

**Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Leader,
Resources and Economic Growth held on 28 February 2017
from 7:00p.m. to 8:37 p.m.**

Present:

Edward Belsey
Margaret Belsey*
Kevin Burke*
Rod Clarke*

Tony Dorey
Jacqui Landriani
Andrew Lea
Bob Mainstone
Gordon Marples

Peter Martin*
Norman Mockford
Geoff Rawlinson
Linda Stockwell
Colin Trumble

* Absent

Also Present (as nominated substitute): None

Also Present (Cabinet Members): Jonathan Ash-Edwards

1. SUBSTITUTES AT MEETINGS OF COMMITTEE – COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 4

None.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Margaret Belsey, Kevin Burke, Rod Clarke, Peter Martin, and Cabinet Member Garry Wall.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 January 2017 were agreed as correct record and signed by the Chairman:

5. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

6. COUNCIL PERFORMANCE FOR THE THIRD QUARTER 2016/17.

Peter Stuart, Head of Corporate Resources introduced the report which contains both the performance monitoring figures from the 3rd quarter, and an update from the Performance Indicator Review Working Group on proposed changes to performance indicators for 2017/18. He stated that the monitoring figures indicated good performance across the Council with no areas of major concern.

A Member queried the readiness of parking machines for the new £1 coins. It was confirmed, (as per item 4 of the previous minutes) that all machines have been adapted.

A Member sought clarification on the reasons for hiring a Private Tenancy Negotiation and Sustainment Officer and how it would address the difficulty in accessing private sector properties. The Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that the Council has committed to investing in frontline Officers to strengthen the enabling role of the Housing team. Since the initial post holder left the Council, the role has been expected to support people in private rented tenancies to avoid them becoming homeless as well as securing private rented homes for those who are already homeless. The Chairman noted an interest in hearing an update on this role in future meetings.

With regard to the performance figures for recycling, a Member requested that future reports include a comparison figure to national targets in order to provide context. It was confirmed that this can be included in future reports and would be part of a revised and updated waste strategy being brought to the Scrutiny Committee for Customer Service and Service Delivery. Independent work has been commissioned to assist the Council in reaching its target of 50% by 2020. Should the Council not meet its target, it was confirmed that under EU legislation there may be a fine. A Member expressed disappointment at the current recycling figures, although he acknowledged that there would be a reduction in winter with less green waste and more street sweepings. Concern was also raised regarding the number of charity collection bags put through letter boxes which could add to landfill, considering that shops are trying to address the issue with the 5p charge for carrier bags. The Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that the issue of charity collection bags will be raised with Officers with the initial aim of it potentially being taken up by the West Sussex Waste Partnership.

Regarding a query on the impact of the charges and reduction in opening hours of the West Sussex County Council Recycling Centres it was confirmed that no significant increase in fly tipping has been reported. There has been one small instance in the South Downs which is believed to relate to Brighton and is being dealt with.

A Member congratulated the Housing Team on keeping the number of tenants in temporary accommodation comparatively low, given the current difficult conditions. He raised a concern regarding the future percentage of Non-Domestic Rates (NDR) collected given that some businesses will face an increase in their bills due to the revaluation. Another Member noted that the performance indicator for the amount of NDR due indicated the health of local businesses. She queried whether it was a now clash of interests in terms of economic strategy where the Council is allowing business premises to change to residential use. The Head of Corporate Resources stated that the amount of NDR collected is currently only marginally lower than expected in-year and highlighted that over 14 months the figures increase as arrears are picked up. Work is ongoing to try and understand why the amounts are falling in general. In reference to business premises changing to residential use, the Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that a balance was needed between providing new housing and employment space. Permitted Development Rights are monitored closely. The Council had tried unsuccessfully to get an Article 4 direction in place for Haywards Heath to prevent permitted development rights.

A Member noted that under item 13, the Customer Services Team dealt with 8,183 visitors to reception and requested the inclusion of a comparative figure from the previous quarter to put the figures in context. Another Member congratulated the Customer Services team on great work as the performance figures were all on target and the number of compliments significantly outweighs the complaints. It was confirmed that the increase in performance was an upward trend through the hard

work of the Customer Services team and the benefits gained from the new Customer Relationship Management system.

A Member noted that under item 31, costs had been awarded against the Council when a decision of the Council had been overturned at Planning Appeal. He queried whether this was an unusual occurrence. The Solicitor to the Council confirmed that costs were awarded as the Members of the Planning Committee had gone against the recommendations of the Conservation Officer and the Inspector had insisted that the Officer's guidance should be followed. It was confirmed that Members of Planning Committees are regularly reminded to recognise the experience and guidance of the Officers involved in recommendations.

It was noted that there have been issues with the speed of processing housing benefit claims and a Member sought clarification on what measures are in place to address this. The Head of Corporate Services confirmed that staff sickness affected performance during the winter months and as it is not a role that can be filled with temporary staff, it is difficult to mitigate the situation. To avoid a clawback of housing benefit subsidy the priority is being focussed on 'change of circumstances' rather than 'new claims'.

A Member raised concern around the length of time it took to replace the Early Intervention Officer after the previous post holder left as this left a large gap in a key service for vulnerable families. The Head of Corporate Services confirmed that as this is a one post position there are contingency plans in place to work with others such as the County Council and Police. There had been a delay in recruitment due to the first person who had been offered the job pulling out at the last minute.

