

Full Council

Minutes of meeting held in Court Room at Eastbourne Town Hall, Grove Road, BN21 4UG on 25 September 2024 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Candy Vaughan (Mayor).

Councillors Nick Ansell, Kathy Ballard, Margaret Bannister, Colin Belsey, Daniel Butcher, Penny di Cara, Ali Dehdashty, Peter Diplock, Christina Ewbank, Nigel Goodyear, Stephen Holt, Jane Lamb, Jim Murray, Teri Sayers-Cooper, Kshama Shore, Alan Shuttleworth, David Small, Robert Smart, Colin Swansborough and Jenny Williams.

Officers in attendance:

Robert Cottrill (Chief Executive), Simon Russell (Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer), Sarah Lawrence (Committee Team Manager), Kate Slattery (Head of Legal Services), Steven Houchin (Deputy Chief Finance Officer) and Ian Fitzpatrick (Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning).

18 Minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2024

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 22 May 2024 were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

19 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 (please see note at end of agenda).

Councillor Ewbank declared a personal interest in agenda Item 7a (Treasury Management Annual Report 2023-24), as an employee of EDEAL, which received funds from the UK government via the UK shared prosperity fund, but on a not for profit basis, to fund local businesses.

Councillor Bannister and Councillor Williams declared personal interests in Agenda Item 7b (Flexible use of capital receipts strategy), as trustees of the Towner.

Councillor Holt declared a personal interest as an employee of BID, in relation to Agenda 8c (Securing the future of Airbourne for Eastbourne's Economy and Community), which had been a sponsor for Airbourne in the past.

20 Mayor's announcements.

The Council received a list of all the mayoral engagements carried out since the last Full Council meeting.

The Mayor highlighted in particular the Armed Forces Day, the visit of PS Waverley and the Vincent Van Gough musical, and advised that the two

mayor's charities for last year had each received £6,800.

Juliet Olsworth-Peter, Deputy Lord Lieutenant of East Sussex, had written to the Mayor inviting Councillors to consider nominating voluntary groups in our community for a Kings Award for Voluntary Service. Nominations were invited by 1 December and further information was available on the Councillor Hub and from democratic services.

21 Notification of apologies for absence.

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Collins, Mayes, Macted, Morris, Parker and Rodohan.

22 Public right of address.

There were four public speakers who had registered to speak on Agenda Item 8a 'Motion - Provision of Public Toilets', and the Mayor advised that she had used her discretion to allow for more than one public speaker per item. They were:

- Denis Scard (Chair of the Meads Community Association)
- Catherine Clifford (Eastbourne Hospitality Association and hotelier for the Lansdowne Hotel)
- Gaynor Sedgwick (Friends of Eastbourne Seafront)
- Mark Holland (local hotelier and speaking on behalf of the B&Bs east of the Pier).

The Mayor indicated that she would invite the speakers to come forward to speak at the start of the item, and they would have 3 minutes each.

23 Order of business.

In order to prioritise the items with the most public speakers and attendees, the Mayor took agenda Item 8a (Motion on Provision of Public Toilets) first, with all other items considered in the order set out in the agenda.

24 Motion - Provision of Toilets

Councillor Lamb moved and Councillor Goodyear seconded the following motion, as set out on the agenda:

“The Council resolves that:

We are gravely concerned by the potential cuts to the provision of toilets being considered by the Cabinet and urge the Cabinet to seek alternatives.”

Councillor Swansborough moved and Councillor Murray seconded an alternative motion as follows:

'We acknowledge the concerns of residents over the provision of toilets being considered by the Cabinet.

The consultation currently seeks the views of residents, businesses, stakeholders and visitors so that Cabinet can make a future decision with an intention to protect the provision of toilets, including using the best examples of other authorities with the aim to:

- Protect the overall level of public convenience provision in the town,
- Make the best use of council resources,
- Increase the quality of provision, and
- Improve the resilience of the public conveniences in managing anti-social behaviour and vandalism.

The Council requests that the Cabinet considers alternatives as part of the consultation process.'

