

## **Cabinet**

**Minutes of meeting held in Court Room at Eastbourne Town Hall, Grove Road, BN21 4UG on 11 December 2024 at 6.00 pm.**

### **Present:**

Councillor Stephen Holt (Chair).

Councillors Margaret Bannister (Deputy-Chair), Daniel Butcher, Peter Diplock, Colin Swansborough and Jenny Williams.

### **Officers in attendance:**

Robert Cottrill (Chief Executive), 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), Luke Dreeling (Performance Lead), Jo Harper (Head of Business Planning and Performance), Lynn Ingram (Interim Head of Financial Planning), Emma Kemp (Senior Planning Policy Officer), Steven Houchin (Deputy Chief Finance Officer), Kate Richardson (Sustainability Lead) and Jennifer Norman (Committee Officer).

### **Also in attendance:**

Councillor Nick Ansell (Shadow Cabinet member), Councillor Penny di Cara (Opposition Deputy Leader), Councillor Nigel Goodyear (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).

### **33 Minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2024**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 November 2024 were submitted and approved and the Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

### **34 Apologies for absence**

An apology for absence was reported from Councillor Murray.

### **35 Declaration of members' interests**

None were declared.

### **36 Questions by members of the public**

The Cabinet received a written question from Rob Sier, in relation to internal catering at the council and transition to plant-based food. The written question was verbally responded to at the meeting by Councillor Holt, in the absence of Councillor Murray.

### 37 Urgent items of business

The Cabinet considered the recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee, following its meeting on 9 December 2024. The Chair of Cabinet was of the opinion this should be considered as a matter of urgency by reason of special circumstances as defined in Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972.

The Cabinet, at its meeting on 13 November 2024, made decisions under the Strategic Finance Programme agenda item, in relation to the Sovereign Centre.

Following debate on a motion at a Full Council meeting on 20 November 2024, Scrutiny Committee, in its advisory capacity, were asked to explore all further options to keep the existing facilities of the Sovereign Leisure Centre open.

Following the meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet were asked to consider the following recommendations:

- 1) The Scrutiny Committee recognises the strength of feeling and support of the Sovereign Centre and thanks the public for their support and contributions.**
- 2) The Scrutiny Committee recognises that the Council is fully committed to keeping the Sovereign Centre open and this commitment is supported.**
- 3) The Scrutiny Committee understands the financial challenges facing the Council, due to a combination of the condition of an aging building, which will continue to require significant maintenance costs, coupled with the wider financial pressures which are faced by some councils.**
- 4) The Scrutiny Committee recognises the opportunity to work with the wider community to explore new options to promote swimming, health and leisure across Eastbourne and recommends the formation of an Eastbourne Strategic Health and Leisure Advisory Group, to consult widely and explore new ideas and potential funding opportunities to invest in the Centre and in leisure across the town.**
- 5) The Scrutiny Committee recognises that the Council has continued to spend significantly on necessary works at the Sovereign Centre and is committed to spending on further priority works at the Centre.**
- 6) The Scrutiny Committee supports the modernisation of the Sovereign Centre to provide a wider range of activities and additional income streams.**

Visiting member, Councillor Smart addressed the Cabinet on this item. He

referenced discussions made at the Scrutiny Committee, including comments made by external public speakers. He enquired as to the business plan for the current arrangements with Wave Leisure and queried why the financial position of the Centre had deteriorated since July 2023, where a nil net cost position was reported. He concluded by stating that there was a lack of clear financial information to justify the measures taken. He recommended that all pools should be kept open, and advice should be taken from an independent advisor and potential market testing take place whilst medium and long term solutions were developed.

Visiting member, Councillor Small addressed the Cabinet on this item and commented on the negative impact on the town of the Cabinet's decision on the Sovereign Centre. He referenced discussions at the Scrutiny Committee and lack of clarity and analysis of the financial figures and savings target concerning the Centre. He then enquired on action taken by the Council to address losses made by the Centre in preceding years and suggested that a business plan should have been developed. He added that other operators outside of Wave Leisure should have been sought and that closing the Training Pool risked the income received by the Centre and that certain activities weren't easily transferable to the Gala Pool. He concluded that savings in other areas of the Council should have been prioritised over cuts to the Sovereign Centre.