In response to a query on the average spend at leisure centres in the District, the Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that the average spend is being monitored and is positive. A Member acknowledged the good performance of the leisure centres but asked whether the number of leisure centre visits had reached a plateau. The Assistant Chief Executive replied that discussions had taken place with Places for People Leisure and it is possible a plateau could occur. There had been a lot of growth in leisure centre membership and visitors recently in Mid Sussex and it is possible that this increase is unlikely to be sustained.

A Member noted the positive performance of the Wellbeing Team but queried the level of funding proposed by the County Council. The Head of Corporate Resources confirmed that the reduction in budget for 2017/18 would be 8%.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Cabinet Leader for Resources and Economic Growth provided an update on the Census Partnership. He confirmed that the partnership has worked well over the years and with shared systems has led to the reduction in days taken to process claims. However, he noted that times change and all Councils would naturally want to review partnership arrangements. He expressed disappointment that Horsham District Council has decided to withdraw from the Revenue and Benefits partnership due to concerns over the loss of subsidy from errors in assessment. He noted that Councils retained 40p in every £1 recovered and this is in fact in excess of the money clawed back. He also noted that Mid Sussex District Council does not include the subsidy loss within the Revenue Budget, whereas Horsham account for this in a different way which affects how they view it. On a positive note, he confirmed that there is now the opportunity for the Council to design a new bespoke service to benefit residents of Mid Sussex. Officers are currently working on this and have sought external consultancy advice with the intention of providing a seamless transition when the partnership ends. Further

information will be provided to the Scrutiny Committee at a later date. The costs of Horsham leaving the partnership will be borne by them, and the exit date is not anticipated to be in 2017.

The Chairman of the Performance Indicator Review Working Group drew Members attention to the recommended changes to Performance Indicators for the next year as set out on page 24 of the report. He highlighted the inclusion of monitoring 'flagship activities' associated with the Council's new priorities. He also noted that extensive discussion had taken place around the inclusion of an indicator to monitor costs imposed by planning appeals. Following further discussion by Members, it was agreed that the percentage of planning appeals allowed should still be monitored but planning appeal costs would be more appropriately monitored by the quarterly meetings of the Planning Committee Chairs and Vice-Chairs. This was confirmed by the Solicitor of the Council and Assistant Chief Executive.

The Chairman took Members to the recommendations of the report which were agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

The Committee resolved to:

- (i) Note the Council's performance in the third Quarter of the year and identify any areas where further reporting or information is required;**
- (ii) Advise the Cabinet of any issues that the Committee considers should be given particular consideration at the Cabinet meeting on 27 March; and**
- (iii) Agree the changes to the bundle of performance indicators and flagship activities to be monitored by the Committee in 2017/18 as recommended by the Member Performance Indicator Working Group.**

7. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

The Assistant Chief Executive introduced the report noting that the paper is before the Committee at the Chairman's request. She highlighted that the update to the Economic Development Strategy has been spurred on by the Burgess Hill Growth Area, pressures on land and housing and the need to keep the area thriving. It is a chance to look at how the Council's economic development offer develops over time and is a component of the flagship goal of being financially independent.

A Member noted the importance of supporting rural communities, drawing attention to the lack of useful broadband connectivity in remote areas and querying what plans were in place to address this. It was confirmed that the working group has only met a couple of times so plans are in their infancy. The Assistant Chief Executive acknowledged that there is a substantial rural economy that works well and stated that considerations are underway on how we can influence others to assist in resolving the broadband issues. These issues will form part of the Council's Economic Development Strategy.

A number of Members focussed on the importance of working together, noting the proposed workshops with Town and Parish Councils. It was suggested that two workshops may be required as the needs of Towns and Parishes often differ. The

Programme Manager confirmed that individual follow up sessions may be run to address this. In response to another query regarding the importance of providing a range of business space offerings, she also confirmed that an audit of office space available in both Council and private ownership is being carried out. The success of the Haywards Heath Basepoint is also an example that can be used in terms of shaping future offerings.

A Member noted that the deliberations should include looking at the right business mix, acknowledging that Burgess Hill is heading in the right direction in this case. He also felt that conferences with businesses should be postponed until proposals for the retention of business rates is clarified.

A Member proposed that paragraph 10 be amended to say that the time is right 'to review our current strategy' as the current wording could imply we have a poor Economic Strategy, which is not the case.

In response to a query regarding stakeholder engagement, the Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that the working group will represent the Council and facilitate the workshops as it is a Member driven review. However, she noted that the Council needed to consider how to engage with our own Members as well.

At the request of a Member, the Cabinet Member for Resources and Economic Growth provided a broad view of what he believes the District would look like following implementation of the new strategy. He acknowledged that it was important to set the environment and see how we can intervene smartly to help businesses, stating that the Council had done well in this respect. Part of the working group's remit is to see where it can add value, particularly how we can encourage people to come into the District to work. Currently many people commute out of the District and those coming in are faced with road congestion that is not sustainable to an increase in business. He stated that the focus needed to be on what is driving this and how it can be improved so that the economic employers profiles can grow. He also stated that there are numerous strands to this review which need to be looked at in a holistic way to encourage high value jobs and ensure that the District is a great place to start or develop a business.

The Chairman then took Members to the recommendations of the report which were agreed unanimously, subject to a spelling correction to Cllr Barrett-Miles' name in Annexe A.

RESOLVED

The Committee resolved to:

- (a) Note the progress made on the Economic Development Strategy to date**
- (b) Note the role of the Committee in signing-off the final report**

Chairman.