

Scrutiny and Overview Committee
14 MARCH 2016

Present: Councillors: Leonard Crosbie (Chairman), David Coldwell (Vice-Chairman), Alan Britten, John Chidlow, Jonathan Dancer, Matthew French, Nigel Jupp, David Skipp and Michael Willett

Apologies: Councillors: Paul Clarke, Roger Clarke, Tony Hogben, Tim Lloyd, Brian O'Connell and Ben Staines

Also Present: Toni Bradnum, Christian Mitchell, Godfrey Newman, Stuart Ritchie and Tricia Youtan

SO/1 **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11th January 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

SO/2 **DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest.

SO/3 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

There were no announcements.

SO/4 **REPLIES FROM CABINET/COUNCIL REGARDING SCRUTINY & OVERVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS**

There were no announcements.

SO/5 **BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT WORKING GROUP**

A Member of the Business Improvement Working Group presented the notes of the meetings held on 12th January, 10th February and 8th March 2016.

The main focus for the Working Group was the review of the S106 process.

The Committee noted the recommendation on page 13 of the agenda which related to a new Working Group being established to look at the Council investing in its own affordable housing stock.

At the meeting of the 8th March 2016 the Chairman of the Working Group gave a summary of the conclusions of the S106 review and there were a number of recommendations listed which the Group would consider at its next meeting, along with the draft version of the final report, if approved by the Working

Group the final report would be presented to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee on 9th May 2016.

The Committee suggested that following completion of the S106 review the Working Group should review the outcome and progress 12 months later. This would be fed back to the Chairman of the Working Group.

It was also confirmed that all Councillors would be briefed on the planning application for new homes and a business park on land north of Horsham and this would include briefings on the infrastructure package to be secured through the s106 process.

RESOLVED

That a new Working Group be established to look into the potential for the Council to invest in building and managing its own affordable housing stock.

REASON

All new working groups are to be approved by the Committee.

SO/6 **CRIME AND DISORDER WORKING GROUP**

The Committee noted that there had been no further meetings of the Crime and Disorder Working Group and the next meeting was on Monday 18th April 2016.

RESOLVED

That an update from the Crime and Disorder Working Group be received.

REASON

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

SO/7 **FINANCE AND PERFORMANCE WORKING GROUP**

The Chairman of the Finance and Performance Working Group presented the notes of the meeting held 17th February 2016.

There was some concern at the meeting regarding the CenSus Revenues and Benefits performance and the cost that the Council had incurred as a result of the audit of benefits payments which revealed for the second year

that errors had exceeded the permitted tolerances.

As a result of the Group's concerns the Members had asked for a full explanation from Mid Sussex District Council which was the lead authority for the Revenues and Benefits service in the CenSus partnership.

There would be an informal briefing, to which all Members were invited, which would be given by the Chief Executive at Mid Sussex District Council, their Head of Finance and HR and also the Head of CenSus Revenues and Benefits on 22nd March 2016. The Committee suggested that the Cabinet Members who represented Horsham on the CenSus Joint Committee, also be invited to the briefing. The Chief Executive would contact them.

The Chairman of the Working Group clarified that this cost was recouping of an overpayment and that the authorities would be asked to pay back money which had been paid out in error.

The Committee agreed that this item should appear on the next agenda for the Working Group in order for Members to monitor this.

Members questioned the impact of Adur District Council exiting the CenSus partnership 2017. The Chief Executive explained that the remaining authorities were faced with a number of options and a report would be brought before Councillors in due course. The Committee suggested that the Committee and Working Group be involved in this.

The Committee also noted the discussions which the Group had at the meeting on requests made under the Freedom of Information Act, following an email received by a member of the public in relation to the performance indicators which were monitored by the Working Group.

RESOLVED

That the notes of the Finance and Performance Working Group meeting held 17th February 2016, be received

REASON

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

SO/8 **SOCIAL INCLUSION WORKING GROUP**

The Chairman of the Social Inclusion Working Group presented the notes of the meeting held 7th March 2016.

The Working Group heard from the Financial Inclusion and Engagement

Officer at West Sussex County Council in relation to the causes of indebtedness and financial hardship.

Arising from discussions the Working Group suggested that the Council review its method of council tax collection, by adopting a more flexible approach. A more flexible system would help those residents suffering financial hardship by making it easier to pay their bills and therefore avoiding debt; in addition it could optimise the efficiency of collection and reduce costs to the Council.

