

Playden DC Report March 2019

1. Cabinet Meeting 11th February 2019, of note:

1.1 Key Performance Indicators (KPI) 2019/20: these are essential in order for RDC to manage performance to deliver the best outcomes with the resources available. The themed areas chosen were to do with housing and homelessness, benefits performance, waste and recycling and asset income. Whilst each year KPIs are reviewed, there have been some changes this year; I expressed concern this may risk an inaccurate picture of improvements or otherwise developing, but was assured that the KPIs selected would adequately reflect a review of RDC's performance as other qualitative information is also considered.

1.2 The Flexible Homelessness Support Grant was awarded to local authorities by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government. RDC has been awarded £275,000 for 2019/20. RDC decided to use the grant for preventative purposes, by implementing measures designed to prevent homelessness through improving access to the private rented sector and reducing the rate at which the cost to RDC of accommodating homeless households in B&Bs has been increasing.

It was resolved that several measures will be undertaken to do this, including:

1.2.1 setting up a Social Lettings Agency which will appeal to landlords who do not wish to manage their property directly but who wished to secure a guaranteed income;

1.2.2 provide landlords with guaranteed rent for six months (Guaranteed Rent Pilot);

1.2.3 continue to issue loans to households and enable low income households to afford fees as regards private sector accommodation;

1.2.4 Work, Live Thrive (CHART) programme which offers match funding and provides dedicated local employment mentors to work with households to improve employment chances. Access to employment increases household incomes and which will therefore be better placed to access private rented accommodation; and

1.2.5 to extend the Rough Sleeper Outreach initiative into 2019/20.

1.3 The draft Revenue Budget Proposals 2019/20 were recommended to Full Council on 25th February. This includes increasing Council Tax for 2019/20 by 2.9%. (£5.13 increase for a Band D property). I do not like to see another rise in CT, but we are relying increasingly on locally generated income; CT is a stable source of income and relatively cost effective to collect, whereas business rates income can be volatile. As explained in previous reports, RDC is looking to become more financially sustainable as it will no longer receive the Government Revenue Support Grant from 2019/20 and will be reliant on income from business rates, council tax, charges for services and income generation. As you are aware, RDC developed a new Investment Strategy last year which is already performing well and the idea is to continue keep CT as low as possible.

Appended to the Agenda online are the results of the public consultation on RDC's Revenue Budget 2019/20. RDC received only 93 individual responses, of which 62% supported raising CT - a similar result as the last two such consultations.

1.4 The Capital Programme 2018/19 - 2023/24 and Capital Strategy were recommended to Full Council on 25th February (as were the Treasury Management and Annual Investments Strategies). The Strategy gives an overview of RDC's approach to capital. RDC's aim is to commit to significant investment in our District to improve it economically and socially - to deliver our economic regeneration aspirations as well as generating a revenue stream for RDC, to provide excellent services whilst keeping CT low.

1.5 As regards the Local Plan Review, it was resolved that joint working with Hastings Borough Council made cost effective sense, as well as complying with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2018) as regards the 'duty to cooperate'. The existing Local Plans of both Councils run until 2028, but following changes to the NPPF in 2018, RDC will be 'out of date' in NPPF housing supply terms. Both RDC and HBC operate within the same housing market and employment market/travel to work areas and share many cross boundary issues, including social, transport, economic development, educational and health provision.

I voiced concern over the not inconsiderable risk element involved with this - for example, HBC's negative reputation on planning matters - but the proposed memorandum of understanding entered into by both Councils to manage risk should alleviate such concerns. In addition, each council will retain its autonomy and progress its Local Plan to examination and adoption independently, whilst developing a shared approach on cross border issues. A non-decision making Advisory Board will be set up in May 2019 comprising of Members chosen by the Leader of RDC.

1.6 RDC formally adopted the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024. You can access the consultation draft on highweald.org. It is actually really quite interesting reading!

This covers the AONB's purpose, character and key components of natural beauty and is relevant for planning, tourism and public realm matters.

1.7 The former putting green, Old Lydd Road and land adjacent to Sands End, Farm Lane are RDC owned pieces of land. RDC intends to consider the potential for development of the sites.

