

SCRUTINY & OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

7TH JULY 2014

Present: Councillors: George Cockman (Chairman), Brian Donnelly (Vice Chairman) John Chidlow, Philip Circus, Roger Clarke, David Coldwell, Leonard Crosbie, Duncan England, Brian O'Connell, Kate Rowbottom, David Sheldon, David Skipp, Diana van der Klugt, Tricia Youtan

Apologies: Councillor Laurence Deakins

Also present: Councillors: Roger Arthur, Sue Rogers (Cabinet Member for a Safer and Healthier District)

Officer: Katharine Eberhart, Director of Corporate Resources

SO/12 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 2nd June 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

SO/13 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

SO/14 **ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE OR THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

The Chairman announced that the Scrutiny and Overview Annual Report 2013/14 had been published; Committee Members had received a hard copy version. The Annual Report had been posted on the Council website. HDC Councillors and the Parish and Neighbourhood Councils had been informed. Hard copies were available on request.

Councillor Donnelly was invited to report back on the Joint Scrutiny Task and Finish Group for the Community Legal Advice Service. He had attended its meeting on 12th June and would attend the meeting on 21st July 2014. The group had been reconvened to consider the process whereby West Sussex councils awarded a contract for the provision of generalist legal advice to the public. The contract had previously been awarded to the Citizens Advice Bureau for three years and then extended for two years. Horsham District Council contributed £93,000 a year. A survey of CAB's performance had shown it had provided a very good service. The Task and Finish Group would consider how to proceed once advice about the tendering process had been received. Committee Members were asked to comment if they had any knowledge about CAB's performance.

SO/15 **REPLIES FROM CABINET/COUNCIL REGARDING SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Cabinet Member for a Safer and Healthier District referred to her response to the further questions asked by the Committee at its meeting on 12th May 2014, arising from the recommendations of the Health Provision Working Group Interim Report.

The Committee had requested the Council to continue to encourage the local CCG to provide an overall administrator or manager at Horsham Hospital. The Cabinet Member reported that the CCG was aware of the Council's view which could be discussed at the Members' Briefing on 21st July 2014 when CCG representatives would outline their proposals for improving local community and primary health care for the Horsham and Crawley areas. The CCG was holding three exhibitions including one at the Drill Hall, Horsham on 31st July between 5:30 p.m. and 9:00 p.m. to allow the public to learn about and comment on its '5 Communities Plan'.

The Committee had also requested the Council to continue to support the provision of more health services locally and to react when services are removed, arising from the closure at short notice of the Mill Stream Medical Centre in Storrington. The Cabinet Member's response stated that she took an active role in the provision of local health care across the District and supported, where possible, more health services to be delivered locally. The Cabinet had been involved in the events regarding the closure of Mill Stream Medical Centre and the Council had been proactive in assisting with urgent arrangements to be put in place with alternative GPs, and had recently been successful in acquiring the surgery site with the intention of providing new medical provision. Members welcomed the swift action taken by the Council.

SO/16 **FEEDBACK ON THE SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW TRAINING SESSION**

Members of the Committee and other Councillors had attended a training session on 30th June 2014 about '*Building on good practice: developing Scrutiny and Overview to get the best value and outcomes.*' The training had been provided by Tim Young, an independent scrutiny and policy consultant and former Head of Scrutiny at the London Borough of Camden.

The Chairman of the Committee reported that the training had been very well received by the attendees. Members commented on the usefulness of the training; the programme had focused on three discussion topics: adding value through 'critical friend' challenge and pre-decision scrutiny, work programming, and effective working methods and techniques.

Members expressed a wish to see the Committee's work archived in a more accessible way so that the annual reports, working groups' review reports, minutes, and the work programme suggestion form could be more easily viewed. Enquiries would be made about how that could be achieved as part of the new Council website.

SO/16 Feedback on the Scrutiny and Overview training session (continued)

The Chairman of the Committee suggested a more systematic way to populate the work programme by requesting Cabinet Members to attend specific meetings to report on their activity and answer any queries from Committee Members. Shorter monthly meetings might also be considered.

Members referred to the training session discussion about pre-decision scrutiny. Members discussed whether the Committee should scrutinise Cabinet policy and contribute to the decision-making process but without causing any significant delay. The Chairman of the Committee reminded Members of the Scrutiny and Overview role which included reviewing and developing policy recommendations for the Cabinet's consideration, providing a means to review the Council's own achievements against its planned targets, setting out to influence Council/ Cabinet decisions and policies, playing a part in the community leadership role of the Council by reviewing services provided by other organisations on issues that affect the public, and contributing to democracy by stimulating public engagement.

