

Cabinet

Minutes of meeting held in Ditchling and Telscombe Rooms at Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes, BN7 1AB on 23 September 2021 at 2.30 pm.

Present:

Councillor Zoe Nicholson (Chair).
Councillors James MacCleary (Vice-Chair), Matthew Bird, Julie Carr, Chris Collier, Johnny Denis, Emily O'Brien and Ruth O'Keeffe.

Officers in attendance:

Robert Cottrill (Chief Executive), Homira Javadi (Chief Finance Officer), Ian Fitzpatrick (Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning), Oliver Dixon (Monitoring Officer and Head of Legal Services), Linda Farley (Head of Customer First), Nathan Haffenden (Head of Commercial Business Development) and Simon Russell (Head of Democratic Services).

Also in attendance:

Councillor Liz Boorman and Councillor Joe Miller (Chair of Policy and Performance Advisory Committee).

22 Minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 July 2021 were submitted and approved and the Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

23 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were reported from Councillor Meyer and visiting members, Councillors Linington and Peterson.

24 Declarations of interest

None were declared.

25 Urgent items

Councillor Nicholson reported that Councillor Stephen Gauntlett would be taking over the Cabinet portfolio from Councillor O'Brien at the end of the month.

Councillor O'Brien was thanked for her work and effort that she had brought to the planning agenda, since being appointed to the Cabinet.

26 Corporate Plan: Achievements and forward look

The Cabinet considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning, considering the Council's progress with the Corporate Plan 2020-2024 aspirations. A list of the Council's achievements was set out at Appendix 1 to the report.

Councillor Collier drew attention to the £40,000 of financial support that had been provided to local groups and food banks because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Cabinet paid tribute to the work of officers and the community throughout the pandemic.

Councillor O'Brien highlighted the achievements in planning, including the development of planning guidance on sustainability, biodiversity, local jobs and the circular economy. She paid tribute to the planning officers for their work in delivering the achievements. As it was her last meeting of the Cabinet, Councillor O'Brien thanked fellow Cabinet members and wished Councillor Gauntlett the best in his new role.

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee (PPAC), held on 16 September 2021, considered the report and were supportive of the officer recommendations in full. Councillor Miller, Chair of PPAC, was in attendance to present PPAC's discussion. Councillor Miller commented that part of the informal discussion at PPAC was on the wording of the bullet point related to the delivery of £42 million of Covid Business grants. PPAC discussed whether "delivery" should be amended to "distributed". This did not however form a formal recommendation from PPAC and was noted by the Cabinet. The above comments by Councillor Miller were echoed by visiting member and Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Boorman.

Resolved (Non-key decision):

To note progress with the Corporate Plan aspirations and future plans.

Reason for decision:

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

27 Portfolio progress and performance report quarter 1 - 2021-2022

The Cabinet considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning, considering the Council's progress and performance in respect of services areas for the first quarter of the year (April-June 2021), as shown at Appendix 1 to the report.

Cabinet noted the work that had been undertaken in reducing the total number of households living in emergency accommodation from 45 in Quarter 1 for 2020 to 25 in Quarter 1 for 2021.

Councillor O'Brien requested that thanks be expressed to Colin Richardson, Neighbourhood First Team Leader and his team, for their work around reducing fly-tipping in the District.

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee (PPAC), held on 16 September 2021, considered the report and were supportive of the officer recommendations in full. Councillor Miller, Chair of PPAC, was in attendance to present PPAC's discussion. It was commented that the short trend for 10/19 of key performance indicators (KPIs) were down and 8/16 of KPIs with traffic light status were at red or amber. The Cabinet responded that this had been discussed in detail and although some of the KPIs were stretch targets, they had agreed that it was important that focus on those indicators was needed to ensure a change in trend for future quarters.

Resolved (Non-key decision):

To note progress and performance for Quarter 1.

Reason for decision:

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

28 Finance update - performance quarter 1 - 2021-2022

The Cabinet considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer, updating members on the Council's financial performance in Quarter 1 for 2021/22, which was indicative of a marginal underspend.

Some of the Council's income streams, such as car parking income was down for the quarter, however this was because of the pandemic, and it was expected that this would improve for future quarters.

Councillor Nicholson highlighted that the Council needed to be mindful that the various support packages such as the furlough scheme, Covid grant and income compensation grant would shortly be ending and its impact on the wider community.

