

COUNCIL
4 July 2022

Minutes of the Council meeting held at the Town Hall on Monday 4 July 2022 at 6:30pm.

Present: Councillors K.M. Harmer (Chair), J. Barnes (MBE), Mrs M.L. Barnes, C.A. Bayliss (remote), R.K. Bird, G.S. Browne, T.J.C. Byrne, J.J. Carroll, C.A. Clark, S.J. Coleman, P.C. Courtel, G.C. Curtis, K.P. Dixon, B.J. Drayson, Mrs D.C. Earl-Williams, S.J. Errington, K.M. Field, A.E. Ganly, N. Gordon, P.J. Gray, L. Hacking, A.K. Jeeawon, Mrs E.M. Kirby-Green, C.A. Madeley, C.R. Maynard, A.S. Mier (Vice-Chair), M. Mooney, Rev H.J. Norton, D.B. Oliver, P.N. Osborne, S.M. Prochak, MBE, G.F. Stevens, R.B. Thomas, H.L. Timpe and J. Vine-Hall.

Advisory Officers in attendance: Chief Executive, Director – Place and Climate Change and Democratic Services Manager.

Also Present: 1 member of the public in the Council Chamber and 10 members of the public via the live webcast.

C22/22. MINUTES

The Chair was authorised to sign the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 16 May 2022 as a correct record of the proceedings.

C22/23. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J.H.F. Brewerton, Mrs V. Cook and L.M. Langlands and the Deputy Chief Executive.

C22/24. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

C22/25. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

The Chair welcomed the newly elected Councillor for Brede and Udimore, Councillor Neil Gordon, to the Council and proceeded to advise the Council of the following engagements she had attended since becoming Chair:

- along with fellow colleagues she had visited the Robertsbridge Junction Station and had an absolutely fabulous day out;
- attended the Tokyo-based artist, Minoru Nomata's first solo exhibition outside of Asia at the De La Warr Pavilion;
- attended the Beeching Road Studios 'Over the fallow flood' that brought together a range of old and new work in sculpture, text, video, audio and performance made over an extended period spent researching and reflecting the life of Cynethryth, eighth-century Queen of Mercia;

- along with one of Her Majesty's Deputy Lieutenants and the Mayor, the Chair attended the lighting of the Beacon on Galley Hill to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee. She had been privileged and honoured to be able to take part in this long tradition of celebrating Royal Jubilees, Weddings and Coronations with the lighting of beacons. A beacon chain, once used as a tool for communication, had now become a symbol of our unity across towns, borders, countries and continents and is often the central point of focus for any outdoor gathering or celebration. In 1897, beacons were lit to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. In 1977, 2002 and 2012, beacons commemorated the Silver, Golden and Diamond Jubilees of The Queen, and in 2016 Her Majesty's 90th birthday;
- attended a luncheon at Azur to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee which was also a mini expo designed for businesses, community organisations and charities to come together under one roof to promote their services and products;
- had the honour of formally opening the new skatepark in Bexhill that was a jewel in the crown of Rother and of a high international standard; it was just amazing to feel the vibe especially for the young people and everyone involved, thanks to Rebecca Owen, Parks Officer was outstanding, way above the call of duty;
- attended Little Gate's lovely Summer Fayre at Beckley, whose mission was to help people with learning disabilities and autism into paid work;
- was delighted to experience students from Bexhill's schools and colleges raising their voices once again at the Bexhill Festival of Music's Big Summer Sing, featuring a massed choir of Year 4 children and live band;
- visited the SUDwell TM factory at Crowhurst, which included the observation of the current manufacturing operation of recycled paving slabs and also included a meeting with Innovate UK who were helping the business with potential funding;
- attended a private pre-trail view of 30 large rubber ducks that were being installed across Hastings and Bexhill as a live art trail to raise money for St. Michael's Hospice;
- attended a Falklands 40th Anniversary Commemoration Service organised by the Royal British Legion Little Common Branch, together with Bexhill RBL Branch and Bexhill Town Council, on the green beside the De La Warr Pavilion;
- attended the pre-show drinks and Brighton & East Sussex Youth Orchestra at the De La Warr Pavilion; on the night, the country-wide orchestra was joined on stage by members of the Hastings Area Youth Symphony Orchestra to perform an exciting selection of music;
- had the pleasure of attending Battle Abbey School's End of Year Service and Annual Prizegiving in St Mary's Parish Church and then afterwards for a picnic lunch on the Sixpenny Lawn and Summer Concert at Battle Abbey School; and
- attended a service to celebrate and give thanks to the volunteers of St John Ambulance as well as investing their new Cadets and Badgers, dedicating their newest vehicles and welcoming their new President and Chaplain at Arundel Cathedral and afterwards at Arundel Castle.

C22/26. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

1. Pursuant to Paragraph 11 of the Council Procedure Rules the following question was put by Mr Bernard Brown and answered by Councillor Dixon.

Question: A Question on the Corporate Plan

In late May 2022 a Freedom of Information request was submitted asking for a comparison between target and achievement of 14 priority objectives for the elapsed period to 31 March 2022. The response given by the Council showed the following:

Of the 14 targets from the Corporate Plan only three had been achieved. None of the targets for Cost savings / reductions or revenue increases had been achieved.

Is it accepted this is an unacceptably high failure rate which means the true Financial Stability of the Council has been allowed to drift into an increasingly dangerous state?

