

## OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 July 2020

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held at the Remote Meeting on Monday 20 July 2020 at 6.30pm.

Committee Members present: Councillors P.N. Osborne (Chairman), Mrs V. Cook (Vice-Chairman), J. Barnes, J.J. Carroll, C.A. Clark, P.C. Courtel, B.J. Drayson (ex-officio), Mrs D.C. Earl-Williams, S.J. Errington, P.J. Gray, L.M. Langlands, C.R. Maynard and M. Mooney.

Other Members present: Councillors C.A. Bayliss, S.J. Coleman, G.C. Curtis, K.P. Dixon, C.A. Madeley, D.B. Oliver and G.F. Stevens.

Advisory Officers in attendance: Executive Director (MJ), Executive Director (AL), Assistant Director Resources and Democratic Services Officer.

Also Present: 11 members of the public, via the YouTube live broadcast.

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### OSC20/10 **MINUTES**

The Chairman was authorised to sign the Minutes of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 15 June 2020 at a later date as a correct record of the proceedings.

### OSC20/11 **APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTES**

There were no apologies for absence.

### OSC20/12 **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

Declarations of interest were made by Councillors in the Minutes as indicated below:

Agenda Item 5 - Councillors Bayliss, Coleman, Courtel, Gray, Langlands and Madeley each declared a Personal Interest in so far as they were former members of Democracy4Bexhill and supporters of a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea.

### OSC20/13 **COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW OF BEXHILL-ON-SEA - DRAFT FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS**

Members received the report of the Executive Director outlining the draft final recommendations of the Community Governance Review Steering Group (CGRSG).

In 2017, under the former administration, the Council undertook a Community Governance Review of Bexhill-on-Sea, and whilst there was overwhelming support shown for the creation of a Town Council (93% of some 9,000+ responses) it was decided at that time not to proceed with the establishment of a Town Council.

Following the local elections in May 2019, and the change in political control, the Council approved a Motion requesting officers to report as to the required procedure with a view to the establishment of a Town Council for Bexhill by 2021. Full Council subsequently agreed the process by which the Council would undertake the Community Governance Review of Bexhill-on-Sea at its meeting on 16 September 2019 and appointed the Community Governance Review Steering Group (CGRSG) to lead on the process.

The CGRSG had met on four occasions between October 2019 and May 2020 in order to progress its Terms of Reference and comprised of the following Members: Councillors J. Barnes, C.A. Bayliss, T.J.C. Byrne, J.J. Carroll, P.J. Gray, L.M. Langlands, P.N. Osborne, R. Thomas and H.L. Timpe. Councillor Bayliss was appointed Chairman and all meetings of the CGRSG were held in the public domain.

At its last meeting held on 29 May, the CGRSG had considered the outcome of the public consultation exercise; the report and full consultation response was attached at Appendix 3 to the report and the Minutes of the meeting attached at Appendix 4.

The key points from the consultation were outlined to Members as follows:

- 2,193 responses were received from the public – 1,564 on-line and 629 response slips;
- in total the Council received 2,208 responses – (4.6% of the population);
- 78% of all responders supported the creation of a town council (22% did not);
- the younger the age group, the less likely they were to support a town council;
- the older the age group the more likely they were to support a town council;
- there were no differences between the views of males and females;
- there was support for the services already funded by Bexhill special expenses to be devolved to a town council; and
- the majority of responders in each Rother District Council Ward were in favour of a town council.

In light of the public support for the creation of a Town Council, demonstrated through both the 2017 and 2020 consultation and in line with the Council's stated objective of delivering a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea, the CGRSG recommended that the Council established a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea. The Town Council would be based on the current District Council external boundary of Bexhill, with nine wards, each appointing two Members and with the first elections taking place in May 2021. It was noted that the recommendation would result in the demise of the Bexhill Charter Trustees who would become defunct once the Town Council was established.

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions and the following points were noted during the discussions:

- if full Council agreed to the creation of a Town Council for Bexhill, ways to engage with younger residents who were less likely to support a town council, would be explored;
- the consultation results showed support for the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan for Bexhill;
- legal advice and assistance would be procured to assist with drafting the Community Governance Order and the establishment of the Town Council; the scope of devolvement would be agreed with the new Town Council once established, but the District Council could have internal discussions prior to that time;
- legal advice had been sought concerning the establishment of a shadow Town Council. This would be set up from 1 April 2021 using existing Bexhill District Councillors until the date of elections; and
- the Bexhill Special Expenses for next year would be set as part of the Council's annual budget setting procedures in the usual way, funded only by Bexhill residents, and would continue until the new Town Council took over the agreed devolved services.

**RESOLVED:** That Cabinet be requested to endorse and recommend to Council that:

- 1) a Parish Council be created for the whole of Bexhill-on-Sea, to be styled a Town Council based on the existing Bexhill Ward External Boundary;
- 2) the Town Council to contain nine Wards, based on the 2019 District Ward Boundaries and that two Town Councillors be elected to each Ward, making a total of 18 Bexhill Town Councillors;
- 3) the first elections be held in May 2021;

Subject to the approval of 1), 2) and 3) above,

- 4) the dissolution of the Bexhill Charter Trustees following the election of Bexhill Town Council be noted; and
- 5) the consultation results be taken into account when the transfer of services / powers to Bexhill Town Council are discussed.

(Councillors Bayliss, Coleman, Courtel, Gray, Langlands and Madeley each declared a Personal Interest in so far as they were former members of Democracy4Bexhill and supporters of a Town Council for Bexhill-on-Sea.)

