

Finance and Performance Sub-Committee
9 FEBRUARY 2017

Present: Councillors: Nigel Jupp (Chairman), Michael Willett (Vice-Chairman), John Bailey, Jonathan Dancer, Tim Lloyd and David Skipp

Apologies: Councillors: David Coldwell

Also Present: Councillor Leonard Crosbie, Chairman of Overview & Scrutiny Committee

29 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Sub-Committee held on 9th November 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

30 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

31 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

32 **PARKING SERVICES PERFORMANCE**

Members considered a written report from the Parking Services Manager regarding the impact of charging for Sunday parking since its introduction to Horsham Town in April 2016.

Members noted the financial and capacity impacts, which were in line with financial objectives and anticipated outcomes. It was also noted that there had been no complaints to the Council regarding displaced parking into residential streets.

33 **HOUSING BENEFIT SUBSIDY**

The Director of Corporate Resources reminded Members that in the light of on-going issues in respect of the loss of Housing Benefit subsidy to the Council, on 26th January 2017 Cabinet had resolved to withdraw from the CenSus Revenues and Benefits partnership from the beginning of the Financial Year 2018/19.

The district's Benefits Grant Subsidy was audited annually by external auditors, and benefits subsidy paid by the DWP to the Council was likely to be reduced because of the level of errors in decisions made during 2015/16. Measures had been put in place by CenSus to improve accuracy. The Director of Corporate

Resources advised Members that, whilst the database was being 'cleaned' with the help of Agency staff who were reassessing problematic claims, there was no guarantee that financial penalties would not be incurred until after the end of Financial Year 2018/19 at the earliest because of the complexity and labour intensive nature of the work.

Members discussed the background to the current situation, the financial consequences for the Council and measures that were being taken to mitigate the situation. It was noted that options for the future running of the service outside the CenSus partnership would be considered by the Cabinet on 30th March 2017.

External consultants had been commissioned by CenSus to look into the on-going error issues and give advice on the way forward. The Finance & Performance Sub-Committee had previously been briefed by the CenSus partnership on these issues in March 2016.

Members agreed that:

- the Consultant's Report into subsidy issues be circulated to the sub-committee;
- the document prepared for a briefing in March 2016 regarding the background to CenSus and the Housing Benefits Subsidy (2014/15) be circulated to members;
- Councillors Brian Donnelly and Gordon Lindsay, in their capacity as members of the CenSus Joint Committee, be invited to meet members of the Sub-Committee to give an overview of actions that are being taken to mitigate the issues.

34 **CORPORATE PLAN PRIORITIES AND FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE FOR QUARTER 3 2016/17**

The Commissioning & Performance Manager introduced the report on the Council's Finance and Performance, Corporate Plan Priorities and Key Projects for the third Quarter of 2016/17.

It was noted that there had been significant progress on the three major projects: Future Horsham; Broadbridge Heath Leisure Centre; and the Hop Oast Depot. The Key Performance Indicators showed no areas of major concern.

The Head of Finance presented the financial section of the report to Members. It was noted that a year-end surplus of £251,000 was forecast.

35 **HOP OAST CONTRACT - PERFORMANCE UPDATE**

Members considered the report on progress that had been made on the Hop Oast Waste Depot redevelopment, which would provide the Council with a modern fit for purpose premises, and consolidate the Hop Oast depot and Hurston depot in Storrington onto one site.

An official 'topping out' ceremony had taken place on the site on 8th February, and the project was on course to be completed as scheduled in October 2017.

36 **COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS - MONITORING AND LEARNING REPORT FOR QUARTER 3**

The Commissioning and Performance Manager presented the report which gave details of complaints and compliments received by the Council between 1st October and 31st December 2016.

Members noted that, whilst the number of complaints received by the Council had increased by 13% since the last Quarter, the number was 8% lower than for the same period last year. The increase could be attributed, in part, to a more focussed approach to logging complaints for certain services. The number of compliments had continued to rise compared to the same quarter in the previous year.

37 **ANALYSIS OF REQUESTS MADE UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION REGULATIONS 2016**

The Commissioning and Performance Manager presented the report of the analysis of requests made under the Freedom of Information Act and Environmental Information Regulations for the third Quarter of 2016/17.

The number of requests received in the third quarter (214) was 33% higher than for the same period the previous year. Members were advised that the Council had achieved a response rate of 96% within 20 working days, against a target of 85%, despite the significant growth in requests.

Members were concerned at the impact that processing requests had on staff capacity, but were mindful that supplying a cost breakdown would in itself be time consuming to administrate. Members noted that a scheduled upgrade to the FOI software system would help reduce administration time.

Members discussed the potential benefits of reporting a breakdown of the issues that FOI requests referred to, in addition to the breakdown of the type of requester.

38 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Finance & Performance Sub-Committee would be held on 15th June 2017.

The meeting closed at 7.08 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN