

Overview and Scrutiny Committee
26 SEPTEMBER 2022

Present: Councillors: Tony Bevis (Chairman), Ian Stannard (Vice-Chairman), Ruth Fletcher, Billy Greening, Nigel Jupp, Richard Landeryou, John Milne, Bob Platt and David Skipp

Apologies: Councillors: Philip Circus, Paul Clarke, Tim Lloyd, Josh Potts and Jack Saheid

SO/22 **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 July were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

SO/23 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

SO/24 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

SO/25 **ANNUAL CRIME & DISORDER UPDATE**

The Chairman advised that Councillor Tricia Youtan, Cabinet Member for Housing & Public Protection was unable to attend this evening and sent her apologies.

The Head of Housing & Community Services, gave an overview of the Annual Crime and Disorder update, which raised awareness of the situation for 2021. In the Horsham District, overall crime increased by 1.3% compared to 2020 but was down 7.5% compared to pre-pandemic levels. Horsham had the second lowest recorded crime rate across West Sussex.

It was noted that reported Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) offences were significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels, but over 88% of these related to neighbour nuisance. It was advised that the Council has only limited powers to address this – effectively mediation support - and that the most effective response is through working in partnership with registered housing providers.

It was emphasised that the message to report crime could be strengthened since the data, and Police response priorities, can only reflect or address that which is identified. Reporting, even if there is no direct outcome, is an important part of building a clearer picture, against which further reports can be set and contextually assessed.

The Committee recommended that messaging relating to the need to report, and the positive picture emerging from the update should be enhanced to counter negative impacts of some social media. The Head of Housing & Community Services was asked to secure information about conviction rates and ensure that this was included in public messaging .

Further discussion of the report and it's implications took place and among the issues raised were:

- The likelihood that police staffing resources would increase. Advice will be requested from the Police on this, but it was advised that the number of PCSOs has increased from 203 to 291 in the last four years.
- Noted that the Wardens scheme has worked successfully with the Police locally and provided vital intelligence to enable the police to decide where to deploy resources. The Head of Housing & Community Services confirmed there were currently seven Neighbourhood Warden schemes, which were largely funded by the Parishes (after being pump primed by the Council). It was agreed that the positive impact of the Wardens is another message to be strengthened, and that this might encourage other parishes to consider funding them.
- The Chairman advised that an all member briefing with Police colleagues will be held later in the autumn.

SO/26 **REPORT ON THE COUNCIL'S FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE IN 2022/23**

The Interim Director of Resources introduced the report on the Council's Finance and Performance in 2022/23 at Month 4, which is an operational surplus of £250k and talked through the details set out in the executive summary of the report. A more favourable return on investment income and an increase in parking income offset the rising costs, in particular for HVO fuel and in Housing due to an increase in board and lodging costs. The overall funding position forecast was set to be a £0.27m deficit. This was largely due to the pay offer for staff, which was significantly higher than forecast. It was noted that the situation with a number of debtors set out in the appendix to the report had improved significantly since the report was published.

Capital expenditure at Month 4 was 8% of the £12.1m capital programme. The Director of Resources advised that the officers' forecasts of expenditure on capital projects had been over optimistic and, because of this, the Director of Resources had instructed a proper review at Month 5. The latest forecast was therefore more realistic. The Director of Resources confirmed that he was working with officers to ensure that future Capital project forecasts were more realistic.

He explained why some items in the capital programme had been delayed and advised that some would be starting in the autumn. He also explained why some of the capital programme budget would not be spent, including the Public Realm Strategy stage 2 that was not going ahead due to capacity restraints. Further information regarding this strategy was requested.

Members discussed Horsham Museum and the drop in attendance compared to the period before its closure during Covid. There was some question over the accuracy of previously quoted Museum visitor numbers and the Director of Resources agreed that he would confirm how these figures were calculated.

With regards to Council Tax and Business Rates collections, the Committee was advised of the challenge in setting accurate targets given the uncertainties arising from the economy and cost of living pressures, but were assured that targets would be revised and added.

Members sought clarification on the reporting of the number of fly-tipping incidents and clearances, and the Director of Resources agreed to give fuller information on the significance of the figures set out in the appendix.

SO/27 **TASK & FINISH GROUP UPDATE**

The Committee considered areas of policy and delivery that might merit closer scrutiny through the creation of time-limited, goal-driven Task & Finish Groups. A number of potential options were considered:

Police performance: A proposal was made to establish a Task & Finish Group to scrutinise Police performance. It was noted that the Sussex Police and Crime Panel served that purpose and any questions from the Committee could be directed to that body. After discussion it was agreed not to set up Task & Finish Group at this stage, but to consider inviting local MP, Jeremy Quin (Home Office Minister of State in the Home Office with responsibility for Policing, Fire and Tackling Crime), to a future meeting of the Committee.

Consultants: It was proposed, and agreed, that a Task & Finish Group be set up to look at the Council's use of consultants, which had increased in recent years. It was agreed that this should be taken forward at the earliest opportunity and an outline brief and invitation to all councillors for expressions of interest would be initiated with a view to approval and appointment at the next Committee meeting.

S106 contributions: It was proposed that a Task & Finish Group be set up to look at the writing and managing of S106 agreements (which require that infrastructural, community and affordability requirements are addressed in planning applications as appropriate). However it was noted that this topic had been looked into several years ago. It was agreed that the findings of the previous Task & Finish Group be brought to the next meeting of the Committee. The previous report will be circulated to Members for information.

Leisure Facilities: Councillor Billy Greening agreed to investigate whether a Task & Finish Group to look at the Council's strategy for leisure provision would be appropriate.

The Chairman advised that he had asked officers what progress had been made in implementing the recommendations of the Sustainable Travel Task & Finish Group and was awaiting a response.

SO/28 **SCRUTINY TRAINING**

Details of Scrutiny Member Development and Improvement training offered by the Centre for Governance & Scrutiny had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting. The Committee agreed to undertake this training, and a session would be booked in due course.

SO/29 **OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY FORWARD WORK PLAN**

The Chairman confirmed that Councillor Tony Hogben, Cabinet Member for Finance & Parking would be invited to a future meeting to discuss the Council's budget for 2023/24 before it is considered by Council in February 2023.

The Chairman agreed that Jane Eaton, Chief Executive, and the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jonathon Chowen, would be invited to a future meeting to discuss the Corporate Plan before it is considered by Cabinet in January 2023.

Task & Finish Group on the Council's use of consultants to be added.

An invitation to Jeremy Quin MP to attend a meeting in relation to Crime & Disorder issues may also to be added.

SO/30 **CABINET FORWARD PLAN**

The Forward Plan was noted.

SO/31 **URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.

The meeting closed at 7.05 pm having commenced at 5.30 pm

CHAIRMAN