1.8 The Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeper Strategy was recommended for approval and adoption to Full Council on 25th February (see also DC Report September 2018). The Strategy provides a clear direction on how RDC and its partners will tackle the issues relating to a lack of affordable housing, meeting housing needs, tackling homelessness and rough sleeping and improving the quality and suitability of housing in the District.

2. At the Full Council Monday 25th February, Council approved the recommendations of Cabinet meetings dated 14th January and 11th February 2019 (cf February 2019 DC also)

3. Update on tourism in our District

Improvements to our public realm are considered to be a pre-requisite to successful tourism, which is one of the reasons why RDC has been focusing on delivering its Public Realm

Strategic Framework. Good management of the public realm is important because it contributes significantly to the well-being, character, uniqueness, and prosperity of our District. Tourism, retail, commerce, community life and day to day living all depend on a quality public realm.

UK wide, tourism is recognised as an important part of the rural economy and has huge potential for growth, particularly in many deprived rural areas, where there is untapped potential to generate tourism-related economic growth and employment.

Tourism is one of the UK's largest industries and visitor spend makes up more than 7% of GDP. In England, rural tourism provides about £17 billion per year to the economy. Rural, coastal Rother District is not an affluent region of the South East. On the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation, it ranks little above the national average with pockets of deprivation and depends not inconsiderably on tourism for jobs and economic activity.

In 2017 (latest figures available), direct expenditure generated by tourism in Rother was £274.3 million (down by 5% from 2016). Direct expenditure multiplies into £329.2 million worth of income for local businesses (through additional indirect and multiplier effects). This tourism-related expenditure is estimated to have supported 5,589 full time equivalent jobs in Rother (decrease of 3% compared to 2016). This increases to 7,837 actual jobs once part-time and seasonal employment is added. These jobs are not only in tourism, but in retail, catering and local government. When you consider that out of a population of around 92,000, where approximately 33,000 are employed - 27,000 employed in Rother (with the balance commuting outside the area) - the proportion of jobs dependent on tourism is substantial - almost 30%. Tourism is an essential element of Rother District's economy.

We have a huge amount to offer tourists, visitors and locals alike. We have an abundance of natural attractions; found in our beautiful beaches and glorious countryside for all sorts of outdoor pursuits. We have a wealth of historic towns, churches, buildings and gardens. We have world-renowned art galleries, vineyards and attractions, as well as the 'truly pioneering centre for arts and crafts' in Bexhill, the De La Warr Pavilion. To enhance this, RDC works very hard, together with partners including the De La Warr, Hastings Borough Council, local businesses and community groups, to be innovative in boosting the tourist, arts and culture offer - and our local economy.

Commercial and community events are increasingly becoming part of our tourism fabric - tourism products. Take, for example, Rye Bay Scallop Festival or the Jazz Festival in Rye. These events increase the profile of Rye, have a significant positive economic impact and enhance Rye as place to visit - and invest in. One of our top strategic objectives for Rother towns is to strengthen their identities. A year on year event brings a sense of place - of identity - to a town, just like a permanent visitor attraction. RDC has supported and will continue to support local events, which generate business opportunities suited to our local environment and communities. Currently, RDC's events policy provides financial contribution to local events, by seed-funding new events for a period of time. It is then expected that events become financially sustainable, perhaps by seeking sponsorship and other funding sources.

RDC also provides significant in kind support for events including allocating staff resources, traffic management (road closures, car parking), additional bin collections, street cleaning,

marketing (1066 and including train poster campaigns in London and across the South East).

As Tourism portfolio-holder, I am aware of the value and necessity in exploring and developing the potential for tourism growth and we are currently gathering evidence through a Tourism Working Group to look at the tourism offer in the District; whether we should improve or tweak it and how. The Working Group has been considering accommodation, events and marketing amongst other considerations.

I am determined to maximise not only the economic benefits of tourism, but also to consider how we can use tourism to inform us about nature, the environment and conservation. We can also maximise on the opportunities tourism facilitates for education and skills training in tourism businesses, conservation and the environment.

