

**CABINET**

8 April 2024

Minutes of the Cabinet meeting held at the Town Hall, Bexhill-on-Sea on Monday 8 April 2024 at 6:30pm.

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

Other Members present remotely: Councillors J. Barnes, A.E. Biggs, S. Burton, Mrs V. Cook, T.O. Grohne, M.C. Legg, P.N. Osborne and J. Stanger.

Advisory Officers present: Chief Executive, Deputy Chief Executive, Director – Place and Climate Change, Head of Housing and Regeneration, Planning Policy Manager, Senior Planning Policy Officer, Levelling Up Partnership Manager and Democratic Services Manager.

Also Present: 13 members of the public via the live webcast.

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Publication Date: 11 April 2024

The decisions made under PART II will come into force on 19 April unless they have been subject to the call-in procedure.

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**CB23/83. MINUTES**

(1)

The Chair was authorised to sign the Minutes of the meetings held on 4 and 19 March 2024 as correct records of the proceedings.

**CB23/84. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

(2)

An apology for absence was received from Councillor C.A. Bayliss (Deputy Leader).

The Leader extended condolences on behalf of Cabinet to Councillor Bayliss whose husband had recently passed away.

**CB23/85. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATIONS**

(5)

There were no declarations of interest made and no dispensations noted.

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

## **PEASMARSH NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN 2021-2028**

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

On 19 January 2024, Rother District Council (RDC) resolved that the PNP (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 29 February 2024 in the Peasmarsh referendum area of Peasmarsh Parish as recommended by the Examiner.

Following a turnout of 27%, 85% were in favour of RDC using the PNP for Peasmarsh to help it decide planning applications; 15% were against.

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

The decision to make the PNP 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 PNP be "made" with immediate effect, which would bring it into legal force. This would take place at the extraordinary meeting of full Council due to be held on 22 April 2024.

It was noted that Neighbourhood Plan end dates were aligned to RDC's current Local Plan which was 2028. The adoption of this plan would mean a simpler review and revise process.

Cabinet and the local Member paid tribute to officers and the dedicated volunteer Neighbourhood Plan team at Peasmarsh for all the hard work and effort that had resulted in the development plan for Peasmarsh being completed in a relatively short period of time, despite the COVID pandemic.

**RECOMMENDED:** That the Peasmarsh Neighbourhood Plan 2021-2028 incorporating the Examiner's modifications, as presented to local

Referendum, be 'made' with immediate effect and form part of the Council's Development Plan.

CB23/87. **TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION INVESTMENT STRATEGY AND TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION PURCHASES**

(7)

Cabinet considered the report of the Head of Housing and Regeneration which sought approval for additional funding to purchase Temporary Accommodation (TA) properties for homeless households and to amend the Council's Temporary Accommodation Investment Strategy (TAIS). Since its inception in 2019, the TAIS had been successful and achieved all aims and objectives set. The Housing Team now possessed the knowledge, experience, and skills to effectively purchase, refurbish, and manage the Council's own TA. Service improvements would be ongoing.

To date, the Council had spent c£5.4m and was forecast to spend a further c£6m in 2023/24 which left an unallocated balance of approximately £1.1m in 2024/25. To date, 30 general needs TA units and 12 Housing First units had been purchased, with a further seven units due to be completed shortly.

The actual costs avoided by the Council annually, based on 30 general needs TA units, was £390,000. The increased cost avoidance was supported by the Council becoming a Registered Provider (RP), which enabled eligibility for additional funding. In total, the Council had secured approximately £3.5m additional funding. Homes England grant schemes could provide up to 30% match-funding against future Council investment.

As of February 2024, 172 households in TA were funded from the Council's Revenue Budget. At present, a further investment of £9m meant that 50 units could be purchased and avoid further costs of £564,000 annually (a return investment of 6.3%). It was noted that properties purchased with grant funding must be used for TA for 30 years. The Council could dispose of these properties later; however, a proportion of the funding must be paid back.

The average net cost to the Council of TA through private providers, per size of household, was illustrated in Appendix A to the report. The average length and cost of stay in TA was 70 (£3,266) and 80 (£5,005) days for single people and families, respectively. Based on a 2-bed house Council-owned property, an annual cost would be £6,813 compared to £16,860 private rented property.

The report outlined the investment over the next 5-6 years, which identified the costs that could be avoided by using Council-owned properties. At present, the forecast indicated an impact of £68,000 2024/25, £204,000 2025/26 and £341,000 2026/27 onwards. Reserves would need to be used to fund the TA costs. Costs monitoring would be ongoing.

