

## Policy and Performance Advisory Committee

Minutes of meeting held in Room 209/210 Marine Workshops, Railway Quay, Newhaven BN9 0ER on 10 July 2024 at 5.00 pm.

### Present:

Councillor Christine Brett (Chair).

Councillors Janet Baah (Deputy-Chair), Graham Clews, Ezra Cohen, Paul Davies, Nikki Fabry, Charlotte Keenan, 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 (Assistant Director, Customer Service and Delivery), Oliver Dixon (Lawyer and Data Protection Officer), Nathan Haffenden (Assistant Director, Property and Development), Steven Houchin (Deputy Chief Finance Officer), Lynn Ingram (Interim Head of Financial Planning), Emma Kemp (Senior Planning Policy Officer) and Kate Richardson (Sustainability Lead).

### Also in attendance:

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### 13 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 30 May 2024 were submitted and the Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

### 14 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Clarkson.

### 15 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

### 16 Urgent Items

There were none.

### 17 Written Questions from Councillors

There were none.

### 18 Verbal update on customer service responses and recruitment

Linda Farley, Assistant Director Customer Service and Delivery, provided an

update to the Committee on the Customer Service Team staffing levels and retention. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- The Customer Service Team now had a full complement of staff with the last three members joining the Team in April 2024 and currently undergoing training, supported by experience team members. The three new members of the team would be operating independently as of July 2024, allowing the experienced supporting staff to return to their normal roles.
- A hybrid work pattern (including flexible working) was introduced for the contact centre, post-Covid. Staff worked across both Lewes and Eastbourne Councils and were able to choose which location they wished to be based at. IT facilities were also provided for staff to work from home. All elements of performance management (including call-listening) were available regardless of where staff were based. A Teams channel was available for all members of the contact centre, where questions could be asked, and queries raised.
- There had been a significant increase in the number of calls to the team over recent months as a result of the Police and Crime Commissioner and the General Elections. The commissioning of the new waste and recycling collection arrangements, as well as the annual billing for council tax, had increased the demand on the contact centre. The cost-of-living crisis was still impacting on residents and added to the demand. The issues in many of the enquiries received by the contact centre were multiple and complex, which led to longer time spent with each person.
- New staff were 'buddied-up' with an existing team member and received training on all areas of the Council's services. The new staff also received one-to-ones and were set targets as part of performance management. Call-listening allowed qualitative scores to be provided, which were added to any quantitative data collected. Team meetings and shadowing were also provided as support.
- Customer Service staff were provided with full support in instances where difficult calls were received and there was also a protocol for clients of concern. The Employee Assistance programme was available for staff to be referred to if necessary and the training programme included personal resilience. The opportunity for councillors to visit the staff on site and see their work was always available.
- The contact centre provided a starting point for new staff and allowed them to progress into specific service areas. Because of these opportunities, only a small number of contact centre staff left the organisation. The average retention period for staff in the contact centre was approximately two years.
- The chatbot, Ellis, was available on the Council's website and supported the work of the contact centre by driving down the time advisers would otherwise spend chatting. Ellis worked very well on the Council's website by signposting customers to the appropriate areas for information. There was

further work needed on the phone interaction with Ellis around language and customer behaviour; data from a four-week period of Ellis being available for all options was currently being analysed to make improvements. Updates on the language model were regularly provided allowing the system to be developed and made suitable locally, whilst also dealing with multiple contacts. The Ellis phone system would be live again once it could be demonstrated that all the criteria for its use could be met.

- There were continued challenges in predicting the types of calls that would be received, but it was anticipated that once all staff were fully trained and confident in all areas of the work, call-times would reduce. The focus would, however, always be on providing a quality response with first-time resolutions. The current telephone system did not include call-recourse and 'live' listening was the only option. However, a new telephony system was being introduced that included a call-back option.

