

Notes of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee
Finance and Performance Working Group
19th June 2014

Present: Councillors: John Chidlow, George Cockman, Leonard Crosbie, Brian Donnelly, Frances Haigh, Brian O'Connell, Stuart Ritchie, Diana van der Klugt

Apologies: Councillors: John Bailey, Jim Rae

Also present: Councillor Roger Arthur

Officers: Katharine Eberhart, Director of Corporate Resources
Jo Hopkins, Planning Services Officer
Simeon Manley, Interim Director of Planning
Julie McKenzie, Performance Manager
Sue McMillan, Head of Financial and Legal Services
Mark Pritchard, Commissioning and Performance Manager

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

Councillor Leonard Crosbie was elected Chairman of the Working Group for the ensuing year.

2. TO APPROVE AS CORRECT THE RECORD OF THE FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE WORKING GROUP MEETINGS ON 5TH AND 12TH FEBRUARY 2014

The notes of the Finance and Performance Working Group meetings held on 5th and 12th February 2014 were approved as a correct record of the meetings.

3. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM CHAIRMAN OR CHIEF EXECUTIVE

There were no announcements.

5. COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS – MONITORING AND LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PERIOD 1 JANUARY TO 31 MARCH 2014, INCLUDING ANNUAL FIGURES FOR 2013/14

The Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions, Monitoring and Learning Report for the period 1st January to 31st March 2014 was presented to the Working Group.

Members noted that 40 complaints had been received and requested that future reports include a figure to allow a comparison with the previous quarter(s). All except one of the complaints had been dealt with at the Stage 1 process; Members welcomed the efficiency of the complaints-handling service. Members suggested that a note be added to any Stage 3 complaint to explain the nature of the complaint and why it had progressed that far. Members were informed that David Plank, the newly-appointed Customer Services Manager, would be reviewing the way in which complaints were processed and recorded, together with dissemination of information about lessons learned and the identification of complaint trends.

Six compliments had been received during the quarter. Members suggested that compliments submitted via social media should also be included in the figures.

A further 84 complaints and 16 compliments were recorded by the Operational Services departments.

Annual figures for 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014 showed that 149 complaints and 66 compliments had been received. A further 308 complaints and 36 compliments were recorded separately by the Operational Services departments.

6. ANALYSIS OF ACTIVITY UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 AND ASSOCIATED LEGISLATION

The Working Group noted that for the year 1st April 2013 to 31st March 2014 the Council had received 664 requests for information which compared with 523 received in 2012/13. Members acknowledged the significant increase in and complexity of Fol requests, and the resulting work for officers and costs for the Council.

Members noted that the Justice Minister had announced that there would be two consultations in 2014. The first would look at issues in relation to the scope of the Fol Act with a view to ensuring it was not abused, with possible amendment to the cost limit for refusing Fol requests or restricting its scope to only apply to British citizens. The second would look at extending the Act to areas not currently covered.

7. MEMBER OVERVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S USE OF THE REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000

The Working Group noted that the Council had not used the powers under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 in the past quarter.

The Council had been inspected in May 2014 and had subsequently received a report by the Assistant Surveillance Commissioner which did not highlight any issues in relation to the Council's RIPA practices or policy.

8. **REPORT ON OUR DISTRICT PLAN PRIORITIES PROGRESS,
PROJECTS AND PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR QUARTER 4
2013/14**

The Performance Manager presented the Key Performance Indicator Report for Quarter 4.

Members discussed the Monitoring Report and highlighted the following areas:

FS13, Business Rates Rateable Value: A comparative figure for 2013 was requested.

DM02a&b, Number of planning enforcement cases received and closed: Members had previously requested further information about the processes within the department and also the number of enforcement cases started. That information would be provided at the meeting on 3rd July 2014.

DM09, Percentage of planning appeals allowed: Members queried the level of planning appeals following decisions made by officers under delegated authority. The Interim Director of Planning stated that the consistency of decision making would be monitored and that, in future, reports would list whether a decision had been made by committee or by officers.

DM17 to DM19, Processing of planning applications: Members requested that the number of applications for each month be added to the table of information. The Interim Director of Planning reported that the Council was exceeding the statutory requirements for the determination of planning applications. He also reported that the Government had introduced a recent change to allow local planning authorities to negotiate a voluntary extension of time for determining all types of planning applications.

DM21, Percentage of all major applications allowed at appeal within the assessment period: The Planning Services Officer explained that, in October each year, the Council returned figures for a 2 year period about the percentage of major applications overturned in relation to the total number of planning applications. The Designation Threshold was 20% or more being overturned; Horsham District Council's figure for January 2012 to December 2013 would be about 4.76% because 5 applications had been overturned in that period out of a total of 105 applications. Members noted that, when a Planning Inspector overturned a decision on appeal, this could result in a lower S106 figure and consequently a significant reduction in S106 income.

