

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of meeting held in Court Room - Town Hall, Eastbourne on 5 February 2024 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Councillors Alan Shuttleworth (Deputy-Chair), Kathy Ballard, Ali Dehdashty, Nigel Goodyear, Jane Lamb, Amanda Morris and Hugh Parker and Robert Smart (substitute).

Officers in attendance:

Homira Javadi (Director of Finance and Performance (Section 151 Officer)), Nick Peeters (Committee Officer), Becky Cooke (Director of Tourism, Culture and Organisational Development), Steven Houchin (Deputy Chief Finance Officer (Corporate Finance)), Lynn Ingram (Interim Head of Financial Planning), Oliver Jones (Lead, Housing, Homelessness & Community Safety), Peter Martin (Acting Events Manager, Tourism & Enterprise), Ross Sutton (Head of Financial Reporting) and Jo Harper (Head of Business Planning and Performance).

Also in attendance:

Chief Inspector Di Lewes (Sussex Police)
Councillor Stephen Holt (Leader of the Council)

50 Minutes of the meeting held on 4 December 2023

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 5 February 2024 were submitted and approved and signed as a correct record by the Chair.

A Member asked that future minutes include actions from previous minutes, and referred specifically to further action on the work of consultants who had presented a study of houses of multiple occupation, in Eastbourne, at the previous meeting.

51 Apologies for absence / declaration of substitute members

Apologies were received from the Chair, Councillor Shore, with Councillor Smart acting as a substitute on the Committee.

52 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPIs) by members as required under Section 31 of the Localism Act and of other interests as required by the Code of Conduct

There were none.

53 Questions by members of the public

There were none.

54 Urgent items of business

There were none.

55 Right to address the meeting/order of business

There were no requests.

56 Corporate Plan 2024-2028

Jo Harper, Head of Business Planning and Performance, presented the report which provided details of the draft Corporate Plan. The draft Plan would be presented to the Cabinet for consideration and recommendation to Full Council.

There was no further discussion on the report.

Resolved to note the report.

57 Eastbourne and Lewes Community Safety Partnership - Annual Report

Oliver Jones, Housing, Homelessness & Community Safety Lead, presented the report which detailed the 2023/24 performance of the Eastbourne & Lewes Community Safety Partnership (E&L CSP).

Chief Inspector Di Lewis was in attendance and highlighted the following points:

- There had been some recent positive changes to the policing structure in Eastbourne, with three new sergeants, police constables and a new draft of police community safety officers (PCSO'S) covering Eastbourne.
- Levels of business crime and shoplifting were a current concern – a number of days of action had been undertaken to deal with shoplifting, and regular meetings were held with the business crime team to identify and target prolific offenders.
- Drugs related harm continued to be an issue and close work with neighbourhood enforcement teams was being maintained, as well as work undertaken with teams in London to identify County Lines crime.
- Burglary numbers had increased in the most recent quarter of the year. The theft of high-value bicycles made up a significant proportion of the increase, but recent work had provided a breakthrough in tackling the levels. Operation Terrain had been rolled out to tackle motorbike theft and anti-social driving, with positive outcomes achieved. Burglaries were still relatively low when compared nationally, and prompt action was taken when spikes in the figures occurred.

- Sussex police were working with the CSP on 'Immediate Justice' which was a pilot scheme in Eastbourne aimed at providing quick justice in relation to low-level crime, with the victim's agreement as to the nature of the justice.
- Operation Marble provided early intervention and prevention of crimes that may otherwise take place during the night-time economy. Operation Wave (Wellbeing And Vulnerability Engagement) identified and mitigated incidents of women feeling vulnerable or threatened – this fed into the work of dealing with night-time economy related crime. The engagement Pod was being retained in Eastbourne to maintain a high-visibility crime deterrent

During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- Crime figures were back to the same levels as pre-Covid. The cost-of-living crisis was having an impact on areas such as shoplifting, but there was also a drive to deal with the impact, including encouraging the reporting of incidents. 'Violence against the person' figures reflected incidents of domestic abuse as well incidents in public areas, and there were violence reduction units in the Town.
- The levels of serious and organised acquisitive crime did not reflect an increase in organised gangs carrying out shoplifting and other crimes. The figure included incidents of fraud which in itself had several sub-categories.
- Members requested that a more detailed analysis of the categories of crime reported, be provided, along with the methods used by Sussex Police to deal with the crimes.