OSC20/14 **REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING QUARTER 4 2019/20**

Members received and considered the report of the Executive Directors on the Provisional Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring Quarter 4 2019/20, which had been referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Members' information and for any recommended actions to Cabinet as necessary. This report updated

Members on the Council's finances as at the end of March 2020 and included a draft outturn for 2019/20. Members were advised that this could change as a result of the external audit of the Council's financial accounts due to take place in August 2020.

The Council incurred a deficit of £207,000 in 2019/20, which was £491,000 lower than the Quarter 3 forecast. The Cost of Services showed a deficit of £748,000, which was £105,000 higher than the Quarter 3 forecast. This was partially offset by under spends on Non-Service budgets and Income, which reduced the Net Deficit at line to £207,000.

As part of the 2020/21 revenue budget considerations, the seeking of voluntary redundancies was one of the measures taken to balance the budget. The cost of redundancies was £316,851 and was paid in 2019/20. The gross ongoing saving was expected to be £490,000 per annum.

The main reasons for the variations as detailed in the report were attributed to underspends/savings on Disabled Facilities Grant, staff vacancies and planning policy. The £207,000 deficit was attributed to purchase of IT equipment, Telephony costs etc. in response to the Coronavirus pandemic, redundancy payments, net rental income shortfalls, loss of income arising from the closure of car parks due to the pandemic, increase in housing benefit payments to people in Temporary Accommodation and interest from investments, which was below the budgeted figure.

The council tax collection rate was at a surplus of £956,000; Rother's share was approximately £95,000. There had been an increase in applications for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme which would therefore have an impact on the current financial year.

Business Rates Collection Fund was in surplus by £462,000 after taking account of actual collection against the original estimate and adjustments to the bad debt provision and provision for rating appeals. Rother's share was approximately £200,000. This was likely to decline over the current financial year as some businesses struggled to meet costs.

The final Capital outturn for 2019/20 was £14,173,000 million, which was £3,072,000 lower than the revised budget.

The largest project underspend was £1,000,000 on the purchase of Temporary Accommodation, which was delayed by a combination of the pandemic and availability of suitable properties. Members were advised that purchases had since been progressed. Works at the Beeching Road site (part of the Property Investment Strategy) were delayed, which resulted in an underspend of £484,000. The Bexhill Leisure Centre development was currently on hold whilst Members considered its future, and this had resulted in an under spend of £381,000. Finally, there was a lower than anticipated uptake in Disabled Facilities Grants, which was under spent by £273,000.

The net impact on Reserves of the 2019/20 outturn was a reduction of £2,392,000, which was £35,000 lower than the revised budget. However, this was not sustainable and further savings would need to be made.

The final Council outturn for 2019/20 was a deficit of £207,000, including redundancy costs of £317,000. Excluding redundancy costs, the surplus was £110,000, which represented just 0.8% of the total Net Cost of Services budget.

Members thanked officers for their hard work in reducing the Council's deficit from that forecast earlier in the year.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

OSC20/15 **WORK PROGRAMME**

Consideration was given to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Work Programme.

It was noted that the Waste Contract Review had been deferred to the September meeting in order to give the full year's picture and the first meeting of the Anti-Poverty Task and Finish Group had now been arranged.

The following additions were made to the Work Programme:

- Review of the Tourism Strategy to be added to 'Items for Consideration'; and
- Review of the Economic Regeneration Strategy to be added to 'Items for Consideration'.

**RESOLVED:** That the Work Programme attached at Appendix A, be agreed as amended.

**CHAIRMAN**

The meeting closed at 7.26pm.

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

<b>WORK PROGRAMME 2020 – 2021</b>		
<b>DATE OF MEETING</b>	<b>SUBJECT – MAIN ITEM IN BOLD</b>	<b>Cabinet Portfolio Holder</b>
<b>14.09.20</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Waste Contract Review</b></li> <li>• <b>Events Strategy</b></li> <li>• Report of the Economic Recovery Steering Group</li> <li>• Performance Progress Report: First Quarter 2020/21</li> <li>• Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring – Quarter 1 2020/21</li> </ul>	<p><b>Prochak Timpe</b></p> <p><b>Dixon</b></p>
<b>19.10.20</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Medium Term Financial Plan 2021/22 to 2025/26</li> </ul>	<b>Dixon</b>
<b>23.11.20</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Report of the Anti-Poverty Task and Finish Group</b></li> <li>• <b>Homelessness and Progress on the Housing Strategy</b></li> <li>• Performance Progress Report: Second Quarter 2020/21</li> <li>• Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring – Quarter 2 2020/21</li> </ul>	<p><b>Byrne</b></p> <p><b>Dixon</b></p>
<b>25.01.21</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Draft Revenue Budget Proposals 2021/22</b></li> <li>• <b>Key Performance Targets 2021/22</b></li> </ul>	<b>Dixon</b>
<b>15.03.21</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Progress on the Environment Strategy</b></li> <li>• <b>Crime and Disorder Committee: to receive a report from the Community Safety Partnership</b></li> <li>• Performance Progress Report: Third Quarter 2020/21</li> <li>• Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring – Quarter 3 2020/21</li> </ul>	<p><b>Field</b></p> <p><b>Dixon</b></p>
<b>26.04.21</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CPE Task and Finish Group</li> <li>• Call-in and Urgency Procedures</li> <li>• Draft Annual Report to Council</li> </ul>	
<b>ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regeneration incl Leisure Centre, Fountains and Skate Park</li> <li>• Corporate Plan review – referred back by Cabinet</li> <li>• Review of the Tourism Strategy</li> <li>• Review of the Economic Regeneration Strategy</li> </ul>		

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