

Cabinet

Minutes of meeting held in Room 209/210 on the Second Floor, The Marine Workshops, Railway Quay, Newhaven, East Sussex, BN9 0ER. on 6 February 2025 at 2.30 pm.

Present:

Councillor Zoe Nicholson (Chair).
Councillors Christine Robinson (Deputy-Chair), Johnny Denis, Wendy Maples, Emily O'Brien, Laurence O'Connor and Mark Slater.

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), Simon Russell (Head of Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer), Kate Slattery (Head of Legal Services), Katie Dawkins (Housing Needs and Standards Lead), Nadeem Din (Planning Policy - Lead), Chris Gape (PR Lead), Jo Harper (Head of Business Planning and Performance), Steven Houchin (Deputy Chief Finance Officer), Lynn Ingram (Interim Head of Financial Planning) and Jennifer Norman (Committee Officer).

Also in attendance:

Councillor Christine Brett (Chair of Policy and Performance Advisory Committee) and Councillor Stephen Gauntlett (Leader of Liberal Democrat Group; Chair of Audit and Governance Committee).

43 Minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2024

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2024 were submitted and approved and the Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

44 Apologies for absence

An apology for absence was reported from Councillor Collier.

45 Declarations of interest

Councillors Denis, Maples and Robinson declared a personal interest in agenda item 8 (Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation) as members of East Sussex County Council. They stayed in the room for the duration of the item.

46 Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation

The Cabinet considered the report of the Chief Executive, informing it of the government White Paper on Devolution and the response made to the paper

impacting on the Sussex area.

Since publication of the paper, the Secretary of State for Local Government had announced on 5 February that it would include a Sussex mayoral combined authority in its priority programme for devolution in England and had agreed a postponement of county council elections due in May.

A formal invitation had also now been sent to local leaders, asking them to work together and submit reorganisation proposals for unitary reorganisation in March 2025.

Cabinet discussed the topic, including expressing disappointment over the postponement of elections and current lack of public consultation on reshaping local government. It also commented on the risks around management of social housing at unitary level, whilst acknowledging the benefit of devolved powers coming to Sussex.

The Cabinet talked about the importance of accelerating work on its Corporate Plan priorities and leaving a strong legacy for any subsequent unitary council/s, in addition to supporting staff throughout the process.

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee (PPAC), held on 30 January 2025 considered the report and were supportive of the officer recommendation in full. Councillor Gauntlett, Leader of the Opposition addressed the Cabinet and commented on the effect of local government reorganisation on town and parish councils.

Resolved (Non-key decision):

To note the report.

Reason for decision:

The issues set out in this report are likely to have significant implications for this council alongside all other local authorities in England.

47 General Fund Revenue Budget 2025/26 and Capital Programme

The Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Finance and Performance, asking it to agree the General Fund Budget 2025/26, updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and the updated Capital Programme and Treasury Management position and make recommendations to Full Council.

The recommended budget was set within the context of continuing financial challenges for the council with the ongoing impact of the inflationary and cost-of-living pressures still keenly felt.

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee (PPAC), held on 30 January 2025 considered the report and were supportive of the officer recommendations in full. Councillor Brett, Chair of PPAC, was in attendance to report on PPAC's

discussion.

Councillor Gauntlett, Leader of the Opposition, commented positively on the budget setting process and was supportive of the officer recommendations.

Recommended to Full Council (Budget and policy framework):

- (1) The General Fund Base Budget 2025/26 and projected MTFs as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.
- (2) An increase in the Council Tax for Lewes District Council of 2.99% resulting in a gross Band D charge (including Special Expenses) of £234.99 for 2025/26.
- (3) The revised General Fund & Housing Revenue Account Capital Programme 2025/26 as set out at Appendix 3 to the report.
- (4) The rates of Fees & Charges proposed at Appendix 6 to the report, to apply from 1 April 2025 and to implement changes to statutory fees and charges for services shown within Appendix 6 as and when notified by Government.
- (5) Delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer to take account in the 2025/26 base budget of any changes to funding allocations when the Final Settlement figures are announced.
- (6) To note the Section 151 Officer's comments as outlined in the report.

Reason for decisions:

The Cabinet must recommend to Full Council the setting of a revenue budget and associated Council Tax for the forthcoming financial year by law.

48 Treasury Management Strategy, Investment Strategy, Capital Strategy and Prudential Indicators 2025/26

The Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Finance and Performance, regarding the Council's Annual Treasury Management Strategy, Capital Strategy and Investment Strategy together with the Treasury and Prudential Indicators.

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee (PPAC), held on 30 January 2025 considered the report and were supportive of the officer recommendations in full.

Recommended to Full Council (Budget and policy framework):

- (1) To approve the Treasury Management Strategy and Annual Investment Strategy for 2025/26 as set out at Appendix A to the report.
- (2) To approve the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement 2025/26 (Appendix A).

