

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of meeting held in Ditchling Room - Southover House, Lewes on 29 November 2018 at 2.00 pm

Present:

Councillor Peter Gardiner (Chair)
Councillors Sam Adeniji, Nancy Bikson, Joanna Carter, Vic lent, Ruth O'Keeffe, Sarah Osborne and Julian Peterson

Officers in attendance:

Jo Harper (Head of Business Planning and Performance), Millie McDevitt (Performance and Programmes Lead), Harry Williams (Policy and Engagement Coordinator), Gareth Robinson (Deputy Chief Finance Officer) and Jazmin Victory (Committee Officer)

Also in attendance:

Councillor Tony Nicholson, District Commander Anita Turner and Huw Oxburgh (Sussex Express)

28 Minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2018

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 September 2018 were submitted and approved, and the Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record, subject to it being made clear that 'the group as a whole' in the extract below referred specifically to The Tactical Co-ordination Group:

Lewes Bonfire Celebrations – The Functional Lead for Quality Environment provided the following update following the recommendations that the Scrutiny Committee made to Cabinet on 28 June 2018:

*The Tactical Co-ordination Group... had noted the views of Scrutiny Committee. These views had been carefully considered, but **the group as a whole** still believed that the decision to bring in changes to transport and travel on 5 November 2018...*

29 Apologies for absence

An apology for absence had been received from Councillor N Enever.

30 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

31 Urgent Items

There were none.

32 Written Questions from Councillors

There were none.

33 Community Safety Partnership Annual Report

Members received the report which outlined the current performance of the Lewes Community Safety Partnership, and welcomed District Commander Anita Turner and Councillor T Nicholson, Cabinet Member for Customers and Partners.

Discussion included:

Road Safety – The District Commander provided an overview regarding Community Speedwatch initiatives; it was suggested that a presentation by the County Speedwatch Co-ordinator would be beneficial for all Councillors. Members noted the multi-agency project Road Safety Action Group between Wealden and Lewes, but requested that Lewes District Council form its own Road Safety Action Group to allow for the input of local expertise.

County Lines – The District Commander explained that the Community Safety Partnership was taking a holistic approach to tackle County Lines; such as identifying vulnerable people who may be involved and sending outreach officers to explain services that were available to them, rather than waiting for them to attend clinics. The District Commander also highlighted that child exploitation was often involved where children and young people were being used for drug distribution.

Rough Sleeping – The District Commander emphasised the complexity of differentiating between rough sleepers, people begging and homeless people, and the subsequent difficulty in providing support for people with complex issues who sometimes refused housing and wished to remain on the street. The Community Safety Partnership allowed for a multiple organisational approach which could identify those most at risk of harm and, not only offer them housing, but provide advice regarding issues such as substance misuse and mental health.

Modern Slavery – The Community Safety Partnership had successfully launched a pilot project in Hastings (the Partnership Project Discovery) which involved officers visiting organisations where reports of modern slavery may be occurring, such as carwashes and fast food outlets. The District Commander emphasised how valuable members of the community could be for reporting people who could be at risk of exploitation; but understood that the wider community needed to be educated regarding what Modern Slavery was, how to identify it, and where to report it.

Members praised the work of the Community Safety Partnership and thanked District Commander Anita Turner and Councillor Nicholson for attending the meeting and contributing to the discussion.

Resolved:

- 1) That the Scrutiny Committee note the achievements and activities of the Lewes Community Safety Partnership during 2017/18 and future risks/opportunities to performance; and
- 2) That the Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that Lewes District Council set up a Road Safety Action Group.

Reason:

To allow the Scrutiny Committee to consider progress on delivery of the current Community Safety Plan.

34 Homelessness

The Policy & Engagement Co-ordinator delivered a presentation which covered the following topics:

- A year-on-year increase in homelessness nationally, reported by Shelter
- The Homeless Reduction Act 2018 and the Council's Duty to assess, prevent, relive and refer;
- Temporary Accommodation costs;
- The Homelessness Pressures Project and the recognition of homelessness as a council-wide priority;
- A Landlord Reward Scheme; and
- A Trainee Caseworker Programme which was currently being undertaken by the Council whereby 7 Trainee Caseworkers were undertaking an intensive training programme.

Discussion included:

Emergency Accommodation – Members were informed that the statistics the committee receive regarding emergency accommodation were a standalone figure and therefore did not account for how many households had come out of emergency accommodation. Officers would look into this to see if anything could be incorporated into the narrative of the quarterly corporate performance report.

Affordable Housing – Members discussed the limited amount of affordable housing available in Lewes which meant that some households had to be rehomed outside of Lewes, and questioned how the Council were working to avoid this happening. Officers assured the committee that a priority was preventing households from becoming homeless and providing help as soon as someone was at risk to avoid them having to be rehomed. The Council were also actively working on acquiring properties in the District and offering them as affordable housing.

