

## **Policy and Performance Advisory Committee**

**Minutes of meeting held in Room 209/210 Marine Workshops - Marine Workshops, Newhaven on 7 September 2023 at 2.30 pm.**

**Present:**

Councillor Christine Brett (Chair).

Councillors Janet Baah, Ciarron Clarkson, Graham Clews, Ezra Cohen, Paul Keene, Paul Mellor and Daniel Stewart-Roberts.

**Officers in attendance:**

Philip Brown (Property Lawyer), Luke Dreeling (Performance Lead), Nick Peeters (Committee Officer), Linda Farley (Head of Customer First), Parmjeet Jassal (Interim Head of Financial Planning), Lisa Rawlinson (Head of Regeneration) and Ross Sutton (Head of Financial Reporting).

**11 Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 11 July 2023 were submitted and the Deputy Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

**12 Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Davies, Fabry and Makepeace.

**13 Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

**14 Urgent Items**

There were none.

**15 Written Questions from Councillors**

There were none.

**16 Requested reports due for consideration by the Cabinet on 14 September 2023**

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

**16a Cost of Living Update**

Seanne Sweeny, Community Services Lead, presented the report which updated Members on the work delivered by the Council in supporting residents through the cost-of-Living crisis, with proposals to continue and build on key work-streams and partnerships. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- The Equality & Fairness analysis, which was updated with each Cabinet report, would be provided to Members.
- The Cost-of-Living Project Officer role would continue to be a secondment from within the organisation. Retaining the position on an annual basis and allowed the Council an element of flexibility.
- Further information would be provided on the Policy and Practice dashboard (LIFT), which had been funded by East Sussex Council, particularly on how it would be implemented and monitored, who was responsible for its management and whether it had dedicated staff assigned to it. It had already been rolled out for Eastbourne Borough Council.
- Preliminary discussions with Lewes District Food Partnership had been held following the Poverty Truth Hearing and a number of actions were being looked at.
- The 'no wrong door principle' was aimed at ensuring, where possible, that the initial point of contact with Council staff resulted in a first-time resolution for customers and avoided the passing on of enquiries.

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

**16b Revenue & Capital Financial Monitoring report Quarter 1 2023-24**

Parmjeet Jassal, Interim Head of Financial Planning, and Ross Sutton, Head of Financial reporting, presented the report which provided an assessment of the Council's financial performance against its approved 2023-24 budget, incorporating key financial risks, issues and opportunities identified at Quarter 1 for the General Fund, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Capital Programme. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- It had been necessary to take on agency staff in certain service areas, where vacancies existed, in order that the Council could continue to deliver statutory services. There was a work stream, as part of the stability and Growth programme, that would review agency costs. A number of recommendations had already been made including identifying funding at the point of recruitment and managing carefully the resources dedicated to both agency and full-time staff.
- Depreciation within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) was part of the rent setting process. The revaluation of properties could result in higher

depreciation – this depreciation was used for improvements to stock as part of the Major Repairs Reserve.

- The initial Recovery and Stabilisation savings on the East Sussex County Council contract business case, in relation to the car parking contract, remained unrealised as the contract was with an external contractor and its termination would be determined by the terms of the contract.
- The Capital Programme was continually reviewed and updated, and covered spend and profiling over several years. Rising costs and capacity impacted on schemes, which then had to be revised.
- Members requested that acronyms in future reports be given their full title, possibly in the form of a glossary.

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

#### **17a Portfolio progress and performance report quarter 1 - 2023-2024**

Luke Dreeling, Performance Lead, presented the report which allowed Members to consider the Council's progress and performance in respect of service areas for the First Quarter of the year (April-June 2023) as shown in Appendix 1 to the report. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- The provision of the performance indicator for air quality had been impacted by staffing issues. The Quarter 2 Performance report would include the values for the first and second quarters of the year. More detail around the values would be provided.
- The Council's chatbot, Ellis, was live on the website and already dealing with a limited number of enquiries over the phone. The next phase would be to look at questions that customers were likely to ask and formulating the responses from Ellis into versions that would be easily understood. Following this, there would be a continual review of the output from Ellis with a focus on the quality of responses provided, and a minimum expected deflection target of 35% for calls that the Council is not responsible for.
- There were currently limited services at the new contact centre in Lewes High Street. Further work on utilities at the centre were being undertaken to allow more staff to operate there. It was anticipated that the Council's Housing team and the Citizen's Advice Bureau would eventually be located there – the new contact centre was three times busier than the previous facility at Southover House. An update on the new contact centre would be provided to a future meeting.
- Further information on the performance indicator for decreasing the average number of days to re-let Council homes (excluding temporary

lets) would be provided, particularly around the re-let process and the impact from the condition of the property and efficiency of the contractor employed to carry out works.