Councillor MacCleary referenced the recent news around energy prices and asked about its impact on the Council and its tenants. The Chief Finance Officer responded that the Council were mindful and aware of the emerging inflationary context and its impact on the Council's finances. Further discussions would take place and be part of the service and financial planning process for 22/23. The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning added that the Council had already contacted its broker that arranged energy for the Council and its housing stock to look at the implications and potential mitigations. Conversations had also taken place with a view to speaking with the Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD), on publicising how to assist residents.

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee (PPAC), held on 16 September 2021, considered the report and were supportive of the officer recommendations in full.

Resolved (Non-key decision):

(1) To note the General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and Collection Fund financial performance for the quarter ended June 2021.

(2) To agree the amended capital programme as set out at Appendix 2 to the report.

Reason for decisions:

To enable Cabinet members to consider specific aspects of the Council's financial performance.

29 Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Cabinet considered the report the Chief Finance Officer, updating them on the process and approach to the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy for the period 2021/22 to 2024/25.

The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) sets the strategic financial direction for the Council and is regularly updated as it evolves and develops throughout the year to form the framework for the Council's financial planning. The report outlined the proposed process for the MTFS for the period 2021/22 to 2024/25, which ultimately would lead to the setting of the Council's budget in February 2022.

The MTFS is shaped by the national economic background and external factors such as the impact of Covid-19 and Brexit, inflation, interest rates, Public Sector Pay and Factors affecting demand-led services would be analysed in undertaking a mid-year review of the Strategy.

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee (PPAC), held on 16 September 2021, considered the report and were supportive of the officer recommendations in full.

The Cabinet paid tribute to Andrew Clarke, Deputy Chief Finance Officer, who would be leaving the authority at the end of the month and wished him all the best for the future.

Resolved (Key decision):

To note the background to the Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2022/23 and to approve the approach outlined in the report.

Reason for decision:

To progress the Medium Term Financial Strategy process and to update Cabinet on the background to this.

30 Housing development update

The Cabinet considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning, providing regular updates on key housing developments in Lewes District.

The proposals contained in the report followed the recent opening of new homes in Lewes at Saxonbury House and Palmerston House in Fort Road. The design of the Former Newhaven Police Station had been subject to a full review of the sustainability features and was in accordance with the Council's corporate priorities.

The Policy and Performance Advisory Committee (PPAC) at its meeting on 16 September 2021, made the following recommendation to Cabinet:

To support the recommendations in the Cabinet report subject to the following amendment to recommendation (3) being considered by the Cabinet:

(3) That the two HRA assets identified, in accordance with the business case as set out in (Exempt) appendix 2 to the Cabinet report, are not disposed of but improved and brought back into council house use, to support two families in Lewes, as part of the council's corporate goal.

Councillor Miller, Chair of PPAC, was in attendance to present PPAC's discussion.

Following presentation of the report, Cabinet resolved to exclude the public whilst discussing the exempt appendix, recommendations from PPAC and comments from visiting members, as otherwise there was a likelihood of disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, paragraph 3 – Information relating to the financial and business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

(Note: Councillor O'Keeffe left the meeting during the exempt discussion before Cabinet determined the matter)

Following the exempt discussion, the public meeting resumed, and Cabinet unanimously agreed the officer recommendations as set out in the report.

Resolved (Key decision):

(1) To approve the project known as the Former Newhaven Police Station, making an allocation within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programme of up to £6.2m, in accordance with the business case as set-out at

the Exempt Appendix 1 to the report.

(2) To approve the Council entering into a construction contract with the preferred bidder to build out the Former Newhaven Police Station, subject to the business case, demolishing the existing buildings and developing 21 new Council homes.

(3) To approve the disposal of the two HRA assets identified, in accordance with the business case as set-out at Exempt Appendix 2 to the report, including a policy to ring-fence the capital receipts generated within the annual budget to support in the financing of other Council-led housing developments in Lewes town, enabling the re-allocation of retained Right to Buy (RTB) receipts.

(4) To authorise the Director of Regeneration and Planning, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Housing, Finance, and Assets, also the Chief Finance Officer, to carry out all necessary actions to facilitate the recommendations including feasibility, financing, appointment of professional services, development, sales, lettings, and determining the terms of, and authorising the execution of, all necessary documentation, in accordance with the business case(s).

Reason for decisions:

To provide updates and secure the necessary approvals to bring forward ongoing key housing development projects within the district, utilising existing assets to deliver highly sustainable Council homes to meet corporate objectives.

Notes: (1) The appendix remained exempt. (2) Exempt information reason 3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

The meeting ended at 3.16 pm

Councillor Zoe Nicholson (Chair)