

**Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Leader,
Resources and Economic Growth on 8 November 2017
from 7:00 p.m. to 8.37 p.m.**

Present:

Edward Belsey
Margaret Belsey
John Belsey*
Richard Cherry
Rod Clarke

Ruth de Mierre
Tony Dorey
Andrew Lea
Judy Llewellyn-Burke
Gordon Marples

Norman Mockford
Geoff Rawlinson
Peter Reed*
Linda Stockwell
Colin Trumble*

* Absent

Also present (as nominated substitute): Cllr Peter Wyan, Cllr Rex Whittaker

Also present: Councillors Jonathan Ash-Edwards, Garry Wall, and Norman Webster

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

Councillor Peter Wyan substituted for Councillor Peter Reed, Councillor Rex Whittaker substituted for Councillor John Belsey.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors John Belsey and Peter Reed and Colin Trumble.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

4. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2017 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

5. URGENT BUSINESS

None.

6. DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN AND BUDGET FOR 2018/19 – CONSULTATION PROCESS

Kate Wilson, Business Unit Leader for Community Services, Policy & Performance introduced the report and highlighted the important role of the committee in the service planning and budget making process. She confirmed that similar to the process followed last year, there will be a six week consultation process which will commence on 15 December 2017 and at the start of this process, a draft report will be circulated to the Committee. Service Plans will be made available for Members on the intranet, with a link sent out by email. Copies of the service plans can also be emailed individually to Members if they can't readily access the intranet, upon

request to Kate Wilson. She highlighted an amendment required to the dates listed under item 8 which should read 30 January 2018 for the next committee meeting, and 19 February 2018 for Cabinet.

In response to a Members query on how the work on the economic strategy fits with the plan, the Head of Corporate Resources confirmed that investment will typically be put into staffing rather than projects, with an additional staff overhead built in to the budget. He also confirmed that should Members wish to make provision for spending in certain areas, they can do so over the course of the 6 week consultation period and reminded Members that a balanced budget must be set.

A Member raised concern that the report implied there were no financial consequences or risk which seemed incorrect if the subject concerned budget matters. It was clarified that as the Committee is only being asked to agree a proposed approach, rather than make a decision on budget changes, therefore the report itself does not pose a risk or have a financial implication.

The Leader of the Council reiterated the importance of the consultation process, especially concerning the subject of Council Tax as it is likely to be a prominent subject in the media and any responses or decisions made by the Committee need to be clearly articulated to Residents.

RESOLVED

That the Committee agrees the proposed approach, noting the amended dates under item 8.

7. PERFORMANCE MONITORING FOR THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2017/18

Neal Barton, Policy & Performance Manager introduced the Report, highlighting the two parts, covering the performance indicators and an update on the flagship activities. He noted a similar position to last year in terms of green indicators, however there are a few more red indicators. The report sets out the reasons for this and the corrective measures being taken to resolve them.

He noted the good progress on the flagship activities, for example with the town centre developments in Burgess Hill and East Grinstead, the support to the community through the Grants Scheme with the recent Silver Sunday events and the work of the Wellbeing team. He also noted in terms of financial independence, the significant improvements made to leisure centres resulting in record levels of membership.

A Member felt that the reasons for the Benefits team missing their targets were unsatisfactory and asked what will be done in the next quarter to improve. In response, the Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Member for Resources noted that in general the Council's performance remains strong, with a significant number of targets being met or exceeded. Regarding benefits, he noted the team was going through a significant period of transition, moving to a single Council service. This would result in a financial impact, details of which will be brought to the committee as part of the budget process. He reassured the committee that it is an area receiving a lot of attention and highlighted the fact that greater emphasis has been put on the accuracy of processing to protect the Housing Benefit subsidy for the Council. This was reiterated by the Head of Corporate Resources who noted the recent

appointment of an interim transition manager who is working with staff to shape and improve the service for the future.

In response to a request from Members, the Policy & Performance Manager agreed to provide information on the number of residents in receipt of benefits, to give context to the performance indicators in the next quarterly report. It was also confirmed that the increase in the volume of rent collected reflects the Orchards Shopping Centre being included in the Estates rental income figures.

A Member raised concerns regarding the funding of the Wellbeing team in the future from the County Council, the number of complaints relating to the Landscapes department and the Government's suggestion that the level of the New Homes Bonus received by local authorities could be linked to the quality of planning decision making as measured by the level of appeals, which may place undue pressure on planning committees.

The Deputy Leader, and Cabinet Member for Resources noted that in relation to Landscapes there were specific issues relating to the quality of the mowing of pitches but these have been addressed with the contractor and apologies given.

With regards to the New Homes Bonus, the Council has responded to the Government's consultation expressing concern with their proposals, as the focus needs to be on appeals based on unreasonable behaviour rather than appeals where people simply disagree with a decision made. He also confirmed that the Wellbeing team is providing a crucial service for the community. The Cabinet Member for Community confirmed that he has been working closely with Public Health and clinical commissioning groups to establish a way forward for funding for this preventative service and is looking for longer term funding arrangements to provide sustainable services to residents, which includes more certainty, essential for staff retention. As well as the health & wellbeing benefits to residents, he is also promoting the long term savings that the team are achieving in terms of weight management, mental health and diabetes, all of which have significant financial implications in the long term.

