

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of meeting held in Court Room at Eastbourne Town Hall, Grove Road, BN21 4UG on 4 February 2019 at 6.00 pm

Present:

Councillor Penny di Cara (Chair)

Councillors Colin Belsey, Md. Harun Miah, Pat Rodohan, Robert Smart, Steve Wallis and Pat Hearn

Officers in attendance:

Pauline Adams (Head of Finance), Peter Finnis (Assistant Director for Corporate Governance), Jo Harper (Head of Business Strategy and Performance), Homira Javadi (Chief Finance Officer), Millie McDevitt (Performance and Programme Lead), Angy Weaver (Senior Specialist Advisor – Thriving Communities), Tim Whelan (Director of Service Delivery), and Emily Horne (Committee Officer)

43 Minutes of the Special Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 17 January 2019

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2019 were submitted and approved as a correct record subject to the amendment of minute 41. Councillor Metcalfe was a reserve member for the Committee, and therefore his apology was removed from the minute.

44 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillor Dean Sabri.

Councillor J Coles declared that she was acting as substitute for Councillor D Sabri for the duration of the meeting.

45 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs) by members as required under Section 31 of the Localism Act and of other interests as required by the Code of Conduct

There were none.

46 Questions by members of the public

There were none.

47 Urgent items of business

There were none.

48 Right to address the meeting/order of business

There were none.

49 Discretionary Housing Payment (DHP) Policy 2019/2020

The Committee considered the report of the Director of Service Delivery for the Scrutiny Committee to review the revised Discretionary Housing Payment Policy for Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Borough Council.

Members discussion included:

- A request for information on the 2018/19 Lewes District Council's funding allocation.
- A request for information on whether the DHP was replaced if income stops for a non-dependent person.

Officers responded that:

- The allocation for Lewes District Council was £224,072. It was a legal requirement for the funding allocations to be administered separately by Lewes and Eastbourne Councils.
- Notice must be given to the Authority regarding loss of income within a month. The claimant can apply for Universal Credit.

Resolved:

To note and support adoption of the revised policy across Eastbourne and Lewes Councils.

Reason:

To ensure that the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme is administered consistently across both authorities.

50 Equality and Fairness Annual Report

The Committee noted the report of the Director of Regeneration and Planning. The report sets out progress against the Council's current Equality Objectives and 2018/19 Action Plan seeks approval of an Action Plan for 2019/20.

Members' discussion included:

- A recognition of the positive impact access training has and, as an example, the training had enabled Neighbourhood First staff to carry out inspections and audits. Neighbourhood First were commended for their intervention in a scaffolding incident which they dealt with amicably and efficiently on behalf of a disabled resident.
- Positive feedback on the collaboration between Eastbourne Borough

Council and the Disability Involvement Group (DIG) in supporting the needs of disabled people.

- A request for confirmation on whether DIG was consulted on all new projects.
- An interest in the Disabled Access Day, which would take place on 16 March 2019 from 10am till 4pm in the Beacon, Eastbourne Town Centre. The Eastbourne Access Group would be providing practical advice, information and support along with many of the local groups, charities and partners who will be showcasing services for disabled people. All members and officers were encouraged to attend.
- A request for clarification regarding the gender pay gap figures.
- An interest in the status of the hearing loop system at the Sovereign Centre.

Officers responded that:

- The Committee was assured that DIG were consulted in the planning stages of new projects and were able to provide a recommendation. For further information was available from the Policy and Engagement Coordinator.
- Although the gender pay gap is not significant, Members were advised that the Council endeavours to reduce it further. It was a legislative requirement that the figures are transparent.
- With regard to the hearing loop at the Sovereign Centre, Members were advised that it should be installed early in the building process, as it was less efficient if added later.

Resolved:

(1) That the Committee note the Annual Report of activities carried out in 2018, set out at Appendix A; and

(2) That the Committee note and support the Action Plan proposed at Appendix B.

Reason:

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

51 Performance Monitoring 2018/2019 - Quarter 3

The Committee considered the report of the Director for Regeneration and Planning regarding performance against Corporate Plan priority actions, performance indicators and targets over Q3 2018/19 period.

Members discussion included:

- A request for an update on the doors to the Beacon which create a wind tunnel and cause minor flooding.
- A request for information on further plans to improve other parts of the town centre.

- A request for clarification on whether the reference to Quarter 4 in the Sovereign Centre review project update related to 2019-2020.
- A continued concern regarding the increase in rubbish deposited across the town, specifically in alleyways, and the need for a different approach to combat the issue.
- A request for information on the total number of HMO's in Eastbourne.
- A request for more information on why the figures for core handling times had decreased since December 2018.
- Training - Members complimented the Call Centre staff on how well phone calls were answered.
- An interest was raised regarding JTP phase 3 and the effect on staff. It was important that support for staff continued during this period.

