

**CABINET**

4 October 2021

Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held at the Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea on Monday 4 October 2021 at 6:30pm.

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

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

Advisory Officers present: Chief Executive, Assistant Director Resources, Director of Place and Climate Change, Head of Housing and Community, Finance Manager, Planning Policy Team Leader (in part), Customer Services Manager and Democratic Services Manager.

Also Present: 24 members of the public via the YouTube live broadcast.

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Publication Date: 8 October 2021

The decisions made under PART II will come into force on 18 October 2021 unless they have been subject to the call-in procedure.

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**CB21/36. MINUTES**

The Chairman was authorised to sign the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2021 as a correct record of the proceedings.

**CB21/37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor K.P. Dixon.

**CB21/38. 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.

**CB21/39. UPDATED STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT  
(8)**

Members considered the draft updated 'Statement of Community Involvement' (SCI), attached as Appendix A to the report, which set out how and when the Council would carry out consultations and involve the community in both the preparation of planning policy documents and in the determination of planning applications.

The SCI had been subject to public consultation, following which a small number of minor amendments had been made as set out in the Consultation Summary Report, attached as Appendix B to the report. None of the amendments made as a result of the public consultation had changed the substance of the draft updated SCI as presented to Cabinet in May this year.

The main amendments to the SCI related to early engagement on plan-making and the Duty to Co-operate, changes to the public speaking processes at Planning Committee, brought in by the current administration, and the increased scope of engagement using new online platforms. Members were pleased with the increased community engagement with both the public and the parish and town councils across the district that enabled participative and collaborative planning processes.

The updated SCI provided a clear, transparent basis for carrying out consultations on future plans and would provide a useful reference to all interested parties on what involvement they could expect to have in planning decisions.

**RECOMMENDED:** That the updated Statement of Community Involvement attached as Appendix A to the report be approved and adopted, with any comments being reported verbally to full Council.

CB21/40.  
(9)

#### **BATTLE CIVIL PARISH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN 2019-2028**

Following an affirmative local Referendum result in relation to the use of the Battle Civil Parish Neighbourhood Plan (BCPNP) to help the determination of planning applications in the Parish Neighbourhood Area, Cabinet was requested to recommend to Council that the BCPNP be formally adopted and become part of the statutory Development Plan for the area.

On 2 July 2021, Rother District Council (RDC) resolved that the BCPNP (as amended in line with the Examiner's proposed modifications) should proceed to local Referendum. This decision, together with a revised version of the Plan, was published on the Council's website. Following the due legal process, and in accordance with the Neighbourhood Plan legislation, a local referendum was held on 16 September 2021 in the Battle referendum area of Battle Civil Parish as recommended by the Examiner.

Following a turnout of 24%, 89% (3% above the national average) were in favour of RDC using the BCPNP for Battle to help it decide planning applications; 11% were against; this was an excellent result and was the expected turnout.

Following this result, it was incumbent on RDC under paragraph 38A(4)(a) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 to 'make' a Neighbourhood Plan within eight weeks of the referendum result. The principal effect of making the Neighbourhood Plan was that it would become part of the statutory 'development plan' for the area.

Hence, planning applications within Battle Civil Parish would be determined against the BCPNP, alongside relevant Local Plan policies, also having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework. It was noted that the development boundary for Battle, as contained in the BCPNP, superseded the development boundary and related site allocations in the 2006 Rother District Local Plan.

The decision to make the BCPNP would need to be publicised together with a statement setting out how the environmental considerations had been integrated into the Plan. Cabinet was pleased to recommend to Council that the BCPNP be “made” with immediate effect which would bring it into legal force.

Members paid tribute to the NP team at Battle for all the hard work and effort that had resulted in a cohesive development plan for Battle.

**RECOMMENDED:** That the Battle Civil Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2019 - 2028 incorporating the Examiner’s modifications, as presented to local Referendum, be ‘made’ with immediate effect and form part of the Council’s Development Plan.

