

**Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee for Leader,  
Resources and Economic Growth on 3 October 2018  
from 7:00 p.m. to 8.03 p.m.**

**Present:**

Edward Belsey  
Margaret Belsey  
Richard Cherry\*  
Rod Clarke  
Ruth de Mierre

Tony Dorey  
Jacqui Landriani  
Andrew Lea  
Gordon Marples  
Norman Mockford

Geoff Rawlinson  
Peter Reed  
Linda Stockwell  
Colin Trumble\*  
Rex Whittaker

\* Absent

**Also present (as nominated substitute):** Cllr Holden,

**Also present (as Cabinet Member):** Cllr Garry Wall, Cllr Judy Llewellyn-Burke and Cllr Ash-Edwards.

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

Councillor Holden substituted for Councillor Cherry.

**2. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Trumble and Councillor Cherry.

**3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

**4. MINUTES**

The Chairman confirmed that items noted in the minutes for referral to other Scrutiny Committees have been actioned.

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**5. URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

**6. PERFORMANCE MONITORING FOR THE FIRST QUARTER OF 2018/19.**

Kate Wilson, Business Unit Leader for Community Services, Policy & Performance introduced the report, noting that performance in the first quarter of 2018/19 has been good overall with 85% of indicators green, compared to 76% at the same point last year. She highlighted notable positives such as the collection targets for Council Tax and Non Domestic Rates (NDR), the percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting, and the processing of planning applications. Flagship activities are also progressing well, with the installation of new parking payment machines in all car parks, and the achievement of a Green Flag award to St

John's Park in Burgess Hill already completed. The first phase of refurbishment at the Triangle Leisure Centre is also complete.

Where targets have not been met in the area of benefits processing, the Business Unit Leader for Community Services, Policy & Performance acknowledged that this was linked to the dissolution of the CenSus Revenues and Benefits Partnership and the establishment of the Council's in-house benefits team, as well as the implications of dealing with the roll out of Universal Credit.

Kevin Stewart, the Business Unit Leader for Revenues and Benefits provided further context to the targets within revenues and benefits. He highlighted that whilst the Council Tax and NDR collection rates were on target, it was also important to note that since the dissolution of the CenSus Revenues and Benefits Partnership the team has maintained business as usual whilst going through a complete restructure, with the hiring and training of 12 new staff, which is a significant achievement.

He highlighted that performance in Benefits processing has greatly improved in August 2018, which coincided with the first month that the Benefits Team had been processing solely Mid Sussex claims. This will be fully reported to Committee at the meeting on the 14 November 2018. There is also a greater emphasis on accuracy to ensure that the right benefit gets to the right person at the right time and to ensure against future housing benefit subsidy loss. The Business Leader for Revenues and Benefits stated that the Housing Benefit Subsidy Claim, whilst still being finalised with external auditors, was very likely to see no payment due to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for the 2017/18 financial year, which would be the second year in a row.

With reference to Universal Credit, he confirmed that the Benefits team have a good working relationship with the local Job Centres and the Citizens Advice Service. The negative publicity which has focused on Universal Credit nationally has not been the case in Mid Sussex. The Business Unit Leader chairs a Universal Credit Stakeholder group for Mid Sussex, and the benefits team continues to work pro-actively to support the implementation and assist local residents.

In response to Member's queries, the Business Leader for Revenues and Benefits confirmed that the number of claimants referred to households rather than individuals, and a household could claim for both housing benefit and council tax support. With regards to the figures presented on collection of NDR, he confirmed that work is ongoing to ensure the figures are clearer and more consistent, as the current format is unclear. He also agreed to provide a median average where targets are red, acknowledging that averages could be mis-leading; for example one missed or very delayed action could move a target from green to red.

A Member welcomed the positive percentage of undisputed invoices paid within 10 days of receipt, and was keen for a more challenging target to be set if possible, as this directly helps support local businesses.

