

## **SOUTHEND-ON-SEA CITY COUNCIL**

### **Meeting of Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee**

**Date: Thursday, 2nd November, 2023**

**Place: Committee Room 1 - Civic Suite**

**Present:** Councillor S Wakefield (Chair)  
Councillors L Burton (Vice-Chair), B Beggs, S Buckley, O Cartey,  
M Dent, F Evans, N Folkard, S George, J Harland, R McMullan,  
J Warren, P Collins\*, D Cowan\*, A Dear\* and R Woodley\*

\*Substitute in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 31.

**In Attendance:** Councillors K Buck, J Courtenay, T Cox, M Davidson, D Garston and  
J Lamb (Cabinet Members)  
Councillor S Ayles  
J Chesterton, G Halksworth, S Newman, A Richards, C Shuter and  
S Cox

**Start/End Time:** 6.30pm - 9.05 pm

#### **38 Chair's Introduction & Apologies for Absence**

##### **(a) Chair's Introduction**

Prior to the consideration of the matters set out in the agenda, the Chair outlined their expectations of the standard of conduct and behaviour to be shown at the meeting.

##### **(b) Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Borton (Substitute: Councillor D Cowan), Councillor T Cowdrey (Substitute: Councillor R Woodley), Councillor Walker (Substitute: Councillor A Dear) and Councillor P Wexham (Substitute: Councillor P Collins).

#### **39 Declarations of Interest**

The following interests were declared at the meeting:

- (a) Councillor M Sadza – Minute 40 (Questions from Members of the Public) – Member of Acorn Renters Union.
- (b) Councillor R Woodley – Minute 43 (Budget Update) – Member of a Bowls Club.
- (c) Councillor O Cartey – Minute 43 (Budget Update) Grandfather Founding Trustee of 'Project Southchurch' and previously advised on financial and operational issues.
- (d) Councillor N Folkard – Minute 43 (Budget Update) – as Fusion leisure was mentioned and he was a daily user of the swimming pool at Garon's Park.

#### **40 Questions from Members of the Public**

The Committee noted the response of the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning to a question presented by Mr Webb.

#### **41 Minutes of the Meeting held on 31 August 2023**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2023 be received, confirmed as a correct record and signed.

#### **42 Minutes of the Special Meeting held on 5 October 2023**

Resolved:

That the minutes of the special meeting of the Committee held on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2023 be received, confirmed as a correct record and signed.

#### **43 Budget Update**

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Finance and Resources (S151 officer) which had been referred direct by the Cabinet from the meeting held on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023.

The report had been circulated prior to the meeting as a supplementary agenda item and set out a range of proposals to help to address the financial challenges the Council was facing, to allow sufficient time to develop and make the necessary detailed arrangements which included appropriate consultation.

The Committee asked a number of procedural questions regarding a S114 notice, any what would happen if one was required to be issued, which were responded to by the S151 officer (the Executive Director of Finance and Resources).

On consideration of the report the Leader of the Council made a commitment that Group Leaders would be involved in the development of the proposed consultation(s) to ensure the best quality responses, and that they would have the opportunity to participate in 'Revenue Challenge Sessions'. (*Action noted*).

The Committee discussed the report at length and asked a number of questions which were responded to by the relevant Cabinet Members. In response to a committee member's question regarding business support grants, the Leader of the Council requested for the meeting to move into exempt session at the end to briefly discuss, to which the Chair agreed.

The Leader of the Council clarified the net General Fund Revenue Budget position for 2023/24 of £143.875M, and that the language would be corrected in future reports.

During the debate a Councillor sought reassurance that he would receive a response regarding a £300,000 overspend in the Highways budget. (*Action noted*).

Prior to the meeting, the Chair of the Committee requested all Councillors to put forward any ideas for revenue generation / revenue savings which were being collated by Democratic Services so that details could be supplied to Cabinet Members. At the time of the meeting, the Chair confirmed that responses had been so far received from Councillor

R Woodley, Councillor S Aylen, Councillor M Dent, Councillor A Jones, Councillor M Berry, Councillor R McMullan and Councillor M Terry.

The Leader of the Council reaffirmed his commitment to appraising all suggested revenue saving / revenue generating ideas at a future meeting of the Cabinet. In order for all suggestions to sufficiently be reviewed by officers and appraised by the Cabinet, all Councillors were requested to submit their responses to Democratic Services and the Chair of the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee within the following 7 days. (*Action noted*).

