

Cabinet

Minutes of meeting held in Court Room at Eastbourne Town Hall, Grove Road, BN21 4UG on 20 September 2023 at 6.00 pm.

Present:

Councillor Stephen Holt (Chair).

Councillors Margaret Bannister (Deputy-Chair), Peter Diplock, Robin Maxted, 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), Luke Dreeling (Performance Lead), Nathan Haffenden (Head of Development, Investment and Delivery), Steven Houchin (Interim Deputy Chief Finance Officer (Corporate Finance)), Lynn Ingram (Interim Head of Financial Planning) and Sarah Lawrence (Committee Team Manager).

Also in attendance:

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).

15 Minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2023 were submitted and approved and the Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

16 Apologies for absence

None were reported.

17 Declaration of members' interests

None were declared.

18 Assurance Review follow up - CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Finance and Accountancy) Rapid Finance Review

The Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Finance and Performance, updating them on the results of the recent review undertaken by Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) and associated

recommendations.

Visiting member, Councillor Smart, addressed the Cabinet on the item. He queried the validity of the report, due to the reporting of the Council's short-term debt management position. Councillor Holt responded and strongly refuted the claims and reported that all information requested as part of the independent review had been provided.

Reference was made to the letter received from the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Local Government and Building Safety, Lee Rowley MP, which thanked officers for their assistance and the Council for their willingness to engage openly with the review team. The letter praised the positive progress that the Council had made to become more financially sustainable since its previous assurance review in 2021. The report acknowledged that the review had found no major areas of concern and much to commend. The Council's debt restructuring plan, instead of long-term borrowing was based on the most efficient financing option and this had been positively reflected on by CIPFA and other independent bodies.

Councillor Holt referenced the ongoing challenges affecting local authorities, driven by the cost-of-living challenges, high inflation and continued increase in costs associated with homelessness. Councillor Holt advised that he was inviting council leaders, Local Government Association and DLUC to an emergency summit, to look cross-party at how to positively resolve the national issue.

Resolved (Non-key decision):

To note the report, and to note that actions to respond to the recommendations would be addressed within the Stability and Growth programme.

Reason for decision:

The assurance review, and the subsequent follow up review referred to in this report, have been necessary as a requirement of the Council accessing Government Exceptional Financial Support.

19 Corporate performance - quarter 1 - 2023/24

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 first quarter of the year (April-June 2023), as shown at Appendix 1 to the report.

Commentary on those key performance indicators performing below target expectations were detailed in the report. Reference was made to the solution sprint outcomes this quarter, as detailed at section 3 of the report, which included the delivery of a 'tackling the crisis' housing/homelessness workshop between housing colleagues from Lewes, Eastbourne and Hastings.

Resolved (Non-key decision):

To note progress and performance for quarter 1 2023/24.

Reason for decision:

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

20 Revenue and Capital Financial Monitoring Report Quarter 1 2023-24

The Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Finance and Performance, providing an assessment of the Council's financial performance against its approved 2023-24 budget, incorporating key financial risks, issues and opportunities identified since 1 April 2023 for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

The report detailed a forecast outturn position for 2023-24 of £2.348k, as detailed at Table 1 to the report. It was reiterated that this was an initial assessment and further monitoring would be undertaken over the coming months. The main underlying pressures included the underlying levels of inflation and increased interest costs affecting contracts, operations and running costs, increase in homelessness and the use of expensive nightly purchased temporary accommodation, increased number of planning appeals and budget pressures associated with establishment restructures. Work was already underway on mitigating options for the potential overspend.

Resolved (Non-key decision):

(1) To note the forecast outturn position for 2023-24 and associated risks.

(2) 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.

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

Reason for decision:

To update members on the financial position of the Council and ensure that the Authority complies with its financial regulations.

21 Housing delivery and asset update

The Cabinet considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning, providing an update on the housing development and delivery programme. This included proposals to identify new opportunities to further the delivery of council housing, requirements to revise existing budget allocations to support delivery and recommendations to dispose of garage sites to generate new income.

Eastbourne was one of just a third of English councils that had built new social housing in each year of the last five financial years, according to government figures. Thanks were also expressed to government for their release of additional grant funding opportunities that the Council had been able to secure and welcomed further opportunities. Further details were contained within the report.

Recommended to Full Council (Budget and policy framework)

(1) To approve an increase of £2.41m to the existing new build and acquisitions budget within the 2023/24 HRA Capital Programme, totalling a new budget of £10.81m, to facilitate and be funded by new government grants, subject to Full Council approval.

Resolved (Key decision):

(2) To note the progress of the housing development and delivery programme as set out at Appendix 1 to the report.

(3) To support the progression of the initial phase of sites identified within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) from the internal Asset Review to be taken through the feasibility and due diligence processes, utilising existing budgets and delegations.

(4) To approve a variation of £150k for the Fort Lane development in accordance with the Financial Procedure Rules, totalling a new scheme budget of £3.15m, financed within the capacity of the existing approved 2023/24 HRA Capital Programme.

(5) To approve the disposal of Council-owned garage sites as set out within Appendix 2 (Exempt) to the report, subject to a full business case, and with the capital receipts ring-fenced to support the HRA Business Plan and future capital schemes for housing.

(6) To authorise the Director of Regeneration and Planning, in consultation with the Director of Finance and Performance (S151 Officer) and Lead Member for Housing and Planning, to take all necessary actions to progress all recommendations including business cases, budget allocations, negotiation and agreement of terms, award of contract(s), and authorising the formal execution of all related documentation.

Reason for decisions:

(1) To provide Cabinet with an update on the growing housing development and delivery programme.

(2) To progress the development of new Council homes across the borough, maximising brownfield sites to enable new affordable housing opportunities.

(3) To ratify HRA Capital Programme budgets to support the delivery and purchase of new homes.

(4) To rationalise the HRA, making best use of assets and resources, and generating income to support future housing schemes.

Notes: (1) Appendix 2 remained exempt. (2) Exempt information reason 3 - Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

The meeting ended at 6.31 pm

Councillor Stephen Holt (Chair)