

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of meeting held in Court Room at Eastbourne Town Hall, Grove Road, BN21 4UG on 12 July 2021 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Tony Freebody (Chair).

Councillors Steve Wallis (Deputy-Chair), Josh Babarinde, Peter Diplock, Jane Lamb and Robert Smart.

Officers in attendance:

Nathan Haffenden (Head of Commercial Business Development), Jo Harper (Head of Business Planning and Performance), Homira Javadi (Chief Finance Officer), Millie McDevitt (Performance and Programmes Lead), Ola Owolabi (Deputy Chief Finance Officer (Corporate Finance)) and Nick Peeters (Committee Officer).

Also in attendance: Councillor Colin Swansborough.

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Minutes of the meetings held on 8 February and 24 March 2021

The minutes of the meetings held on 8 February and 24 March 2021 were submitted and approved and signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

Matters arising:

Members requested that an update be provided by Brighton and Hove City Council on Homelessness placements into Eastbourne at the next meeting, as discussed at the 24 March meeting.

2 Apologies for absence / declaration of substitute members

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Burton and Morris.

3 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

Councillor Wallis declared a personal interest in item 8. Corporate Plan Review and item 9. Portfolio Progress and Performance Report 2020/21- Quarter 4, as a result of his being a trustee of the charity 'Warming up the Homeless'.

4 Questions by members of the public

There were none.

5 Urgent items of business

There were none.

6 Right to address the meeting/order of business

There were none.

7 Recovery and Reset

Jo Harper, Head of Business Planning and Performance, presented the report. During discussion the following points were highlighted.

- The detail in appendix A to the report in reference to 'Leisure centre' and 'Sovereign Leisure Centre' proposed savings, related to a renegotiation with Wave Leisure of its existing contract for other leisure centres in the Borough, and a change of management arrangements to enable non domestic rates (NNDR) exemption for the Sovereign Leisure Centre, respectively.
- The aspiration would be to return to previous levels of investment in future years, although this would be dependent on several factors including the recovery of the economy.
- Approximately eight other authorities were progressing with capitalisation programmes within a range of £3 million to £70 million.
- Concern was expressed over the impact on the Borough's tourism offer through proposed savings from weed control, street cleansing and grounds maintenance. It was felt that there had been an increase in litter in the borough and town centre, and that there could be connection to the change to fortnightly bin collection. It was requested that this area be monitored. Concern was also expressed that the Borough's cemeteries were not being maintained to a high standard.
- The assumptions in the budget were based on the information available at the time and the current environment, and were yet to be tested. The Council was mindful that residents and businesses would not be returning to what was considered a normal environment prior to the Pandemic and that the 'new normal' could be significantly different in terms of people's behaviours, spending patterns and, therefore, impact on services.
- The impact of proposed changes to services where efficiency savings had been identified would be measured through the quarterly performance reports. The Council was mindful that further efficiency savings should not impact on service levels and the experience of residents if possible.
- There were proposals within a recent government consultation on free collection of garden waste. However, a final decision had not been reached.

- Comparisons with other authorities were difficult as Eastbourne Borough was unique in its position as a tourism-based economy where the Council itself was a major provider. It was noted that it had the built-in resilience of a shared partnership with Lewes District Council. Early planning at the start of the Pandemic and the use of staff across services had made a positive difference.
- The Council had an established, active network of stakeholders to respond to community-based support responsibilities.
- The projected income for the Golf Course was based on an increase in membership during the Pandemic. The income projected for 1 Grove Road was expected to be realised, as an agreement with a prospective tenant was imminent. In other areas, stress tests and risk assessments were being regularly applied to provide further confidence that savings would be delivered.

Resolved to note the report.

8 Corporate Plan- Year 1 Review

Millie McDevitt, Organisational Effectiveness and Performance Lead, presented the report. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- There had been ongoing communication throughout the year highlighting the work the Council had undertaken during the Pandemic. The communications strategy would continue and there would be a focus on areas such as the Waste Service.

It was also agreed that further detail on the following area would be provided in future:

- The income generated from public space protection orders relating to dog-fouling fines.

Resolved to note the report.

9 Portfolio Progress and Performance Report 2020/21- Quarter 4

Millie McDevitt, Organisational Effectiveness and Performance Lead, presented the report. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- The majority of targets had been met despite the difficult circumstances.
- The figure for the percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting was not available. Continued efforts were being made to obtain the data from East Sussex County Council.

- The position on the collection of food waste would be checked and reported back to the Committee.

Resolved to note the report.

10 Provisional revenue and capital outturn 2020/21

Homira Javadi, Chief Finance Officer, presented the report. During discussion the following points were highlighted.

- The production of the medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) for presentation in September would be an opportunity to reassess the business case for items in the capital programme and to look at the associated costs. There would be an opportunity for the Council to assess its financial stability and reprioritise, and determine which projects needed investment.
- Members referred to the Council's cycling strategy and felt that its promotion needed a stronger focus, as a project that would contribute to other important areas, such as public health, congestion, and reductions in carbon emissions. Members noted that a cycling consultation was closing imminently.

Resolved to note the provisional revenue and capital outturn for 2020/21

11 Treasury management annual report 2020/21

Ola Owolabi, Deputy Chief Finance Officer, presented the report. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- The table in paragraph 8.3 of the report was an indication of the total resources available to the Council. It was noted that the Finance team had agreed to provide details of the Council's cashflow.
- Concern was expressed by Members at the level of debt incurred by the Council which had not reduced.

Resolved to note the Treasury Management Annual Report 2020/21

12 Forward Plan of Decisions

Resolved to note the Forward Plan of Cabinet decisions.

13 Scrutiny Work Programme 2021/22

The Chair, Councillor Freebody introduced the report. Members requested that the following item be added to the Committee's work programme:

- An update on the placement of homeless people in Eastbourne Borough by Brighton and Hove City Council.

Resolved to note the work programme subject to the inclusion of the item requested above.

14 Exclusion of the public

The Chair, Councillor Freebody, introduced the item and proposed that items 15. Housing Development update - Southfield Road Car Park and item 16. Housing Development update - Southfield Road Car Park, Exempt appendix, be considered together in an exempt session.

Resolved that the public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting as otherwise there was a likelihood of disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. (The requisite notice having been given under regulation 5 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.

15 Housing Development update - Southfields Road Car Park

Nathan Haffenden, Head of Commercial Business & Development, presented the report. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- The properties would be set at affordable rents (80% of the market rent) but capped in accordance with Local Housing Allowance (LHA) levels to ensure affordability within the context of housing benefit.
- Members felt that the business plan for the scheme should be included as part of the Cabinet's consideration of the report. Members also requested that the scheme be reviewed within the current commercial/supply context.
- A more detailed handover to occupants was expected in order to highlight the green technology included in the build and to ensure that residents made full use of it.

Resolved:

- 1) To note the report; and
- 2) Request that the Cabinet consider a review of the scheme within the current commercial/supply context, including consideration of the business case for the scheme.

16 Date of the next meeting

Resolved to note that the date of the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee is scheduled for Monday, 13 September 2021 in the Court Room, Eastbourne Town Hall, Grove Road, Eastbourne, BN21 4UG.

The meeting ended at 8.15 pm

Councillor Tony Freebody (Chair)