

Scrutiny Committee

**Minutes of meeting held in the Ditchling Room, Southover House,
Southover Road, Lewes on 7 February 2019 at 2.00pm**

Present:

Councillor Peter Gardiner (Chair)

Councillors Nancy Bikson, Nigel Enever, Vic lent, Susan Murray, Sarah Osborne, Julian Peterson and Johnny Denis

Officers in attendance:

Linda Farley (Head of Customer First), Jo Harper (Head of Business Planning and Performance), Homira Javadi (Chief Finance Officer), Helen Knight (Head of Human Resources), Millie McDevitt (Performance and Programmes Lead), Jennifer Norman (Committee Officer), Leigh Palmer, Jazmin Victory (Committee Officer), Angy Weaver (Senior Specialist Advisor - Thriving Communities) and Tim Whelan (Director of Service Delivery)

Also in attendance:

Seanne Sweeney, Strategy and Corporate Projects Officer (Thriving Communities)

38 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2018 were submitted and approved, and the Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

Discussion between the Committee and Officers regarding the Corporate Performance Report – quarter 2 included:

Air Quality – The Committee had requested a more comprehensive update and explanation be provided at a future meeting as to why there had been a delay in replacing the air quality monitoring station in Newhaven. Officers informed the Committee that a substation site had been located in Newhaven. Officers had identified that the land was owned by Royal Mail and that discussions were now ongoing as to how the project would progress.

Modular housing – Officers informed the Committee that a planning application for a site identified for modular housing was currently being processed.

Planning – The Interim Head of Planning provided an update regarding planning applications, including a comparison of planning applications received in the prior and current year. The Committee requested that the Interim Head of Planning provide figures regarding the decrease in processing of planning applications from 2017 to 2018 as a result of the new W360 system which was implemented for processing applications.

39 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Joanna Carter and Robbie Robertson. Councillor Denis declared that he was acting as substitute for Councillor Carter for the duration of the meeting.

40 Declarations of interest

There were none.

41 Urgent items

There were none.

42 Written questions from councillors

There were none.

43 Recruitment

The Director of Service Delivery provided a verbal update on Customer Contact Centre recruitment as requested by the Committee at its previous meeting on 29 November 2018.

The Committee queried whether staff in the Customer Contact Centre had been fully trained since its last meeting. The Director of Service Delivery confirmed that all staff members in the Customer Contact Centre were now full trained, including 4 additional full-time staff members who had been recently recruited to the team.

Resolved:

That the verbal update on Customer Contact Centre recruitment be noted.

44 Discretionary housing payment amended policy 2019/2020

The Committee received the report which detailed the revised Discretionary Housing Payment Policy for Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Borough Council.

The Senior Specialist Advisor for Thriving Communities (SSATC) explained that prior to the Joint Transformation Program, Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Councils had two separate Discretionary Housing Payment Policies

(DHPP). As a result of the implementation of a shared services model, the 2 DHPP were reviewed and consolidated into one policy across both authorities.

The SSATC highlighted the main changes to the DHPP as detailed in section 3 of the report. She further highlighted the factors which may be taken into account when the eligibility for discretionary housing payments was decided, as detailed in appendix 1.

The Committee expressed its concern with bullet point 5 in section 4.1 of appendix 1. The Committee was concerned that if a landlord had insurance to cover rent arrears and the landlord was approached by the authority in the first instance, the relationship between the landlord and the tenant would be adversely affected. The Director of Service Delivery clarified that DHP applied to instances of short term financial issues, with the landlord being approached regarding their insurance for rent arrears as a result of long term financial issues.

The Committee wished to thank the SSATC and her team for aligning the policies but it would not support the policy with the inclusion of bullet point 5 in section 4.1 of the report.

Resolved:

That Cabinet be recommended to adopt the Discretionary Housing Payment Amended Policy 2019/2020 subject to the exclusion of the bullet point 5 in section 4.1 of appendix 1 to the report.