(3) To approve the Prudential and Treasury Indicators 2025/26 to 2027/28 (Appendix A).

(4) To approve the Capital Strategy 2025/26 (Appendix B).

Reason for decisions:

It is a requirement within the budget setting process for the Council to review and approve the Prudential and Treasury indicators, Treasury Strategy, Investment Strategy and Capital Strategy.

49 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Revenue Budget and Rent Setting 2025/26 and HRA Capital Programme 2024-29

The Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Finance and Performance, asking it to agree the detailed Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget proposals, rent levels and service charges for 2025/26, and the HRA Capital Programme 2024-29 and make recommendations to Full Council.

Thanks were conveyed to Debbie Twitchen, Chair of the Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD) and the collaborative work with TOLD, in working towards a balanced budget for the HRA.

Debbie Twitchen addressed the Cabinet and spoke positively on the budget allocation for damp and mould repairs and commitment to working together in enhancing priority repairs and other provisions for the forthcoming year. Thanks were expressed to officers and fellow councillors for participation in that collaboration.

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee (PPAC), held on 30 January 2025 considered the report and were supportive of the officer recommendations in full.

Recommended to Full Council (Budget and policy framework):

(1) The HRA Revenue budget for 2025/26 and revised budget for 2024/25 as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.

(2) The five-year HRA Capital Programme as set out at Appendix 2 to the report.

(3) An increase of 2.7% to social and affordable rents (including shared ownership) with effect from 7th April 2025 in line with government policy.

(4) When social rented supported accommodation properties are relet to new tenants, the applicable rent will be increased by 10% above target rent with effect from 7th April 2025 in line with government policy.

(5) When affordable rented properties are relet to new tenants, the applicable

rent is reset to the lower of 80% of market rent (inclusive of Service Charges) or Local Housing Allowance, with effect from 7th April 2025 in line with government policy.

(6) That the revised service charges as set out in paragraphs 2.4 of the report and Appendix 3 to the report are implemented with effect from 7th April 2025.

(7) An increase of 10% to Garage rents with effect from 7th April 2025.

(8) To note that £5.982m of Major Works capital expenditure profiled over 4 years between 2024/25 to 2027/28, is being 50% match funded by grant, subject to Government grant bids. The Government scheme aims to improve EPC ratings in HRA properties.

Reason for decisions:

The Cabinet must recommend to Full Council the setting of the HRA revenue and capital budget and the level of social and affordable housing rents for the forthcoming year.

50 Allocations Policy - Review of the Choice Based Lettings Model

The Cabinet considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning, seeking approval to proceed with a public consultation on a new model of allocating Council housing stock.

Thanks were expressed to officers for their work in producing the policy, that continued the authority's path towards a more prevention-based and joint-working approach to tackling homelessness in all its forms.

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee (PPAC), held on 30 January 2025 considered the report and were supportive of the officer recommendations in full. Councillor Brett, Chair of PPAC, was in attendance to report on PPAC's discussion.

Councillor Gauntlett, Leader of the Opposition and Debbie Twitchen, Chair of Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD), spoke in support of the proposals, as set out in the report.

Resolved (Key decision):

(1) To give its approval to proceed with a public consultation on a new model of allocating Council housing stock.

(2) To approve the proposed new direct-allocations model.

Reason for decisions:

To provide the local authority with greater flexibility over how and to whom to allocate our limited social housing stock, to ensure the right properties are

matched with the right applicants more quickly, and to help us manage false expectations about the availability and demand for these properties.

51 Local Development Scheme (January 2025)

The Cabinet considered the report of the Chief Executive, seeking its endorsement of the Local Development Scheme update for approval by Full Council.

A Local Development Scheme (LDS) is a requirement for every local planning authority under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended by the Localism Act 2011).

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee (PPAC), held on 30 January 2025 considered the report and were supportive of the officer recommendations in full. Councillor Brett, Chair of PPAC, was in attendance to report on PPAC's discussion.

Recommended to Full Council (Budget and policy framework):

(1) That Cabinet acknowledge the revised timetable, as set out in the updated Local Development Scheme, for the preparation of the Lewes Local Plan (i.e. for the planning authority area outside the South Downs National Park) and recommends it for approval by Full Council and resolve that it will come into effect the day after the Full Council meeting and be published on the council's website.

(2) The delegated authority is provided to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Infrastructure to make minor and presentational updates to the LDS where necessary.

Reason for decisions:

To enable the publication of the updated Local Development Scheme outlining the revised timetable for the preparation of the Lewes District Local Plan, and other planning documents as required by Section 15 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (as amended).

The meeting ended at 3.29 pm

Councillor Zoe Nicholson (Chair)