

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee

Minutes of meeting held in Council Chamber, County Hall, St Anne's Crescent, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 1UE on 3 November 2022 at 2.30 pm.

Present:

Councillor Liz Boorman (Chair).
Councillors Isabelle Linington (Deputy-Chair), Robert Banks, Nancy Bikson, Christine Brett, Roy Clay, Lynda Duhigg, Christine Robinson, Adrian Ross, Steve Saunders and Richard Turner.

Officers in attendance:

Homira Javadi (Director of Finance and Performance (Chief Finance Officer)), Ola Owolabi (Deputy Chief Finance Officer - Corporate Finance), Nick Peeters (Committee Officer), Nathan Haffenden (Head of Development, Investment and Delivery), Mark Langridge Kemp (Head of Property and Asset Management) and Marc Stephens (Capital Delivery Lead).

Also in attendance:

Dr Toby Willison, Chief Environment & Sustainability Officer and Dr Nick Mills, Head of Storm Overflow Taskforce.

30 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2022 were submitted and the Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

31 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Saunders.

32 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

33 Urgent Items

There were none.

34 Written Questions from Councillors

There were none.

35 To scrutinise the issue of wastewater discharge into local rivers and seas

The Chair, Councillor Boorman, introduced the report which provided

background to the request from the Committee to discuss the issue of wastewater discharge into local rivers and seas, with representatives from Southern Water.

Dr Toby Willison, Southern Water Chief Environment and Sustainability Officer and Dr Nick Mills, Southern Water Head of Storm Overflow Taskforce, addressed the Committee. Dr Willison and Dr Mills provided responses to questions received from Members prior to the meeting (the responses are attached as an appendix to the minutes). The following responses were provided to additional questions from the Committee:

- Treatment works were regulated by the volume of flow that was required to go through, the amount that goes through at any one time, and the capacity at the works. If all these requirements were met, a spill was considered legal. If any of the requirements were not met, the discharge was non-compliant. There had been approximately 20,000 storm overflows in the previous year and 370 were non-compliant. Further details would be provided via an Environmental Information Request.
- The mechanism used for measuring the releases in the previous year was based on a 12 hour/24 hour matrix (required by the EA) that counted short releases in a 12 hour period as one release and broke up releases over periods longer than 24 hours. The monitoring system currently used did not measure volume and this measurement was going to be reviewed.
- The Environment Agency was notified of all storm overflow releases and would be involved in any that were considered significant. Lewes District Council received notification, depending on the location of the release (it would be checked that the correct officers were receiving this notification, and a response provided to the Committee).
- Southern Water recognised that its one-star rating awarded by the Environment Agency was not sufficient. The organisation had plans in place to achieve a three-star rating by 2025. It was further recognised that public expectation was for better management of combined sewers overflows and the setting up of the Storm Overflow Taskforce was a response to this.
- The Beachbuoy tool provided by Southern Water was to provide real-time updates on the conditions in coastal environments and the extension of its use into inland sites was being explored. There were 84 bathing in waters in the Southeast; 57 were measured as being of an excellent standard in 2021, 23 were good and 4 were measured as satisfactory. There were many sources of information available to check the quality of water bathing areas.
- Details of ad-hoc sampling by Southern Water at specific locations would be provided. The Environment Agency had extensive river-level monitoring equipment and the Environment Act required Southern Water to install water monitoring equipment over the next investment period.

- Detail of Southern Water’s remuneration strategy was available on its website and would be provided to the Committee.
- Southern Water’s intention was to separate the rainwater and sewage infrastructures; however, this was not considered to be necessary in all areas. The estimate for separating the two systems nationally was up to £600 billion. Alternative, natural drainage routes for between 20 and 40 percent of run-off water was needed to have a significant reduction on storm overflows, which would support a reduction in flooding. It was estimated that the increase in urbanised non-permeable areas had doubled per household, since the 1960’s and this presented a significant challenge. The input from highways authorities to reduce highway run-off was essential.
- Significant changes in the executive team at Southern Water indicated that historical issues had been challenged and one of the recommendations from the Office of Water Services (Ofwat) was for an extensive retraining programme, a cultural review and wholesale changes in procedures. A refinancing programme had been brought into Southern Water, including new investors. There was confidence that Southern Water’s rating would improve.
- Southern Water was open to meeting a task and finish group from the Council and to work with a stakeholder group that would include organisations such as East Sussex Highways and Highways England.