Universal Credit – Whilst an increase in household rent arrears was predicted, officers reported that it was too soon to determine whether there was any link between the rollout of Universal Credit and homelessness.

Rural Areas – Members commented on the possibility of households being rehomed from rural areas to cities/towns in Lewes District due to the lack of affordable housing, and Officers once again stressed the Council's priority of preventing homelessness to reduce the possibility of households being rehomed to other areas. Members suggested that local parishes receive an introduction from relevant contacts in the Council so that they were aware they could report households struggling and who may be at risk.

Resolved:

That members noted the update provided by the Policy & Engagement Co-ordinator regarding homelessness.

Reason:

Demonstrating the Scrutiny Committee's capacity to invite any senior officer to attend before it to explain matters within their remit, the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee had requested that an officer attend the meeting on 29 November 2018 to discuss homelessness.

35 Corporate Performance Report - Quarter 2

Members received the report which presented the Council's progress and performance in respect of key projects and targets for the second quarter of the year (July- September 2018).

Discussion included:

North Street Quarter – The committee questioned which officers should be contacted regarding business resettlement support and requested that officers would relay this information to members before the next meeting.

Springman House – Members queried the narrow focus of the update. Officers agreed to check whether the Corporate Performance Report Quarter 3 narrative could be expanded to give details of other development on the site.

Air quality – Members remained concerned at the lack of progress in replacing the air quality measurement apparatus in Newhaven, asked for a further report on progress on this, and that they had asked for an entry on air quality in the quarterly performance report. Members were informed that officers were in the process of developing proposals for how air quality performance could best be reported (data and/or action plan progress), and that the new performance measure would be included in the quarterly corporate performance report 2019/20.

Council tax – The committee noted the improvement regarding Council tax collection rates and commended the department.

Modular housing – Members noted that the six potential sites for modular housing had been reduced to one, and requested that officers provide an update whether other sites had been identified and were being considered.

Benefits – The committee suggested that the target for ‘The number of days taken to process new housing/council tax benefit claims’ should be changed from 20 days to 23 days, in line with the national average. The committee also noted that the benefits processing times performance had improved in October and commended the department.

Planning – Members requested that the Functional Lead for Housing and Development be invited to attend the next Scrutiny Committee meeting on 4 February 2019 to provide an update regarding planning applications, including a comparison of planning applications received this year and last year.

Fly tips – The committee requested additional data regarding the volume of fly tips during Quarter 3. Officers assured the committee that they would look into if there were any issues/delays with fly tips being reported via Report It app in Lewes.

Solution Sprint Project – Members were updated regarding a new Council project whereby the Corporate Management team requested the Business Planning and Performance team to help improve the performance of areas which were not meeting their targets. Currently, the Performance & Programme Lead was working closely on benefits processing and looking to see how the work could be more efficient. The project was going well and the team foresaw it being deployed to other areas of the Council.

Website – Members commented on the improved usability of the website now that it has a search function, however still felt that there were too many steps needed to land on the correct page. Members were encouraged to report any constructive feedback to the Customer Communications & Engagement Lead to help with the ongoing development of the website.

Resolved:

- 1) That the Scrutiny Committee note progress and performance for Quarter 2 and;
- 2) That the Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that the target for ‘The number of days taken to process new housing/council tax benefit claims’ be changed from 20 days to 23 days in line with the national average.

Reason:

To enable Scrutiny to consider specific aspects of the Council’s progress and performance.

The committee received the Forward Plan for the period from 1 November 2018 to 28 February 2019.

Resolved:

That the Forward Plan of the Council for the period from 1 November 2018 to 28 February 2019 be noted.

Reason:

To demonstrate the discharge of the Scrutiny Procedure Rule 9 (d) to have regard to the Forward Plan of Decisions.

37 Scrutiny Work Programme

The committee considered the work programme, which set out in-year variations to the annual scrutiny work programme for the forthcoming year.

Members were disappointed that no officers were available to attend the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 29 November 2018 regarding recruitment, but noted that would be added to the agenda for the meeting on 7 February 2019.

The Chair, in agreement with the committee, requested that it be recorded in the minutes that they were disappointed in members of the committee who had not attended the meeting and not sent apologies.

Resolved:

That the Scrutiny work programme be noted.

Reason:

To demonstrate the Scrutiny Committee's entitlement of in-year variations to the Work Programme, as indicated by Part 4 Rule 7 (c) of the Constitution of the Council.

The meeting ended at 4.30 pm

Councillor Peter Gardiner (Chair)