

CABINET

4 September 2023

Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held at the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea on Monday 4 September 2023 at 6:30pm.

Committee Members present: Councillors D.B. Oliver (Leader), C.A. Bayliss (Deputy Leader), S.M. Prochak (MBE) (Deputy Leader), T.J.C. Byrne, S.J. Coleman, K.M. Field, A.K. Jeeawon, R.A. McCourt, A. Rathbone Ariel and H.L. Timpe.

Other Members present: Councillors J. Barnes (MBE) (remote), A.E. Biggs (remote), Mrs V. Cook (remote), B.J. Coupar (remote), T.O. Grohne (remote, in part), C.R. Maynard (remote), P.N. Osborne and J. Stanger (remote).

Advisory Officers in attendance: Chief Executive, Interim Deputy Chief Executive, Director - Place and Climate Change, Head of Service Neighbourhood Services (in part), Corporate Policy and Projects Manager and Democratic Services Officer.

Also Present: 1 member of the public in the Council Chamber and 13 members of the public via the live webcast.

Publication Date: 7 September 2023

The decisions made under PART II will come into force on 15 September 2023 unless they have been subject to the call-in procedure.

CB23/20. MINUTES

(1)

The Chair was authorised to sign the Minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2023 as a correct record of the proceedings.

CB23/21. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(2)

There were no apologies for absence.

CB23/22. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

(5)

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

Field	Agenda Item 8 – Personal Interest as Chair of Battle Pre-School.
-------	--

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

CB23/23.
(7)

LAWN TENNIS ASSOCIATION TENNIS FOUNDATION GRANT

Cabinet considered the report of the Head of Neighbourhood Services which sought approval to accept a Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) Tennis Foundation grant to resurface / refurbish the public tennis courts and access gates in Egerton Park, Bexhill.

In October 2021, the Government (supported by the LTA) launched a national £30m investment programme to rejuvenate derelict or poor-quality "open access" public only tennis courts and improve facilities, including access gates to support / increase popularity of the sport. Match funding was not required, however the Council would be expected to maintain the courts and provide public access to tennis facilities, as well as coaching.

The Council owned eight tarmacked courts at Egerton Park: two were leased to Bexhill Tennis Club (BTC), one was used for a general 'kick-about', the remaining five were available to the public. The 'kick-about' court was popular, therefore it was proposed that this be retained specifically for this usage. Detailed discussions with BTC had resulted in them wanting to renew their lease, which meant that the two courts they used would not qualify for funding. The Council would work with BTC to agree an appropriate length of lease that would support in BTC seeking alternative funding in the future.

Members raised concerns that the current three-year lease term with BTC was not a sufficient length for the club to realise a return on any investment made. Cabinet agreed that officers explored the possibility of a longer-term lease with BTC, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services, Tourism and Joint Waste Contract.

A grant offer of £104,070.50, which had been increased to £104,954.50 since publication of the report, had been secured to complete works to the five remaining tennis courts, as well as install new access gates. In return, the Council was required to maintain a 'sinking' fund to meet the LTA criteria for surface refurbishment in 10 to 15 years, equivalent to £1,200 per annum per court, as well as enable tennis coaching and provide 'tennis for free' initiatives for all ages and abilities. To ensure sustainability it was important that a mixture of tariffed and free sessions was delivered.

The report detailed the proposed works, and it was noted that the new gate system would link to the existing system, ensuring that an income stream was maintained, courts could be booked on-line in advance, which also helped to prevent anti-social behaviour and vandalism. It was confirmed that an alternative booking system to the on-line only booking service would be explored in due course, once a tennis coach had been appointed.

After deliberation, Cabinet was pleased to support the LTA grant being included within the Council's Capital Programme for 2023/24 and agreed that the funding be used to refurbish the five public tennis courts, as well as two controlled gates in Egerton Park, Bexhill.

Cabinet also agreed that delegated authority be granted to the Director – Place and Climate Change to enter into a call-off contract with the contractor appointed by the LTA to complete the refurbishment works.

RECOMMENDED: That funding of £104,954.50 be included in the Council’s Capital Programme for 2023/2024;

AND

***RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) the £104,954.50 grant from the Lawn Tennis Association Tennis Foundation be formally accepted to deliver five refurbished tennis court surfaces and two controlled access gates for public use in Egerton Park, Bexhill;
- 2) delegated authority be granted to the Director – Place and Climate Change to enter into a call-off contract with the contractor appointed by the Lawn Tennis Association to complete the refurbishment works; and
- 3) an extended lease with Bexhill Tennis Club be explored by officers in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services, Tourism and Joint Waste Contract.

*The **RESOLVED** parts of this Minute are subject to the call-in procedure under Rule 16 of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

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 14 September 2023.

CB23/24. **REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING QUARTER 1 2023/24**

(6)

Consideration was given to the report of the Interim Deputy Chief Executive on the Revenue Budget and Capital Programme Monitoring as at 30 June 2023. The Revenue Budget and Capital Programme statements were summarised in Appendices A and B respectively to the report, together with the impact of the forecast on the Council’s reserves at Appendix C. The report also included a brief update on the Collection Fund performance.