**Resolved** to note the update.

## **18a Complaints Management Policy**

Linda Farley, Assistant Director Customer Service and Delivery, presented the report which provided details of the corporate complaints policy. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- The current guidance on the Policy was issued in April 2024 and there had not been any amended guidance received following the change in government. The approach being taken was that the guidance was still current and many of the points raised in it constituted good practice and would be implemented regardless.
- Any person who was dissatisfied with the level of service following an interaction with the Council was able to make a corporate complaint. However, there were certain circumstances, such as the reporting of a missed bin collection, where the initial complaint would be treated as a service request; the customer would be asked how they wished to deal with the complaint should the collection be missed on a second or third occasion and a further missed collections would normally trigger an investigation and a corporate complaint if appropriate.
- Customers were encouraged to complete the complaint themselves, in their own words. If an officer completed the complaint form, they would be expected to use the exact words provided by the customer. Copies of the complaint form were made available to customers along with an acknowledgement of the complaint within five days of it being registered. The acknowledgement included a summary of the complaint and allowed customers the opportunity to amend it, if they wished to do so. The social media referred to in the policy, through which complaints could be made, related to the Council's own social media platforms. Local external social media was monitored to flag any issues that the Council would not otherwise be aware of.

- It was recognised that the statement in the policy under 'Timescales and exceptions' that referred to when customers first become aware of issues or issues occurring, could be considered ambiguous. The policy was due to go out for public consultation and the reference would be considered as a minor amendment under delegation to lead officers and the Cabinet portfolio holder, as part of the consultation process

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

## **19 Summary of requested reports due for consideration by the Cabinet on 11 July 2024**

This report was for Information purposes only.

### **19a Recommendations for Community Infrastructure Spending**

Emma Kemp, Senior Planning Policy Officer, introduced the report which sought Cabinet approval to release Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Funds, as recommended by the CIL Executive Board, to help deliver infrastructure projects required to support development in the district. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- Following the collection of CIL payments, the payments were apportioned in two parts; the first part included 5% allocated to the CIL administration fee (staffing and software) and between 15-25% (dependent on the adoption of a neighbourhood plan) was automatically allocated to town and parish councils, twice yearly. The second apportionment was the remainder of collected CIL payments and was the amount recommended for spending in the report.
- The CIL awards considered by the CIL Management Board were comprised of all the recommendations into the three pots; the local pot, the community pot, and the small projects pot; and the CIL Executive Board, which reviewed the CIL Management Board recommendations and also considered the bids into the strategic pot. The governance arrangements for this process had been in place since 2015.
- For previously awarded funds communication was maintained with the infrastructure providers and grant agreements were completed prior to the handing over of any funds, which included updated quotes. In the case of large projects, the Council's planning and legal teams worked with the provider and if necessary, staged payments were provided. Complete payments for smaller projects were made once all the correct and outstanding documents were in place; all projects were dealt with on a case-by-case basis.
- The preference was for CIL payments to be collected and project funds delivered on an annual basis. However, this would be impacted by the

number and size of developments coming forward, and how quickly the various funding pots built up. A database of infrastructure providers was maintained, and close communications were maintained with town and parish councils who, in turn, were asked to communicate with community groups. Prior to the CIL Bidding Round infrastructure providers were invited to the Council to receive training on the CIL process and how good bids were formed.

- After the CIL Boards made their recommendations to Cabinet small amounts remained in the strategic and local and pots. Two bids were received which were recommended for approval but exceeded the funds available in the Pots. However, CIL monies were confirmed as due in the next 12 months from developments that had already commenced and as a result, these bids would still be recommended for approval. Funds remained in the community pot as a result of bids that were not approved or that had not been submitted. No funds were allocated beyond amounts that the Council was due in CIL monies, in any given round of application bids.
- There were currently no examples of Neighbourhood CIL funds unspent and approaching the five-year deadline for their use. The Planning team worked closely with all stakeholders to avoid this outcome.
- For those CIL bids that were subject to recommendations going to Cabinet, there were plans to introduce a spend time-limit of 3 years.
- Members considered that communication of the availability of CIL funds to local councils and community groups could be strengthened and publicised more widely across the district.

