

Rother District Council

Report to	-	Council
Date	-	24 May 2023
Report of the	-	Chief Executive
Subject	-	Decisions taken as a matter of urgency at Cabinet Meetings

The Council is asked to receive the report of Cabinet, in accordance with paragraph 4 of the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules and 17(a) of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, on a decision taken as a matter of urgency at its meeting held on 27 March 2023.

CB22/97. **UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND – RYE FISHERIES**

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) supported the Government's wider commitment to level up all parts of the UK and was a £2.6 billion Fund designed to succeed and improve upon EU structural funds.

In 2021 the Council commissioned a feasibility study on how the Rye Fisheries could be developed which resulted in the identification of total project cost of £321,677 required to renovate the business site to meet new business model requirements. The UKSPF Investment Plan had agreed a capital allocation of £170,000 against the £321,677 fisheries project which was approved in January 2023.

Chapmans was a fish wholesaler based in Sevenoaks and Rye who purchased the Rye business in 2015 with the intention to set up the facility to allow fishermen to land from their boats directly into the premises. They worked directly with local Hastings and Rye fishermen who fish sustainably using under 10 metre boats, pledging to take 100% of the catch that a boat lands to provide their fishermen/women with greater financial stability.

Fisheries along the rest of the south coast had moved to selling direct to Brixham Trawler Agents (BTA), Devon who were in the process of offering free refrigeration units at ports across the south east, and cheap transportation back to Brixham. Much of the fish sold on Brixham's auction was then exported to Europe adding another 300-mile journey back to a UK port for export adding an extra 800 food miles.

The Chapmans' pledge to buy the whole catch, together with the rapidly changing marketplace, required new ways of working internationally, nationally and locally. This needed a multi strand approach consisting:

- a. Reducing the need to export to Europe
- b. Selling more to the local / national market
- c. Education locally to support the consumption of local, seasonal fish

In practice this meant a new business model, based on sales to a new UK market. Chapmans have looked at doing this by:

- a. Selling fish direct to the public.
- b. Selling unwanted and unused fish to the UK market in a palatable way.
- c. Re-educating and skills development.

Cabinet was pleased to agree that the £170,000 capital allocation for the fisheries project be allocated to the Chapmans' project so that work could start immediately on developing the proposals and putting the proposition in place. The terms of the grant would ensure that the added value in terms of skills development and training would be delivered, or monies would be recovered. The UKSPF allocation for 2022/23 had been carried forward into 2023/24 so spend could happen from April, subject to a formal grant agreement. The Director – Place and Climate Change agreed to check whether this proposal would have any impact on a local seafood specialist in Etchingham.

RESOLVED: That:

- 1) the £170,000 UK Shared Prosperity Fund capital funding allocation be directed towards the Rye Fisheries project in partnership with Chapmans; and
- 2) the Director – Place and Climate Change be delegated authority to agree the terms of grant.

(The Chairman of Council had agreed that this decision could be taken as a matter of urgency to enable the Council to formally confirm how the Council intended to spend the 2022/23 carry over no later than 3 May 2023).

(The Leader had accepted this item onto the Agenda as an Additional Agenda Item in order for the Cabinet to consider this matter which could not wait until the Cabinet's next scheduled meeting in June 2023).

(As this matter was also a Key Decision which had not been published on the Cabinet's Forward Plan, the Chair of the Overview Scrutiny Committee had agreed in accordance with Access to Information Rule 15 (Key-Decisions - Special Urgency) that as the date by which this decision must be taken Access to Information Rule 14 (general exception) could not be followed that the taking of this decision could not be reasonably deferred).

(Councillor Maynard declared a Personal Interest in this matter as an elected Executive Member of East Sussex County Council and in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct remained in the meeting during the consideration thereof).

(Cabinet Agenda Item 15)

Malcolm Johnston
Chief Executive