

Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of meeting held in Court Room at Eastbourne Town Hall, Grove Road, BN21 4UG on 7 February 2022 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Tony Freebody (Chair).

Councillors Steve Wallis (Deputy-Chair), Josh Babarinde, Peter Diplock, Jane Lamb, Amanda Morris and Robert Smart.

Officers in attendance: Lee Banner (Transformation Programme Manager), Philip Brown (Property Lawyer), Jane Goodall (Environment Lead), Homira Javadi (Chief Finance Officer), Oliver Jones (Lead, Housing, Homelessness & Community Safety), Ola Owolabi (Deputy Chief Finance Officer (Corporate Finance)), Leigh Palmer (Head of Planning) and Nick Peeters (Committee Officer).

Also in attendance: Chief Inspector Di Lewis (Sussex Police).

41 Minutes of the meeting held on 29 November 2021

Resolved that the minutes of the meetings held on 29 November 2021 were submitted and approved and signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

42 Apologies for absence / declaration of substitute members

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Burton.

43 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

There were none.

44 Questions by members of the public

There were none.

45 Urgent items of business

There were none.

46 Right to address the meeting/order of business

There were no requests.

47 Assurance Review

The report was presented by Homira Javadi, Chief Finance Officer. During discussion the following points were highlighted.

- Recommendations from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA), appendix 1 to the Report.
- 1.5 - the focus of debt recovery was primarily on rent arrears for existing commercial tenants. However, over the previous two years, there had also been active support for business rates, council tax and grants and loans payments, and It was recognised that the Council was now operating in a more difficult environment. At the point at which the final version of the Report had been produced, deferred (holiday payments) were still being provided to tenants. The Council was carefully monitoring any risks associated with the reprogramming of debt.
- 1.7 the work of the Council, tourism economy, and coastal protection through the Environment Agency, meant that a collaborative effort was needed to support the Seafront Strategy.
- 6.1 – the savings/efficiencies identified as ‘highways and transport’ for districts/boroughs relates to car-park income.
- The recommendations from CIPFA were based on arriving at a financially stable point and did not necessarily take into account the strategic value of the assets to Eastbourne Borough The linking of the capitalisation to the revenue shortfall was a technical accounting solution. The link was needed to provide financial resources to pay for the deficit created by the Covid pandemic. The disposal of financial assets would reduce the need for borrowing and the additional cost of borrowing, to pay for capitalisation.
- The key areas in the CIPFA recommendations would be focussed on and There was a commitment to deliver whatever was critical to provide a sustainable, financial environment.

Resolved to note the report

48 Eastbourne Public Spaces Protection (Anti-social Driving) Order 2022

Oliver Jones, Housing, Homelessness & Community Safety Lead, presented the report. Chief Inspector Di Lewis, Sussex Police, also addressed the Committee. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- The public space protection order (PSPO) could be varied during its term if displacement to other areas of the Borough was recognised. The data during and outside of the periods when the Order was being actioned would be monitored, as would its impact.
- The implementation and actioning of the order would have an impact on the Police’s resources. However, the demand on Police resources would

potentially be reduced in the future, through having the Order in place. The public were encouraged to report incidents through Operation Crackdown.

- Sussex Police already used 'engage, encourage and explain' as a model to try and change the behaviours behind the anti-social incidents, before considering enforcement. Local neighbourhood policing teams had been supported during Covid in engaging with the public and educating in areas such as the impact of vehicle noise.
- There were other areas of anti-social behaviour that impacted on the Town and any dialogue with Members who had previous experience and ideas on how to engage with those responsible for the behaviour was welcome.
- Proving a link between car users and incidents of littering was difficult and part of the process in producing the Order was the ability to legally put in place the prohibitions included in the Order and demonstrate proportionality.
- Traffic calming measures by East Sussex County Council were welcome, however, they were normally dependent on killed and seriously injured data, rather than on the number of reported incidents.
- The next stage of the implementation of the order would be public consultation and although the areas identified for its use were data led, if there were significant responses regarding other locations, this would be looked at.
- The officers in Sussex Police and the Council who had worked on the production of the Order were thanked for their work towards addressing the issue of anti-social driving and the recommendations for the implementation of the Order were warmly welcomed by the Committee.

Resolved to note the report and unanimously support the Officer recommendations to the Cabinet.

