

Cabinet

Minutes of meeting held in Court Room at Eastbourne Town Hall, Grove Road, BN21 4UG on 13 December 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), Jo Harper (Head of Business Planning and Performance), Steven Houchin (Interim Deputy Chief Finance Officer (Corporate Finance)), Lynn Ingram (Interim Head of Financial Planning), Oliver Jones (Lead, Housing, Homelessness & Community Safety) and Jo Wunsch (Specialist Advisor (Sustainability)).

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) and Councillor Robert Smart (Opposition Leader).

30 Minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2023

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2023 were submitted and approved and the Chair was authorised to sign them as a correct record.

31 Apologies for absence

None were reported.

32 Declaration of members' interests

None were declared.

33 Right to address the meeting/order of business

A request to address Cabinet had been received from Councillor Goodyear for agenda item 13 (Eastbourne Carbon Neutral 2030: Annual Report). The Chair agreed to alter the order of business to consider the item after agenda item 9

(Corporate performance – quarter 2 – 2023/24).

34 Interim Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024/25 to 2027/28

The Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Finance and Performance, asking them to agree the interim Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2024/25 to 2027/28, together with the updated Capital Programme position.

Driven by cost-of-living pressures, the council was experiencing unprecedented increase in demand for some critical services such as homelessness support and the costs of emergency and temporary accommodation. Based on the latest information the net forecast in unfunded cost of temporary accommodation alone was £4.9m (£2.7m more than the budgeted provision).

The council continued to adopt a planned approach and had developed its newly revised Stability & Growth Programme to ensure it remained financially sustainable.

Councillor Diplock updated the Cabinet on progress made since the emergency summit to address the social and financial crisis created by the unprecedented demand for temporary accommodation. A motion was agreed cross-party at the November Full Council meeting, supporting the points raised at the summit, that were then sent in a letter to government. The council would continue to work with partners and seek constructive dialogue with central government on tackling the issues.

The Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning also updated the Cabinet regarding ongoing work around the capital programme and upcoming projects.

Resolved (Non-key decision):

(1) To note the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) forecasts and the requirement to identify additional savings of £2.1m for the period 2024/25 to 2027/28.

(2) To note that this forecast could change significantly based upon government funding settlement announcements and demand for services and pressures upon the council.

(3) To note that at this stage a forecast £1.6m of savings are required to balance the 2024/25 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 and 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.

35 Revenue and Capital Financial Monitoring Report Quarter 2 - 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 Council, alongside many other local authorities and organisations across the nation, had seen a significant impact on its finances because of external factors beyond its control, including the rising costs of homelessness and lack of clarity over Government funding. As a result of these externally driven financial challenges, the Corporate Management Team continued to be focused on reducing the cost-of-service delivery in their areas to support the Council to forecast spend closer in line with the budget, whilst ensuring that services were still delivered and that there was not a corresponding reduction in service provision.

Section 3 of the report covered the pressures of homelessness and temporary accommodation on the council's financial position in greater detail. Thanks were expressed to council officers for their continuous work in addressing the ongoing pressures.

Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 10 July 2023, considered the report. The Committee resolved to support the Officer recommendations to the Cabinet along with a strong endorsement from the Scrutiny Committee of the Council's ongoing work towards its engagement with Government, in highlighting the impact and cost of homelessness and the need for additional funding and support to tackle unprecedented levels. This was strongly welcomed by the Cabinet.

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 decisions:

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

36 Corporate performance - quarter 2 - 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 second quarter of the year (July-September 2023), as shown at Appendix 1 to the report.

The overall position reported that 16 of the 23 key performance indicators for which a target had been set, were green (over target) or amber (only just off target), despite the challenging financial position being experienced by the authority.

Resolved (Non-key decision):

To note progress and performance for Quarter 2 2023/24.

Reason for decision:

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

37 Eastbourne Carbon Neutral 2030: Annual Report

The Cabinet considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning, noting progress to date and approve publication of the Annual Update, as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report.

The report provided a summary emission report for the year 2022/23, along with a progress summary against its baseline year 2018/19. The report also detailed the many regional and local projects that the council had progressed over the year, working with partners, neighbouring local authorities and other community groups.

Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 4 December 2023, considered the report and were supportive of the officer recommendations, subject to the following amendment to recommendation (3) being considered :

(3) Approve to delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Planning and Regeneration, in consultation with the Lead Member for Climate Change, to complete a **thorough** refresh of the Climate Change Strategy and action plan in readiness for the new financial year 2024/5.