Reason:

To ensure that the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme is administered consistently across both Lewes District and Eastbourne Borough Councils.

45 Equality and fairness annual report

The Committee received the report which set out progress against the Council's current Equality Objectives and 2018/19 Action Plan and which sought an Action Plan for 2019/20.

The Head of Business Planning and Performance (HBPP) highlighted that the Strategy and Partnership Lead for Thriving Communities was retiring and with her departure from the Authorities, the Strategy and Corporate Projects Officer for Thriving Communities would be dealing with equality and fairness across both Authorities.

The HBPP reminded the Committee that the report was similar to the one presented to the Committee at this time last year. The Councils had a statutory duty to report on progress regarding equalities legislation and the

equality duty. She reported progress on aligning policies and that the action plan for the current year was almost complete as detailed in appendix A.

The HBPP brought the Committee's attention to section 3.7 and highlighted that as part of the Member Induction Programme following the 2019 District elections in May, training on equality and fairness would be provided for all Members as part of the programme.

The Committee requested that the Gender Pay Gap report as mentioned in appendix A could be provided in future reports on equality and fairness. The HBPP confirmed that the Head of Human Resources would be providing Gender Pay Gap information and that this would be published on the website.

Resolved:

1. That the Annual Report of activities carried out in 2018 as set out in appendix A be noted; and
2. That the Action Plan proposed in appendix B be noted.

Reason:

To promote equality and fairness and eliminate discrimination, ensuring fair access to services and opportunities and to comply with the Council's duties under the Equality Act 2010.

46 Voluntary sector support

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Regeneration and Planning, which reported on the performance of voluntary organisations funded by the Council in 2018/19.

The HBPP brought the Committee's attention to the table listed in section 2.26 of the report. She clarified that the final organisation listed at the bottom of the table as 'BHT Eastbourne Advice – Universal Credit service' should read as 'BHT Lewes Advice – Universal Credit service.' The HBPP explained that the organisation had begun its provision of services in September 2018 and that the service had been well received.

Resolved:

1. That the proposed policy amendments on grant funding, as set out in section 2 of the report and incorporated at appendix A be noted;
2. That the proposed extension to the grant awarded to BHT in 2018/19 for their support to Lewes District residents needing to claim Universal Credit be noted; and
3. That the proposed allocation of funding to voluntary organisations for 2019/20 as set out in paragraph 2.26 subject to the grant conditions set out in appendix A be noted.

Reason:

The Council may choose to give grants to voluntary organisations and currently funds a small number of strategic voluntary sector organisations which provide a range of essential services to our residents which address key council priorities.

The proposed amendments to the council's Voluntary Sector Grants Policy are designed to ensure that awards of grants comply with current European State Aid regulations and with Data Protection legislation.

The proposed grants are in line with the council's Voluntary Sector Grants policy and Cabinet decisions made on 5 February 2018.

47 Performance monitoring 2018/2019 - quarter 3

The Committee received the report which presented the Council's progress and performance in respect of key projects and targets for the third quarter of the year (October to December 2018).

Discussion included:

North Street Quarter - The Committee suggested that a liaison group should be implemented so that local people can talk to the people who are in control of the project and so that their views can be heard on an ongoing basis. The Committee were reminded of the NSQ oversight board as the existing appropriate forum.

Downs Leisure Centre – Some Members of the Committee attended the public consultation event and they wished to commend all those involved for organising such a successful event..

Housing/Council tax benefit claims – The Committee noted the improvements over the previous quarter and appreciated the steps taken to continue to improve performance.

Modular accommodation – The Committee requested further public communication about Saxonbury House about the progress of the site. The Director of Service Delivery confirmed that communication would be provided and put in place.

Fly tipping – The Committee commented that East Sussex County Council had introduced charges for fly tippers and had requested that data be collected and collated by Lewes District Council to see if the charges had impacted fly tipping occurrences. The DSD replied that he would follow up and report back to a future meeting of the Committee.