Visiting member, Councillor Di Cara addressed the Cabinet on this item. She commented that Scrutiny Committee did not have enough time to look at the Cabinet decision around the Sovereign Centre and that a Task Group would have been beneficial to the process.

Visiting member, Councillor Shore addressed the Cabinet on this item. She commented on the Cabinet report considered in July 2023, in relation to the proposed future operation and interim management of the Sovereign Centre and lack of detailed arrangements, following that decision. She reiterated comments made on the financial clarity and detail concerning the Centre and sought clarity on the consultation process. She referenced discussions at Scrutiny Committee and the negative impact of proposals. She concluded by recommending a pause of the decision and that further financial information should be sought, along with independent analysis.

In response to points raised by visiting members, Councillor Holt acknowledged the concerns that had been raised and stated that the decision protected the Centre in the short term, whilst a long-term plan could be developed. Without the significant savings the council would be at risk of being unable to set a balanced budget and risk the potential complete closure of all discretionary services, including the entire Sovereign Centre. Every swimming lesson would be rescheduled and continue in the Gala Pool. A consultation would take place for dry side activities to replace the two closed pools.

The Chief Executive commented on market testing, the age of the building and projections for repairs and maintenance, which would represent a significant asset cost to the Council. The Chief Executive also detailed the consultation

process for proposals around the Sovereign Centre, prior to the decision of Cabinet in November.

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning commented on the interim short-term arrangements with Wave Leisure.

Following discussion, the Cabinet thanked Scrutiny Committee for its commentary and unanimously agreed to the recommendation for the formation of an Eastbourne Strategic Health and Leisure Advisory Group.

**Resolved (Non-key decision):**

To accept the approved recommendations from Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 9 December 2024.

**Reason for decision:**

Cabinet was asked to consider the recommendations from Scrutiny Committee.

**38 Order of business**

The Chair agreed to alter the order of business to consider agenda item 8 (Eastbourne Carbon Neutral 2030: Annual Progress Report) first, due to a request to speak on the item by a member of the public.

**39 Eastbourne Carbon Neutral 2030: Annual Progress Report**

The Cabinet considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning, noting progress to date and seek approval to publish the annual update, detailed at Appendix 1 to the report.

Serena Stallard, member of the public, addressed the Cabinet on this item. She commented on the scrutiny of the paper and referenced the climate effect of manufacturing and transporting electric vehicles and solar panels and sustainability of using HVO generators, particularly in its reference to Airbourne. She concluded by asking why the Council's support for the Climate and Nature Bill was not consulted on. In response, Councillor Holt advised that a written response to the question would be provided after the meeting.

**Resolved (Key decision):**

(1) To approve the Eastbourne Carbon Neutral 2030 Annual update as attached at Appendix 1 to the report, for publication on the council's website

(2) To note progress to date on the strategy and action plan as contained within Appendix 1 to the report.

**Reason for decisions:**

To progress towards the aim of achieving Eastbourne Carbon Neutral 2030 as

resolved in July 2019.

**40 Recommendations for spending of the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL)**

The Cabinet considered the report of the Chief Executive, seeking its approval to release Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) funds, as recommended by the CIL Advisory Board, to help deliver infrastructure projects in the borough.

Among the projects proposed for the awarding of funds were three community centres which would benefit from renovations, the creation of an access ramp and installation of a new boiler, alongside the refurbishment of two public toilets.

**Resolved (Key decision):**

To agree the release of funds from the NCIL pot, as recommended by the CIL Advisory Board.

**Reason for decision:**

To help deliver the right level of infrastructure to support the delivery of community infrastructure.

**41 Corporate performance - quarter 2 - 2024/25**

The Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Finance and Performance, considering the council's progress and performance in respect of service areas for the second quarter of the year (July-September 2024), as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report.

For the quarter, of the Council's 32 performance indicators: 11 achieved its target, 3 were slightly below target, 6 were below target, 9 were data only points and 3 had data unavailable. 15 positive trends and 13 negative trends were detailed from Quarter 1 to Quarter 2.