Visiting member, Councillor Goodyear, addressed the Cabinet on this item and endorsed the recommendation made by the Scrutiny Committee. Following discussion, the Cabinet unanimously agreed to accept the recommendation and expressed the need for continuous partnership working on this topic.

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 website.

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

(3) To approve to delegate authority to the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Planning and Regeneration, in consultation with the Lead Member for Climate Change, to complete a thorough refresh of the Climate Change Strategy and action plan in readiness for the new financial year 2024/5.

Reason for decisions:

To progress towards the aims of achieving Eastbourne Carbon Neutral 2030, as resolved in July 2019.

38 Housing Services - Current Operating Pressures

The Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Service Delivery, providing Cabinet with a summary of the current operating context and the challenges that is presenting to the delivery of housing services in the Borough.

An additional recommendation was added to reflect the Cabinet's appreciation of the efforts undertaken by Council teams in responding to the pressures and this was detailed below.

Resolved (Non-key decision):

(1) To note the contents of the report and the activities that Council teams are taking to address these.

(2) To express thanks to Council teams for their ongoing work and efforts in response to the current operating pressures.

Reason for decision:

To provide information about the current operating context.

39 Council tax and business rate base 2024/25

The Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Finance and Performance, asking them to approve the Council Tax Base and net yield from Business Rate Income for 2024/25, in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 1992.

Resolved (Key decision):

(1) To agree the provisional Council Tax Base of 35,687.2 for 2024/25

(2) 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 2024/25.

(3) To agree that the Chief Finance Officer, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, determine net yield from Business Rate income for 2024/25.

Reason for decisions:

Cabinet is required to approve the Tax Base which will be used for the purposes of calculating the 2024/25 Council Tax.

40 Council Tax Discounts and Premiums

The Cabinet considered the report of the Director of Service Delivery, asking them to determine the level of certain Council Tax discounts and Council Tax premiums with effect from 1 April 2024 and 1 April 2025 and recommend that decision to Full Council.

The proposed changes were in line with the majority of councils across the country and followed the introduction of new rules by government that allowed local authorities to set higher council tax premiums on empty and second homes.

The Cabinet advised that a report on the council tax reduction scheme would be considered at its next meeting in February 2024.

Recommended to Full Council (Budget and policy framework):

(1) From 1 April 2024

(a) The adoption of a standard 0% discount for all Class C and D chargeable dwellings; and

(b) Levying the maximum level of premium i.e.:

- Premium of 100% for dwellings which are unoccupied and substantially unfurnished (Empty Homes Premium) after 1 years up to 5 years of becoming empty;
- Premium of 200% for dwellings which are unoccupied and substantially unfurnished (Empty Homes Premium) between 5 years and up to 10 years; and
- Premium of 300% for dwellings which are unoccupied and substantially unfurnished (Empty Homes Premium) for 10 years or more.

(2) From 1 April 2025

(a) The continued application of 0% discount for Class C & D and Empty Homes premiums at 100% effective when dwellings have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for 1 year; and

(b) The application of a premium (Second Homes Premium) of 100% for all dwellings the are no one's sole or main residence and which is substantially furnished.

(3) Exception to premiums

Where premiums are to be applied, the Council is mindful of the current consultation by government which recommends exceptions in certain circumstances outlined within the report. Subject to the outcome of that consultation, it is recommended that the Section 151 Officer is given delegated powers to implement the Council's policy on premiums in line with statute, the Council's requirements and any guidance given by the Secretary of State.

Reason for decisions:

(a) To reduce the number of empty homes within the Borough in line with the Council's Empty Homes Strategy; and

(b) To encourage the use of premises as main residences by local residents rather than second homes.

41 Eastbourne Borough Council Asset Strategy

The Cabinet considered the report of the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Regeneration and Planning, asking them to agree a new Corporate Property and Assets Strategy, in line with recommendations from the Assurance Review.

Officers were advised that there was a minor typo in appendix 1 to the report. Under list of assets '1-5 Seaside Road', should instead be named '1-5 Seaside'. This was noted by officers.

Resolved (Key decision):

(1) To agree the strategy, as detailed at Appendix 1 to the report, to inform future asset related decisions.

(2) To authorise the Director of Regeneration and Planning to adopt the strategy and produce a formatted version for public release.

Reason for decisions:

There was a need to update and replace previous related documentation in light of Assurance Review recommendations.

The meeting ended at 6.53 pm

Councillor Stephen Holt (Chair)