The Committee's terms of reference were: to assist in the strategic development of policy, review issues of local concern, review the policy of others within and outside the Council, call in Cabinet decisions, scrutinise the Council's decision-making processes, monitor the internal and external delivery of services, to review specific services, and to monitor and scrutinise the activities of outside bodies.

Members suggested topics that the Committee might wish to consider for pre-decision scrutiny: the proposed office relocation and the proposed Broadbridge Heath medical centre.

The Chairman of the Committee suggested a follow-up discussion in the autumn to consider again the role of Scrutiny and Overview in light of the thoughts provoked by the training session and when progress on the Committee's work programme could be reviewed.

SO/17 **BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT WORKING GROUP - TO RECEIVE THE FINAL REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP ON DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PRACTICES AND S106 PROCESS**

The Chairman of the Business Improvement Working Group presented a final report which concluded the review of Development Control practices and procedures, and the S106 process. He thanked all Members who had contributed to that work and commended Sim Manley, Interim Director of Planning, who had been responsible for the implementation of the change programme.

SO/17 Business Improvement Working Group - to receive the final report of the Working Group on Development Control practices and S106 process (continued)

Members noted the Development Management Improvement Plan Programme which outlined 46 tasks, the majority of which had been completed and the remainder were on schedule for implementation. The Committee welcomed the turnaround in performance and confirmation that the Council had returned to the top quartile of planning authorities.

The new Director of Planning, Economic Development and Property, Chris Lyons, would take up his post on 11th August 2014. Members noted that he would be tasked with a career grading review of his staff. The Committee agreed to invite relevant Cabinet Members, the new Director and key Service Managers to attend, in turn, future Committee meetings.

Committee Members commented on the charts that showed performance figures. The chart comparing performance figures for 2012/13 and 2013/14 clearly showed a significant improvement in the determination of major applications and marked improvements for minor and other applications.

Members queried why the monthly figures for the period from July 2013 to June 2014 showed a substantial dip in performance in February 2014. The Chairman of the Working Group explained that part of the reason was because of the need to tackle a backlog of legacy cases and resources had been diverted to that task. However, a consultant had recently been engaged whose dedicated task was to clear those cases.

The Chairman of the Working Group reported that there had been, over the last 12 months, a high turnover of staff in the planning department. He thanked those members of staff who remained. There were a number of vacancies that were being filled; a number of consultants would stay in post while new permanent staff members were recruited.

The Committee requested the Working Group to continue to receive performance figures in the format of graphs and also additional information about the number of appeals allowed and whether the decisions had been made by committee or by officers. It was agreed that the Working Group would review planning performance figures at every second meeting to ensure there was no slippage in performance. That information could be shared with the Scrutiny and Overview Committee and the Finance and Performance Working Group. The Working Group would conduct a follow-up review at its January 2015 meeting to ensure changes implemented so far were having the desired effect, performance continued to improve, vacancies were filled, and the backlog of old cases had been cleared.

SO/17 Business Improvement Working Group - to receive the final report of the Working Group on Development Control practices and S106 process (continued)

The Working Group had reviewed the process of producing S106 agreements. A protocol between the planning and legal departments had been implemented which was showing a beneficial impact because the legal team was being notified and instructed at an earlier stage with all of the required information. It was noted that the new Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Paul Cummins, would take up his post on 16th July 2014. The Working Group had concluded that the current procedures in relation to S106 were not ideal but conformed with current regulations; all funds held by the council were distributed fairly in accordance with the regulations when applied for by the parishes.

The Working Group had discussed the imminent introduction of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) charging scheme and was recommending that a new CIL Officer be employed to oversee the implementation of the scheme and work closely with the parishes to advise them about the change and to take responsibility for the distribution of funds to the parishes in accordance with the new regulations. The Committee supported the recommendation that a CIL Officer be employed.

The Committee thanked the Chairman and Members of the Working Group for their hard work in undertaking and completing this review.

SO/18 **CRIME AND DISORDER WORKING GROUP – TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE FROM THE CHAIRMAN**

The Chairman of the Crime and Disorder Working Group reported that the Working Group would arrange two further meetings, the first to receive information about the performance in relation to the Community Safety Partnership action plans and a second meeting to discuss with CSP partners their performance for 2013/14. The Working Group would then feedback its comments and any recommendations to the CSP Board. The Chairman of the Working Group would be attending the CSP Board meeting on 16th July 2014.

RESOLVED

To note the update given in respect of the Crime and Disorder Working Group

REASON

All Working Group updates are to be received by the Committee.

