

CABINET

24 May 2021

Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held at the Town Hall, Bexhill on Sea on Monday 24 May 2021 at 6.30 pm.

Committee Members present: Councillors D.B. Oliver (Leader), S.M. Prochak, MBE (Deputy Leader), C.A. Bayliss, T.J.C. Byrne, K.P. Dixon, K.M. Field, H.L. Timpe and J. Vine-Hall.

Other Members present: Councillors Mrs V. Cook, P.C. Courtel and P.N. Osborne.

Advisory Officers in present: Chief Executive, Assistant Director Resources, Head of Acquisitions, Transformation and Regeneration, Head of Housing and Community (in part), Head of Neighbourhood Services (in part), Head of Strategy and Planning and Democratic Services Manager.

Also Present: 46 members of the public via the YouTube live broadcast.

Publication Date: 27 May 2021

The decisions made under PART II will come into force on 4 June 2021 unless they have been subject to the call-in procedure.

CB21/1. **MINUTES**

The Chairman was authorised to sign the Minutes of the meetings held on 29 March and 8 April 2021 as correct records of the proceedings.

CB21/2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

CB21/3. **DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS**

There were no declarations of interest made.

PART I – RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL – not subject to call-in procedure under Rule 16 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

CB21/4. **PRIVATE SECTOR LEASING SCHEME**

(9)

The Head of Housing and Community outlined two measures proposed to improve housing outcomes and reduce the cost to the Council of providing temporary accommodation (TA) by preventing homelessness through greater access to quality and affordable accommodation.

To date, the Council had over 100 households within TA with the average stay of a household with children being 66 days at a cost of

£2,500. During the COVID-19 pandemic, fewer properties had been made available to the Rother Tenant Finder Scheme (RTFS) as a result of a significant stagnation in the lettings market and increased rental charges. Therefore it was considered opportune to review the RTFS, as well as various incentives offered to private sector landlords and estate agents. It was noted that the RTFS had secured a limited number of properties during the pandemic, as a result of the provision of 0% tenant loans, as well as incentive payments to landlords and agents, funded through a combination of external government grants.

The two measures proposed to secure more accommodation were a Private Sector Lease Scheme (PSLS) and Rent Guarantee Scheme (RGS).

The PSLS would provide the Council access to properties for a fixed period and property owners would be guaranteed a fixed monthly payment. Properties would need to meet or exceed defined national standards and the property owner would retain full responsibility for the management, maintenance and repair of the external fabric of the building. At the end of the lease period, the property would be returned to the owner in the same condition as at commencement of the lease (except for an allowance on reasonable wear and tear). Initially, properties would be managed by an external management organisation with the potential to bring in-house once economies of scale could be achieved and property management expertise had been developed.

Cabinet was advised that the scheme would be funded from an external Homeless Prevention Grant allocated annually by the Ministry of Housing Community and Local Government (MHCLG). It was proposed that 30 properties be leased over 24 months (15 Year 1, 15 Year 2) and reviewed at the end of this period to ascertain whether the scheme was operating effectively. Each property would contribute 5% annual income to offset any repair costs.

The RGS, also funded from the external Homelessness Prevention Grant would underwrite landlord arrears risks, subject to the following conditions:

- time limited to 12 months;
- the Council would be liable for up to six months of rent arrears accrued during the first 12 months of the tenancy;
- guarantees would be provided for Assured Shorthold Tenancies with a minimum fixed term of 12 months;
- tenancies must be assessed as affordable for the tenant; and
- the landlord or their agent must inform the Council in writing within seven days of the first missed rent payment and within seven days of all subsequent missed payments.

The Council's Tenancy Sustainment Officer would monitor tenants' rent accounts and offer support to sustain rental payments. However, even with support there was a risk that some tenants would default on their rent payments. A 20% arrears level was considered a reasonable worst-case scenario; however the team would operate to an arrears

target of 5% which was comfortably achieved by most Registered Providers.

The two options enabled the RTFS to make a more competitive offer to landlords and property owners that would enable the Council to reach its Corporate Plan target of securing 100 tenancies per year for homeless households by March 2023.

The two measures would prevent the need for the Council to place households in expensive TA, avoiding the associated cost. The P SLS proposal would enable the Council to avoid up to £11,000 of TA costs in its first year and £7,000 in its second year. The RGS would enable the Council to avoid up to £48,000 for every 30 rent guarantees issued.

RECOMMENDED: That:

- 1) lease agreements be entered into with property owners to enable the provision of tenancy agreements between the Council and households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness;
- 2) the Head of Service Housing and Community be authorised to enter into property and rent account management contracts; and
- 3) fixed-term rent guarantees be issued to private sector landlords to enable access to households who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

PART II – EXECUTIVE DECISIONS – subject to the call-in procedure under Rule 16 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules by no later than 4:00pm on 3 June 2021.

CB21/5. **PROGRESS ON THE ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY (2020)**
(6)

Cabinet received and considered Minute OSC20/47 arising from the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) held on 15 March 2021 regarding progress on the Environment Strategy (2020) (ES).

The OSC had considered priorities within the scope of the ES, key performance indicators, internal and external focus and linkages, resource gaps, core stakeholders and initiated partnership projects.

Members were encouraged by the progress made to date and were supportive of the OSC's recommendation that the Climate Change Steering Group's Terms of Reference be expanded to include a review the Council's Grounds Maintenance contract. It was noted that the Council's ES would need to be fluid and flexible to ensure that targets kept up-to-date with emerging new strategies and sciences to combat the global emergency. The need for all officers to consider the environmental impact of all that they do was slowly filtering through the organisation, but more awareness and training was required.