49 Eastbourne & Lewes Community Safety Partnership - Annual Report (Eastbourne)

Oliver Jones, Housing, Homelessness & Community Safety Lead, presented the report. Chief Inspector Di Lewis, Sussex Police, also addressed the Committee. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- It was recognised that it was a minority of houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) where residents displayed criminal and anti-social behaviour and that further work was needed in this area. Joint outreach work had been undertaken to provide local healthcare and support. The main issue was the high turnover of residents in HMOs which made it difficult to provide a sustainable support infrastructure. The Violence Reduction Unit had been linked into the ongoing work and had multi-agency buy-in.

- The £420,000 funding for the Safer Streets Initiative, referred to in the report, was for 2019/2020 and detail was provided in the previous year's report – detail on the outcomes of the funding were available and the impact of the spending was being monitored.
- Members agreed that further oversight by the Committee of the inspection and governance of HMOs should be undertaken and added to its work programme.

Resolved to note the report.

50 Recovery and Reset

Lee Banner, Transformation Programme Manager, presented the report. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- Future updates would provide more detail and context for the Recovery and Reset Programme savings.
- The Strategic Property Board was responsible for reviewing the business cases for proposals and if deliverable, putting the proposals forward to the Cabinet. Other than areas where commercial sensitivities prevent it from being available, Members were able to access the details of the proposals.

Resolved to note the report.

51 General Fund Revenue Budget 2022/23 and Capital Programme

Homira Javadi, Chief Finance Officer, presented the report. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- Members expressed concern over the length of the finance reports and the level of detail included. Members requested that more concise and accessible reports be made available to Members and the public in the future.
- The departmental lines detailed in the General Fund Budget were kept as they were to provide context from the previous year and allow for any variations the Budget. The starting point for the current Budget was the 2020/2021 Budget. The cost of capitalisation would be financed through capital receipts and this was reflected in the Budget provision.

Resolved to note the report.

52 Treasury Management and Prudential Indicators 2022/23, Capital Strategy & Investment Strategy

Olo Owolabi, Deputy Chief Finance Officer, presented the report. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- Table 2 of appendix E to the report provided figures for the Capital programme. Further detail and analysis on the capital receipts, capital grants and capital reserves could be provided. An analysis and more detail on the Council's 'own reserves' was also requested.
- Appendix 3 of the General Fund report detailed the Capital programme and showed the Council's level of borrowing decreasing.

Resolved to note the report.

53 Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Revenue Budget and Rent Setting 2022/23 and HRA Capital Programme 2021-25

Homira Javadi, Chief Finance Officer, presented the report. There was no discussion on the item.

Resolved to note the report.

54 Litter and Fly-tipping Reduction Strategy 2022

Jane Goodall, Environment Lead, presented the report. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- The suggestion of an action that looked at working more closely with businesses such as fast-food companies in the Borough, to tackle levels of littering at source, was welcome and would be built into the Action Plan. Education and individual responsibility were also factors to be considered.
- Concern was expressed at the levels of fixed penalty notices imposed for littering and dog fouling, and whether the income generated was ring-fenced for environmental work. Members felt that more work was needed on enforcement, particularly around dog-fouling.
- There was concern that the 'Go To' recycling bins sited on the Seafront were contaminated to a point where the contents ended up in general waste. However, it was considered that, overall, the impact of their use was a positive one.
- The fly-tipping incident in the previous summer, in the Town Centre, had been dealt with as an operational response and pre-dated the implementation of the Strategy.
- The number of incidents of fly-tipping recorded for quarter 3 had reduced from Quarter 2.
- More widespread advertising and communicating of the 'Report it' app was requested.

Resolved to note the report.

55 A Coastal Concordat for England

Leigh Palmer, Head of Planning, presented the report. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- A Member felt that the proposals and recommendations in the Report would lead to an erosion of local democracy.
- Councillor Smart proposed the following recommendation – ‘That the Scrutiny Committee does not believe that local democracy is improved by the proposal for a coastal concordat and advises against it’. The recommendation was not seconded and therefore dismissed.

Resolved to note the report.

56 Forward Plan of Decisions

The Chair, Councillor Freebody, introduced the Forward Plan of Cabinet decisions.

Resolved to note the Forward Plan of Cabinet decisions.

57 Scrutiny Work Programme

The Chair, Councillor Freebody introduced the Scrutiny Committee’s work programme.

- Members requested that the licensing of houses of multiple occupancy be added to the work programme.

Resolved to note the Committee’s work programme.

The meeting ended at 8.20 pm

Councillor Tony Freebody (Chair)