

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

Present: Councillors: Leonard Crosbie (Chairman), George Cockman, Brian Donnelly, Frances Haigh, Brian O'Connell, Jim Rae, Stuart Ritchie, Diana van der Klugt

Apologies: Councillors: John Bailey, John Chidlow

Also present: Councillors: Roger Arthur, Gordon Lindsay

Officers: Katharine Eberhart, Director of Resources
Julie McKenzie, Performance Manager
Sue McMillan, Head of Finance
David Plank, Customer Services Manager
Mark Pritchard, Commissioning and Performance Manager
David Robertson, Waste and Recycling Manager

1. **TO APPROVE AS CORRECT THE RECORD OF THE FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE WORKING GROUP MEETING ON 13TH AUGUST 2014**

The notes of the Finance and Performance Working Group meeting held on 13th August 2014 were approved as a correct record of the meeting.

2. **TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

3. **ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM CHAIRMAN OR CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

There were no announcements.

4. **COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS – MONITORING AND LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PERIOD 1ST APRIL TO 30TH SEPTEMBER 2014**

The Customer Services Manager reported on the complaints and compliments notified to the Council's Complaints and Information Officer for the period from 1st April to 30th September 2014.

There had been 246 complaints which compared to 191 complaints for the same period in 2013. A new module had been purchased for the Covalent system to facilitate more accurate complaints recording and to produce data about how complaints were received, and lessons learned.

A training day on Effective Complaints Handling would be held on 9th December 2014 for representatives of all customer-facing departments; the skills course would be delivered by Local Government Ombudsman investigators. Following that, complaints handling training would be rolled out to all Council officers responsible for investigating complaints.

A total of 84 complaints had been received in relation to Planning Services for the period; an action plan was in progress to address the reasons for those complaints. Operational Services had received 68 complaints, mostly relating to refuse collection which Members commented was a small number in relation to the overall number of bin collections in the District. The 32 complaints received about Parking Services would be discussed with the Parking Services Manager.

Members requested details of the level at which complaints had reached in the complaints handling process, as had previously been reported, and comparative figures with the previous year.

The Working Group noted that complaints about Leisure Services were independently dealt with by DC Leisure. Members requested, for information, details of those complaint numbers.

A total of 28 compliments had been received. Members requested the figure for the comparative period in the previous year, and asked that the compliments be reported back to the relevant staff member or teams.

5. ANALYSIS OF REQUESTS MADE UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT 2000 AND ASSOCIATED LEGISLATION

The Customer Services Manager reported that the Council had received 303 FOI requests for the period from 1st April to 30th September 2014, which compared to 281 requests for the same period in 2013. The majority of requests had been received from businesses and from the media.

The Working Group suggested that the Council keep under review the volume of FOI requests and the responses made within the appropriate timeframe.

The Council had received seven requests for internal reviews of decisions made to withhold information during this period; two reviews upheld the original decisions, one provided further information, and four reviews were ongoing.

The Information Commissioner's Office had investigated three complaints about decisions the Council had made in relation to FOI requests. In one case the original decision was upheld; the other two investigations were ongoing.

Members noted that the Council could charge to provide a response to an FOI response if it required 18 or more hours of work but that had to be estimated in advance and the requestor notified.

The Chairman asked about the Environmental Information Regulations (EIR) 2004 which gave enhanced access to environmental information by allowing anyone the right to access environmental information held by public authorities. Local authorities had 40 days to provide a response. The Chairman requested that future reports identify separately the number of FOI and EIR requests.

6. REPORT ON HDC'S FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE, DISTRICT PLAN PRIORITIES AND KEY PROJECTS FOR QUARTER 2, 2014/15

The Working Group noted the report detailing finance and performance information up to 30th September 2014 which was presented in the new combined report format which provided a summary of financial information along with performance data. The report included the financial expenditure and income for each service area with accompanying text by the relevant service manager.

The Director of Corporate Resources stated that the forecast outturn for the year to 31st March 2015 was estimated to underspend the approved revenue budget by £395K. Actual spend from April to September 2014 on capital projects was £2.6M which was 22% of the annual budget; an underspend for the year of £4.5M was anticipated because some projects would slip to 2015/16.

The key performance indicators showed that 20 (67%) were on target, 6 (20%) were close to target, and 4 (13%) were outside the target range. The indicators falling outside the target included the percentage of planning appeals allowed, council tax benefits speed of change of circumstances processing, staff sickness, and staff turnover.

A capital overspend of £45K was forecast for the introduction of new car park payment machines.

The Director of Corporate Resources highlighted key information in the report about staffing costs and the Business Transformation Programme. The Director stated that Business Transformation would be reviewed as part of the budget setting exercise in January 2015.

