

Cabinet

Minutes of meeting held in Court Room at Eastbourne Town Hall, Grove Road, BN21 4UG on 13 November 2024 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Stephen Holt (Chair).

Councillors Margaret Bannister (Deputy-Chair), Jim Murray and Colin Swansborough.

Officers in attendance:

Robert Cottrill (Chief Executive), Homira Javadi (Director of Finance and Performance (Section 151 Officer)), Ian Fitzpatrick (Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning), Becky Cooke (Director of Tourism, Culture and Organisational Development), Simon Russell (Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer), Kate Slattery (Head of Legal Services), Lee Banner (Assistant Director, Neighbourhood and Transformation), Jane Goodall (Environment Lead), Jo Harper (Head of Business Planning and Performance), Steven Houchin (Deputy Chief Finance Officer), Lynn Ingram (Interim Head of Financial Planning) and Sara Taylor (Regeneration Officer).

Also in attendance:

Councillor Nick Ansell (Shadow Cabinet member), Councillor Ali Dehdashty, Councillor Penny di Cara (Opposition Deputy Leader), Councillor Jane Lamb (Shadow Cabinet member), Councillor Kshama Shore OBE (Shadow Cabinet member and Chair of Scrutiny Committee), Councillor David Small (Shadow Cabinet member) and Councillor Robert Smart (Opposition Leader).

27 Minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 September 2024 were submitted and approved and the Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

28 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were reported from Councillors Butcher, Diplock and Williams.

29 Declaration of members' interests

Councillor Holt declared a personal and prejudicial interest to agenda item 7 (Strategic Finance Programme), solely in relation to proposed car parking charges, as his employer (Your Eastbourne BID) were intending to submit a view on this topic. Councillor Holt chaired the meeting for the agenda item for all aspects not related to car parking charges. He withdrew from the meeting and Councillor Bannister chaired for Cabinet discussion and decision on car parking charges.

30 Strategic Finance Programme

The Cabinet considered the report of the Chief Executive, recommending that it agreed savings proposals to address the exceptional financial challenges currently being experienced by the council.

Following the last Cabinet meeting, an extensive consultation exercise was undertaken over a six-week period between 19 September and 31 October. Full details of that consultation was detailed in the report. Appendix 3 to the report also set out the equality and fairness analysis undertaken for each proposal.

Following the consultation, adjustments had been made to the proposals, considering the feedback received, and full details of the savings proposals were set out in the report. A recommended savings plan was detailed at Appendix 2 to the report.

Gaynor Sedgwick (Friends of Eastbourne Seafront), addressed the Cabinet on this item. She commented on the 'Save our Toilets' Campaign undertaken, following the last Cabinet meeting. She reiterated the adverse impact of public convenience closures on businesses, residents and the tourist offer of the town. She was encouraged that there was confidence that seafront toilets would remain open following the consultation, however sought reassurance that Fisherman's Green and Harbour Reach public conveniences would be included in this. Thanks were expressed to officers for their work in finding cost saving solutions, in order to preserve the opening of public conveniences.

Dennis Scard (Meads Community Association), addressed the Cabinet on this item. He requested that the Council postpone the closure of any public conveniences until agreements had been finalised, that detailed businesses that had signed up to the community toilet scheme, its location and hours of operation. He referenced the equality and fairness analysis undertaken and adverse impact that closure of public conveniences would cause.

Nassiba Chikh (Nasafe), addressed the Cabinet on this item. She commented on the concerns raised regarding public convenience closures and its impact on businesses, residents and the tourist offer of the town. She also queried whether the community toilet scheme would incorporate council buildings such as the Town Hall and Theatres. She requested that the council commit to re-open and maintain its public conveniences.

Visiting member, Councillor Smart, addressed the Cabinet on this item. He referenced the savings plan, detailed at Appendix 2 and asked what the annual budget of street cleansing was and a description of savings at Devonshire Park theatres for 24/25. He requested that Cabinet keep public conveniences open whilst satisfactory solutions were found. He added that introducing a small charge could lead to revenue outweighing operational costs. He concluded by referencing proposals around the Sovereign Centre and requested a business plan for the building going forward.

Visiting member, Councillor Shore, addressed the Cabinet on this item. In addressing the proposed savings, she referenced section 1.3 of the report and suggested that council resources should be provided to prioritise immediate council tax/business rate collection to improve the council's financial position. In referencing proposals on the Sovereign Centre, alternative options considered was queried. She concluded by referencing street cleansing and proposed changes to customer service and asked if the financial position improved, whether any of the proposed measures would be reversed.

Visiting member, Councillor Small, addressed the Cabinet on this item around its financial management. He asked at what point, after setting a balanced budget did the Council identify a deficit and require in year saving cuts.

In response to points raised by members of the public, Councillor Holt referenced the work with partners in creating a sustainable solution in relation to the provision of public conveniences. In addressing the public conveniences, Councillor Holt confirmed that a business case had been developed for the Pier, Bandstand and Holywell to continue operation. Negotiations were ongoing with potential operators for the other public conveniences around the town referenced. For those public conveniences currently in negotiations, the council would assess on a case-by-case basis as to whether they would close from 1 December 2024, if no agreement had been reached. He also confirmed that the community toilet scheme would include council buildings such as Eastbourne Town Hall, Congress Theatre and the Towner.