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

## **19b Climate and Nature Strategy Action Plan 2024**

Kate Richardson, Sustainability Lead, introduced the report which provided details of the Council's new Climate and Nature Strategy and Action Plan for publication. During discussion, the following points were added.

- The red, amber, green (RAG) ratings that would be included in the action plan were intended to be specific to each individual action, whereas the performance measures in the strategy document were to provide a broader indication of progress. There were areas of the plan where progress would be more difficult to measure over a longer period, but those areas still had actions attached. The Strategic Climate and Nature Board would have the opportunity to scrutinise the performance of actions by exception and the performance measures would be reviewed annually.
- The 86 electric vehicle charge points highlighted in the strategy were across 11 carparks in Seaford, New Haven, Lewes and Barcombe and

were funded through the On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme (ORCS) and by Connected Kerb (a 60/40 split). The funding was only available for sites that did not have sufficient off-street parking. There was a further site in Peacehaven that was noted in the action plan and was currently being costed. The majority of the Council's own car parks had been considered, but the remaining car parks were unlikely to have installations at the current time due to their viability and/or the prohibitive cost of connection. Proposals to provide funding to town and parish councils and other organisations to enable installation of charge points were being considered. Lewes Council was working closely with East Sussex County Council on its on-street charging scheme.

- The Council was leading on various elements of the strategy, for example through decarbonising its own housing stock and through the initial setting up of Hydrogen Sussex, which supported the hydrogen economy throughout Sussex. The Council's website had been refreshed and the strategy was available on its pages. The individual schemes within the strategy were promoted by the Council where possible and a condensed version of the strategy would be considered.
- The actions within the strategy were developed in conjunction with the officers who had responsibility for enabling their delivery. Schemes such as the Car Club, were specific actions within a set timescale and were delivered as part of the Council's capital programme, and therefore not annually reviewed in terms of further/additional actions. New targets were added year-on-year.
- A carbon reduction pathway would be available in the next update of the strategy and would include narrative around previous emissions and an emissions inventory.
- Member expressed concern at the wording in the action plan under 'Water, Rivers and Seas' and suggested that 'seek' should be removed when referring to working with stakeholder communities, landowners and others as it did not provide a strong enough position.

**Resolved** to support the recommendations in the Cabinet report, in full. Additionally, the Committee requested that the Cabinet consider strengthening the wording in appendix 2 to the report (the strategy action plan) around the use of the word 'seek' in reference to working with stakeholder communities, landowners and others under 'Waters, Rivers and Seas'.

#### **19c Portfolio progress and performance report 2023/24 - Quarter 4**

Luke Dreeling, Performance Lead, presented the report which detailed the council's progress and performance in respect of service areas for the Fourth Quarter of the year (January – March 2024). During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- The NEC benefits system had been unavailable for the entirety of November 2023 and as a result, a backlog had been created in the fourth quarter of the year. Significant work had been undertaken and progress was being made in the first quarter to address the backlog
- The performance measurements for fly tipping were an indicator introduced by the government. The timeframe for collecting items that had been fly tipped was dependent on the volume and the circumstances under which fly tipping occurred, such as the location and the resources available. A more relevant format for the indicator would be looked at.
- A Member questioned the accuracy of the comment attached to the performance indicator for the Percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting, and the reasons for the reduction in food waste. It was agreed that further clarification would be provided by officers.
- A Member requested that further detail on the performance indicator for appeals allowed against the authority's decision not to grant planning permission, be provided, and in particular the Council's progress in discussions with the Planning Advisory Service and Planning Inspectorate, on moving towards de-designation.
- It was considered that, when setting the performance indicators for 2024/2025 under 'Customers', a performance indicator for the average time taken to answer calls in the contact centre would have more value than a target for calls answered in under 60 seconds. This reflected the significant increase in calls per month to the contact centre and the increased complex nature of the calls. It was felt that the introduction of a baseline at this point would not accurately reflect the progress that was expected from the use of chatbot and callback systems. The focus of performance indicators for contact centre calls was moving to more qualitative outcomes and it was hoped that, over the next year, the new telephone system would provide quality data on waiting times etc. At that point a more relevant target that took account of the dynamic nature of the contact centre calls would be considered.
- The performance indicator for the number of people registering for the Council's email service had increased, however, the level would reach an expected plateau based on the number of residents in the District. The Communications Team was working towards reaching as many residents as possible.