- Further detail on the performance indicator for customer complaints logged at stage 2 and resolved within 20 working days, would be provided, particularly around the percentage of those complaints upheld against the total number received (which would be included in future commentary).

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

#### **17b Community Wealth Building Action Plan update**

The Chair, Councillor Brett, introduced the report which provided an update on the progress of the Community Wealth Building Delivery plan. Members noted the report and requested that the following information be provided:

- Concern was expressed that the financial risk associated with projects that encountered issues, was not highlighted.
- What the long-term sustainability of the total spending locally was and was there an expectation of when the large capital projects end? Additionally, was there a target for when gaps in total spend/local spend needed to be addressed?
- How often were the Council's land and building assets reviewed; what was the process for the review; were the socially productive uses of the assets considered; and were external bodies provided with an opportunity to suggest uses? Additionally, where were the assets located and were they distributed evenly across the District?

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

#### **17c Business support for Lewes District**

Lisa Rawlinson, Head of Regeneration, presented the report which provided an update on the achievements of the Local Enterprise and Apprenticeship Platform (LEAP) business start-up, and the general business support programmes, funded by Lewes District Council. During discussion, the following additional information was requested by Members:

- Whether a cost/benefit analysis had been included as part of the work and whether a feasibility assessment had been undertaken.
- Whether, in relation to key outcomes, the annual turnover and number of

staff involved should be monitored as indicators that determined the success of a business.

- Further detail on the business that was no longer operating and which sector of business it had operated in, as a possible indicator of what worked and what didn't work.
- Members felt there should be wider communication of the scheme with successes advertised and promoted.

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

#### **17d Funding Simplification Pathfinder Pilot**

Lisa Rawlinson, Head of Regeneration, presented the report which provided further detail on the Funding Simplification Pathfinder Pilot that Lewes District Council has been invited to participate in. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- Flexibility within the scheme allowed for the monitoring of rising costs and continued assessments of project viability. Funds were reallocated where necessary, to ensure viable projects were delivered. Any changes were reflected in the investment plan. The report highlighted those projects that were no longer progressing and the funds allocated to those projects were returned to the consolidated pool. Reprofiling allowed identification of additional costs to fully cover other projects.
- The Newhaven Town Deal Board had strategic oversight of schemes, with Lewes District Council remaining as the accountable body, and was made up of representatives from a wide range of organisations including local councils, education providers and local businesses.
- The 10 local authorities chosen to pilot the scheme were those that had received funding through the Levelling Up Fund, the Town Deal and the Future High Street Funding. A memorandum of understanding was in place for each of these funding programmes. Once the Government has approved the Council's investment plan, a new MoU would be issued and the existing grant funding agreements would need to be amended to reflect this.

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

#### **18 Exclusion of the public**

**Resolved** to enter into an exempt part of the meeting for item 7e Robinson Road Depot – Capital Development Project and item 10 Robinson Road Depot – Capital Development Project Exempt Appendix 2, as it was considered that public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in

disclosing the information.

Exempt reason 3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

**18a Robinson Road Depot - Capital Development Project Update**

Nathan Haffenden, Head of Development, Investment and Delivery, introduced the report which provided an update on the progress of the plans to redevelop the waste and recycling depot in Robinson Road, Newhaven to meet the future needs of the service.

Members discussed the management of the project within an agreed budget and the provision of sufficient resources. It was noted that part of the due diligence undertaken by the Council would include looking at all options for renewable energy across the entire scheme.

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

**19 Robinson Road Depot - Capital Development Project Update - Exempt Appendix 2**

**20 Forward Plan of Cabinet 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.

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

**21 Policy and Performance Advisory Committee Work Programme**

The Chair, Councillor Brett, introduced the Policy and Performance Advisory Committee's work programme. Officers confirmed that the Southern Water Panel would be holding its first meeting on the 5 October, with Southern Water representatives in attendance. It was further confirmed that Councillor Brett would be replacing Councillor Fabry on the Panel, to enable it to be politically proportionate.

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

**22 Date of Next Meeting**

**Resolved** to note that the that the next scheduled meeting of the Policy and Performance Advisory Committee was scheduled to be held on 2 November 2023 at The Marine Workshops, Railway Quay, Newhaven, East Sussex, BN9 0ER.

The meeting ended at 4.00 pm

Councillor Christine Brett (Chair)