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee agreed with this proposal and made a recommendation to the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets.

**RECOMMENDED TO THE CABINET MEMBER
FOR FINANCE AND ASSETS**

That the Cabinet Member for Finance and Assets review the Council Tax fixed collection date with a view to having more flexibility in the system. By engaging with those in debt at an early stage rather than simply pursuing them for payment would have a positive outcome on the Council by reducing costs (e.g. bailiff costs) and potentially reducing cases of homelessness.

SO/9 **HEALTH PROVISION WORKING GROUP**

The Chairman of the Health Provision Working Group presented the notes of the meeting 25th January 2016.

The Working Group agreed to write a letter to West Sussex County Council to seek its support in action to address the lack of health provision in the District. A letter addressed to the Chairman of the WSCC Health and Adult Social Care Select Committee (HASC) was presented to the Committee for approval.

The Committee noted that the Chief Executive had already corresponded with HASC and circulated a copy of his letter.

There had previously been meetings with the CCG and NHS England and Members were keen to keep pressure on in relation to this issue with the support of the County Council. The Chairman of the Working Group had already contacted the local MP.

Once there was a strategy in place the Council could look to gain the support of the local GPs.

Members noted that there was also some parallel working with the Cabinet Member for Community and Wellbeing and the Leader in relation to this

matter.

RESOLVED

That the notes of the Health Provision Working Group meeting held 29th January 2016, be received

REASON

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

SO/10 **FEEDBACK FROM WEST SUSSEX JOINT SCRUTINY**

The Chairman of the Committee had attended the meeting of the West Sussex Joint Scrutiny Steering Group, which met twice a year, at which it agreed that the West Sussex Joint Scrutiny Task and Finish Group would review the housing provision for care leavers.

Councillor Alan Britten represented Horsham District Council on the Task and Finish Group and he provided the Committee with an update following the first meeting.

Ofsted had highlighted many areas which required improvement in relation to the education and housing provision, for care leavers. The service was considered to have deteriorated.

The Task and Finish Group, which included representatives from all district and boroughs in the County along with the County Council, would be looking into whether there was adequate support for young people leaving care. The review was due to be completed by the end of April; some Members were concerned that this was not adequate time to cover such a wide scope.

Councillor Britten wished to thank the Community Development and Engagement Manager and the Housing Needs Manager, for their help and assistance during this review and he would report back on progress at the next meeting of the Committee.

The Committee supported the suggestion that this Task and Finish Group be responsible for reviewing and monitoring the progress and outcome following the completion of this review. Normally any follow up would be carried out by the Joint Scrutiny Steering Group. Councillor Britten would report this back to the Group.

It was also important that the outcome of this review was fed into the Scrutiny and Overview Committee and then subsequently Council.

SO/11 **PLANNING APPEALS: BUDGET 2015/16 COSTS TO DATE AND CURRENT STATUS OF MAJOR APPEALS**

The Chairman of the Committee was concerned about the costs of three major planning appeals, which were in addition to the figures reported in the performance data for the Finance and Performance Working Group.

The Committee noted that there were not any decisions at this stage.

SO/12 **WORK PROGRAMME**

The Scrutiny and Overview Work Programme was circulated.

There was one additional suggestion for the work programme raised by the Chairman. As a result of all the additional housing in the District he was concerned that this would lead to an increase in car ownership and that there was no provision for an increase in parking in the town centre. Car parking fees were also an important part of the Council's revenue and needed to be safeguarded.

The Chairman sought support from the Committee to ask the Cabinet Member for the Local Economy to produce a report with a strategy for the future with consideration to be given to the additional houses, potential car parking sites, park and ride and the car parking revenue. The Committee suggested that this also include rural car parks.

The Committee noted that the Cabinet was already looking at a future vision and plan for Horsham and parking was also part of this.

The Committee supported the request that the Cabinet Member for the Local Economy produce an overall review of car parking in the District.

SO/13 **CIL REPORT CONSULTEES: ROLE OF SCRUTINY & OVERVIEW COMMITTEE**

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Draft Charging Schedule Consultation and Viability Assessment were now available and the Scrutiny and Overview Committee had expressed their wishes to be a consultee in the process. Members were awaiting confirmation from the officers on when the consultation period would take place, but in the meantime Councillors Crosbie and Jupp would begin reading the documents as part of the background work for Scrutiny's official response.

SO/14 **URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

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The meeting closed at 8.09 pm having commenced at 6.00 pm

CHAIRMAN