

Notes of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee
Finance and Performance Working Group
17th February 2016

Present: Councillors: Stuart Ritchie (Chairman), John Chidlow, Leonard Crosbie, Nigel Jupp, Michael Willett

Apologies: Councillors: John Bailey, Jonathan Dancer, Brian O’Connell, Ben Staines

Also present: Councillor: Peter Clarke, Brian Donnelly, Christian Mitchell, Godfrey Newman

Officers: Ben Bix, Governance Project Manager
Dominic Bradley, Head of Finance
Mark Pritchard, Commissioning and Performance Manager

1. TO APPROVE AS CORRECT THE RECORD OF THE FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE WORKING GROUP MEETING ON 26TH AUGUST 2015

The notes of the Finance and Performance Working Group meeting held on 18th November 2015 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. REPORT ON THE COUNCIL’S FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE, DISTRICT PLAN PRIORITIES AND KEY PROJECTS FOR QUARTER 3, 2015/16

The Commissioning and Performance Manager presented the report on the Council’s Finance and Performance, District Plan Priorities and Key Projects for Quarter 3, 2015/16.

This report detailed the finance and performance figures for Quarter 3 2015/16.

It was noted that the format of the report had been rearranged to provide a summary of the District Plan Priorities at the beginning.

Members noted the development of ‘Horsham Town Vision’.

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Members discussed the status of the new Broadbridge Heath Leisure Centre.

Action: Commissioning and Performance Manager to provide members with an illustration on 'Leisure Requirements' and 'Operations' Governance Model in regard to the new Broadbridge Heath Leisure centre.

The Head of Finance presented a summary on income and expenditure for Quarter 3 2015/16 and reported that an underspend of £73k was forecast at year-end.

Members noted that the revenue summary appendix had been re-ordered by significance rather than Directorate to aid their review of the papers.

Members suggested that an updated balance sheet be produced each quarter and be included within the report. The Head of Finance explained that this was not possible at present without significant time and resource being spent on it. It was noted that the Finance Department are planning a new Financial Management System in April 2017 which should more easily produce these reports and summaries.

Action: Head of Finance to find out how other authorities handle balance sheets.

The Head of Finance provided members with an update on the New Homes Bonus.

Action: Head of Finance to discuss Development Management costs with Chair of Scrutiny.

5. **COMPLAINTS, COMPLIMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS – MONITORING AND LEARNING REPORT FOR QUARTER 3**

The Working Group noted the figures for the quarter which were detailed in the Complaints, Compliments and Suggestions report.

The Members noted that there was a significant decrease in the number of complaints during quarter 3.

The report detailed a breakdown of the figures for the Working Group.

Members noted the introduction of the new complaints, compliments and suggestions methodology.

6. ANALYSIS OF REQUESTS MADE UNDER THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT AND ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION REGULATIONS 2015

The Governance Project Manager read a statement from the Head of Legal and Democratic Services Finance to Members in regards to an email received from a member of public, whom had been in correspondence with the Information Commissioners Office (ICO). Members attention was drawn to the performance indicators monitored by the Working Group which were the measures used by the external Regulator (the Information Commissioner).

With regard to response rates, the Working Group was informed that the ICO may formally monitor response rates below 85% - in the last year, monitoring was undertaken by the ICO on Salford, Greenwich, Cumbria and Nottingham councils. Horsham was not vulnerable to a monitoring notice, as noted in the report before members, because response performance was 98%. Turning to requests for reviews, contextually, there had been 32 requests for review out of 789 requests for information since 1 April 2014 (4%). Of those 32 reviews, 24 requestors did not choose to appeal to the ICO. Five did appeal to the ICO and the ICO upheld the Council's decision on all 5 occasions.

The member of the public had incorrectly described the action of the Information Commissioner with regard to the 2 cases that were the subject of his email as decisive, and that the Council had a finding against it. By dealing with his request outside the 20 day timescale, the Council had breached regulation 5(2) and in 1 to 2 % of cases the Council continues to breach regulation 5(2) as did every other public body that does not comply with 100% of requests within 20 days. However this was recognised by the ICO and should be seen in the context that the Information Commissioner had a tolerance level of 85% responses within 20 working days, that is, the Information commissioner has tolerated breaches of regulation 5(2) in respect of 15% of requests. Horsham District Council was 98% compliant (well above the tolerance level).

The member of the public had failed to state that the Information Commissioner had found the Council in compliance with the main duty (regulation 5(1)) to provide the information and therefore closed the case with no further action. Members were informed that the ICO published its decision notices online and that the ICO had not deemed it necessary to publish such a notice on the occasion mentioned by the member of the public.

The Working Group noted the contents of the Freedom of Information Act and Environmental Information Regulations report and were reminded that the council published its disclosure log online. .

Members requested to keep the report quarterly rather than annual.

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7. CENSUS JOINT COMMITTEE MINUTES HELD ON 11TH December 2015

The Members discussed the Revenues and Benefits Performance Update section of the minutes.

Members agreed on a date (22 March 2016) to convene with the lead members from Mid-Sussex of the CenSus joint Committee (revenues and benefits) for an informal briefing on the subject of the Revenues and Benefits Performance.

The meeting ended at 7.41 p.m. having commenced at 6.00 p.m.

CHAIRMAN