Members were advised that the financial assessment should be read in conjunction with the TAIS at Appendix B to the report, which outlined

the approximate number and types of property the Council would target for use as TA alongside how these properties would be purchased, managed, repaired and maintained. It was noted that despite the national picture, empty homes were not such an issue in the Rother district and the Council's Empty Homes Steering Group was proactive in identifying and working with these properties / owners; it was second home ownership and the prevalence of internet-based holiday lettings which were more of a concern.

Cabinet was supportive of the proposals in the report, which would reduce the drain on the Council's resources, ensure decent homes standards were maintained for TA and improve the Council's asset base. Cabinet paid tribute to the work of the Housing Team, particularly now that the expertise and experience to manage properties was in-house.

**RECOMMENDED:** That:

- 1) the amended Temporary Accommodation Investment Strategy be approved;
- 2) the current 'Housing - Temporary Accommodation Purchase' capital budget of £12.476m be increased by a further £12m to enable the acquisition of additional temporary accommodation, to be funded by £9m of borrowing and £3m anticipated grant provision from Homes England;
- 3) the additional revenue impact for 2024/25 of £68,000 be approved, to be funded from reserves if service savings are not forthcoming and that the future estimated revenue impacts be noted;
- 4) delegated authority be granted to the Head of Housing and Regeneration to complete property purchases as required, in consultation with Section 151 Officer;
- 5) delegated authority be granted to the Head of Housing and Regeneration to receive Capital Grant Awards to support the purchase of temporary accommodation, in consultation with Section 151 Officer; and
- 6) delegated authority be granted to the Head of Housing and Regeneration to make amendments to the Temporary Accommodation Investment Strategy from time to time in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Housing.

CB23/88.  
(8)

**LONG TERM PLAN FOR TOWNS FUNDING FOR BEXHILL 2024-25**

Cabinet considered the report of the Head of Housing and Regeneration which sought approval for the Long-Term Plan for Towns (LTPT) grant funding to be formally received by the Council and added to the Council's Revenue and Capital budgets. The funds would be provided directly to each delivery organisation following approval by the Bexhill Town Board.

The LTPT was a government initiative administered through the Department of Levelling Up and Communities (DLUHC). It was a regeneration initiative that aimed to support improvements to UK towns, boosting economic growth, improving infrastructure, enhancing social well-being and reducing disparities in areas most in need.

The total grant allocation over the 10-year period of LTPT was £19.510m across revenue and capital. £50,000 revenue funding had been paid in 2023/24, as initial capacity funding for the Council to do the work necessary to establish the Town Board by 1 April 2024. The provisional revenue allocation for 2024/25 was £449,000, the remaining £4,075,000 revenue funding was split across the budget years 2025/2034. The capital allocation totalled £14.936m between 2024 and 2034, with exact spend to be decided through the Town Board. It was noted that the allocation of funding was to the whole of Bexhill within the municipal boundary, including Little Common and Sidley.

The decision-making body for funding priorities would be the new local decision-making body – the Bexhill Town Board. The LTPT guidance stated that the Town Board should involve people from the local community, including businesses, working with central and local government representatives to identify and address regeneration priorities. The Council would be the accountable body for the spend, as well as having a representative on the Town Board and was likely to become a delivery partner for some projects.

The funding would be released by DLUHC subject to a 10-year vision statement and 3-year investment plan. The Levelling Up Partnership Manager, supported by Council Senior Managers and Members, would work with the Town Board to develop both the vision statement and the investment plan, drawing on learning from direct community engagement. The 10-year vision and 3-year, evidence-based, investment plan must have formal Town Board approval.

DLUHC required the establishment of the Town Board by 1 April 2024, with a Chair and Membership identified and with draft Terms of Reference developed for consideration by the Board. The recently appointed Levelling Up Partnership Manager would support the Chair and the Membership and the meetings of the Town Board and any required sub-groups. They would also lead on community engagement, drawing in the expertise of colleagues and partners as appropriate. It was recognised that this new way of working would be challenging for the community and business sectors who would be the decision makers, via the Town Board.

A full economic and social impact assessment would be undertaken for the Town Board programme, alongside that for the Levelling Up Partnership projects funding (elsewhere on the agenda). This would be completed by 1 August 2024 as part of developing the evidence based 3-year investment plan.

The LTPFT governance arrangements would need to provide the Council with a level of assurance that satisfied its position as

accountable body for the grant and minimise financial risks to the Council. Members noted that the governance arrangements were subject to change as the Council collaborated with stakeholders to ensure that it was able to achieve the assurances it needed as the accountable body. This was a fast-moving initiative with a complex relationship between its different elements and regular updates would be provided.

Cabinet was delighted to agree that the LTPT grant funding be formally received by the Council and added to the Council's Revenue and Capital budgets. Members agreed to grant delegated authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, for approval of the governance arrangements when finalised. Members also agreed to grant delegated authority to the Head of Housing and Regeneration to enter into relevant agreements with third party entities, as agreed by the LTPT Board and for the purposes of delivering the programme, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance.