Resolved to note the report.

58 Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2024-25 - to follow

Angie Weaver, Senior Specialist Advisor (Income Maximisation and Welfare), introduced the report which detailed the proposal to adopt the 2023/24 scheme Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme as the 2024/25 scheme, and commence the statutory consultation process the Council needed to follow in order the make changes to the current Local Council Tax Reduction scheme.

There was no further discussion on this item.

Resolved to note the report.

59 Request to Southern Water to attend a Scrutiny meeting - verbal update

The Chair, Councillor Shuttleworth, introduced the item which had been retained on the Committee's work programme. Southern Water had been invited to attend a Scrutiny Committee meeting to discuss concerns raised by the Council regarding sewage spills in coastal areas and inland waters.

Southern Water had responded by advising that, although it would continue engaging with local councils, this would be done through private meetings with leaders, cabinet members, relevant officers and other decision makers – Southern Water would not be meeting with scrutiny committees. Members discussed the issue and highlighted the following points:

- Members expressed concern that, by not going through the Scrutiny process and instead, engaging privately with the leadership, opposition groups were excluded from joining discussions.
- The Leader of the Council advised that a report would be provided following discussions with Southern Water. Members were advised that scrutiny of Southern Water could continue without the organisations attendance.

Resolved to note the update and agree that the item be retained on the Committee's work programme.

60 Airbourne - post event update

Becky Cooke, Director of Tourism, Culture and Organisational Development and Peter Martin, Events and Seafront Manager, provided a presentation on the environmental impact of Eastbourne Airshow. The presentation highlighted the following points:

- Carbon data in relation to the event had not been collected prior to 2021/2022. Positive work by the Council had since been undertaken to collect data, measure the carbon output and mitigate, where possible, the environmental impact of the event. The work towards measuring the carbon output from the event and audience travel and making the data publicly available seen as an industry standard.
- Changes had been implemented to operational procedures and procuring services to improve the reduction of the event's carbon footprint at all stages, with the offsetting of unavoidable emissions as a last resort. The scheme was supported by the United Nations Eastbourne and the Council's Cabinet member for climate change.
- The headline figures for the 2022 event were that 4% emissions related to the event and the air displays, with the remainder (approximately 96%) related to audience travel.
- There was a financial cost to reducing carbon output from the Event, however, this was had been managed within the overall budget, which was a neutral cost.
- The aviation industry was making significant, technological steps towards the production of sustainable fuel and although not currently mass produced, it was hoped safe production would become industry standard. In terms of the display teams, data was provided for fuel usage and four teams had signed up to their own carbon offsetting schemes.

- The aim for the Event was to use 100% renewable energy, through the use of hydrotreated vegetable oil (HVO) and although this was only partly achieved in 2022, it is anticipated that data from the 2023 Event will show that 100% use of HVO was achieved.
- A 'refill, not landfill' campaign was held ahead of the 2023 event to encourage attendees to bring water bottles and to reduce the amount of single-use water bottles. An additional water-station was provided at the Western Lawns. Staff were provided with drinking water bottles. Additionally, bar outlets that previously provided single-use plastic cups, were being asked to transition to cardboard cup alternatives.
- As already highlighted, travel is quite a high element of the carbon emissions from the Event and the Council's work included campaigns to promote low carbon transport options, such as public transport and cycling. The Council used all electric vehicles where possible to support the event. The Council was offsetting areas where it was unable to reduce emissions by supporting tree-planting initiatives.
- Job opportunities at the Event included 100 residents receiving paid employment. There was a net benefit to the local hospitality economy also.

