



Lewes District Council

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a Meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Ditchling Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes, on Thursday, 12 January 2017** at 10:00am

Present:

Councillors P Gardiner (Chair), J Carter, N Enever, V Ient, I Linington, S Osborne and J Peterson.

Officers Present:

J Blackwell, Regeneration Project Manager
J Harper, Head of Business Strategy and Performance
T Hayward, Committee Officer
A Osborne, Deputy Chief Executive

Apologies Received:

Councillors S Adeniji and R O’Keeffe MBE

Minutes

29 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 8 November 2016 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair, subject to the inclusion of Councillor S Davy’s request for her vote of abstention being recorded in respect of Minute No 22.3, as she did not agree with the establishment of a joint Lewes District Council/Eastbourne Borough Council wholly owned housing investment company.

30 Apologies for Absence/Declaration of Substitute Members

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors S Adeniji and R O’Keeffe MBE.

Action

31 2017/18 Budget Overview and Tax Base

The Committee considered Report No 9/17 which provided an update on financial matters that affected the General Fund Revenue Account and the Housing Revenue Account. It also set out details which related to the setting of the council tax base for 2017/18.

The Deputy Chief Executive guided the Committee through the Report and indicated that the budget setting process was well underway for 2017/18, details of which would be reported to the Cabinet.

All Treasury Management activity in the period to 30 November 2016 was in accordance with the Council's approved Treasury Strategy Statement and limits set.

The Council was required by law to set the Council Tax Base before 31 January each year so as to enable East Sussex County Council, Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner and East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service to apportion their precepts between the billing authorities in the county on the basis of their tax bases.

There had been an increase in the number of chargeable properties since 2016/17 that exceeded the prudent projection of 0.5% recurring annual growth used over the duration of the Council's Medium Term Finance Strategy (MTFS), which equated to 179 additional Band D equivalent dwellings in 2017/18.

Following a national revaluation exercise, a new 'Rating List' in respect of business rates would come into effect from 1 April 2017. As a result, the amounts paid by individual business ratepayers would vary compared with 2016/17, subject to a transitional relief scheme that would mitigate significant increases or decreases. The Council was reviewing the business rates in respect of its own buildings portfolio. The Government had noted that the impact on local authorities of the new List should be broadly neutral.

The sum of £300,000 had been awarded to Newhaven Port which had won its appeal in respect of its rating valuation.

Paragraph 8 of the Report set out details relating to the National and Local Context to the 2017/18 Budget. 2017/18 would be the second year of the Council's medium term savings and income programme which the MTFS had identified to reduce the annual net General Fund budget by £2.8m by 2019/20 compared with the 2015/16 base year.

The Deputy Chief Executive reported that, since the preparation of the Report, it had been established that the Council Tax surplus amounted to in excess of £70,000 more than had been anticipated which resulted in a balanced budget without the need for the Council to use its reserves.

Paragraph 9 of the Report set out details relating to the Housing Revenue Account 2017/18.

The rules that related to the New Homes Bonus had changed which had reduced the amount that was paid to the Council from £1.4 million to £1.2

million.

Resolved:

- 31.1** That the emerging 2017/18 budget context and high level proposals, as detailed in Report No 9/17, be noted;
- 31.2** That the calculation of the Council Tax Base for 2017/18 be noted;
- 31.3** That it be noted that Cabinet delegates the setting of the final demand on the business rates collection fund for 2017/18 to the Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the portfolio holder;
- 31.4** That it be noted that the Council has operated within its limits set for treasury management activity for the period up to 30 November 2016;
- 31.5** That the Deputy Chief Executive and his finance team be thanked for their work in the preparation of the 2017/18 budget;
- 31.6** That no specific comments in respect of the Report be forwarded to the Cabinet ahead of its meeting in February 2017.

DCE

32 Annual Equalities Report 2016

The Committee considered Report No 10/17 which set out progress against the Council's Equalities Objectives for 2016 and outlined the Council's planned activities for 2017.

The Head of Business Strategy and Performance outlined the content of the Report. The Equality Act 2010 protected people from discrimination on the basis of the protected characteristics of disability, race, sex, age, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, and marriage and civil partnership. The Act applied to employment rights, service provision, and the provision of goods and facilities.

The Act included a general Public Sector Equality Duty, which required public authorities to proactively consider equality implications in all they did. It involved giving due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination and harassment, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between groups of people with protected characteristics.

The Act also imposed specific duties on public authorities for the purpose of enabling their better performance of the general duty referred to above. The specific duties required local authorities to set one or more Equality Objectives, publish information annually to show how they had met the provisions of the Act, and review their objectives at least every four years.

Paragraph 2 of the Report set out details of the equality analysis of Council services whilst paragraph 3 detailed progress towards meeting the Council's Equality Objectives. The Equalities Work Programme for 2017 was referred

to in paragraph 4 of the Report.

Appended to the Report were the Revised Programme of Equality Analysis 2016 (Appendix A); the Equalities Action Plan 2016 (Appendix B); and the Draft Equalities Action Plan 2017 (Appendix C).