RESOLVED: That the Climate Change Steering Group's Terms of Reference be expanded to include reviewing the Council's Grounds Maintenance contract.

CB21/6.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE OFF-STREET CAR PARKS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

(7)

Cabinet received and considered Minute OSC20/57 arising from the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) held on 26 April 2021 that had considered off-street car parking provision in the district. The OSC had undertaken a thorough review of the Council's off-street car parking through the establishment of the Off-Street Car Parks Task and Finish Group (OSCPT&FG) Chaired by Councillor Mrs Cook.

Councillor Mrs Cook addressed Cabinet and paid tribute to the officers and Members for their input into the work of the OSCPT&FG. The OSCPT&FG had been meeting regularly since October 2020 and had monitored the impact of Civil Parking Enforcement on usage of off-street car parks, charges, hours of operation and permits, as well as generation of sufficient revenue to maintain the car parks. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and third lockdown in December 2020, the findings and information gathered had not provided accurate data, therefore, it was suggested that monitoring continued throughout the summer until October 2021.

Councillor Osborne confirmed that the OSC had held a thorough debate and several additional recommendations had been proposed for Cabinet's approval; these included reduced daily charges, generic chargeable hours, improved signage and installation of a cash machine.

Cabinet acknowledged the work of the OSCPT&FG and considered the recommendations proposed. After discussion, Cabinet approved the reduced daily charges at Wainwright Road – Bexhill, Gibbets Marsh – Rye and Lower Market – Battle, alignment of chargeable hours across all car parks within the district, installation of signage, where required and installation of a cash and card payment machine at Manor Gardens car park (anticipated by July). The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economic Development and Regeneration was particularly grateful for the work of the OSCPT&FG and the contribution she had been able to make to the review.

It was queried whether the reduction in charges required the full due legal process as the likelihood of objections were minimal; the Head of Service undertook to ensure that the changes agreed were implemented as soon as practically possible within the legal framework that the Council had to operate and working with the Council's contractors and suppliers to keep administrative costs to a minimum.

A further recommendation was proposed and agreed to task the OSCPT&FG with investigating the possibility of a weekly parking ticket via the Ringo app and ticket machines.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) Wainwright Road – Bexhill Gibbets Marsh – Rye and Lower Market – Battle be designated as ‘long stay’ car parks. The daily parking charge for Wainwright Road and Gibbets Marsh be reduced from £5 to £2 per day and for Lower Market to £3 per day, for both summer and winter as soon as reasonably practicable to encourage usage of these less used ‘out of town’ car parks;
- 2) the chargeable hours be brought into line across all car parks as soon as reasonably practicable, with charging starting at 8:00am and finishing at 7:00pm;
- 3) signage be installed to promote parking at Gibbets Marsh – Rye, Little Common – Bexhill, Lower Market – Battle and Wainwright Road – Bexhill car parks to improve visibility of the facility as ‘long stay’;
- 4) a cash and card payment machine be installed at Manor Gardens car park; and
- 5) the Off-Street Car Parks Task and Finish Group be tasked with investigating the possibility of a weekly parking ticket via the Ringo app and ticket machines.

CB21/7.
(8)

KEY PERFORMANCE TARGETS 2021-22

Members received and considered Minute OSC20/58 arising from the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) held on 26 April 2021 that had considered the approved list of 11 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2021/22.

Cabinet shared the OSC’s concerns regarding the length of time taken to determine planning applications from validation and agreed that it was a corporate concern and had disproportionate effect on the Council’s reputation. It was therefore considered appropriate for two indicators to be added to the KPI set, namely, the number of days taken to determine major and minor planning applications from validation to decision. It was noted that the production of this data for the quarterly monitoring reports to the OSC would not result in any additional work for the planning officers as this data was already collated.

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Planning advised that there were historic resource issues within the Planning Department, exacerbated by COVID-19, which had resulted in the current reduced performance. An external peer review of the planning service had recently concluded and identified a number of service improvements to streamline and automate processes; however these would take time to come to fruition and have a positive impact on performance. It was therefore considered appropriate to monitor the planning performance through the corporate set of KPIs, which would include trend data.

RESOLVED: That two additional Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) be added to the KPI set to be monitored by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during 2021/22, namely, the number of days taken to determine (1) major and (2) minor planning applications from validation to decision.

CB21/8.
(10)

UPDATED STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The Council's Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) was a statutory document that set out how and when the Council carried out consultations and involved the community in both the preparation of planning policy and in the determination of planning applications.

Whilst the existing SCI adopted in 2018 continued to meet most statutory requirements in terms of plan-making, there was now greater focus on early engagement, which was the challenge. The Council had already improved engagement in the planning process, through changes to the public speaking scheme, including making it more accessible and inclusive to town and parish councils, and the success of live broadcasting meetings, some of which had attracted 700 viewers, the with average at around 350.

It was also considered opportune to update the SCI in advance of any statutory consultation on the forthcoming new Local Plan. It also incorporated several changes, namely the closure of the Rye Community Help-Point (where planning policy documents were made available for public viewing), updated public speaking scheme at Planning Committee and the Council's temporary COVID-19 Addendum, the use of online platforms (MS Teams and Zoom) to increase engagement opportunities, as well as incorporating some minor layout / format changes.

Members were disappointed to note that the environmental impact for the SCI had not been considered within the report – there would be clear environmental wins through the increased use of online platforms for consultation through the reduction in travel, which was just one example.

The draft SCI was appended to the report at Appendix 1; a six-week consultation was proposed and comments raised would be considered in finalising the document, which would be presented to Cabinet and full Council for adoption in due course.

RESOLVED: That the draft updated Statement of Community Involvement as attached at Appendix 1 to the report be approved for public consultation.

CHAIRMAN

The meeting closed at 7:40pm

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