Regarding the target number of days to process benefits claims, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Performance reiterated the focus on accuracy over speed. It was noted that the national average is 22 days and there is a long term plan to increase the speed as the new benefits team is embedded. Figures for August already reflect a positive increase in the speed of processing with all but one indicator at green and in excess of the target range specified.

A Member queried the use of enforcement agents in the collection of rates and council tax. The Business Leader for Revenues and Benefits confirmed that they were used as a last resort when other avenues of collection had been exhausted to ensure amounts owed to the Council were collected.

A number of Members commented on the positive performance report for the first quarter, in particular the progress made in the Revenues and Benefits service. It was noted that complaints, especially relating to waste collection were very low when compared to the number of waste collections carried out. The Leader concurred with a Member's comments that positive performance should be more widely promoted, particularly regarding the reduction in the number of planning appeals allowed against the refusal of planning permissions. This is tangible evidence of the positive impact for the community of the successful adoption of the District Plan and the identification of a 5 year land supply.

The committee discussed concerns about the staffing implications in both the Environmental Health and Housing teams where a change of legislation has been implemented or is due to come into place. The Solicitor to the Council confirmed one additional Officer has joined the Environmental Health team and capacity will be monitored against the number of Houses in Multiple Occupation coming forward. The Assistant Chief Executive acknowledged that the Council is facing two new housing initiatives: the additional responsibilities under the Homelessness Reduction Act, and the fact that the Council is embarking on becoming a landlord for the first time in many years. She confirmed that robust business cases will be put forward to ensure that staffing capacity meets these requirements.

The anti-social behaviour index was discussed and the Business Unit Leader for Community Services, Policy & Performance confirmed that the figures collected in this first year of reporting will be used to set the benchmark for future years. She also confirmed the purpose of the 'Make A Difference Awards' which are quarterly awards for staff, nominated by colleagues and presented by the Cabinet Member for Customer Service.

A Member commended the work of the Wellbeing service. He noted that there is limited attendance by Councillors at the quarterly Health & Wellbeing Network, and the Leader agreed to raise this with the Member Development Working Group to encourage Members to attend.

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

## **RESOLVED**

The Committee:

- (i) Noted the Council's performance and progress with flagship activities in the first 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 15<sup>th</sup> October 2018.

**Councillor Whittaker left the meeting at 7.45pm.**

## **7. LAUNCH OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY**

The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Growth provided a verbal update to the Committee. The launch of the Economic Development Strategy took place in June, hosted by CAE in Burgess Hill, and was well received by the business community. He confirmed that the Council has invested £187k to expand the Economic Development team to provide the capacity to carry out the 66 actions in the 5 year Strategy. He noted that the local economy is performing well and that the Council continues to support and influence businesses, for example the Local Full Fibre Network bid to drive economic growth and create a strong unique selling point for the area. He drew Members attention to the strong focus on the people element of the strategy, and work is under way on the 'Open 4 Business' event in 2019 with a theme of skills and apprenticeships.

A Member provided information on the Mid Sussex Expo, recently held for the second year running at the South of England Showground, which would be a great opportunity to showcase the Council's ambitions in economic development.

A discussion was held on the positive developments in reinstating post 16 education in Haywards Heath. The Deputy Leader confirmed that the University of Sussex is keen to look where they can to expand operations across the County and the Council will be actively promoting the options within the district. He also noted that the infrastructure and skills ambitions set out in the 12 year development programme will contribute in the long term to GVA in the area. The apprenticeship route offers a huge area of potential for young people in the district and it is the Council's responsibility to promote this where ever possible.

The Leader concluded by acknowledging the importance of a recent decision to separate the portfolios for Economic Growth and Finance and Performance as both Cabinet Members can take a strong lead in these key areas.

## **8. WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19**

Tom Clark, Solicitor to the Council introduced the report. He acknowledged that the current meeting was scheduled late in the year, and confirmed that the programme of meetings for 2019/20 will propose a meeting scheduled for late July in the future to allow for the first quarter performance report to be presented earlier.

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

### **RESOLVED**

The Committee:

- (i) Agreed the Committee's Work Programme as set out at paragraph 5 of the report.

Chairman.