

Cabinet

Minutes of meeting held in Ditchling and Telscombe Rooms at Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes, BN7 1AB on 9 December 2021 at 2.30 pm.

Present:

Councillor Zoe Nicholson (Chair).
Councillors Matthew Bird, Julie Carr, Chris Collier, Johnny Denis, Stephen Gauntlett, William Meyer and Ruth O'Keeffe.

Officers in attendance:

Homira Javadi (Chief Finance Officer), Ian Fitzpatrick (Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning), Tim Whelan (Director of Service Delivery) and Simon Russell (Head of Democratic Services).

Also in attendance:

Councillor Liz Boorman (Vice-Chair of Policy and Performance Advisory Committee) and Isabelle Linington (Leader of the Opposition)

38 Minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2021 were submitted and approved and the Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

39 Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was reported from Councillor MacCleary and visiting members, Councillors Miller and Peterson.

40 Declarations of interest

None were declared.

41 Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the Working Age 2022/23

The Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Service Delivery, asking them to consider and then recommend to Full Council for adoption, a revised Local Council Tax Reduction scheme for 2022/23 and continuation of the existing Exceptional Hardship scheme.

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee (PPAC), held on 30 November 2021, considered the report and were supportive of the officer recommendations in full. Councillor Boorman, Vice-Chair of PPAC, was in attendance to present PPAC's discussion. Visiting member and Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Linington addressed the Cabinet on the consultation that was undertaken and commented on the opposing views received from the

major precepting organisations.

A statutory consultation took place on 2 August to 31 October over proposals to increase the maximum reduction to 100%, remove the minimum awards so a claimant can qualify for, and be awarded, less than £5 per week and to base a self-employed claimant's income on their actual earnings. Full details of this consultation were detailed in the report and contained at Appendix 2 to the report.

In reaching their decision, Cabinet gave due regard to all the responses received from the consultation, including from the major precepting organisations, East Sussex County Council, Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner and East Sussex Fire and Rescue, who had confirmed that they could not support the proposals contained in the report.

Recommended to Full Council (Budget and policy framework):

(1) To recommend to Full Council the revised LCTR Scheme for the working age for 2022/23, comprising the features proposed at paragraph 2.1 of the report.

(2) That the Exceptional Hardship Scheme continues in 2022/23.

Reasons for decisions:

(1) The proposed changes provide more financial support to some of the most financially challenged residents and supports the Corporate goal of 'A fairer council tax for those on lowest incomes'.

(2) The Exceptional Hardship Scheme provides additional support to those who are in receipt of a Council Tax Reduction but are suffering exceptional hardship.

42 Council tax base and non-domestic rate income for 2022/23

The Cabinet considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer, asking them to approve the Council Tax Base and net yield from Business Rate Income for 2022/23, in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee (PPAC), held on 30 November 2021, considered the report and were supportive of the officer recommendations in full. Councillor Boorman, Vice-Chair of PPAC, was in attendance to present PPAC's discussion. Visiting member and Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Linington addressed the Cabinet. In response to a question around why collection rate was expected to decrease next year, the Chief Finance Officer commented that this was due to the withdrawal of a variety of financial support packages, that had been made available this year.

Resolved (Key decision):

(1) To agree the provisional Council Tax Base of 36,726.6 for 2022/23 for the whole area and that the Council Tax Base for each of the Town and Parish areas of the District shall be as set out in Appendix 2 of this report.

(2) To agree that the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Assets, determine the final amounts for the Council Tax Base for 2022/23.

(3) To agree that the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Assets, determine net yield from Business Rate income for 2022/23.

Reason for decisions:

Cabinet is required to approve the Tax Base which will be used for the purposes of calculating the 2022/23 Council Tax.

43 Portfolio progress and performance report quarter 2 - 2021-2022

The Cabinet considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning, asking them to consider the Council's progress and performance in respect of service areas for the second quarter of the year (July-September 2021), as shown at Appendix 1 to the report.

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee (PPAC), held on 30 November 2021, considered the report and were supportive of the officer recommendation in full. Councillor Boorman, Vice-Chair of PPAC, was in attendance to present PPAC's discussion. Visiting member and Leader of the Opposition, Councillor Lington also addressed the Cabinet and reiterated the comments made at PPAC.

Commentary on those performance indicators that were currently below target was detailed in the report. The Director of Service Delivery updated the Cabinet on the most up to date performance for the Customer Contact team. The vacancies in the team had now been filled and a training induction was taking place for those new starters. Last week, the Council received 1,771 calls, 90% of which were handled. Only 49% of those handled calls weren't answered within 60 seconds and the average speed to respond to those calls was 2 minutes. The Cabinet acknowledged the timely improvement in call handling performance, particularly as due to the rapid spread of the Omicron variant and confirmation from the Government that England would be moving to Plan B, the Council were shutting their front offices to reflect national guidance. This would likely result in an increase in customers contacting the Council via telephone, although other channels of communication were available.

The Director of Service Delivery also updated the Cabinet on the recent recruitment event organised by the Council. He confirmed that the event

attracted 140 visitors and the number of entry level posts was attracting a younger demographic for a workforce. This was positively welcomed by the Cabinet as the Local Government Association had often commented on the difficulty of recruiting younger staff.

Finally, the Director of Service Delivery updated the Cabinet on the latest figures for days to process change of circumstances forms and council tax and housing benefit claims. New benefit claims were now being processed in 11 days, half the national average and change of circumstances forms were being processed in 4 days.

Resolved (Non-key decision):

To note progress and performance for Quarter 2.

Reason for decision:

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

44 Finance update - performance quarter 2 - 2021-2022

The Cabinet considered the report of the Chief Finance Officer, updating members on the Council's financial performance in quarter 2 2021/22.

The General Fund position at the end of June, reported a net underspend of £33K. The Housing Revenue Account at the end of June, reported an underspend of £353K.

In response to a question from Councillor Meyer with regards to ensuring a commitment to spending its HRA budget, the Chief Finance Officer advised that any underspend due to Covid or capacity issues would be carried over to next year's budget. The Director of Service Delivery added that part of the underspend was due to a pause in the repairs and capital maintenance programme because of supply issues, but it was expected that this would catch up by year-end and the majority of the HRA budget would be spent.

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee (PPAC), held on 30 November 2021, considered the report and were supportive of the officer recommendations in full. Councillor Boorman, Vice-Chair of PPAC, was in attendance to present PPAC's discussion.

Resolved (Non-key decision):

(1) To note the General Fund, HRA and Collection Fund financial performance for the quarter ended September 2021.

(2) To agree the amended capital programme as set out in Appendix 2a and 2b to the report.

Reason for decision:

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

The meeting ended at 3.04 pm

Councillor Zoe Nicholson (Chair)