

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee

Minutes of meeting held in Ditchling and Telscombe Rooms at Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes, BN7 1AB on 30 November 2021 at 2.30 pm.

Present:

Councillor Joe Miller (Chair).

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

Officers in attendance:

Philip Brown (Property Lawyer), Tim Whelan (Director of Service Delivery) and Nick Peeters (Committee Officer).

37 Minutes of the previous meeting dated 3 November 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2021 were submitted and the Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

38 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bikson.

39 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

40 Urgent Items

There were none.

41 Written Questions from Councillors

There were none.

42 Requested reports due for consideration by the Cabinet on 9 December 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:

6(a) Portfolio progress and performance report quarter 2 - 2021-2022

6(c) Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the Working Age 2022/23

The following Cabinet reports were not requested for inclusion in discussion and as a result the Committee; **Resolved** that the Officer recommendations the reports be supported in full:

(6b) Finance update - performance quarter 2 - 2021-2022

(6d) Council tax base and non-domestic rate income for 2022/23

42a Portfolio progress and performance report quarter 2 - 2021-2022

Tim Whelan, Director of Service Delivery, presented the report. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- Nine new members of staff had been recruited to the Customer Contact Team.
- The holistic approach to housing rent arrears was commended as it prioritised the need for daily living costs. The intelligent use of data allowed for the identification of vulnerable tenants and where needed, discretionary housing payments, as a starting point to assist with rent arrears. Tenants were signposted to a number of external organisations for additional support.
- The only element of the contract with Mears that could increase was the rate of inflation – this was already included in the contract itself. Discussions were ongoing regarding bringing the Mears calls back in-house. All of Mears's business costs were within the schedule of rates, allowing for room for negotiation going forward. The Contract with Mears ran until January 2023 and stake-holder engagement was being undertaken to discuss the shape of the new contract, and how a significant increase in the market, through any potential increase costs, such as materials, could be avoided.
- Lewes District had not received any placements of asylum seekers in emergency accommodation. These placements tended to be in areas where inexpensive hotel accommodation was available.
- Plans were ongoing to purchase additional cameras to identify incidents of fly-tipping. The cameras were 'overt' and would include signage regarding their use, which would provide a deterrent. Meetings with the environment agency and Sussex Police were taking place to arrange 'days of action' where vehicles would be stopped and waste transfer licences would need to be provided. Fly-tipping sites did not generally meet the necessary criteria for covert cameras.

Resolved to note the report.

42b Finance update - performance quarter 2 - 2021-2022

This report was not requested for inclusion in discussion by the Committee (see minute 42). Members had previously resolved to support the officer recommendations in the Cabinet report in full.

42c Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme for the Working Age 2022/23

Tim Whelan, Director of Service Delivery, presented the report. During discussion the following points were highlighted.

- The collection rate for council tax with the proposed 100% discount on liability was anticipated to remain at 97%, based on the increased discount and the reduction in the number of residents who would otherwise have difficulties in paying the existing 20% liability. It was anticipated that the net figure for collection would increase across the scheme.
- The scheme and the overall collection rates allowed for existing long-term payment arrangements. There were various stages of enforcement and once a debt was handed to an external agency for collection, there was no cost to the Council. Legislation determined that a full collection process should be followed prior to a council tax debt being written off.
- There was no indication of a reduction in service levels as a result of the proposed scheme.
- Approximately 50% of the exceptional hardship fund had been used over the previous year and was provided to support vulnerable people and as a means of preventing homelessness. It had been noted that applications for the fund stalled at the point at which bank statements were required and a portal to provide 'open-source' banking data was being considered to resolve the issue.
- Concern was expressed by some members over the impact the scheme would have on the services provided by preceptors such as the County Council, Sussex Police and East Sussex Fire and Rescue, as well as those residents who were liable for the full rate of council tax. Further, some Members considered that, although support should be provided to those in exceptional hardship circumstances, there should be an expectation that all those liable should make some sort of contribution.
- It was confirmed that preceptors could request a precept figure for the budget and services they provided, within a certain framework, although there was a cap on the amount that the request could be increased by.

The following amended and additional recommendations to the proposals under consideration for 2020/2023 were proposed and seconded (detailed in 2.1 of the report):

- a) Calculate Local Council Tax Reduction on 90% of a claimant's council tax liability

- b) To include a £141,000 hardship fund to provide support for those that present to the Council and have difficulty paying the 10% balance of the Local Council Tax Reduction.

The amended and additional recommendations were not supported by a majority.

Resolved to support the officer recommendations in the Cabinet report.

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

This report was not requested for inclusion in discussion by the Committee (see minute 42). Members had previously resolved to support the officer recommendations in the report in full.

43 Forward Plan of Decisions

The Chair, Councillor Miller introduced the Forward Plan of Cabinet Decisions. Members requested that the following reports be included on the agenda at the next meeting, for consideration:

- Recovery and reset programme
- Portfolio progress and performance report quarter 3 - 2021-2022
- Finance update - performance quarter 3 - 2021-2022
- General Fund Revenue Budget 2022/23, Capital Programme
- Treasury Management and Prudential Indicators 2022/23, Capital Strategy & Investment Strategy
- Housing revenue account budget 2022/23
- Fees and charges
- Voluntary sector support
- Community safety partnership annual report
- Litter strategy 2022-27
- Council Approach to Evidential Material to support Coastal Defence Matters

Resolved to note the Forward Plan of Cabinet decisions.

44 Policy and Performance Advisory Committee Work Programme

The Chair, Councillor Miller introduced the Committee's work programme.

Members requested that the following item be included on the agenda at the next meeting on the 27 January 2022 for consideration:

- An update on the Planning Service.

Members further requested that the following item be included on the agenda for the 17 March meeting:

- An update on the Council's Housing Development programme

Resolved to note the Committee's work programme.

45 Date of Next Meeting

To note that the next meeting of the Policy and Performance Advisory Committee is scheduled to be held on the 27 January 2022, at 2.30pm, at Southover House, Lewes.

The meeting ended at 3.50 pm

Councillor Joe Miller (Chair)