What specific steps will the Administration take to rectify this failing performance by 31 March 2023?

Answer: I totally reject the statement that the “true financial stability of the Council has been allowed to drift into an increasingly dangerous state”. Members and officers of this Council have been working hard post COVID-19 to deliver the required savings, along with ensuring that we promote and invest in the economic activity of the district. We are confident that the steps being taken will deliver a budget that removes reliance on reserves and in fact returns money to reserves by the timescale referred to in the Corporate Plan. No one has ever stated this would be an easy or quick process.

For clarity, the Corporate Plan is a dynamic document and from time to time it will be necessary to change targets and deadlines. It is linked to the Medium Term Financial Plan, which is also a live document, and is periodically reviewed for affordability. The next review will take place in the next few weeks and reported to Members in the autumn as part of the budget setting process. The Corporate Programme Board, made up of Officers and Members also meets regularly to review progress of both the Corporate Plan progress and the Financial Stability Programme.

As Mr Brown is aware from the answer given to his question at the full Council meeting in January, it would have been very easy to simply stop delivering services, make more staff redundant and slash expenditure to meet our financial targets. We specifically chose not to do that and instead want to protect services that local people value and want to see continued. As stated previously and in line with Cabinet decisions, the way we are doing this is through discussion with our Town Councils and the outcome of these discussions will be reported through the democratic process later this year. Cabinet has already agreed a ‘Plan B’ if these discussions are not successful.

Furthermore, through the Council’s regeneration investment there will be income streams coming on-line this year that will further contribute towards the financial stability of this Council in the long term.

Supplementary Oral Question: Thank you, Madam Chairman

Any organisation with more than 65% of targets unmet is risking being a failing organisation. This is reflected beyond the Corporate Plan as exemplified by delivery failures with Glyne Gap Roundabout; PSC, SLA and External Director issues at Rother Housing and a progress report required by resolution to Overview and Scrutiny in early 2022 on the Town Hall Project. None of which have been delivered.

The Corporate Plan is a dynamic plan, a living plan but here that means if you fail to meet your targets, just change them, no explanation required. That is not planning, it is the stuff of fairy tales and financial nightmares. Councillor Dixon refers to his January answer ignoring that it is his administration's freely set policy and targets not being met.

So, I specifically ask again, how will the overall financial targets be met when there is a £2m deficit in the savings target?

Answer: Thank you Mr. Brown for your question, even though I think it is the same question that you asked and the original question so I am not really sure what more I can add to that except that savings are ongoing. I will repeat again, for several meetings I have said the same thing. We have had an issue at the Council with the removal of Government grants, just like all councils have across the country and these discussions are happening in every council chamber across the country because every council is in the same position. I refer back, because I have to, to 2011 to 2015 where this Council did not put up its Council Tax and that has caused us to have currently a £88,000 per year shortage in its income, we would have had £7.9 million pounds more in income in that period. We have also had the Biffa issue of a million pounds extra that we have to pay, so these things are all long-term and have caused over a long-term and will be fixed over a long-term. Your reference to the 31 March 2023 seems a little arbitrary. These are issues that are going to go on longer than that and actually, probably for years and years. All get used to the new regime of councils not having any grants from the Government and as I said there is going to be an awful lot of councils that are in an awful lot worse position. Thank you.

C22/27.

REPORT OF THE CABINET ON MATTERS FOR DETERMINATION BY COUNCIL

1. It was moved by Councillor Oliver and seconded that the reports of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 27 June 2022 (there were no recommendations to Council at the meetings held on 23 May 2022), as set out in the Agenda be approved and adopted.
2. The Chairman of the Council having called over the reports, the following Minute was reserved for discussion:

27 July – CB22/09 - Burwash Neighbourhood Development Plan 2019-2028

3. On the Motion of the Chair of the Council, the Chair proceeded to deal with the minute reserved for discussion.

C22/28. **RESERVED MATTERS**

**CB22/09 – BURWASH NEIGHBOURHOOD DEVELOPMENT PLAN
2019-2028**

RESOLVED: That Minute CB22/09 be approved and adopted, as submitted.

C22/29. **REPORT OF THE HEAD OF PAID SERVICE ON DECISIONS TAKEN
BY CABINET AS MATTERS OF URGENCY**

It was moved by Councillor Oliver and seconded that it be noted that no executive decisions had been taken by Cabinet as a matter of urgency at its meetings held on 23 May 2022 and 27 June 2022.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

C22/30. **REPORT OF THE RETURNING OFFICER**

It was moved by Councillor Oliver and seconded that the report of the Returning Officer on the results of the by-election for Brede and Udimore held on 16 June 2022 be received.

The report detailed the Committees that Councillor Gordon had been appointed to and a number of other minor committee adjustments that had been agreed by the Chief Executive and relevant Group Leaders in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.6 (b).

RESOLVED: That the report be received and it be noted that:

- 1) Councillor Neil Gordon had been appointed to the Licensing and General Purposes and Planning Committees in accordance with the Group Leader's wishes;
- 2) Councillor Mary Barnes had been appointed as the Conservative Substitute on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in place of Councillor Gennette Stevens; and
- 3) Councillor Drayson had replaced Councillor Byrne as the Association of Independents' Substantive Committee Member on the Planning Committee, with Councillor Byrne acting as Substitute.

CHAIR

The Council rose at 6:52pm.