

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of meeting held in Court Room - Town Hall, Eastbourne on 6 February 2023 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Kshama Shore (Chair).

Councillors Steve Wallis, Josh Babarinde (Vice-Chair), Jane Lamb, Md. Harun Miah, Amanda Morris, Hugh Parker and Robert Smart.

Officers in attendance:

Philip Brown (Property Lawyer), Luke Dreeling (Performance Lead), Lee Banner (Transformation Programme Manager), Homira Javadi (Director of Finance and Performance (Chief Finance Officer)), Nick Peeters (Committee Officer), Parmjeet Jassal (Interim Head of Financial Planning), Ross Sutton (Head of Financial Reporting), Mark Walker (Head of Financial Planning) and Tim Whelan (Director of Service Delivery).

62 Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2022

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2022 were submitted and approved and signed as a correct record by the Chair.

63 Apologies for absence / declaration of substitute members

There were none.

64 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.

65 Questions by members of the public

There were none received.

66 Urgent items of business

There were none.

67 Right to address the meeting/order of business

No requests were received.

68 Eastbourne & Lewes Community Safety Partnership – Annual Report (Eastbourne) - to follow

Oliver Jones, Strategy Lead, Homes First, presented the report which enabled the Scrutiny Committee to consider the 2022/23 performance of the Eastbourne & Lewes Community Safety Partnership. Oliver was joined by Chief Inspector Di Lewis, Sussex Police. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- Work on identifying ‘high harm’ hotspots was refreshed across the year and daily operational safety patrols were directed to those areas where increases were identified. Neighbourhood policing teams also carried out any necessary enforcement activity to help proactively and robustly deal with criminal activity. Research was being undertaken with Sussex Police, the Safer Communities team at East Sussex County Council and other partners, through a placed-based approach to serious violence in the Devonshire ward, looking at a range of data, including, crime statistics, temporary accommodation / HMO use, and NHS incidents. Funding had been provided which supported the employment of a community development worker to undertake engagement work in the Devonshire ward.
- The issue of bicycle thefts was raised and one of the main challenges when dealing with these was being able to link recovered bikes with owners. Some work had been done locally through identification, with positive results and enforcement action being taken. PCSOs and Engagement Officers were also encouraging the ‘marking’ of bikes which was having a positive effect on identification and return.
- Between 6 – 8 PCSOs covered the Town Centre on a regular basis, with between 15 – 20 across the Borough. Recruitment of PCSOs across East Sussex continued. The work of the PCSOs provided significant support across Sussex Police.
- As a force, Sussex Police did not have a large number of burglaries. Those that did occur could be attributed to private HMOs and hotels, where access was easily gained. CCTV was in use and kept up to date, and the Community Safety Partnership had funded replacement units and upgrades. The Force Control room included CCTV monitoring operators and the work to investigate incidents was often supported by volunteered Ring doorbell footage. When people who are known burglars are released back into communities, they are monitored and interviewed if reoffending is suspected.
- There were rises in numbers of burglaries, robberies and shoplifting, and it was reasonable to assume that the cost-of-living crisis was a factor. Drug testing upon arrest was undertaken and the Drug Liaison team worked in custody units to provide support and reduce reoffending. Partnership work took place to provide appropriate accommodation and support mental health issues.

Resolved to note the report.

69 Customer Contact Overview

Tim Whelan, Director of Service delivery, presented the report which provided members with an overview of the work of the customer contact team. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- Calls to the Contact Team included a front-end message during periods of delay. Calls were being answered within an average of 2 minutes and the call abandon rate was 6 percent. This was considered to be a very high standard with the increased rate of calls as result of the cost-of-living crisis.
- The focus of the Team was to answer calls quickly and provide first-time resolutions. Reducing the reasons for customers needing to contact the Council by phone was also important in reducing wait times.
- The Chatbot (Ellis) had dealt with a number of enquiries, 25 % of those were out of hours, demonstrating the demand for information outside of normal working hours. The level of answers from Ellis had been measured and there was a 96 % parity with answers that would have been provided by a human operator.
- The number of calls regarding waste was being delt with by reducing the number of missed bins. This figure reduced following the service being taken over by SEESL.
- The data provided in the report related to Eastbourne Borough only. Lewes District enquiries were to a separate phone number.

Resolved to note the report.

70 Corporate Performance - quarter 3 - 2022-2023

Luke Dreeling, Performance Lead, presented the report which update Members on the Council's performance against Corporate Plan priority actions, performance indicators and targets for the third quarter of the year 2022-23. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- Although not yet at target level, household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting had increased as a result of alternative weekly collection. The annual outturn would provide a more accurate figure as opposed to the quarterly data. The numbers of people using the garden waste collection service was being maintained. The Council used the single green bin collection method to encourage recycling, along with communication to residents on how and what to recycle.
- The performance indicator for number of new sign-ups to the Councils' social media channels had increased post covid and continued to be above

target. The numbers had been maintained and the Council's focus was on continuing to provide information and promote its services via social media.

- Members felt that future reviews of performance indicators could include comparisons to the types of indicators being used by other authorities and targets set.

Resolved to note the report.

