

Monday, 6 June 2016
at 6.00 pm



Scrutiny Committee

Present:-

Members: Councillor Blakebrough (Chairman) Councillor Holt (Deputy-Chairman) Councillors Belsey, Miah, Rodohan, Sabri, Smart and Coles (as substitute for Murray)

1 Minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2016.

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2016 were submitted and approved, and the Chairman was then authorised to sign them as an accurate record.

2 Apologies for absence.

Councillor Murray.

3 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.

4 The Towner Art Gallery.

The committee received a presentation from the Executive Director, Towner, Emma Morris. David Dimbleby, Chairman of the Towner was also in attendance.

The presentation centred on the development of the Towner Trust which had been in place since July 2014, highlighting key exhibitions, fund raising activities, education and outreach programmes. Numbers of visitors had increased by 12% in the previous year. According to economic figures researched and analysed by Regeneris Consulting who had been commissioned by Tate, the Towner was currently generating around £940,000 of economic benefit in the local area.

Following the presentation, the committee put a number of questions which were answered by Emma Morris and David Dimbleby. These were as follows:

Q – Could the numbers of repeat visitors be quantified?

A – This was not possible at present.

Q - How did the Towner performs in comparison to other authorities' investment into arts and culture?

A – This information was not available at present; however there was significant investment in Arts and Culture throughout Eastbourne which showed a serious commitment to its future development.

Q – The investment into the Towner from the Council appeared to be the same for four years – why was that?

A – The funding remained the same demonstrating no further cost to the Council, and was the reason for moving to a Trust. This would enable the Towner to seek funding from other sources in future.

Q - What is the social value of the Towner?

A - The committee was advised that the De La Warr pavilion had conducted a survey assessing qualitative feedback, funded by East Sussex County Council. The Executive Director hoped that a similar assessment could be carried out with regard to the Towner.

Q – What were the future fund raising initiatives, with regard in particular to donations and membership?

A - The appointed 'high level' fundraiser had started in May 2016, focusing on individual and corporate patronage.

Q – How would the development of an auditorium / cinema space on the ground floor of the Towner enhance the offer?

A – It was anticipated that footfall would increase and accessible, affordable events would be provided for residents and visitors alike. Investment would also be made into improving the shopping outlet online and 'in venue'.

Members agreed that they would forward any further questions arising from the presentation or the Business Plan which had been circulated prior to the meeting, to the Executive Director, via the Chairman or Local Democracy Officer for a response at the earliest opportunity.

Members thanked the Executive Director and Chairman for their attendance and input at the meeting.

RESOLVED: That any further questions from committee members arising from the presentation or business plan be submitted to the Executive Director via the Chairman or Local Democracy Officer.

5 Financial Performance - Provisional Outturn 2015/16.

Scrutiny considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer providing the provisional outturn results for 2015/16. The final outturn report would form part of the statement of accounts that would be reported to the Audit and Governance committee in June and Cabinet in July.

The General Fund - figures included the transfers to and from reserves as shown in Appendix 2 of the report.

The General fund service expenditure variance for the year was principally as a result of:

- Theatre show increased income achieved (principally from the pantomime) (£203,000).
- Savings on street cleansing contract (£102,000).
- Surplus on catering trading account (£101,000).
- Additional income and expenditure savings on bereavement service (£74,000).

These had, however, been offset in part by the following negative variances:

- Redundancy payments (£109,000).
- Rental income from corporate properties (£83,000).

The committee was advised that work was still underway reconciling some accounts and in particular the Housing Benefit Subsidy and Housing Benefits overpayments. It had been assumed for this report that these budgets would be on target, but experience from past years had indicated that this could vary considerably. Any changes would be reported as part of the final outturn report to the next meeting of Scrutiny.

Housing Revenue Account (HRA) - The table at Appendix 3 of the report summarised the HRA performance for 2015/16 and showed a surplus of (£559,000). This represented a variance of (£218,000) against the revised budget of (£341,000). The principle reason for this variance was due to savings in council tax on void properties, lower insurance premium, low demand on the under-occupations transfer scheme and savings resulting from Future Model restructuring.

Capital Programme - A summary of capital expenditure for the year was shown in Appendix 4 of the report. The revised capital programme for 2015/16 was £19.9m and the outturn was £18.0m. This was a variance of £1.9m; (£0.3m) for general fund and £2.2m for HRA. A detailed reason for the variance against each scheme was also shown at Appendix 4 of the report.

The Senior Corporate Development Officer advised the committee that the Corporate Plan and performance quarter 4 and year-end report would be presented in full at the next meeting in September allowing for a full "end-of-life" assessment report of the 2010-2015 Plan to be considered. Scrutiny would also receive the Quarter 1 outturn 2016/17.

The Senior Corporate Development Officer took the opportunity to re-introduce the Covalent Browser to Members and explain the proposed approach for monitoring and managing the new Corporate Plan. Members were also advised that refresher training for accessing Covalent would be scheduled for the beginning of August and end of September should any Members wish to attend as well as ad-hoc support being available to them through the Corporate Development team.

RESOLVED: (1) That the provisional general fund outturn on services expenditure for 2015/16 of £16.427m, a net favourable variance of £195,000 against the revised budget, be noted.

(2) That the transfers to and from reserves as set out at appendix 2 of the report be noted.

(3) That the provisional housing revenue account surplus for 2015/16 of £559,000 be noted.

(4) That the final capital programme and outturn for 2015/16 of £18.0m be noted.

6 A27 - Member Briefing.

The committee considered the notes from the informal briefing with Highways England held on 2 June 2016. Following consideration of the notes the committee agreed that there was a need to build an evidence based case for further investment into the A27 east of Lewes, and that this should be undertaken by a Scrutiny-appointed Task Group

The Head of Corporate Development and Governance advised the committee that it was likely that the forthcoming consultation would be prescriptive in respect of the options being put forward by Highways England. Therefore, if the intent was that the findings be used as a response to the consultation, it would be important to ensure that the specific options for the proposed £75m investment were addressed. However, it would also be perfectly reasonable to make the case for wider investment on the basis that a well-evidenced dossier would be useful as a lobbying tool.

As a result of a proposal by Councillor Blakeborough, seconded by Councillor Holt, it was;

RESOLVED: (1) That a scrutiny task group comprising 4 members (2 from each group) be set up with the following terms of reference:

Purpose:

To engage as widely as possible in order to obtain current evidence and opinion as to the level of local demand for investment in and improvements to the section of the A27 east of Lewes.

Objective:

To collate the feedback received together with the overarching agreed findings of the Council for submission to Highways England during their forthcoming consultation exercise into the options for the proposed £75m investment scheme currently being considered.

Methodology:

- A task group comprising four Councillors (two from each party) set up by the Scrutiny Committee to seek out and collate evidence obtained by holding a series of fact finding interviews with key area stakeholders over a period of 12 months. A detailed scoping exercise identifying relevant agencies, local businesses, community groups and residents will be carried out by the task group to facilitate this process.
- A findings report submitted by the Task Group to the Scrutiny Committee for approval in due course.

- Scrutiny recommendations arising from the Task Group findings to be submitted to Cabinet and full Council for endorsement and approval respectively.
- Submission of the final Council-approved findings report to Highways England as this Council's formal response to the consultation process.

(2) That the appointed membership of the Task Group be Councillors Belsey, Holt, Sabri and Smart.

The meeting closed at 7.20 pm

**Councillor Blakebrough
(Chairman)**