Resolved (unanimously)

- (1) To thank representatives of Southern Water for attending the meeting and to note the report;
- (2) To provide a report to Full Council on the work of the Policy and Performance Advisory Committee; and
- (3) To appoint a panel to attend meetings with Southern Water representatives, the remit of which is to be confirmed.

36 Requested reports due for consideration by the Cabinet on 10 November 2021

It was confirmed by Members that, as part of the call-over process, the following reports would be included in discussion by the Committee:

- 7(b) Interim Medium Term Financial Strategy 2023/24 - 2026/27
- 7(c) Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy - Annual update 2022
- 7(d) Housing Development Update
- 7(e) Property and Asset Management Update

The following Cabinet report was not requested for inclusion in discussion and

as a result the Committee; **Resolved** that the Officer recommendations in the report be supported in full:

7(a) - Elections Act 2022

37 Exclusion of the public

Resolved to enter into a private session for Items 8a - Housing Development update/exempt appendix 1 and 8b Property and Asset Management Update/exempt Appendix 1 only, as both items were likely to disclose exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and would therefore need to take place in a private session.

37a Housing Development Update

Marc Stephens, Capital Delivery Lead and Nathan Haffenden, Head of Development, Investment and Delivery, presented the report.

The Committee discussed the report.

Resolved:

To not support the officer recommendations in the Cabinet report.

37b Housing Development Update - Exempt Appendix 1

This item was dealt with in a private session as detailed in minute 37a above.

37c Property and Asset Management Update

Mark Langridge-Kemp, Head of Property and Asset Management and Nathan Haffenden, Head of Development, Investment and Delivery, presented the report. Members discussed the report and agreed the following recommendation:

Resolved to support the officer recommendations in the Cabinet report in full.

37d Property and Asset Management Update - Exempt Appendix 1

This item was dealt with in a private session as detailed in minute 37c above.

38 Interim Medium term Financial Strategy 2023/24 - 2026/27

Homira Javadi, Chief Finance Officer, presented the report which sought the Cabinet's agreement on the updated General Fund budget and updated Medium Term Financial Strategy, together with the updated Capital Programme position. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- Members expressed concern that there would be further cuts in funding that

would affect the Council's core services. It was recognised that there would be challenging decisions ahead in terms of the capital projects to be brought forward.

- Part of the Finance strategy was to send a strong message to Government asking that the pressures faced by local government be recognised.

Resolved to support the officer recommendations in the Cabinet report in full.

38a Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy - Annual update 2022

The Chair, Councillor Boorman, introduced the report, which provided an update on the Climate Change and Sustainability Action Plan and to set out proposals for climate change activities in 2023/24. Members requested further information on the following points:

- Paragraph 6.1 of the report - Allocation of 'Cost of Living Crisis' Fund money to green energy initiatives.
- Paragraph 7. of the report - Climate Change Project Proposals for 2023/24

Some Members expressed concern that alternative means of funding for several of the initiatives had not been explored. It was felt that, in light of the current economic climate and the additional financial pressures the Council was likely to face, this was necessary.

Resolved to support the officer recommendations in the Cabinet report in full, subject to the following amendment to recommendation (3) being considered:

(3) To support the proposed climate change activities for 2023/24, subject to the consideration of any alternative funding sources available.

38b Elections Act 2022

This item was dealt with under minute 36.

39 Forward Plan of Decisions

The Chair, Councillor Boorman, introduced the Forward Plan of Cabinet Decisions which detailed those items being considered at future Cabinet meetings. Members requested that the following reports be included at the Committee's next meeting on the 1 December 2022:

- Cost of Living Crisis Fund Update
- Local council tax reduction scheme
- Council tax base and non-domestic rate income for 2023/24

- Finance update performance quarter 2 - 2022-2023
- Portfolio progress and performance report quarter 2 - 2022-2023
- Sustainable Energy Investment

Resolved to note the Forward Plan of Cabinet Decisions.

40 Policy and Performance Advisory Committee Work Programme

The Chair, Councillor Boorman, introduced the Committee's work programme, which detailed the items due to be considered at future meetings and provided an opportunity for members to request any areas or issues they wished the Committee to look at in further depth.

Resolved to note the Committee's work programme.

41 Date of Next Meeting

To note that the next meeting of the Policy and Performance Advisory Committee was scheduled to be held on Thursday 1 December, 2.30pm at Southover House, Lewes.

The meeting ended at 6.00 pm

Councillor Liz Boorman (Chair)