The Council then heard from the following public speakers:

- Denis Scard (Chair of the Meads Community Association) asked for the consultation on toilets closures to be paused until more information was available on those participating in the community scheme. He expressed concerns that the Leader had stated at Cabinet that any vandalised would stay closed even during the consultation period, and urged the Council to look at options around funding from Community Infrastructure Levy.
- Catherine Clifford (Eastbourne Hospitality Association and hotelier for the Lansdowne Hotel) spoke of how vital public facilities were to the success of the town and its tourism, and concern that no business providing toilets could cope with the volume of people visiting the seafront.
- Gaynor Sedgwick (Friends of Eastbourne Seafront) advised that she understood the need for the Council to make savings, but that cutting the provision of toilets and not repairing those vandalised was a cut too far, and that many people would stay away. She reported on concerns expressed by the elderly, those with medical conditions, and those who were homeless of the closure of public facilities.
- Mark Holland (local hotelier and speaking on behalf of the B&Bs east of the Pier) and advised that even whilst the Council is making cuts, designating public toilets as non-essential was the wrong choice and that access was a basic human right. He believed that closure of most of the toilets on the seafront would cause significant issues and asked that at the very least the pier toilets remain open whether by the Council or another suitable operator.

The Council then debated the motion and the amendment together. Councillors thanked members of the public for attending and speaking on this matter.

During the debate, concerns were raised that cutting the toilet provision would have public health, inclusion, tourism, hospitality and basic human respect

implications and would impact those most vulnerable in the community. Other Councillors advised that the purpose of the consultation was to hear views of residents, businesses, stakeholders and visitors, and to look at ideas of how toilets could be provided for the public and maintained, whilst making the best use of Council resources.

In responding to the public speakers in particular, Councillor Holt corrected his statement at Cabinet and confirmed that not all toilets vandalised during the consultation period would automatically stay closed, but that they would be considered on a case by case basis, depending on if it was economically feasible to repair them. He advised that the Council would look into the rules around the Community Infrastructure Levy and see if it could be used for this purpose, alongside other suggestions and alternatives raised as part of the consultation.

As part of summing up, Councillor Lamb indicated that she would be willing to incorporate into her motion the proposed alternative, as she felt that this did look at options for continued provision. Approval to merge the motion and amendment was given by the seconder to the motion and the proposer and seconder of the amendment.

The merged motion was then put to a vote and carried unanimously.

Resolved (Unanimously)-

“We are gravely concerned by the potential cuts to the provision of toilets being considered by the Cabinet, and we acknowledge the concerns of residents over the provision of toilets.

The consultation currently seeks the views of residents, businesses, stakeholders and visitors so that Cabinet can make a future decision with an intention to protect the provision of toilets, including using the best examples of other authorities with the aim to:

- Protect the overall level of public convenience provision in the town,
- make the best use of council resources,
- increase the quality of provision, and
- improve the resilience of the public conveniences in managing anti-social behaviour and vandalism.

The Council requests and urges the Cabinet considers alternatives as part of the consultation process.’

25 Matters referred from Cabinet or other council bodies.

25a Treasury Management Annual Report 2023-2024

Councillor Butcher move and Councillor Holt seconded the recommendation referred from the meeting of Cabinet held on 19 July 2023, in support of the approval of the Annual Treasury Management Report 2023/24. The referral document from Cabinet and the report to Cabinet were considered.

The report and the wider issues related to it were debated fully by the Council. Issues raised during the debate included the difficult position of the economy for council finance, the high costs of borrowing, the reprofiling of debt to move to short-term borrowing until interest rates reduced, the impact of the homelessness crisis, and lack of funding for Councils in general, set against the Council's investment into council housing. Alternative views were expressed raising questions about financial management, public reporting, the level of debt, and choices on investments.

The recommendations in the report were put to a vote and approved.

RESOLVED (by 13 votes to 8):

(1) To approve the Annual Treasury Management report 2023/24 for publication (attached as Annex 1 in the Council agenda); and

(2) To approve the 2023/24 Prudential and Treasury Indicators included in the report.

25b Flexible use of capital receipts strategy

Councillor Holt moved and Councillor Butcher seconded the recommendation referred from the meeting of Cabinet held on 19 July 2023, in support of a policy for the flexible use of capital receipts. It was highlighted that this was a technical report, and the policy would enable the Council to use income from the sale of certain assets to fund the short-term revenue costs that support transformation, invest-to-save and efficiency projects in order to provide revenue savings in the future. It was advised that any Council wishing to use this provision had to submit to the Secretary of State a Flexible Use of Capital Receipts Strategy setting out how the provision would be applied during the financial year, and this was the purpose of the report.

The report and proposed 'Policy for flexible use of capital receipts' was discussed in full by the Council and then put to a vote.

RESOLVED (unanimously):

To adopt the new strategy for flexible use of capital receipts, as appended to the Cabinet report (and attached as Annex 1 to the report to the Council).

