

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee

Minutes of meeting held in Ditchling and Telscombe Rooms at Southover House, Southover Road, Lewes, BN7 1AB (TBC) on 1 December 2022 at 2.30 pm.

Present:

Councillor Liz Boorman (Chair).
Councillors Robert Banks, Christine Brett, Lynda Duhigg, Christine Robinson, Adrian Ross, Steve Saunders, Richard Turner, Jim Lord and Ron Maskell.

Officers in attendance:

Luke Dreeling (Performance Lead), Ola Owolabi (Deputy Chief Finance Officer - Corporate Finance), Nick Peeters (Committee Officer), Jane Goodall (Environment Lead), Jo Harper (Head of Business Planning and Performance), Ellen Miller (Specialist Advisor Coastal Projects (Green Consultancy)), Leigh Palmer (Head of Planning First) and Angy Weaver (Senior Specialist Advisor - Thriving Communities)

42 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2022 were submitted and the Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

43 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Linington, Bikson and Clay. Councillor Jim Lord advised that he was a Substitute for Councillor Bikson and Councillor Ron Maskell advised that he was a substitute for Councillor Linington.

44 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

45 Urgent Items

There were none.

46 Written Questions from Councillors

There were none.

47 Requested reports due for consideration by the Cabinet on 8 December 2022

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(b) Portfolio progress and performance report quarter 2 - 2022-2023

6(c) Finance update - performance quarter 2 - 2022-2023

6(d) Local council tax reduction scheme 2023/24

6(f) Local Development Scheme

6(g) Natural Flood Management within the Ouse and Eastern Adur catchment

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

6(a) Cost of Living Update

6(e) Council tax base and non-domestic rate income for 2023/24

47a Cost of Living Update

This item was dealt with under minute 47.

47b Portfolio progress and performance report quarter 2 - 2022-2023

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

- The 'cost of living' crisis was a significant factor in an increase in the volume of calls received by the contact centre, and this had impacted on the indicator for the 'Increase in the percentage of calls to the contact centre answered within 60 seconds'. A piece of work was being undertaken over the following three months that would review the measurements used to provide customer service indicators and look to introduce indicators that provided a better understanding of the Service in terms of answering calls, and more depth around the types of calls being received and whether the enquiries were being resolved. The outcomes of the increase in the use of the Chatbot would also be included in any analysis. Members requested that further detail on the levels of retention of staff in the contact centre, following training, be provided.
- Further detail would be provided on the indicator for the 'decrease average number of days to re-let Council homes (excluding temporary lets)'.
- Recruitment continued to be challenging. New staff were in an environment where they were able to progress to other opportunities in the organisation. However, this resulted in vacancies for their original positions. New ways of working meant that the geographical location of staff was not an issue. Staff were expected to understand the culture

across both authorities. The recruitment issues faced by the Council across its services, in attracting people with the right skills and experience, were being experienced nationally.

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

47c Finance update - performance quarter 2 - 2022-2023

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

- The impact of the local government pay award on the projected deficit was approximately £500,000.
- Members requested that further detail be provided on the £2 million forecast for local energy schemes.
- It was confirmed that the actual spend, and forecast spend for each service, was included in the report. The Finance team would look to fine tune the information provided to improve future reports, however, the accurate profiling of budgets in each service was needed to achieve this.
- The figures/variances for the Fire Station in Newhaven, which had been presented at a previous meeting, had been reprofiled and a comparison between what had been reported in Q1 and the current position, would be provided.
- There was a contractual clause within the Housing Repairs contract that related to annual increases and was linked to the Building Cost Information Service (BCIS) index (this equated to an approximate increase of 7 %). The contract was due for review in 2028 and the current budget reflected the increases in the contract.

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

47d Local council tax reduction scheme 2023/24

Angy Weaver, Customer First Resolution Team Senior Specialist Advisor, presented the report. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- The scheme was reviewed on an annual basis and any significant changes would include consultation. There were no changes to the current scheme.

Resolved to support the officer recommendations in the Cabinet report.

47e Council tax base and non-domestic rate income for 2023/24

This item was dealt with under minute 47.

47f Local Development Scheme

Leigh Palmer, Head of Planning, presented the report. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- Unacceptable development schemes would be refused regardless of an 'out of date' Local Plan and the Local Plan was only out of date in terms of housing delivery. The two most recent appeals were overturned by the Inspector based on decisions that housing delivery outweighed the 'local landscape impact'. This highlighted that the Council had to be certain, when refusing schemes, that the landscape impact had to be greater.
- It was not advisable for town and parishes to invest significant resources in refreshing neighbourhood plans currently. It was more important that the timelines of the plans, in terms of site allocations, aligned with the Lewes District Council's Local Plan.
- The Council would have a greater understanding of what special growth was required during the 'preferred options' stage in Autumn of 2023, and it was necessary that, at a neighbourhood plan level and District level, the methodology for the 6 key areas involved in the Issues and Options document was looked at collectively. The difficulty, and expense involved in bringing forward neighbourhood plans forward was recognised, and the Council's Local Plan team was committed to providing support to town and parish councils.
- It was important that the Planning service was given the opportunity to acquire evidence to support the Council's position on the spatial, landscape impact, highways and other areas of infrastructure when considering what was acceptable in planning terms. The Planning service maintained relationships with colleagues at County level around where Councils were in their plan production. The timetable for the Local Plan would be continually reviewed.
- Members noted the level of resources required to gather evidence and ensure delivery of the Local Plan within the agreed timescale. It was requested that the Cabinet consider recruitment of additional staff to support this.

Resolved To support the officer recommendations in the Cabinet report, subject to the following additional recommendation:

- 3) That the Cabinet consider providing funding for additional staff resources, to support the existing timetable and delivery of the Local Plan.

47g Natural Flood Management within the Ouse and Eastern Adur catchment

Jane Goodall, Environment Lead and Ellen Miller, Neighbourhood First Specialist Advisor (Coastal Projects), presented the report. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- In response to a specific question, there were aspirations to introduce beavers into waterways in East Sussex in the future, however, there were many aspects to the proposals that needed consideration, including engagement with landowners.
- All of the natural flood management work involved engagement with landowners and in particular farmers who wanted to support nature restoration.
- £2 million of lottery funding had been received by the Ouse Valley Climate Action programme; a multi-partnership body that included Lewes District Council and South Down National Park. The funding would support community engagement initiatives including natural flood management projects to address climate-change at a local level.
- The natural flood management focused on upstream catchments but it was recognised that coastal engineering and flood defence impacted on tidal waterways.

Resolved to support the officer recommendations in the Cabinet report.

48 Forward Plan of Cabinet 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 26 January 2023:

- Portfolio progress and performance report quarter 3 - 2022-2023
- General Fund Revenue Budget 2023/24, Capital Programme
- Treasury Management and Prudential Indicators 2022/23, Capital Strategy &
- Investment Strategy.
- Housing revenue account budget 2023/24
- Fees and Charges
- Community grants programme
- War Pensions and Armed Forces Compensation Policy
- Homes First Repairs Service: Re-design and Development

Resolved to note the Forward Plan of Cabinet Decisions.

49 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.

- Members requested an update on the Elections Act 2022.
- Local Plan update

Resolved to note the Committee's work programme.

50 Date of Next Meeting

Resolved To note the date of the next meeting of the Policy and Performance Advisory Committee, scheduled to be held on Thursday 26 January 2023, 2.30pm at Southover House, Lewes.

The meeting ended at 4.40 pm

Councillor Liz Boorman (Chair)