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

#### **19d Provisional Revenue and Capital Outturn 2023/24**

Steve Houchin, Deputy Chief Finance Officer and Lynn Ingram, Interim Head of Financial Planning, presented the report which provided an update Members on the provisional outturn for 2023/24. During discussion, the

following points were highlighted:

- Work had been undertaken to review the various budgets set in February 2024 and adjustments made where necessary. A more rigorous approach was being taken to ensure the budget lines were correct and to ensure that variances were lower. Part of the process would include an increase in spending controls and a pilot scheme that flagged potential overspends against budgets when orders were placed and necessitated a managerial review of the order. Contingency plans had been put in place during the budget setting process for 2024/2025 to mitigate recurrent budgetary pressures in future years.
- Two areas in particular where cost pressures had occurred were: the lack of clarity over what was awarded as government funding as opposed to business rates; and the Neighbourhood First overspend as a result of a significant review of the service (this was expected to be back on budget by 2024/2025). The Council had also incurred significant costs from planning consultants and legal costs as a result of planning appeal decisions being awarded against the Council.
- Further detail would be provided on the shortfall under 'Estates and Properties' for Lewes House Complex and Southover House Running costs.

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

## **20 Exclusion of the public**

**Resolved** to enter into an exempt part of the meeting for items 7f – Newhaven Square Health and Wellbeing Hub and item 9 – Newhaven Square Health and Wellbeing Hub exempt appendix, 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).

### **20a Newhaven Square - Health & Wellbeing Hub**

Nathan Haffenden, presented the report which detailed the Council's progress on the Newhaven Square – Health & Wellbeing Hub project, forming part of the Reimagining Newhaven programme, into the delivery phase. During discussion, the following points were raised:

- The site where the GP's currently operated was privately owned and the owner had already been contacted with a view to the site potentially being developed by Lewes District Council or the Council being an enabler for a third party to develop the site. All options regarding buildings on and around the site were to be explored.



- Although challenging, the business case proposed was considered viable and incorporated the current rent levels as set by the District Valuer, although they remained, in the council's view, at pre-pandemic levels and were considered to be low. The business case included a number of financial contingencies, the costs of the existing pre-construction services agreement, and a fixed-price construction contract for delivery. These costs underpinned the business case.
- Subject to approval of the recommendations by the Cabinet, there would be further press releases confirming the outcome, followed by a more detailed communications and stakeholder plan. The proposals included a primary care network with additional health services. Discussions on the provision of a pharmacy and the breadth of its service were currently taking place.

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

## **21 Newhaven Square - Health & Wellbeing Hub - Exempt Appendix**

This item was dealt with as part of item 7f – Newhaven Square – Health and Wellbeing Hub.

## **22 Forward Plan of Cabinet Decisions**

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

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

## **23 Policy and Performance Advisory Committee Work Programme**

The Chair, Councillor Brett, 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 discussed the following items

- A review of the use of Artificial Intelligence and the impact of its use in the Lewes District - It was suggested that a briefing on the impact of AI could be provided to all members if possible.
- A review of speed limits and potentially unsafe roads in the district – it was noted that this item could be progressed by speaking to speed-watch groups in the Lewes District.
- A review of the management of Newhaven Port Authority - An update on the bio-security station was requested.

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

**24 Date of Next Meeting**

**Resolved** to note that the next meeting of the Policy and Performance Advisory Committee is scheduled to be held on the 19 September 2024 at The Marine Workshops, Railway Quay, Newhaven.

The meeting ended at 7.30 pm

Councillor Christine Brett (Chair)