There had been one reportable virement to the Revenue Budget regarding the internal service restructure. The Revenue Budget indicated a deficit of £0.516m against the approved budgeted drawdown from Reserves of £2,035m resulting in a forecast reserve drawdown of £2.55m. The main reasons for the variations were detailed in the report. Since the budget was approved, the Council had received several small grants totalling £60,000 for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities; the largest being £34,000 New Burdens grant.

The unbudgeted costs of the Council's district elections were raised as a concern by Members. District election costs could be recognised in the Medium Term Financial Plan each year going forward, and a more detailed breakdown of extra costs would be provided to Members after the meeting.

The forecast deficit in respect of temporary accommodation (TA) of £540k was a significant concern and officers had been reviewing options to address this. The issue was being exacerbated by the amount of rent that the authority could offer private sector landlords and it was proposed that payments increased. Paragraph 8 in the report demonstrated the cost savings to the TA budget should market rent be paid to landlords, resulting in a net annual saving of £169,125. If agreed, the impact on the forecast deficit position would be a reduction of £85k to reflect the forecast saving for the remainder of this financial year; Cabinet were happy to agree to this approach.

The Capital Programme showed expenditure of £2.4m – 8% of revised 2023/24 budget incurred during the first three months of the financial year. A further £0.66m had been spent on capital projects. The revised 2023/24 budgets had been derived from reviewing project cashflows and assessing the expected position at the time; up to £27.7m was forecast to be spent. Continued monitoring would be undertaken by the Finance department and Heads of Service.

The forecast impact on Reserves was a drawdown of £2.551m which was £0.516m higher than the planned use of £2.035m and £0.260m for capital which was £74,000 higher than the planned use of reserves.

The Collection Fund was 30.02% of the collectable debit, which was 0.21% higher than the corresponding figure in 2022/23. The budgeted yield was 30.65% which was 0.3% lower than the same period in the previous year. Business Rates Collection Fund was 29.38%, which was 0.11% higher than the previous year. Collection rates had held up well despite the cost-of-living crisis and COVID-19 pandemic.

The forecast outturn at Quarter 1 was a deficit of £2.11m which was £0.59 higher than the approved planned use of Reserves. The Capital Programme was forecast to outturn at £27.7m with £8.2m being re-profiled into future years of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Interim Deputy Chief Executive would work closely with Heads of Service and Members to reduce areas of overspend and the impact on reserves.

It was clarified for Members that there was clear, statutory guidance that did permit councils to dispose of assets in order to cover a budget deficit. In extreme circumstances, such as the issuing of a Section 114 Notice, central Government might give this consideration.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) the report be noted;

- 2) the virements to reflect the new service structure as contained within paragraph 2 in the report and Appendix A be approved; and
- 3) the approach proposed to help manage the increasing costs of temporary accommodation in respect of leasing contained within paragraph 8 in the report be approved.

CB23/25.
(8)

COMMUNITY GRANTS SCHEME - ROUND 1

The Council's Community Grants Scheme (CGS) made provision for up to £130,000 per annum to be made available to community groups or organisations that met the grant criteria of the CGS. The CGS Panel had delegated authority to grant awards up to £1,000 and it was noted that one application had been received in Round 1; Family Support Work for £312. Two applications had been awarded from the Rother Reduce, Reuse and Recycle (RRRR) Scheme to The Hunter Gatherers for £1,000 and Bexhill Environmental Group for £364.

Round 1 for 2023/24 closed on 6 July 2023. A total of six applications were received. The Panel met on 27 July 2023 and recommended awards for four applications from Battle Pre-School, Community Supporters, Right Path Hiking and Camping Skills and Winchelsea Village Hall, as set out in the report; (each application was summarised in Appendix A to the report). If agreed, this would leave £90,144 for Round 2 and other small grants for the remainder of the financial year 2023/24. It was noted that small grant and RRRR applications were accepted all year round through the on-line application process. Support and guidance could be obtained via Rother Voluntary Action (RVA) and applicants were recommended to contact RVA before submission of an application; £4,687.50 for small grants and £13,636 for RRRR grants was available for 2023/24.

Cabinet was reminded that conditions were applied when awarding grants; specifically, that full funding was required to be obtained in advance of any Rother payments being made and that Rother District Council was acknowledged in any publicity and promotional material associated with any project. After discussion, Cabinet approved all four grants and Members noted that officers were assisting Little Gate Farm to explore additional funding to meet the Council's climate agenda.

Since the Rother Community Lottery's (RCL) launch in April 2022, approximately £47,000 had been facilitated by RCL, with £28,500 distributed to various good causes (81 causes were signed up). To date £7,825 had been awarded in prizes. Prize money of £800 was donated back by winners to the causes they supported.

Members were encouraged to promote the RRRR Scheme and Round 2 of CGS within their Wards.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) the community grants listed below, as recommended by the Grants Panel, be approved subject to specific conditions relating to each application, as follows:

Battle Pre-School – £3,400

Community Supporters – £10,000

Right Path Hiking and Camping Skills – £2,384

Winchelsea Village Hall – £3,802

- 2) all Members to promote the Rother Reduce, Reuse, Recycle Scheme and Round 2 of the Community Grants Scheme within their wards.

(Councillor Field declared an Personal Interest as Chair of Battle Pre-School, and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the meeting for the consideration thereof).

CHAIR

The meeting closed at 7:26pm