**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 15 October 2021.

CB21/41. **REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING**  
(6) **QUARTER 1 - 2021/22**

Members received and considered the report of the Finance Manager on the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring Quarter 1 2021/22 (April to June 2021) and the comments arising from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 13 September 2021. The report contained details of the significant variations of the Revenue Budget and updated Capital Programme and the following key points were highlighted:

- a revenue forecast deficit of £144,000, against the approved budget drawdown from Reserves of £2.7m - main reasons included planning appeal costs, the procurement of support from Capita for the Planning department, the delayed drawdown of £50,000 for the development of the community wildlife garden at Rye Harbour, a forecast shortfall in car parking income and a shortfall of £474,000 in the Financial Stability Programme’s savings target;
- additional grant funding of £317,000 had been received from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) to offset partially the over spends and the slowing of the Council’s capital investment programme due to the ongoing impact of the pandemic was forecast to reduce financing costs by £688,000;
- the Capital Programme forecast as at 30 June 2021 had increased by £1m against the approved budget; the position was summarised in Appendix B to the report. The biggest change related to the North East Bexhill Office Development scheme which had been removed from the programme and had reduced the estimated outturn by £15.737m. Other changes included an approved

increase of £6 million to fund the purchase of further Temporary Accommodation (TA) units and scheme slippage from 2020/21 totalling about £9 million;

- the forecast impact on Reserves was a reduction of £4.282m against the planned use of £3.319m, an increase of £963,000, several capital schemes originally planned to be funded from revenue reserves in 2020/21 had slipped into 2021/22; the additional drawdown was £819,000 and was shown in Appendices B and C to the report.

With regard to planning income, it was noted that whilst the number of applications had increased, the level of income was still below the budgeted amount. Further analysis of the income against the number of applications compared to prior years would be undertaken subject to the information being available. It was also noted that whilst financially a cautious approach would always be taken, it was hoped that there would be future savings realised due to lower than forecasted planning appeal costs.

Members were also particularly pleased to note the additional funding for the purchase of additional TA units; the impact of the investment in TA thus far had significantly improved the available provision. It was noted that the national initiative to assist those rough sleeping would continue.

**RESOLVED:** That the:

- 1) report be noted; and
- 2) grant offer of £391,050 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to support the purchase of further accommodation units as part of the East Sussex Rough Sleeper Initiative be approved.

CB21/42.  
(7)

## **FINANCIAL STABILITY PROGRAMME - PROGRESS REPORT**

Consideration was given to the progress report on the Financial Stability Programme (FSP) adopted by the Council in March 2021 under the direction of the FSP Board. The programme set out how the Council might achieve the savings and income targets in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) and ultimately deliver on the ambition to achieve financial stability as set out in the Corporate Plan.

Since April 2021, Heads of Service had been developing ideas in line with the key themes of invest to save, income generation and service prioritisation. This work had identified a significant number of suggestions which had been reported to the Financial Stability Programme Board on the 16 September 2021 and were being worked up into detailed proposals, as detailed in the report. Members were appreciative of the creativity that had been shown and the ideas that had come forward from the various departments.

It was noted that a number of small proposals could be commenced immediately which was expected to deliver some savings in the current

financial year, however it was likely that the majority of proposals and savings would start to be delivered from 2022/23 onwards. An updated timetable was shown at Appendix A to the report.

Proposals centred on service prioritisation would be considered in conjunction with phase two of the Council staffing restructure and those reliant on devolution to parish and town councils were very much in their embryonic stage. An increase in the staffing capacity of the Council would be required in order to deliver the proposals and this could be accommodated within the £750,000 earmarked reserve approved by Council. An initial appointment would be made shortly for an officer to focus on the income generation proposals and support the discussions with parish and town councils.

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

CB21/43.  
(10)

## **RESULTS OF CUSTOMER SURVEY**

As part of the Council's Corporate Plan priority objective to become a more customer focused organisation, the Council had become a member and was working with the Institute of Customer Service (ICS) to develop a Corporate Customer Service Strategy (CCSS) to build on the Council's existing customer service standards. It was noted that 21 other councils were members of the ICS.

Two recent surveys had taken place to inform this work, one directed at 4,000 residents that had recently been in contact with the Council and the second, an internal survey to all staff and Members. Members were disappointed to note that response rates were consistently around 50% between Council departments and Members. It was hoped that the response rate would improve as the value the organisation placed on prioritising positive experiences and outcomes for customers was promoted and embedded throughout the Council.

