

## **Policy and Performance Advisory Committee**

**Minutes of meeting held in Room 209/210 Marine Workshops - Marine Workshops on 25 January 2024 at 2.30 pm.**

**Present:**

Councillor Christine Brett (Chair).

Councillors Janet Baah (Deputy-Chair), Ciarron Clarkson, Ezra Cohen, Nikki Fabry, Paul Keene, Paul Mellor, Daniel Stewart-Roberts and Charlotte Keenan.

**Officers in attendance:**

Philip Brown (Property Lawyer), Homira Javadi (Director of Finance and Performance (Section 151 Officer)), Nick Peeters (Committee Officer), Jo Harper (Head of Business Planning and Performance), Steven Houchin (Interim Deputy Chief Finance Officer (Corporate Finance)), Julie Quanstrom (Neighbourhood First Manager) and Ross Sutton (Head of Financial Reporting).

**Also in attendance:**

Councillor Wendy Maples

**41 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 30 November 2023**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 30 November 2023 were submitted and the Deputy Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

**42 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Clews and Councillor Keenan was a substitute.

**43 Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

**44 Urgent Items**

There were none.

**45 Written Questions from Councillors**

There were none.

**46 Lewes Farmers Market update - to follow**

Julie Quanstrom, Head of Neighbourhood First, provided a verbal update on

the further work being considered, following the presentation of a petition at the Committee's previous meeting, requesting that the Lewes Farmers Market be moved back to Cliffe Precinct. The Committee was informed that, having received quotes for survey work, it was considered that the cost was excessive and further quotes would be sought. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- It had been the understanding of officers that all car park parks in the area would be included in the survey in order to get an overall understanding of the parking needs for the Farmers Market, visitors and retail businesses, on Market days. Any elements of public consultation would also be considered. Members were advised that interview surveys could include questions that would provide a focus on Friars Walk Car Park specifically.
- The presenter of the petition and Common Cause, who managed the Farmers Market, would be notified of any future developments and officers confirmed that both had been advised upon publication of the report and their comments had been fed back to the lead officer. The sharing of information with stakeholders would continue.
- The Cabinet Member for Neighbourhood and Wellbeing reiterated previous discussions on the issue by highlighting the importance of any survey work being independently sourced and evidence based.

**Resolved** that officers return to the Committee with an update on further work undertaken.

#### **47 Update from the Chair of the Southern Water Panel**

The Chair of the Southern Water Panel, Councillor Keene, updated the Committee on the Panel's work. The most recent meeting had taken place on the 12 January and included representatives from Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust, The National Farmers Union, and Surfers Against Sewage. Discussion at the meeting covered the following points:

- A number of maps pinpointed specific areas of water quality along the River Ouse, including sewage discharge points and where there were areas of concern. The Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust had compiled 20 years of water quality data, including the status of the river either side of the Barcombe Water Treatment Works.
- There was a need for innovative, nature-based solutions to mitigate the pressure from planning and development, however funding for these solutions continued to be an issue. The Ringmer Wetlands project was an example of a successful nature-based solution. The project was low cost and stored and slowed 500,000 litres of water, which reduced surface water flow into the sewage network, and reduced flooding for 17 properties in the village.
- There were historic and continuing challenges in engaging with Southern

Water - other water companies were more successful at engaging with stakeholders and interest groups. Response times by Southern Water to reports of blocked pipes and spillages on farmland was good but the reporting mechanism through the Environment Agency was challenging and needed changing.

- The Safer Season River Service (SSRS) app was available for bathers to advise if waters were safe or polluted and was based on data received from water companies. There was a government requirement for water companies to deliver a similar service.
- Flooding, sewage leaks and river contamination were broader issues than those only involving Southern Water, and included agriculture and privately owned water treatment centres – pharmaceutical contamination was a current concern also.

The Committee discussed a recent visit by Members to the Barcombe Waste Water Treatment Works and it was noted that, although work was being done to increase the capacity (the Works was already operating beyond capacity), financial constraints imposed by the Environment Agency meant that longer-term planning was not possible within the current five-year investment strategy.

**Resolved** to note the update.

**48 Requested reports due for consideration by the Cabinet on 1 February 2024.**

It was agreed by Members that all the reports on the agenda would be considered by the Committee.

**48a General Fund Revenue Budget 2024/25, Capital Programme**

Director of Finance and Performance, Homira Javadi, presented the report which detailed the General Fund Budget 2023/24 and provided an update on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, together with the updated Capital Programme and Treasury Management position. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- In terms of any financial impact on Lewes District Council, from Eastbourne Borough Council's current position, the only element that was shared under 'shared services' was officer resources. Lewes retained financial and decision-making autonomy, as a sovereign authority. There had been an impact on Eastbourne as a result of Covid, but services were still delivered in a way that was appropriate to each authority's key priorities and corporate plans.
- Reference in the report to 'special expenses' was identification of particular elements of the Council's budget that were provided specifically for particular parishes in the Lewis area. A slightly higher proportion of Council tax would be levied on the basis that some services, for example,

open spaces and parks are provided specifically for those parishes.  
Council tax bills would include reference to special expenses, if applicable.