The Working Group noted the positive performances of increased attendance figures for Horsham Museum, and for the key government measure to improve the quality of decision making in relation to the percentage of all major planning applications allowed at appeal.

Members requested further information on activities in Economic Development, and for the inclusion of performance indicators for all services in the next report.

Development Management had exceeded the targets for processing major, other and minor planning applications. The Chairman of the Business Improvement Working Group requested details of the number of household and minor applications that had been determined subject to voluntary extensions.

The Working Group requested further details about planning appeals allowed to show how many had been permitted, dismissed and withdrawn, and to indicate whether the planning decision had been a Committee or a delegated officer decision, where Members had overturned officers' recommendations, and any resulting costs. Members asked that those details appear on future reports under DM09.

Members expressed their thanks to the Spatial Planning Manager and her team for their work in relation to the Horsham District Planning Framework Public Examination.

The Working Group noted the work of the Commissioning and Performance Manager; a commissioning framework was being prepared.

The Chairman, in relation to the salaries monitoring schedule for April to September 2014, highlighted the figures for Development Management. The Working Group would continue to keep those salary costs under review. Members thanked the finance department staff members for preparing the salaries monitoring schedule.

Members welcomed the good attendance figures for visits to sports centres, swimming pools, and Horsham Museum and Visitor Information Centre.

The Working Group requested, in relation to housing, that future reports include details of all the Council's housing properties and the number of families placed in that accommodation. Members noted that, as at 30th September 2014, 485 households were on the housing waiting list and that the number of homeless preventions had remained stable at 33 for Quarter 2 as compared to 38 in Quarter 1.

The Working Group requested, in relation to Waste and Recycling, an explanation for the increase in the number of refuse, recycling and garden waste collections reported as having been missed. The Chairman highlighted the reference in the salaries monitoring schedule to the vacant posts for four side loader operators and two tug drivers; those posts were covered by agency staff. The Waste and Recycling Manager explained that recruitment was made via specialist agencies and training was provided to produce side loader operators who, if proficient, were then offered permanent positions.

The Working Group noted the Capital Budget Monitoring Report as at 30th September 2014. There had been £2.6M net expenditure out of a budget of £11.8M. The Director of Corporate Resources informed Members that £4.5M of that budget would be moved across to 2015/16. The remaining budgets for two major projects, the Broadbridge Heath Leisure Centre new build and the redevelopment of Hop Oast Depot, would be carried forward to 2015/16.

The Working Group noted the Key Income areas report. Income from Development Control and Enforcement was above budget expectations, Building Control income was good, Land Charges income again exceeded the annual budget expectation, and Garden Waste Collection income had also exceeded the forecast income. The Head of Finance agreed to check the reason for the reduction in income for miscellaneous commercial and domestic property rents.

The Working Group noted the Tracked Projects List summary report and that only one project, Horsham Town car parking equipment replacement, was coded red.

The Working Group noted the District Plan Priorities report for Quarter 2 which showed all but one task (works at Warnham Mill Reservoir) as completed or on track.

The Working Group noted the new combined report format and that further revisions to the format would be forthcoming.

7. NEW HOMES BONUS

The Head of Finance tabled information on the New Homes Bonus 2015/16. It was estimated that a further £876K New Homes Bonus would be received in 2015/16 relating to house completions in the year to October 2014.

8. PLANNING ENFORCEMENT PERFORMANCE REPORT FOR QUARTER 1, 2014/15

The Working Group noted the planning enforcement cases report for Quarter 1 in 2014/15 as compared to previous quarters.

A Member asked how old the enforcement cases were when they were closed. That information would be requested for Business Improvement Working Group meeting on 25th November 2014 when it would receive the figures for Quarter 2.

9. **INITIAL REVIEW (FINANCE / BUDGET) OF THE COUNCIL'S KEY AREAS OF ACTIVITIES: PARKING, PLANNING AND OPERATIONAL SERVICES – SUB-GROUPS' TERMS OF REFERENCE**

The Chairman tabled the proposed terms of reference for the sub-groups that would review the finance / budget of the Council's key areas of activities in relation to planning, parking, and operational services. He asked the Members of the sub-groups to consider the terms of reference for approval at the Working Group meeting on 3rd December 2014 and to prepare the timetable for those reviews.

10. **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.

11. **CENSUS JOINT COMMITTEE MINUTES**

The Working Group noted the minutes of the CenSus Joint Committee held on 26th September 2014.

The meeting ended at 8.35 p.m. having commenced at 5.30 p.m.

CHAIRMAN