71 General fund budget 2023/24 and capital programme - to follow

Homira Javadi, Director of Finance and Performance, presented the report which detailed the General Fund Budget 2023/24, and updated Medium Term Financial Strategy, together with the updated Capital Programme and Treasury Management position. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- The work on the revised policy for the introduction of a council tax premium on second homes for 2024 would include consultation. There were approximately 843 second homes, the majority of which were concentrated in the Meads area and Sovereign Harbour.
- The Council had a statutory duty to balance its budget and there was a significant gap between expenditure and sources of income, with pre-covid levels of income not yet reached. Efficiencies and savings would be achieved through areas such as improving IT procurement and using digitalisation to improve service delivery and reduce service delivery costs. Further work on how best to utilise the Council's under-performing assets would also be done. The Council was also looking at reducing its reliance on tourism income and its provision being independent from the level of Council subsidy currently provided. Partnership working to reduce the number of people in emergency accommodation would also produce savings.
- The pay award for the current financial year had only recently been agreed. The 2021/2022 pay award had been provided as a flat rate, benefiting officers at the lower scale of pay. A 4% increase had been assumed for 23/24 but this could be subject to change.
- Members expressed concern that the rise in council tax would impact heavily on individuals and households who were already experiencing financial difficulties through the cost-of-living crisis.
- The budget included an additional allocation of £100,000 for the Cost-of-living Crisis Fund. There was a broad package of support that would be targeted through the use of in-house data and widely advertised.

Resolved to note the report.

72 Treasury Management and Prudential Indicators 2023/24, Capital Strategy & Investment Strategy - to follow

Homira Javadi, Director of Finance and Performance, presented the report which provided detail on the Council's Annual Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy & investment Strategy together with the Treasury and Prudential Indicators. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- Members were offered additional training on any areas of the Treasury Management and Prudential indicators, where that felt more detail was needed.

Resolved to note the report.

73 Housing Revenue Account Budget 2023/24 - to follow

Homira Javadi, Director of Finance and Performance, presented the report which detailed HRA budget proposals, rent levels, service charges and heating costs for 2023/24, and the HRA Capital Programme for 2022-26. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- It was confirmed that proposals for increasing garage rent were 7%.

Resolved to note the report.

74 Congress and Devonshire Park Theatres - Future Governance Arrangements

Lee Banner, Transformation Programme Manager, presented the report which provided an update on the progress of the work of the cross-party Devonshire Park Governance Board and proposed changes to the governance arrangements for the Congress and Devonshire Park Theatres, in pursuit of cultural and financial benefits. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- The report looked specifically looked at the Congress and Devonshire Park theatres. Future discussion would include all areas of the Devonshire Quarter and the relationship between the buildings. However, there was no expectation of any impact, as a result of this work, on the conference sector in Eastbourne.
- There were further details that needed to be worked through with regards to the operation of the arrangements. As the business plan and the memorandum of understanding were worked through, detail on the practical operational element of the governance would become clearer.
- The Committee noted the report, with several members commenting on its complexity and requesting regular updates to clarify specifically on the long-term effects of the Conference facilities provision & VAT cultural exemption.

- The aim of the project was to establish a self-sufficient entity, through a charitable trust, that was able to access external grant-funding and would have a greater capacity to deliver the tourism offer. The current proposals sought Cabinet approval to create the Local Authority Controlled Company as an interim step towards setting up the charitable entity.

Resolved to note the report.

75 Update on Scrutiny of Gatwick Airport Ltd (Carbon Neutral Accreditation/Northern Runway development) - verbal update

The Chair, Councillor Shore, introduced the item and reminded Members of the presentation received from Gatwick Airport Ltd representatives at the previous meeting and that the Committee had resolved to defer a decision until the Committee's next meeting, following receipt of further information requested from Gatwick Airport Ltd. It was agreed that all the follow-on information requested had been received:

Resolved by a majority of 5 in favour and 2 against that

Full Council is asked to consider the following recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee. That the Scrutiny Committee:

1. Is committed to advancing the Eastbourne Carbon Neutral 2030 (ECN2030) agenda, as committed to by Eastbourne Borough Council councillors in 2019.
2. Recognises the progress that Gatwick Airport Limited has made to achieve neutrality in its Scope 1 and Scope 2 emissions, securing a 'Neutral' (Level 1) Airport Carbon Accreditation as awarded by Airports Council International.
3. Recognises the potential economic value that the proposed Northern Runway Project at Gatwick Airport could bring to Eastbourne.
4. Is aware that the additional Scope 3 emissions enabled by - and associated with - Gatwick Airport's current proposals for the Northern Runway Project could be significant, may not be carbon neutral, and could therefore compromise the ECN2030 commitment.

The Scrutiny committee therefore recommends that Full Council:

1. Makes any support for Gatwick Airport's Northern Runway Project conditional on Gatwick Airport's production and pursuit of a credible plan, in partnership with its Scope 3 stakeholders, to work towards carbon neutrality across its Scope 3 emissions by 2030.
2. Calls on any Government to mandate a faster transition to low-carbon aviation and to provide meaningful support to the fuel industry, airlines, manufacturers and other aviation industry stakeholders to achieve this.

76 Forward Plan of Decisions

The Chair, Councillor Shore, introduced the Forward Plan of Cabinet decisions.

There were no further updates to the plan.

Resolved to note the Forward Plan of Cabinet Decisions.

77 Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

The Chair, Councillor Shore, introduced the Committee's work programme. Members were advised that they would be contacted prior to the next scheduled meeting for any items they wished to be considered for inclusion and the setting of the 2023/2024 would form part of the agenda at the next meeting.

Resolved to note the Scrutiny Committee Work Programme.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm

Councillor Kshama Shore (Chair)