- There were potential risks associated with the ability to recover Port Health Charges costs, as additional services were being provided in the current year. The Finance team was working with other authorities to get a better understanding of the charges and to look at other ways of providing the service – there was limited potential to recover charges from the Government.
- The reductions in the ‘service planning and effectiveness’ column related to year-to-year budget adjustments. The Finance team was undertaking a line-by-line review to further identify areas of the Budget that needed adjustments.
- Aspiration Homes was a joint piece of work between Eastbourne Borough Council and Lewes District Council. It had been set up to provide greater flexibility for the provision of affordable housing, and was able to take greater advantage of, for example, the Right to Buy scheme.
- The Local Energy Scheme was a community Wealth building initiative that looked at green energy investments. It was necessary to ensure that local communities benefited from the Council’s investments, the Scheme had provision within the capital program and was subject to a business case.
- Any business rates income generated in the Newhaven Enterprise Zone was intended to be returned to its reserves. The current reserves were in a financially healthy position and the return of some of the fund to the Council was being considered.
- A number of measures were already in place to address the cost-of-living crisis and provide a financial support system. This included the appropriate provision of officer support to ensure information to residents was available. Hardship funds were available and a funds had been set aside which were dedicated to address cost of living pressures. These were partly funded by the general fund and partly by the housing revenue account.

**Resolved** to support the Officer recommendations in the Cabinet report, in full.

**48b Treasury Management Strategy, Investment Strategy, Capital Strategy and Prudential Indicators 2024/25**

Deputy Chief Finance Officer, Steve Houchin, presented the report which detailed the Council’s Annual Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy & Investment Strategy together with the Treasury and Prudential Indicators. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- The Council had limited investments and followed the security, liquidity

and yield principles, but it was not a requirement that the Council had to choose non-ethical investments.

**Resolved** to support the Officer recommendations to the Cabinet, in full.

**48c Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Revenue Budget and Rent Setting 2024/25 and HRA Capital Programme 2023-28**

Deputy Chief Finance Officer, Steve Houchin, presented the report which detailed the Housing Revenue Account budget proposals, rent levels and service charges for 2024/25, and the Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2023-28

- In order to maintain a balanced position within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan, the Council needed to undertake significant levels of investment in order to maintain the property portfolio over a prolonged period of time. The 30-year plan was in place to ensure that over the lifetime of the HRA the Council would be able to balance the Account and make it sustainable for the duration of that period. In order to maintain the sustainability, the Council would need to invest in property (either by acquiring new property or building new property).
- In respect of garage rents, the management of the HRA bases the rents charged on a single indicator, with the September inflation figure as the primary indicator.

**Resolved** to support the Officer recommendations in the Cabinet report, in full.

**48d Re-imagining Lewes District: Delivering the Vision 2024 - 2028**

Jo Harper, Head of Business Planning and Performance, presented the report which provided the draft Corporate Plan for the Committee to consider and comment on. The Committee was advised that the draft Plan had been out for consultation and that, in its current version, minor amendments were being considered. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- Members expressed concern at the low responses to the consultation and urged future versions of the plan to be made available to as wide a range of groups as possible.
- The final version of the Plan would be promoted by the Council through social media. The availability of the Plan could be made known through the publication 'District News'.
- Members highlighted a number of minor amendments which officers agreed to consider prior to the presentation of the draft Plan to Full Council.

**Resolved** to support the Officer recommendations in the Cabinet report, in

full.

#### **49 Forward Plan of Decisions**

The Chair, Councillor Brett, introduced the Cabinet Forward Plan of decisions, which outlined decisions due to be presented to the Cabinet at its future meetings. Members agreed that the following Cabinet reports be included on the agenda for the Committee's next meeting on the 7 March 2024:

- Rights of Rivers Update
- Portfolio progress and performance report quarter 3 - 2023-2024
- Finance update - performance quarter 3 - 2023-2024
- Eastbourne & Lewes Community Safety Partnership – Annual Report (Lewes)
- Complaints Policy

**Resolved** to note the Forward Plan of Cabinet decisions.

#### **50 Policy and Performance Advisory Committee Work Programme**

The Deputy Chair, Councillor Baah, 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:

Members were advised that a review of the Council's maintenance of green spaces, grass-cutting and cemeteries would be retained on the work programme.

**Resolved** to note the Committee's work programme.

The meeting ended at Time Not Specified

Councillor Christine Brett (Chair)