**RECOMMENDED:** That £14.936m (2024/2034) be added to the Capital Programme and phased in-line with the 10-year drawdown schedule, for the Long Term Plans for Towns. Additionally, £449,000 revenue funding for 2024/25 only.

**AND**

**\*RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) the receipt of £0.94m grant funding from the Department of Levelling Up Housing and Community's Long-Term Plan for Towns Fund in 2024/25 as detailed in the report, be approved;
- 2) the Councils' role as the accountable body for the Long-Term Plans for Towns and delegated authority be granted to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Section 151 Officer, for approval of the governance arrangements when finalised, be accepted; and
- 3) delegated authority be granted to the Head of Housing and Regeneration to enter into relevant agreements with third party entities, as agreed by the Long-Term Plans for Towns Board and for the purposes of delivering the programme, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance.

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

CB23/89.  
(9)

**LEVELLING UP PARTNERSHIP FUNDING AND PROJECTS**

Cabinet considered the report of the Director – Place and Climate Change which sought approval for the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) grant funding for the Levelling Up Partnership Programme 2024/25 to be formally received by the Council and added to the Council's Revenue and Capital budgets. The funds

would be provided to delivery organisations in-line with decisions made by DLUHC.

This funding was separate to the funding previously reported (the Levelling Up Fund), which was allocated by DLUHC to the De La Warr Pavilion and Sidley; it was a range of capital and revenue projects Rother-wide to boost economic growth and community infrastructure across the district.

Whilst the Council was consulted regarding strategic priorities, the final decisions on which projects would be allocated funding, and the amounts provisionally awarded, were made by DLUHC as a result of direct liaison with community and business projects and representatives. The grant award was for 2024/25 spend and contained both Capital and Revenue funding.

The prospective deliverers of the funded projects and project overviews were found at Appendix A to the report; projects needed to be delivered by March. DLUHC had also funded several other projects, for which East Sussex County Council was the accountable body and these were listed for information at the end of Appendix A to the report.

Reporting of delivery progress and spend to DLUHC would be undertaken by the Levelling Up Partnership Manager, approved by the Director – Place and Climate Change, in line with DLUHC grant agreement requirements to be advised. All projects would be screened and assessed, if necessary, under Subsidy Control regulations and an initial communications plan had been developed with the Marketing Communications Account Manager.

A full economic and social impact assessment would be undertaken for the Levelling Up Partnership (LUP) programme, alongside that for the 3-year investment plan for the Bexhill Town Board (elsewhere on the agenda). This would be ongoing and completed by 1 August 2024.

The Council would be the accountable body for the LUP funded projects. Grant agreements between the Council and each individual grant recipient would make clear the terms under which the grant was awarded and minimise any risk to the Council as accountable body; however, given the complexity of this programme which covered 13 distinct projects, it was important that a robust programme management and performance monitoring approach was followed, to ensure the terms of the grant agreements were met.

The award of LUP funding represented much needed investment in community building infrastructure and capacity building, that underpinned social capital and reduction in social and health inequalities. Cabinet was delighted to receive this funding from Government, although some rural Members were disappointed at the allocation of projects supported and felt that the rural areas, which also had significant levels of poverty, had been overlooked. It was noted that officers and political leaders had promoted projects across the whole of the district and the issues pertaining to the rural areas had been highlighted.

Cabinet was pleased and enthusiastic to receive the LUP funding, allocated by DLUHC for projects across Rother, being added to the 2024/25 Capital Programme and Revenue Budgets and agreed that, subject to full Council approval of the programme of projects outlined in the report, the Director – Place and Climate Change be granted delegated authority to agree terms and conditions of the grant, in consultation with Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Economic Development.

Cabinet also agreed that delegated authority be granted to the Director – Place and Climate Change, in consultation with legal colleagues and the Council’s Section 151 Officer, to extend Levelling Up Partnership grant funds to third party entities via individual grant agreements.

**RECOMMENDED:** That the Levelling Up Partnership funding allocated by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for projects across Rother be added to the 2024/5 Capital Programme and Revenue Budgets at the amounts £18.080m and £0.410m, respectively.

**AND**

**\*RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) subject to full Council approval of the programme of projects outlined in this report, the total of £18,490,000 Levelling Up Fund be accepted, and the Director – Place and Climate Change be granted delegated authority to agree terms and conditions of the grant, in consultation with Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Economic Development;
- 2) delegated authority be granted to the Director – Place and Climate Change, in consultation with legal colleagues and the Council’s Section 151 Officer to extend Levelling Up Partnership grant funds to third party entities, as decided by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities allocation advice, via individual grant agreements; and
- 3) the Councils’ role as the accountable body for the Levelling Up Partnership be noted.

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

**CHAIR**

The meeting closed at 7:16pm.