Officers responded that:

- Concerns regarding the doors to the Beacon were noted. Officers would liaise with Lisa Rawlinson and update members accordingly.
- Members were advised that Quarter 4 in the Sovereign Centre review update, related to Q4 in 2018-2019.
- The Director of Service Delivery stated that he would speak with Councillor Dow, Lead Member for Place Services, regarding concerns relating to the issue of fly tipping in alleyways across the town.
- In the future, waste data would be made available in a more timely manner when the waste is collected in-house by the Local Authority controlled company.
- The Director of Service Delivery would confirm the total number of HMO's.
- The figures for the number of calls received by the Contact Centre changed daily. These figures showed an improving trend for Q3 and are broadly on target so far in Q4.
- The previous roles of two heads of Service had been reviewed resulting in there now being a single Head of Customer First.
- Call handing - Training for the Contact Centre Advisors covered many aspects and this was coming to fruition.

Resolved:

That progress and performance for Quarter 3 be noted.

Reason:

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

52 Council Budget Proposals 2019/2020

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

Members' discussion included:

- A request on when the Budget Book will be available.
- An ongoing request for details of the Corporate Landlord accounts that had been requested at the September meeting, had not received.
- A request for an impact assessment on Brexit to be included in finance pages.
- A request on the status of Downland Water Scheme – pipes.

Officers responded that:

- The Budget Book will be provided after Full Council meeting at the end of February 2019. The Chief Finance Officer invited members to contribute to its presentational layout.
- The Corporate Landlord accounts show performance as estimated for the revised budget. Members were informed that some of the budgeted income were included under the Corporate Services budget heading and more detailed accounts can be provided.
- The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy took into account the potential impact of Brexit. The Assistant Director – Corporate Governance advised that a Brexit impact assessment had been published on the Council's website and would be sent to all scrutiny members.
- The Downland Water Scheme required a wholesale survey. Members were advised that the pipes had been clad.

Resolved:

That the Committee notes the following recommendations to be considered by Cabinet on 6 February 2019:

- (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 Eastbourne Borough Council of 2.99% resulting in a Band D charge of £246.77 for 2019/20;
- (iii) Revised General Fund capital programme 2018/22 as set out in **Appendix 3**; and
- (iv) Notes the section s151 Officers sign off as outlined in 1.6.

Reason:

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

53 HRA Revenue Budget and Rent Setting 2019/20 and HRA Capital Programme 2018/22

The Committee noted the report of the Chief Finance Officer which detailed HRA budget proposals, rent levels, service charges and heating costs for 2019/20, and the HRA Capital Programme 2018/22.

Resolved:

That Members note the following recommendations to be considered by the Cabinet on 6th February 2019:

- i) The HRA budget for 2019/20 and revised 2018/19 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 delegated authority be given to the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio holders for Financial Services and Direct Assistance Service, to take measures in the management of the Week 53 rent year;
- iv) That service charges for general needs properties are decreased by 13.20%;
- v) Those service charges' for the Older Persons Sheltered Accommodation are increased by 0.24%;
- vi) That the Support charge for Sheltered Housing Residents remains at £7.20 per unit, per week;
- vii) That heating costs are set at a level designed to recover the estimated actual cost;
- viii) That water charges are set at a level designed to recover the estimated cost of metered consumption;
- ix) Garage rents remain at current levels;
- x) To give delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holders for Financial Services and Direct Assistance Service and the Head of Finance to finalise Eastbourne Homes' Management Fee and Delivery Plan; and
- xi) The HRA Capital Programme as set out in **Appendix 2**.

Reason:

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

54 Forward Plan of Decisions

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

Resolved:

That the Forward Plan of the Council from 1 February 2019 – 31 May 2019 be noted.

Reason:

To demonstrate the discharge of the Scrutiny Procedure Rule 13.2 that the Scrutiny Committee will have access to the Cabinet's Forward Plan.

55 Scrutiny Annual Work Programme 2018/19

The Committee noted the report of the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services. The report detailed the Annual Work Programme for Scrutiny, which enables the process for the committee to review proposed policies of the Cabinet, the outcome of such decisions and the call-in of alleged unlawful decisions in accordance with constitutional rules.

Resolved:

That the current Annual Work Programme be noted and that the Committee notes the need to formulate a refreshed programme at the June 2019 meeting for subsequent approval by Full Council.

Reason:

To discharge scrutiny procedure rule 7.1 to prepare and submit an Annual Work Programme to the Full Council.

56 Pat Taylor

Members were advised that Pat Taylor, Strategy and Partnership Lead (Thriving Communities) would be retiring in March 2019. Members thanked her for her hard work and contribution to the Scrutiny Committee.

57 Date of the next meeting

Resolved: that the date of the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee be scheduled to be held on Monday, 10 June 2019 in the Court Room, Eastbourne Town Hall, Grove Road, Eastbourne, BN21 4UG.

The meeting ended at 7.10 pm

Councillor Penny di Cara (Chair)