I am currently leading a SE Nature Tourism Initiative across Kent and Sussex; to establish the region encompassing Romney Marsh, the Dungeness Complex, Hastings, Rother and the Sussex and Kent areas of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty as a major destination for nature tourism. We have a wonderful new infrastructure project being developed in Rye Harbour, which Rother has invested in, the Discovery Centre Project. This modern, ambitious and state of the art visitor attraction will not only benefit Rye Harbour, but also Romney Marsh and the Dungeness Complex - giving a major tourism boost to East Sussex and Kent.



Visiting somewhere as a tourist and trying to make a positive impact on the environment, society, and economy is sustainable tourism, something we must promote as a Council.

Rother District has huge potential for a sustainable growth in tourism and tourist related activities - that is what we are currently exploring. I will keep you updated!

4. Police and Crime - Drugs and violent offending

For more than the last two years, I have been concerned with the increase of drug/violent offending that I have seen in my other public service role and have recently asked one of our local MP's for help to see if we can organise a 'grassroots' community prevention initiative - where communities work together with relevant agencies such as GPs, schools, police local authorities etc to combat drug crime and violent offending in our District.

I have done a bit of digging:-

4.1 Figures show that East Sussex is the cocaine dealing capital of England and Wales; police seized more cocaine per person in the county than in any other region. From 2017 - March 2018, police seized 23kg of cocaine in 1,105 seizures - 653 seizures for every 1 million people. Between April 2017 and March 2018 there were 5,493 drug seizures in Sussex.

The most commonly seized drug was cannabis, with 9,356 plants seized, 129kg of herbal cannabis and 77kg of cannabis resin seized.

In spite of the above, drug seizures have reportedly decreased over the last couple of years due to limited Police resources and the loss of stop and search powers.

In 2016, Hastings had the eighth highest drug death rate in England and Wales; around 9.1 deaths per 100,000. Hastings is in the top 10 locations for the highest number of deaths from heroin/morphine misuse - deprivation and drug misuse are closely linked.

4.2 Is crime getting worse?

The latest police recorded figures shows that crime has increased year on year in Rother. During the twelve months to September 2018, there were 5,077 reported offences (ONS data). In the twelve months to September 2017, the number was 4,922 - up in a year by 3%. What is disturbing is the gun and knife possession statistics; up from 17 to 69 incidents in the same time.

Drug crime statistics do not include offences fuelled by drug and alcohol dependency.

Annual crime rate in East Sussex is 2.3, i.e. 2.3 crimes committed per annum per 1,000 workday people. Compared to the national crime rate, East Sussex's crime rate is at 95%. Drugs crime makes up 2.2% of all crimes committed in the county. The total number of "drugs crime" is 1.8k, and this number has increased by 8.2% when compared year-over-year in the period of January 2018 - December 2018.

It's the 19th highest drugs crime rate out of 55 England and Wales' counties.

The category of "possession of weapons crime" is the highest ranking crime category when category crime rate is compared to the national average. "Possession of weapons crime" rate is at 146% of national crime rate which puts East Sussex on 4th position out of 55 England's and Wales' counties in this crime category. "Possession of weapons crime" makes up 1.1% of all crimes committed in the area. The total number of "possession of weapons crime" is 858 cases and has increased by 14.9% when compared year-over-year in the period of January 2018 - December 2018.

4.3 As part of their public health remit, local authorities are responsible for commissioning alcohol and drug interventions and services. Levels of drug taking in the Southeast are the third highest in England and Wales. The financial cost of problem drug use in the Southeast is estimated at approximately £1.8 billion per annum - which includes the costs of healthcare and crime, but does not include the costs of 'looked after children' which are borne by the local county councils.

Out of ESCC's total budget of £778.8 million for 2016/17, £5.2 million was spent on drug and alcohol support and a further £0.6 million on substance misuse support, £9.7 million on mental health support and £128.8 million was spent on Children's Services (most of local authority involvement is due to drug and alcohol misuse).

4.4 The human and economic cost is high and we need to crack this. If anyone has any ideas on how we can fight this in our communities, please contact me.

SAH

