan were no longer available for consideration. It was explained that staffing levels and commercial sensitivities had affected the availability of reports for specific deadlines and that the Forward Plan was an evolving document.

Resolved to note the Forward Plan of Cabinet decisions.

39 Scrutiny Work Programme

The Chair, Councillor Freebody, introduced the Committee's work programme.

Members noted the update on the figures for the number of homelessness placements into Eastbourne by Brighton and Hove City Council and that this had now reduced to 64 people, close to pre-pandemic figures. Officers and Members were thanked for their work towards the reduction in the figures. Members were advised that Brighton and Hove City Council had declined to attend a further meeting on the issue.

Members requested that updates on the Levelling Up fund be provided to future meetings.

Resolved to note the Committee's work programme.

Matters arising from the previous meeting:

As requested at the beginning of the meeting, the following issues were highlighted and responded to:

Treasury management annual report 2020/21, details of the Council's cashflow – this had been provided as a one-page analysis and was available for circulation.

Housing Development update - Southfields Road Car Park – the recommendation from the Scrutiny Committee was considered by the Cabinet on the 14 July 2021 and it was considered that the request was already considered within the officer recommendations.

40 Date of the next meeting

Resolved to note that the date of the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee is scheduled for Monday 7 February 2022, in the Court Room, Eastbourne Town Hall, Grove Road, Eastbourne, BN21 4UG.

The meeting ended at 7.50 pm

Councillor Tony Freebody (Chair)