Visiting member, Councillor Shore, addressed the Cabinet on this item. She thanked officers for their work on developing benchmarking data and commented on performance during the quarter. In particular, she enquired on the council's current arrears position associated with council tax/business rate/overpaid housing benefit and steps taken by the Council to address it. Councillor Holt in response, advised that Audit & Governance Committee, at its meeting on 12 December 2024, would be considering a report around debt collection and the current position. Information on the time to pay arrangements would also be provided to Councillor Shore.

**Resolved (Non-key decision):**

To note progress and performance for quarter 2, 2024/25.

**Reason for decision:**

To enable Cabinet members to consider specific aspects of the Council's progress and performance.

**42 Provisional Revenue & Capital Outturn 2024/25 - Quarter 2 and Council Budget reset for 2024/25**

The Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Finance and Performance, resetting the budget for 2024/25 at the midpoint of the year, incorporating key financial risks, issues and opportunities for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and setting the basis for preparing a balanced General Fund budget for 2025/26.

Section 1.7 of the report detailed the significant action taken by the Council to tackle the challenging financial situation confirmed at Quarter 1. A budget reset was proposed, which drew upon agreements made at previous Cabinet meetings and within the original budget envelope of £20.319 million agreed by Full Council in February 2024.

**Resolved (Key decision):**

(1) To agree the revised budget for 2024/25 and associated risks.

(2) To note the revised forecast outturn position for 2024/25 and associated risks.

(3) To delegate authority to the Director of Finance and Performance and the portfolio holder for finance to apply the required budget virements to support effective management of the overall budget.

(4) To note the 2024/25 Capital Programme and forecasts.

(5) To note Appendix 1 and 2 to the report.

**Reason for decisions:**

To enable Cabinet members to consider the Council's financial performance for 2024/25.

**43 Interim Medium Term Financial Strategy 2025/26 to 2028/29**

The Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Finance and Performance, noting the interim medium term financial strategy (MTFS) for 2025/26 to 2026/27, together with the updated Capital Programme position.

The draft MTFS indicated that without intervention, a funding gap/savings requirement of £2.06m would be required to balance the budget during the period, with this figure being required by 2025/26.

**Resolved (Non-key decision):**

- (1) To note the updated MTFS forecasts and the requirement to identify additional savings for the period 2025/26 to 2028/29.
- (2) To note that this forecast could change based upon government funding settlement announcements and demand for services and pressures upon the council.
- (3) To note that at this stage and considering the assumptions for contingencies a forecast £2.06m of savings are required to balance the 2025/26 budget; and
- (4) To note the planned annual review of earmarked reserves which aims to reallocate them in line with the emerging risks.

**Reason for decisions:**

To provide Cabinet with an update and early sighting of key MTFS and budgetary implications in preparation for the setting of a revenue budget and associated Council tax for the forthcoming financial year by law.

**44 Council Tax Base and Non-Domestic Rates Income for 2025/26**

The Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Finance and Performance, seeking its approval of the council tax base and net yield from Business Rate Income for 2025/26, in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

Given that the council would still need to consider and confirm its 25/25 Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS), scheduled for February 2025, it was agreed by Cabinet to accept the Council Tax Base based on the current CTRS scheme, in addition to the proposed 100% CTRS scheme. Conversations were ongoing between the Council and other stakeholders, as part of the process.

**Resolved (Key decision):**

- (1) To agree the provisional Council Tax Base for 2025/26 of 36,019.8 based on the councils existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
- (2) To agree the provisional Council Tax Base for 2025/26 of 35,581.3 based on the councils proposed 100% Council Tax Reduction Scheme (a reduction equivalent to 438.6 Band D properties compared to 24/25 figures).
- (3) To agree that the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Financial Services, determine the final amounts for the Council Tax Base for 2025/26.
- (4) To agree that the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio

Holder for Finance, determine net yield from Business Rate income for 2025/26.

**Reason for decisions:**

Cabinet is required to approve the tax base which will be used for the purposes of calculating the 2025/26 Council Tax.

The meeting ended at 8.17 pm

Councillor Stephen Holt (Chair)