The results of the surveys had been circulated to Members and published on the website after publication of the Agenda and the headline results were as follows:

- Rother had an overall score of 59.4 out of 100 – 5% below the average score for the other local authorities that were members of the ICS and had completed this survey;
- the results showed that customers were most satisfied with the helpfulness and competence of staff and least satisfied with the speed in resolving and handling complaints as well as the outcome of the complaints made;
- the complaints measure was markedly lower than the public sector average and the rate at which things were right first time was lower compared to the ICS member councils, with Rother scoring 39% compared to an average of 57% on average; and
- customer satisfaction score varied across different communication channels, with in-person and telephone experiences significantly out performing that of written responses.

The results of the survey would not only enable the Council to identify the objectives for the new CCSS, but would also be used to compare present customer service performance to that of other local authorities and benchmark future performance monitoring. Members requested data on the number of abandoned calls and the Customer Services Manager agreed to provide the data outside of the meeting.

The CCSS would enable the Council to set its aims and objectives (including quick wins) and embark on a programme of cultural transformation setting clear targets and measures for quantifying success levels. It would need to be dynamic and flexible to allow the Council to manage customer expectations and achieve the best service outcome resources and various legal duties allowed. Improvement of internal and external processes would be required, as well as partnership participation from internal and external stakeholders. An internal group would lead on development of the draft CCSS and action plan. The draft CCSS would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for onward approval in early 2022.

Members were grateful for the work and commitment shown by officers thus far on the journey to deliver on the Corporate Plan's vision of putting customers at the heart of everything the Council does. The whole organisation had a role to play, it was not just about the customer services department, but all staff who were customer facing. The rewards for getting it right were increased productivity and respect and trust from residents and all other stakeholders.

**RESOLVED:** That the results of the recent customer survey and internal staff and Member survey conducted in partnership with the Institute of Customer Services be noted.

CB21/44.  
(11)

#### **AFGHAN RESETTLEMENT UPDATE**

The Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP) announced in spring 2021 aimed to resettle 3,000 people (approximately 600 families) by September who had been locally employed and worked alongside the British forces in Afghanistan. Local authorities were being encouraged to participate in the scheme by offering resettlement through private rented accommodation within their areas. East Sussex was committed to resettle eight families (two in Rother).

Due to ongoing unrest in Afghanistan, the Government launched a separate Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme (ACRS) to support vulnerable people displaced by the conflict. East Sussex was committed to resettle 200 individuals. These would be vulnerable people, including women, girls, minority groups (including ethnic and religious minorities and LGBT+). The first to be resettled would be those who had arrived under the evacuation programme. The Council had experience of resettling displaced people and had successfully resettled eight Syrian families under the UK Resettlement scheme (UKRS).

The Government funding provided for the UKRS had met all costs and the funding announced for the ARAP/ACRS would be comparable.

Therefore, officers were confident that the costs of operating the new schemes would be met by an integration package of funding from the Government. The core local authority tariff would be £20,520 per person over three years and all those resettled through the ARAP/ACRS would be granted immediate Indefinite Leave to Remain. In addition, funding would also be available for child education, English language lessons and healthcare, as well as £20m to support local authorities with higher service costs and £10m for housing costs, which would reduce over the 3-year period.

East Sussex had established an operational steering group in collaboration with local relevant partners to oversee preparation for the ACRS and build on existing good practice through the UKRS and identify any potential capacity gaps etc. Due to increasing pressure on the housing and homelessness services across the county, exacerbated by the current COVID-19 pandemic, it was noted that accommodation would be sourced from the private rented sector only and landlords with empty properties were encouraged to contact the Council.

Cabinet acknowledged that the Council had met its share of the national commitment to resettle Syrian refugees and was therefore well placed to meet its share of a county-wide commitment to resettle 200 households across East Sussex. It was noted that both schemes were cost neutral to the Council, as costs would be claimed back from central Government under the terms of a formal grant agreement and staff resources would be utilised from the existing UKRS Rother team.

**RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) Government funded integration package for both the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy and the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme be noted;
- 2) the progress of the Council in successfully meeting its commitment to resettle two families under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy be commended; and
- 3) the intention of the Council to join the county-wide commitment to resettling 200 families under the Afghan Citizens Resettlement Scheme be noted.

**CHAIRMAN**

The meeting closed at 7:32pm.