26 Motions.

26a Motion - Pension Credit

Councillor Ansell moved and Councillor Shore seconded the following motion, as set out on the agenda:

"The Council resolves that:

This Council is most concerned over the recent announcement by the Labour Government to end universal winter fuel payments and restrict eligibility to only those in receipt of Pension Credit or other benefits.

While some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter fuel allowance may not require it. Council is deeply concerned that there are a significant

number of pensioners in Eastbourne who are just above the cut off mark and who will lose their winter payments

Only those receiving a pension of less than £218.15 a week (or £332.95 a week for couples) are eligible for pension credits. This is significantly lower than the living wage rate.

Pension credit is a top up worth £4000. As well as a cash top up to state pension it also acts as a passport to other benefits such as help with housing costs, council tax reduction schemes, heating bills and now, winter fuel payment.

Council is therefore, concerned by the low take up of pension credit with only 63% of those eligible nationwide receiving them.

In Eastbourne, DWP analysis in 2022 showed that although about 3,000 residents were claiming pension credit, around 25% of people who could claim did not do so.

Council recognises the role we have to play to increase awareness of benefits such as Pension Credit to ensure people are aware of the support they are entitled to.

Council also recognises that in 2022 in response to the cost of living crisis, the Council, in conjunction with MP Caroline Ansell, ran a successful campaign to increase the uptake of pension credit.

Council further notes that the Energy Price Cap is due to rise by 10% in October, which combined by the removal of Winter Fuel Payments will push even more local pensioners into fuel poverty.

Council resolves to:

- Instruct the relevant officers to repeat the exercise and commence a significant awareness campaign to encourage uptake of pension credit using in person workshops.
- Encourage local efforts to increase uptake of pension credit through partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all pensioners in Eastbourne are supported in claiming their entitlement.”

Councillor Holt moved and Councillor Diplock seconded the following amendment:

Motion as per agenda (first seven paragraphs) and then the following amended wording:

“Council also recognises that in 2022 in response to the cost of living crisis, the Council, in conjunction **with the** then MP Caroline Ansell, ran a successful campaign to increase the uptake of pension credit.

Council notes that the current MP Josh Babarinde has voted twice against the changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance.

Council further notes that the Energy Price Cap is due to rise by 10% in

October, which combined by the removal of Winter Fuel Payments will push even more local pensioners into fuel poverty.

Council resolves to:

- **Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for the policy on linking Winter Fuel Payments to Pension Credit receipt to be immediately paused and introduce a new threshold to determine eligibility for Winter Fuel Payments.**
- **Call on the National Government to provide funding to support an awareness campaign to increase the pension credit provision.**
- **Work with community groups, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Age Concern Eastbourne to provide a pension workshop to encourage uptake of pension credit.**
- Encourage local efforts to increase uptake of pension credit through partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all pensioners in Eastbourne are supported in claiming their entitlement.”

The Council then debated the motion and the amendment together. It was noted that a countywide campaign would begin at the end of October inviting those entitled to pension credit to apply to the DWP, and that the Citizens Advice Bureau and Age UK would be available to assist with applications. The Leader confirmed that it was not appropriate for the Council to lead on the process, but the Town Hall could be used as a venue for events being led by the relevant organisations.

Councillor Ansell summed up, before the Council moved to a vote, and welcomed the support from Councillors to encourage the take up of pension credit.

The amended motion was then put to a vote and carried.

Resolved (unanimously) -

The Council resolves that:

This Council is most concerned over the recent announcement by the Labour Government to end universal winter fuel payments and restrict eligibility to only those in receipt of Pension Credit or other benefits.

While some pensioners currently in receipt of the Winter fuel allowance may not require it. Council is deeply concerned that there are a significant number of pensioners in Eastbourne who are just above the cut off mark and who will lose their winter payments

Only those receiving a pension of less than £218.15 a week (or £332.95 a week for couples) are eligible for pension credits. This is significantly lower than the living wage rate.

Pension credit is a top up worth £4000. As well as a cash top up to state pension it also acts as a passport to other benefits such as help with housing costs, council tax reduction schemes, heating bills and now, winter fuel

payment.

Council is therefore, concerned by the low take up of pension credit with only 63% of those eligible nationwide receiving them.

Council also recognises that in 2022 in response to the cost of living crisis, the Council, in conjunction with the then MP Caroline Ansell, ran a successful campaign to increase the uptake of pension credit.

Council notes that the current MP Josh Babarinde has voted twice against the changes to the Winter Fuel Allowance.

Council further notes that the Energy Price Cap is due to rise by 10% in October, which combined by the removal of Winter Fuel Payments will push even more local pensioners into fuel poverty.

