

Policy and Performance Advisory Committee

Minutes of meeting held in Council Chamber, County Hall, St Anne's Crescent, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 1UE on 21 September 2022 at 3.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Liz Boorman (Chair).

Councillors Isabelle Linington (Deputy-Chair), Robert Banks, Nancy Bikson, Roy Clay, Lynda Duhigg, Adrian Ross and Richard Turner.

Officers in attendance:

Philip Brown (Property Lawyer), Luke Dreeling (Performance Lead), Homira Javadi (Chief Finance Officer), Ola Owolabi (Deputy Chief Finance Officer - Corporate Finance), Nick Peeters (Committee Officer), Linda Farley (Head of Customer First), Bill McCafferty (Lead for Income Maximisation and Welfare) and Sarah Tye (Commercial Business Property and Development Project Manager).

21 Minutes of the previous meeting dated 29 June 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 29 June 2022 were submitted and the Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

22 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Saunders, Robinson and Brett.

23 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

24 Urgent Items

There were none.

25 Written Questions from Councillors

There were none.

26 Requested reports due for consideration by the Cabinet on 22 September 2022

All reports on the agenda were requested for consideration by the Committee.

26a Portfolio progress and performance report quarter 1 - 2022-2023

Luke Dreeling, Performance Lead, presented the report which provided an update on the Council's financial performance in Quarter 1 2021/22. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- Recruitment continued to be a challenge both nationally and sector-wide, with a low volume of applications. Recruitment events were being held and all staff vacancies were advertised on JobsGopublic. Agencies were used for permanent positions that required specific skillsets. Various social media was used to advertise vacancies and a certain amount of intelligence was returned to highlight where people were viewing vacancies. Employing staff to take messages from customers would potentially speed up the response time to calls but it would add another process for back-office staff and ultimately increase the time taken for resolving the enquiry.
- The Committee expressed concern that Members and residents were not able to access services and staff movement meant that there were not up-to-date points of contact. Concern was also expressed that this was partly due to a reduction in office-based staff. It was explained that staff were now on hybrid contracts and worked remotely the majority of time, and that this allowed applications for vacancies from a wider geographic area. Other ways for staff to work collaboratively were being looked at. It was agreed that a current list of 'points of contact' would be provided to Members, for services.
- Solution Sprint was a system put in place several years previously and was being revisited post-Covid19. Its purpose was to investigate in-depth areas of need, including business processes and IT solutions, and provide targeted resources to those areas as quickly as possible. Members and the complaints team were consulted to identify areas where the resources may be needed.
- The face-to-face customer service offering over the long-term was being reviewed. Southover House reception was open with limited staff resources. However, staffing levels at Saxon House, Newhaven was determined by the Fire and Rescue Service and had been driven by the need to keep essential front-line staff safe during Covid19. The option of customer service staff at Saxon House was being included in the review.
- It was confirmed that further information on the Cheeky Wipes scheme could be provided if required.

Resolved to support the officer recommendations in the Cabinet report.

26b Finance update - performance quarter 1 - 2022-2023

Homira Javadi, Chief Finance Officer and Ola Owolabi, Deputy Chief Finance Officer, introduced the report which provided an update on the Council's financial performance in Quarter 1 2021/22. During discussion, the following points were highlighted:

- A higher level of income recovery had originally been projected than the Council was now able to project forward for. A prudent view would be taken on the existing profile and this would be subject to change as part of the revised budget and a review of performance in the second quarter.
- Additional staffing costs, including higher agency staff costs, had been incurred to ensure that service levels were maintained.
- A new reserve policy for levels of unallocated reserves had been introduced the previous year, which ringfenced provision for specific targeted areas. Subject to any final accounting adjustment, a draft reserves table could be provided. Levels of unallocated reserves remained unchanged. The reserves were subject to annual review and consideration of the exposure to risks, a reduction in income or an increase in costs. Earmarked reserves had been introduced to address the cost of living crisis and additional utilities costs.
- A more detailed breakdown on the £182,853 (projected variance at year end for specialist advisers) and the spend on the OVESCO – Ouse Valley Solar Farm scheme would be provided to the Committee.
- A budget review was due to be launched which would include the Capital Programme. Once complete, it would provide a clearer indication of the Council's position and a realistic picture of its ability to deliver the Capital Programme. New or emerging capital initiatives would also be included. The profiling of certain projects where the spread of cost was not linear presented difficulties.

Resolved to support the officer recommendations in the Cabinet report

26c Lewes District Council Cost of Living Emergency Fund

Bill McCafferty, Lead for Income Maximisation and Welfare, presented the report. During discussion the following points were highlighted:

- Clarification on the composition of the monies allocated to the Cost of Living Emergency Fund would be provided.
- The draft guidance suggested that, the Household Support Fund and the Cost of Living Emergency Fund, would be aimed at the same people, i.e those that did not qualify for the £650 cost of living payment awarded by the Government but were on low income. It was anticipated that the Household Support Fund and the Cost of Living Emergency Fund would run in tandem. This would benefit applicants as they would only need to make one application.
- Government had advised that the Department of Work and Pensions would be providing a list of people who were in receipt of housing benefit and/or council tax benefit but not in receipt of the cost living payment; it

was not known when the list would be available. It was thought that there were approximately 2000 resident who met the criteria and a more accurate number would be available once the list is received. There was confidence that all the funding would be allocated.

- The cost of setting up the system to process applications was approximately £1000 and there was confidence that the scheme would be resourced sufficiently using the allocated £25,000. People who were unable to access the application process online would be able to receive a call-back online from staff, who would then complete the application on behalf of the applicant.
- A County-wide approach would continue to be taken with the Household Support Fund 3, ensuring all organisations had the same criteria, with the same level of awards. A meeting with colleagues in other authorities was being held to discuss the details. Once the Household Support Fund award was agreed, people would only need to make one application.
- It was requested that an update on the awards be brought back to the Committee at its December meeting.

Resolved to support the officer recommendations in the Cabinet report.

26d Housing development update

Sarah Tye, Community, Engagement and Stakeholder Manager, presented the report which provided an update on the progress of the housing delivery programme. During discussion the following points were raised.

- Members supported the delivery of a social housing scheme which included sustainable and environmental features.

Resolved to support the officer recommendations in the Cabinet report, in full.

27 Exclusion of the public

Resolved to enter into a private session as Item 7a on the agenda - Housing Development update - Exempt appendix 1 was likely to disclose exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and would therefore need to take place in private session.

27a Housing Development update - Exempt appendix 1

This item was dealt with in a private session as detailed in minute 27 above.

28 Forward Plan of Decisions

The Chair, Councillor Boorman, introduced the Forward Plan of Cabinet Decisions which detailed those items being considered at future Cabinet

meetings. Members requested that the following reports be included at the Committee's next meeting on the 3 November:

- Medium term financial strategy
- Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy - Annual update 2022
- Homes First Repairs Service: Re-design and Development

Resolved to note the Forward Plan of Cabinet Decisions.

29 Policy and Performance Advisory Committee Work Programme

The Chair, Councillor Boorman, introduced the Committee's work programme, which detailed the items due to be considered at future meetings and provided an opportunity for members to request any areas or issues they wished the Committee to look at in further depth.

The Chair reminded Members that a request for questions to be asked of Southern Water at the next meeting had been circulated to all Councillors by email.

Resolved to note the Committee's work programme.

The meeting ended at 4.50 pm

Councillor Liz Boorman (Chair)