During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- The Council worked closely with Southern Rail leading up to the event and in previous years poster campaigns were held across the rail network to encourage visitors to the event to travel by train. The Council continued, as part of its marketing campaign, to encourage visitors to the event to consider alternative modes of transport, other than motor vehicles.
- The Council's event team had reduced in size and although a high-level estimate for the emissions from the 2023 event could be provided, the final figures would not be publicly available until all data was collected – a proportion of the data was dependent on third-party providers. An in-person sustainability survey was used to calculator the emissions from travel. The same survey was available on-line.
- The option of a park-and-ride scheme had been explored previously and its feasibility would remain as an area of focus. The current difficulty was that the infrastructure into the Town would not support the number of vehicles needed for a single event of this type. If attempted currently, a likely outcome would be single or double decker buses idling in congestion.
- Members commended the efforts that were being made year-on-year to reduce the carbon emissions from the event but noted that transport to and from the event was, by a significant margin, the largest contributor to the emission levels.

Resolved to note the update.

61 General fund budget 2024/25 and capital programme - to follow

Homira Javadi, Director of Finance and Performance, introduced the report which sought agreement to the General Fund Budget 2023/24 and updated Medium Term Financial Strategy, together with the updated Capital Programme and Treasury Management position. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- If reserves were used to fund day-to-day costs for the Council, the interest otherwise received would be lost. As part of the Council's stability and growth program, and in response to a recommendation by CIPFA, the Council's strategy had been to reduce the cost of borrowing and the cost of financing. However, if exceptional financial support was offered and accepted, there would be an increase in the cost of borrowing and furthermore, the exceptional financial support would include an added premium of an additional 1% to the existing rate.
- Increasing council tax beyond the existing threshold was not realistic. It would require a referendum, that in itself involved cost. The option would not be supported in the current financial climate.
- A Member expressed concern that there were a number of points not being addressed within the report and that the issue of homelessness numbers and the financial impact had not been raised sooner. Officers advised that the initial cost of providing temporary accommodation and housing needs had been referenced in financial reports over the previous three years. The trend that was expected in 2023/2024 in terms of the cost to the Council had not come about and instead of reducing, had increased.
- A member requested that the Committee expressed its support for the work being undertaken by the Cabinet in lobbying the Government for support.

Resolved to note the report and submit the following comment for Cabinet's consideration:

- That the Scrutiny Committee endorse the Cabinet's work in continuing to lobby the Government to support local councils through exceptional financial challenges and exploring all funding options.

62 Treasury Management Strategy, Investment Strategy, Capital Strategy and Prudential Indicators 2024/25 - to follow

Steve Houchin, Deputy Chief Finance Officer, and Ross Sutton, Head of Financial Reporting, presented the report which outlined 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:

- In terms of cash-flow, a three-year projection that also looked at investments, borrowing and the capital programme, had been included in forecasts. This was necessary to determine how much the Council needed to borrow. The Finance Team was working towards maintaining the Council's position in terms of cash-flow. Part of this work was encouraging budget holders to focus on spending on essential items only and ensuring monies (including recharges) owed to the Council are paid.

Resolved to note the report.

63 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Revenue Budget and Rent Setting 2024/25 and HRA Capital Programme 2023-28 - to follow

Steve Houchin, Deputy Chief Finance Officer, introduced the report which outlined detailed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget proposals, rent levels, service charges and heating costs for 2024/25, and the HRA Capital Programme for 2023-28.

There was no further discussion on the report.

Resolved to note the report.

64 Forward Plan of Decisions

The Chair introduced the Forward Plan of Cabinet decisions, which outlined those reports due for consideration by the Cabinet its future meetings.

Members were advised that the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee would be provided with an updated version of the Forward Plan ahead of the next meeting and would liaise with Democratic Services when considering which reports needed to be included on the agenda.

Resolved to note the Forward Plan of Cabinet decisions.

65 Scrutiny Work Programme

The Chair, Councillor Shuttleworth, introduced the Scrutiny Committee work programme, which outlined those items previously requested for inclusion on future agendas.

Members were advised that those items discussed during the meeting would be considered as part of the work programme and that Democratic Services could be contacted if there were areas of concern or issues that Members felt needed to be raised.

Resolved to note the Scrutiny Committee work programme.

66 Date of the next meeting

Members were advised that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for 8 July 2024, however, this would not be confirmed until the draft timetable of meetings had been considered at the next meeting of the Full Council.

The meeting ended at 7.55 pm

Councillor