Council resolves to:

- Instruct the Leader of the Council to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for the policy on linking Winter Fuel Payments to Pension Credit receipt to be immediately paused and introduce a new threshold to determine eligibility for Winter Fuel Payments.
- Call on the national Government to provide funding to support an awareness campaign to increase the pension credit provision.
- Work with community groups, such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Age Concern Eastbourne to provide a pension workshop to encourage uptake of pension credit.
- Encourage local efforts to increase uptake of pension credit through partnerships with local charities and community organisations to ensure that all pensioners in Eastbourne are supported in claiming their entitlement.

26b Motion - Securing the Future of Airbourne for Eastbourne's Economy and Community

Councillor Small moved and Councillor di Cara seconded the following motion, as set out on the agenda:

"This Council notes that:

- Airbourne has been a cornerstone of the town's summer events program for 30 years.
- According to the Council's own analysis, Airbourne carries a £27 million benefit to the local economy and has returned a small profit to the Council in recent years, along with raising substantial sums for local charities.
- Airbourne is crucial for local businesses, particularly in the hospitality sector, filling hotels and restaurants and bringing footfall to the town centre.
- The current practice of delaying confirmation of the event until financial analysis of the previous year is complete creates uncertainty for businesses, potential sponsors, exhibitors, and display teams.

This Council further notes that:

- Long-term planning is essential for securing sponsorships, booking

high-quality displays, and maximising the economic benefits of the event.

- The uncertainty surrounding the event's future each year may be limiting its potential growth and success.

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

1. Commit in principle to hosting Airbourne 2025
2. Direct officers to begin immediate work on planning for Airbourne 2025, including exploring sponsorship opportunities, booking displays, and engaging with local businesses.
3. Task the relevant project board with exploring and reporting back on potential avenues to secure the event financially in the event it may make a small loss, considering options including but not limited to: a) Exploring increased sponsorship opportunities b) Exploring ways to secure additional backing from Eastbourne's business sector
4. Commit to a review of the Airbourne planning process with the aim of establishing a multi-year commitment to the event, subject to annual safety and financial reviews."

Councillor Bannister moved and Councillor Diplock seconded the following amendment:

Retain the first section:

"This Council notes that:

- Airbourne has been a cornerstone of the town's summer events program for 30 years.
- According to the Council's own analysis, Airbourne carries a £27 million benefit to the local economy and has returned a small profit to the Council in recent years, along with raising substantial sums for local charities.
- Airbourne is crucial for local businesses, particularly in the hospitality sector, filling hotels and restaurants and bringing footfall to the town centre.

Delete the remainder of the motion and replace with:

- Airbourne has a social value for many families and residents who see it as a highlight of their summer.

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

In view of the current financial difficulties facing Local Authorities, commit, in principle, to hosting Airbourne 2025 dependent upon the financial outturn for this year."

The Council then debated the motion and the amendment together. Councillors across the Council spoke in support of Airbourne, and the benefit to the town was recognised, but there was a difference of opinion as to whether it was possible to commit to funding any costs, at this point or not.

Councillor Small summed up, before the Council moved to a vote.

The amended motion was then put to a vote and carried unanimously.

Resolved (14 for, 6 against and 1 abstention):“This Council notes that:

- Airbourne has been a cornerstone of the town's summer events program for 30 years.
- According to the Council's own analysis, Airbourne carries a £27 million benefit to the local economy and has returned a small profit to the Council in recent years, along with raising substantial sums for local charities.
- Airbourne is crucial for local businesses, particularly in the hospitality sector, filling hotels and restaurants and bringing footfall to the town centre.
- Airbourne has a social value for many families and residents who see it as a highlight of their summer.

Therefore, this Council resolves to:

In view of the current financial difficulties facing Local Authorities, commit, in principle, to hosting Airbourne 2025 dependent upon the financial outturn for this year.

27 Discussion on minutes of council bodies.

The minutes of the following Council bodies were submitted to the meeting for information:

Scrutiny Committee – 15 July and 16 September 2024
Cabinet – 17 July 2024, 12 June 2024, 18 September 2024
Planning Committee – 23 July 2024, 20 August 2024
Audit and Governance Committee – 18 July 2024

No items were called for discussion.

Councillor Holt moved and Councillor Bannister seconded acceptance of the minutes.

RESOLVED (unanimously) – That the minutes be accepted.

28 Date of Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was scheduled to be held on 20 November 2024 at 6 pm.

The meeting ended at 8.42 pm

Councillor Candy Vaughan (Mayor)