SO/19 **FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE WORKING GROUP – TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND NOTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19TH JUNE 2014**

The Chairman of the Finance and Performance Working Group presented the notes of the meeting held on 19th June 2014. He requested that, in relation to Key Performance Indicators DM02a&b for the number of planning enforcement cases received and closed, the Business Improvement Working Group receive that information and monitor it henceforth. The Committee agreed to that.

The Chairman of the Working Group also referred to the meeting held on 3rd July 2014. The Working Group had requested further details of the budget for Phase 2 of the West Street, Horsham project. It had decided to consider CIL in detail prior to final acceptances for CIL in September 2014; the Working Group would report back to all Councillors. It also proposed that the consideration of improvements to Piries Place car park and car parking in general would transfer to Scrutiny and Overview Committee to consider, to allow the Working Group to focus on CIL; the Committee agreed to that.

RESOLVED

That the notes of the Finance and Performance Working Group meeting, held on 19th June 2014, be received.

REASON

All notes of Working Group meetings are to be received by the Committee.

SO/20 **SOCIAL INCLUSION WORKING GROUP – TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE FROM THE CHAIRMAN AND NOTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 16TH JUNE 2014**

The Chairman of the Social Inclusion Working Group presented the notes of the meeting held on 16th June 2014.

The Working Group had considered the information gathered for its review of poverty amongst an ageing population. Its Members felt that some older people may not want to use computers to access services and information and that some may not be able to afford internet services. The Working Group felt that there should not be an insistence on the public accessing services and information solely via the Council's website and other websites; that information should still be available via telephone contact or by visiting the Council offices.

The Working Group was recommending that relevant information for local older people about services, helplines, organisations and applicable documents be collated and posted on the Council's website. That information

SO/20 Social Inclusion Working Group – to receive an update from the Chairman and notes of the meeting held on 16th June 2014 (continued)

could also be featured in the Horsham District News magazine (Spring 2015 edition) which would be delivered to households. The Older Persons' Directory was being revised and should be clearly accessible on the Council website and also distributed in hard copy throughout the District to appropriate locations. The Head of Community and Culture would be asked to assist with that work.

RESOLVED

That the notes of the Social Inclusion Working Group meeting, held on 16th June 2014, be received.

REASON

All notes of Working Group meetings are to be received by the Committee.

SO/21 HEALTH PROVISION WORKING GROUP – TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

There had been no further meetings of Health Provision Working Group. The Chairman reported back on a tour of Horsham Hospital by some Members of the Working Group on 6th May 2014 to view the health services provided by the Sussex Community Trust. The Working Group would next meet on 4th August 2014.

RESOLVED

To note the update given in respect of the Health Provision Working Group

REASON

All Working Group updates are to be received by the Committee.

SO/22 TRADE WASTE WORKING GROUP – TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE FROM THE CHAIRMAN

There had been no further meetings of the Trade Waste Working Group. It had been previously reported that the Cabinet Member for the Environment had accepted all of the recommendations of the Working Group.

The Working Group would reconvene in October 2014 to consider whether the recommendations had been progressed and implemented.

SO/22 Trade Waste Working Group – to receive an update from the Chairman
(continued)

RESOLVED

To note the update given in respect of the Trade Waste Working Group

REASON

All Working Group updates are to be received by the Committee.

SO/23 **TO RECEIVE ANY SUGGESTIONS FOR THE SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW
WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee discussed additional possible topics for the Scrutiny and Overview work programme for 2014/15, following the receipt of a number of completed suggestion forms.

The Committee agreed the following additional topics for immediate review:

- The induction and training of newly elected Councillors.
- The effectiveness of provision for local residents who are in financial hardship.
- West Sussex County Council's £14 million gap in funding for the infrastructure work west of Horsham. (It was suggested that Councillor Malcolm Curnock be invited to assist.)
- Business Improvement Working Group to review property management procedures.

The Committee agreed the following topics for future consideration in 2015:

- Horsham District Council's lack of a Five Year Land Supply; to understand why this happened and prevent it happening again.
- The Council's heritage strategy.

The Committee agreed to defer one topic: Communication Policy.

The Committee noted that one proposed topic had been withdrawn: to compare the Cabinet system for decision-making against a Committee system. This could be a topic for 2015/16 following the Council elections in May 2015.

The Chairman of the Committee agreed to inform Council about the work programme topics and timetable and to invite Councillors to assist.

SO/24 **ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA BUT CONSIDERED URGENT**

There were no urgent items.

The meeting finished at 8.04 p.m. having commenced at 5.30 p.m.

CHAIRMAN