The Leader reiterated the opportunities that the committee has in determining if they wish to increase levels of funding in this area to strengthen the work that the team do.

A Member commented on the amount of performance related information that the report provides. He complimented the Officers on the work they are doing and highlighted that although there are a red indicators, when you drill down into the actual number involved, they are minimal, because the Council holds itself to such high standards.

As West Sussex County Council featured in discussion by the committee, Councillor Andrew Lea declared an interest as he is a West Sussex County Councillor, offering his support to other Members if required in his capacity as a 'double-hatted' Member.

Discussion was held over the number of visitors to leisure centres, how this relates to the population size and how the Council will ensure that it provides for the increasing growth in the District. Further details will be presented to the Scrutiny Committee for Customer Services and Service Delivery. The Leader confirmed that the numbers are determined by the operator with agreement with the Council with relation to the cost of the contract. An increase in numbers does have a value to the Council and reflects the investment made to ensure that facilities are of a high calibre. He noted that work is ongoing to consider ways to improve services and cited the 'Clip and Climb' facility

opening at The Triangle this week as an example. The Deputy Leader also drew Members attention to the flagship activities report which highlighted the work the Council is doing to ensure we respond to the demand and growth in the District.

With regards to the flagship report, a Member queried whether the Orchards shopping centre is performing in accordance with its business plan. The Deputy Leader confirmed that in general terms it is, but that there will be a need for the Council to continue to look at the management of the centre to ensure that it delivers the maximum economic benefit.

A Member noted that the report didn't reflect the amount of progress with the redevelopment of East Grinstead town centre, beyond the former Martell's site in East Grinstead. He was aware of further planning applications for the wider town centre. The Deputy Leader acknowledged that the report was limited partly as the Council isn't a significant landowner in that area so doesn't have the ability to coordinate or shape the development but he will talk with the Ward Members on ways to work with interested parties. It was also confirmed that the level of Membership at the King's Centre, is now at just under 3000, which reflected a good level of investment, placing it as a competitor to other gyms in the area.

Discussion was held on the provision of new affordable homes and the possible use of the Council's own land, noted in the report. The Leader and Deputy Leader confirmed that further information on this will be brought to the next Scrutiny Committee for Community, Housing and Planning. This will involve serious consideration by the committee as there is no easy solution to increasing the delivery of affordable housing.

The Chairman took Members to the Recommendations which were agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

That the Committee:

- (i) Noted the Council's performance and progress with flagship activities in the second quarter of the year and identified any areas where further reporting or information is required;
- (ii) Agreed to advise the Cabinet of any issues that the Committee considers should be given particular consideration at the Cabinet meeting on 20 November.

8. CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING

Peter Stuart, Head of Corporate Resources introduced the report which provides information on the progress of key projects that form part of the Capital Programme. He noted that there were two main areas of slippage: the proposed new car park and village hall at Finches Field which should be completed by the end of the financial year and the Council Chamber renewal project which is proving challenging. He reiterated that this report does not contain any financial implications as it is asking Members to note the content and advise on any other areas they would like included.

Regarding a query on Finches Field, it was confirmed that the contract has been let at a fixed sum, however there is currently a planning application to move the building

away from electric cables so as soon as this has been decided, the building work can start.

Regarding a query on the slippage of the amount for affordable housing into next year, the Head of Corporate Resources confirmed that the affordable housing situation is as a result of central government policy changes on rents which has affected registered providers business plans.

The Head of Corporate Resources confirmed that the work at Clair Hall has not taken place so the funds have been recycled as part of the budget management process. He noted that the Council owns the vacated Age Concern Building and is currently seeking a new tenant. He also noted that the Orchards car park has been completed and the report should have indicated this.

He clarified to Members that FMS commitments refers to the financial management system which would indicate if an order is outstanding there would be a commitment showing to be spent. However he noted that the report was not intended to provide full financial information as this will be shown in the budget management report presented to Cabinet.

A number of Members felt that the report could be tailored to provide more specific information as its current format raises more questions than answers. Following discussion, the Head of Corporate Resources will design a new format, perhaps similar to the performance monitoring report to reflect where projects are within their timeframe, and if they are within costs.

The Chairman took Members to recommendation which was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

That the Committee:

- (i) noted the report and its contents.

9. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOR LEADER, RESOURCES AND ECONOMIC GROWTH WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18.

Tom Clark, Head of Regulatory Services introduced the Report, noting that the main item at the January meeting will be the draft Corporate Plan and Budget for 2018/19, along with the draft economic strategy.

A Member raised the possibility of monitoring the investment in the Orchards Shopping Centre, and which Scrutiny Committee would be best placed to cover this. The Deputy Leader agreed that as a major decision for the Council it would be good to have a 'lessons learnt' exercise, perhaps with an exempt item to cover the management of the site. This could potentially be brought to the meeting in March but would need further discussion before confirming.

The Chairman took Members to the recommendation which was agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

That the Committee:

- (i) agreed the Work Programme for 2017/18 as set out in the report.

Chairman.