In response to points raised by visiting members, Councillor Holt referenced the volatility of business rate income, because of government revaluation of businesses, which impacted on the amount that the council could collect. In addressing the debt position of the council, Councillor Holt stated that historical borrowing had been required to drive investment and regeneration for the town given the baseline spending power of the authority. Managing the council's debt position was important and part of the measures outlined would contribute to reducing that figure. The council set a balanced budget in February 2024 but were aware that savings would be required during the year but ongoing pressures, particularly around homelessness, had led to an unsustainable position.

Addressing the Sovereign Centre and changes required due to the infrastructure and high running costs of the centre, it was confirmed that a range of swimming provisions including swimming lessons, lane swimming and leisure activities would continue to be maintained through use of the Gala Pool.

The Chief Finance Officer addressed the Cabinet and reported on the council's legal requirement with regards to setting a balanced budget, the council's overall financial position including borrowing and asset management, implications of not delivering the required savings and outlined the section 114 process and its impact on the authority and Borough.

The Chief Executive presented the report to Cabinet and detailed the

proposals, as set out in the report. He updated Cabinet on developments since the publication of the report with regards to public conveniences. The Chief Executive confirmed that in addition to the Pier, Bandstand and Holywell, the council was in advance negotiations with new operators to take on seven of the remaining nine council toilet blocks. Of the two remaining, one was currently in negotiations and the one block where negotiations were not currently progressing was Seaside Recreation Ground. Discussions were ongoing with potential operators for the currently closed facilities in Hyde Gardens and Gildredge Park, with the aim to re-open before the end of the year. Agreements had also been secured with 19 local organisations and businesses to be part of the community toilet scheme, with the potential for an additional 14.

In referencing questions from Councillor Smart, the Chief Executive confirmed that the savings proposed for street cleansing contributed around 10% of the overall budget.

Cabinet discussed the report and commended officers for their hard work in identifying solutions to address the significant financial challenges and also expressed thanks to all that had engaged in the consultation process.

Councillor Holt, chaired the meeting during the item for all discussions and decisions on matters not concerning car parking charges. Due to his personal and prejudicial interest, as detailed at minute 29, he withdrew from the room and the meeting was chaired by Councillor Bannister for the discussion and decision relating to car parking charges. A full description of the Cabinet resolutions were detailed below.

Resolved (Key decision):

- (1) To note the results of the consultation (Appendix 1) and the Equality and Fairness Analysis (Appendix 3)
- (2) To grant delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to progress the savings proposals as set out in the report.
- (3) To agree the budget reductions, as set out in the savings plan (Appendix 2).
- (4) To agree the new fees and charges policy (Appendix 4).
- (5) To agree the changes to garden waste charges and crematorium charges (paragraph 4.2 of the report and Appendix 5).

Reason for decisions:

Following the Assurance Review undertaken in July/August 2024, and in light of the exceptional financial challenges being faced by the council, there is a need to agree a savings plan, following recent consultation with residents,

businesses and visitors.

31 The Super National Nature Reserve

The Cabinet considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning, introducing the Seaford to Eastbourne Super National Nature Reserve, to be known as The Seven Sisters National Nature Reserve. Across 1,200 ha of the iconic land and seascape of the South Downs, the project builds on initial research into chalk habitats providing clean and plentiful water and aims to join up efforts in nature conservation with partners including South East Water, the South Downs National Park, Seaford Town Council and others to improve, restore and connect the landscape to benefit wildlife, water and people.

The report detailed that there were no financial implications arising from the contents of the report.

Visiting member, Councillor Shore, addressed the Cabinet on this item. She welcomed the initiatives as set out in the report.

Resolved (Key decision):

(1) To note and welcome the emergence of the Super National Nature Reserve proposal of Natural England which involves the extension of Lullington Heath National Nature Reserve.

(2) To authorise the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning to:

(a) apply to Natural England to become an Approved Body under section 35 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; and

(b) seek a declaration from Natural England that the land at Eastbourne Downland currently managed in-house by the Council also be designated as a National Nature Reserve (NNR) and becomes part of the Seven Sisters National Nature Reserve.

Reason for decisions:

This nature recovery project will enrich our landscapes for wildlife, develop resilience to climate change, store carbon and help to clean up air and water. It will help restore habitats, allowing many species of pollinators, small animals and plants to spread and thrive by connected well-managed land. It will also enhance the opportunities people have to make the most of the wellbeing benefits that come with connecting to the natural world.

32 Local Employment and Training Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

The Cabinet considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning, asking it to review representations from an 8-week consultation period and recommend adoption of the Local Employment and Training Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to Full Council.

Following the adoption of the Local Employment and Training Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in November 2016, Eastbourne Borough Council had refreshed the policy to reflect adaptations in approach based on implementation of the policy since April 2013.

Visiting member, Councillor Di Cara, addressed the Cabinet on the item. She welcomed the inclusion of the East Sussex Economic Prosperity Strategy and reference to Skills East Sussex. Questions were posed on whether Skills East Sussex were included as part of the collaboration with ESCC Employability & Skills team, whether sectors associated with developments (e.g. back-office staff) were included and whether there were any additional challenges in relation to the monitoring of section 106 agreements, arising from the refreshed SPD. In presenting the report, the Regeneration Officer responded to questions raised by Councillor Di Cara.

Resolved (Key decision):

(1) To review representations and comments following an 8-week consultation period.

Recommended to Full Council (Budget and policy framework):

(2) To formally recommend adoption of the Local Employment and Training Supplementary Planning Document to Full Council.

Reason for decisions:

A refresh of policy was required to reflect changes in employment and training proposals associated with major developments within the Borough of Eastbourne.

The meeting ended at 7.39 pm

Councillor Stephen Holt (Chair)