Waste and Recycling team – The Committee expressed its gratitude for the all of the work the Waste and Recycling team had done in order to improve recycling and composting across the District.

Contact Centre calls –The Committee noted the figures regarding the percentage of calls to the Lewes District Contact Centre answered within 60 seconds as detailed in pages 68 and 69 of the agenda. The Director of Service Delivery highlighted the improvements between quarters 2 and 3 and informed the Committee that the figures had increased during quarter 4.

Resolved:

That the progress and performance for Quarter 3 as detailed in appendix 3, be noted.

Reason:

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

48 General fund revenue budget 2019/20 and capital programme 2018/19 - 2021/22

The Committee received the report of the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) which detailed the General Fund budget proposals for 2019/20 and Capital Programme 2018/22.

Discussion included:

- Whether the figures in relation to the estates and property section listed under Regeneration and Planning indicated income and, if so, where in the report the income was included. The CFO confirmed that the figures reflected income as a result of the acquisition of several shops in Lewes town over the last few years. The CFO clarified that analysis of the income was included within the appendices;
- Whether the Council was receiving a profit in relation to increased recycling within the District. The CFO explained that the general income the Council received in prior years had been reduced as a result of the market not being as favourable as it was in previous years; and
- That detailed information on recycling income be provided at future meetings of the Committee. The CFO confirmed that she would provide the information requested where applicable.

Resolved:

That the following recommendations to be considered by Cabinet on 11 February 2019 be noted:

- (i) General Fund budget for 2018/19 (Revised) and 2019/20 (original) Appendix 1 including growth and savings proposals for 2019/20 as set out in Appendix 2;
- (ii) An increase in the Council Tax for Lewes District Council of 1.99% resulting in a Band D charge for general expenses of £187.08 for 2019/20;
- (iii) Revised General Fund capital programme 2018/22 as set out in Appendix 3; and
- (iv) Notes the section 151 Officers sign off as outlined in 1.6.

Reason:

Cabinet has to recommend to Full Council the setting of a revenue budget and associated council tax for the forthcoming financial year by law.

49 HRA revenue budget and rent setting 2019/2020 and HRA capital programme 2018/2022

The Committee received the report which detailed the HRA budget proposals, rent levels and service charges for 2019/2020 and the HRA Capital Programme 2018/2022.

Resolved:

That the following recommendations to be considered by Cabinet on 11 February 2019 be noted:

- i) The HRA budget for 2019/2020 and revised 2018/2019 as set out in Appendix 1;
- ii) That social and affordable rents (including Shared Ownership) are decreased by 1% in line with government policy;
- iii) That private sector leased property rents are increased by 3.3%;
- iv) That delegated authority is given to the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio holders for Finance and Cabinet Portfolio holder for Housing to take measures in the management of the Week 53 rent year;

- v) That the revised service charges are implemented;
- vi) That garage rents are increased by 3.30%; and
- vii) The HRA Capital Programme as set out in Appendix 2.

Reason:

The Cabinet has to recommend to Council the setting of the HRA revenue and capital budget and the level of social and affordable housing rents for the forthcoming year.

50 Forward plan of decisions

The Committee received the Forward Plan of the Council for the period of 1 February 2019 to 31 May 2019.

Resolved:

That the Forward Plan of the Council for the period of 1 February 2019 to 31 May 2019, be noted.

Reason:

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

51 Scrutiny work programme

The Committee considered the Scrutiny Work Programme, which set out in-year variations to the Annual Scrutiny Work Programme for the forthcoming year.

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.

52 Date of next meeting

Resolved:

That the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee scheduled to be held on Thursday, 21 March 2019 in the Ditchling Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes, commencing at 2:00pm, be noted.

The meeting ended at 3.47pm.

Councillor Peter Gardiner (Chair)