The Working Group requested that a guidance note be prepared about the procedures in relation to planning appeals, the consequences for the Council if it lost at appeal, with reference to some historical cases and the costs involved. That information could be presented to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee and the Council to inform Members

about the planning appeal process and the potential risk if the recommendations on planning applications were not approved. The Working Group also suggested that Members could receive training on this topic.

HS17, 18 & 19, Number of homelessness preventions, number of households in temporary accommodation, and number of households in B&B accommodation: Members noted that the figure of 16 households in B&B accommodation in March 2014 was the lowest figure since January 2013. The opening of Bridge House should see that figure further decrease. Members expressed a view that the figures showed that there was a need to help despite the supply of affordable housing. Members requested that the number of households on the waiting list be included in the figures.

LS01a, 01b, 03 and 05, Attendance at sports centres, swimming attendances, attendance at the Capitol, and at Horsham Museum: The Working Group welcomed the above-target quarterly figures.

OP13 (iv) & (v), Green garden waste rejects and blue topped bin recycling rejects: Members were concerned at the high levels of rejects but noted that stickers were being placed on blue topped bins to inform owners about what to recycle.

Members discussed the end of year 2013/14 Key Performance Indicator report.

The Performance Manager highlighted that the performance of ten KPIs had worsened in 2013/14; five of those indicators related to waste collection. There had been a significant increase in the level of household refuse going to landfill from Acornplus (OP13i). The level of blue topped bin recycling rejects had also risen in 2013/14 with almost 10% rejected against the target of 7%; an externally funded education was being implemented to address that.

Members noted that green waste income targets had been exceeded in 2013/14; 51% of households had taken up the service.

Members welcomed the 2013/14 annual figures for attendances at sports centres which had exceeded one million for the first time; the Capitol and Horsham Museum had also exceeded their targets and the figures for the previous year.

The Working Group noted that 239 affordable homes had been delivered in 2013/14 as a result of the Council's work with developers which compared favourably with the 147 delivered in the previous year. The projected figure for the net additional homes provided was 434 (which included affordable homes) which compared with 484 homes provided in 2012/13. Actual figures for new homes in 2013/14 would be provided at the next main Working Group meeting.

Members noted the SLT Tracked Projects list and the progress being made.

The Chairman, in relation to the Community Infrastructure Levy Scheme, suggested there was a need for Members to fully understand the workings of CIL. He would propose at a future meeting the establishment of a sub-group to analyse CIL. Members noted that the Business Improvement Working Group had suggested that a permanent CIL Officer be employed to oversee the introduction of the new scheme, to work with parishes to advise them on the implications of CIL, and to be responsible for the distribution of monies to the parishes in accordance with the new regulations.

The Chairman of the Working Group requested, in relation to the Council's office relocation, if it proceeded, details of the budget for that project.

The Working Group noted the District Plan Priorities Quarter 4, 2013/14.

9. YEAR END OUTTURN 2013/14 REPORT

The Head of Financial and Legal Services presented the year end outturn report for 2013/14 which compared the 2013/14 actual expenditure (outturn) on revenue, capital and repairs and renewals with the budget approved by the Council.

The Council had achieved £478,000 additional income in 2013/14 from fees and charges, and departmental spending had an underspend of £431,000, making a total of £909,000 underspend against the original budget.

Staffing costs had been underspent by approximately £67,000. Members discussed the underspend on salaries for permanent and contract staff of £1.125 million but an overspend of £884,000 on agency and casual staff, and queried why that had occurred. The significant sums spent on temporary staff and the equally significant sums not spent on full time staff were of concern to Members. The Director of Corporate Resources noted that Members were not given sufficient information to understand if the respective overspends and underspends were an issue for the Council. It was agreed that quarterly reports, in relation to salaries 2014/15, should include a commentary to fully explain the figures.

The Working Group noted that, from 2014/15, all planned revenue expenditure previously met from the repairs and renewals fund would be provided through the revenue account; the R&R account would no longer be used. There had been no significant overspends on R&R projects in 2013/14. Members queried why approximately £718,000 of the R&R budget of £1 million had not been spent but would be carried forward. The main underspend related to the Pavilions swimming pool scheme but that work was now in progress.

10. **CENSUS JOINT COMMITTEE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD
ON 28TH MARCH 2014**

The Working Group noted the minutes of the CenSus Joint Committee meeting held on 28th March 2014.

The Chairman of the Working Group had previously suggested that the Working Group might wish to consider, at a future meeting, whether or not it should consider a review of the CenSus partnership because it was a significant cost item in the budget.

11. **TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR THE SUB-REVIEWS INTO THE
COUNCIL'S KEY AREAS OF ACTIVITIES**

The Chairman of the Working Group agreed to prepare the terms of reference for the sub-groups that would review the Council's key areas of activities in relation to planning, parking, and operational services.

The meeting ended at 8.06 p.m. having commenced at 5.30 p.m.

CHAIRMAN