In response to a Councillor's question, the Head of Business Strategy and Performance reported that the Council analysed its equalities responsibilities each time that it reviewed one of its policies or established a new policy. Furthermore, over a three year period the Council undertook a programme to analyse all of its services in light of its equalities responsibilities. However, it was reported that the Council had decided not to assess itself against Equality Standards for Local Government or commit to achieving a particular level within that standard.

Resolved:

- 32.1** That the Cabinet be requested to arrange for a Report to be prepared for consideration at a future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, when the first phase of the Joint Transformation Programme had been implemented, setting out how equalities policies would be aligned, or otherwise, with Eastbourne Borough Council and the implications for the preferred level of achievement of the Equality Standards for Local Government.

DSD

33 Variation in the Order of the Agenda

Resolved:

- 33.1** That Agenda item 9 (Scoping Report for Proposed Scrutiny Review of Tourism) be taken before Agenda item 8 (Voluntary Sector Support).

34 Scoping Report for Proposed Scrutiny Review of Tourism

The Committee considered Report No 12/17 which set out details relating to a potential future scrutiny review into the Council's role in relation to tourism and, in particular, the part that it played in relation to economic sustainability. Details of the potential scope for the review were set out in Appendix A thereto.

The Regeneration Project Manager summarised the Report, the subject of which had been suggested by Councillor O'Keeffe who was a Member of the Committee.

The Committee was invited to consider whether the proposed scope of the review adequately covered all the matters that the Committee wished to examine, or whether any adjustments were required. The Committee was also invited to consider whether it wished to pursue the proposed review.

Given the fairly specific and limited nature of the proposal, the Report suggested that a Scrutiny Panel be not convened but that, instead, a Report be prepared for consideration by the Committee as a whole.

In summarising the Report, the Regeneration Project Manager outlined the work that was undertaken by the Council with regard to tourism and indicated that, in her view, it was a positive move for the Council to share its tourism related resources with Eastbourne Borough Council.

Resolved:

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| 34.1 | That a scrutiny review of tourism, as set out in Report No 12/17, be agreed and that its scope be as set out in Appendix A thereto, subject to the inclusion of: (a) consideration of the ways in which the Council supported creative industries and start-ups; (b) consideration of issues relating to sustainable transport; and (c) a degree of flexibility with regard to the consideration of tourism related issues that were outside the Council's geographic boundary; | DTE |
| 34.2 | That Members of the Committee be invited to notify the Head of Business Strategy and Performance of any additional topics that they wished to be included in the review; and | Members of Cttee |
| 34.3 | That a Report setting out the outcomes of the review be made to the Committee at its meeting on 23 March 2017. | DTE |

35 Voluntary Sector Support

The Committee considered Report No 11/17 which set out details relating to the performance of the voluntary organisations that were funded by the Council in 2016/17 under a service level agreement; and proposed arrangements for 2017/18. The Head of Business Strategy and Performance guided the Committee through the Report.

The Council recognised the significant contributions that the community and voluntary sector played in delivering services to its residents. Partnership working was a key priority and the Council was committed to working with voluntary and community organisations through the giving of community grants. Such grants helped to support a thriving voluntary sector in the District and could also provide a cost effective way of delivering the Council's objectives.

Historically, the Council had provided funding to a small number of voluntary and community organisations on a recurring basis, namely: the Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB), 3VA, Action in Rural Sussex (AiRS) and Sompriti. Those organisations played a core role in enabling and supporting other parts of the community and voluntary sector or provided a unique advisory role to those who experienced hardship or disadvantage.

In February 2015, the Council had agreed a three year Service Level Agreement (SLA) for each of the above key organisations that provided

them with certainty for a three year period which enabled them to plan ahead and ensure consistent delivery of service. The security of a 3 year SLA with the Council could also assist voluntary organisations in the leverage of further funding from other sources.

During 2015/16 an additional SLA had been negotiated with East Sussex Credit Union which, in the past, had received funding from the Council through the Housing Revenue Account. The additional SLA had been granted for a period of eighteen months until August 2017. The Union was committed to becoming a financially self-sufficient organisation and, therefore, the Council's funding would not be ongoing beyond that time.

Paragraphs 13 to 33 of the Report set out details of the performance of the five organisations in 2016/17 and paragraph 34 detailed their proposed funding from the Council in 2017/18.

Resolved:

- 35.1** That, in light of the forthcoming review of Service Level Agreements, the Citizen's Advice Bureau, 3VA, Action in Rural Sussex and Sompriti be invited to each give a presentation to the Committee at its meeting that is provisionally scheduled to be held on 15 June 2017, on matters relating to their achievements in relation to the Council's past funding; DSD
- 35.2** That the Officers be requested to prepare a Report for consideration at a future meeting of the Cabinet relating to the above review of past performance of the voluntary organisations; and DSD
- 35.3** That the Cabinet be requested to ensure that the Council is receiving good value from the above four organisations in return for its grant funding thereof. DSD

36 Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2016/17

The Committee considered its Work Programme for 2016/17, as set out on page 41 of the Agenda.

Resolved:

- 36.1** That the Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2016/17, as set out on page 41 of the Agenda, be received and noted.

37 Date of Next Meeting

Resolved:

- 37.1** That details relating to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee scheduled to be held on Friday, 17 February 2017 in the Ditchling Room, Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes, commencing at

10:00am, be noted.

The meeting ended at 11.35am.

P Gardiner
Chair