During the debate a number of revenue saving / revenue generation suggestions were put forward by Members, which were logged by Democratic Services. These included:

- to review the modelling for burials in Southend with a comparison of nearby neighbours, and whether an alternative fee structure could be introduced for those living outside of the City.
- Associated cost savings and possibility of moving staff from Civic 2 into the main tower block (estate optimisation).
- Subsidies to bowl clubs.

The Committee agreed that, in addition to noting the following decisions by Cabinet, a new recommendation be added (at number 7) that Members suggestions for revenue saving / revenue generation be collated and appraised at a future meeting of the Cabinet.

Resolved:

That the following decisions of the Cabinet be noted:

1. Notes the significant financial challenges facing the Council and agrees that immediate action is required in-year to mitigate the scale of current year overspending as well as plan for longer term, fundamental re-design of Council service delivery.
2. Notes the work already in progress under existing delegations to the Chief Executive and senior officers.
3. Agrees therefore to take the decisions outlined in Appendix 1 and delegates to the relevant Executive Director authority to take all necessary action to realise savings, income generation and cost avoidance measures related to those decisions.
4. Agrees also to delegate authority to the relevant Executive Director, in consultation with (relevant Cabinet Member) to agree the consultation document for decisions in Appendix 1 subject to statutory consultation. The outcome of the consultation and resulting recommendations to be taken back to Cabinet for agreement.
5. Agree that officers continue to develop the longer-term service re-design measures as set out in paragraph 6 and that Cabinet receive a future report on the projected impact of that service redesign on the Council's finances.
6. Agrees that the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, will develop a new design for service delivery based upon a localities model for approval by a future Cabinet.

Note: This is an Executive Function

Cabinet Member: Councillor T Cox (Leader of the Council)

7. That is be agreed Members suggestions for revenue saving / revenue generation be collated and appraised at a future meeting of the Cabinet.

#### **44 Southend-on-Sea City Council Refreshed Corporate Plan 2023-2027**

The Committee considered a report of the Executive Director (Strategy and Change), by way of pre-Cabinet Scrutiny, presenting the Council's refreshed Corporate Plan for 2023 to 2027.

In response to questions from members of the Committee, the Leader confirmed that the final document would be shared with partners as appropriate, and that there was not expected to be any significant changes to the Corporate Plan arising from the budget update report which had more recently been referred.

The Leader of the Council thanked everyone who had attended the working party to contribute to the draft Corporate Plan and commended the collaborative approach that had been undertaken.

Resolved:

That the report to Cabinet be noted.

Note: This is an Executive Function

Cabinet Member: Councillor T Cox (Leader of the Council)

#### **45 Treasury Management Report - Mid Year 2023/24**

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director (Finance and Resources), by way of pre-Cabinet scrutiny, presenting the treasury management activity and compliance with the treasury management strategy for both quarter two and the period from April to September 2023.

The Committee asked a number of questions regarding the Lothbury Property Trust which were responded to by the Executive Director (Finance and Resources) and the Leader of the Council.

Resolved:

That the report to Cabinet, be noted.

Note: This is an Executive Function

Cabinet Member: Councillor T Cox (Leader of the Council)

#### **46 Association of South Essex Local Authorities - Joint Committee (now re-branded as South Essex Councils (SEC))**

The Committee received the draft minutes of the meeting of the Joint Committee of the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA), held on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

The Committee also received a cover note which advised that the Joint Committee of the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA) had been rebranded as South Essex Councils (SEC) at the meeting held on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

The covering note highlighted any implications, benefits or considerations for Southend and its interests arising from the SEC Joint Committee, its work programme and operations.

One of the reported implications was that Southend was being asked to recommend through its own governance procedures that Castle Point Borough Council be indemnified against all costs and liabilities arising from the OSE-related redundancy, in the same proportion as our current OSE subscription (currently 17%).

In response the Leader advised that he was not aware of such implications arising from the meeting, however he would seek further clarification and provide a written response to the Committee. (*Action noted*).

Resolved:

That the draft minutes of the meeting of the Joint Committee of the Association of South Essex Local Authorities held on 28<sup>th</sup> September, be noted.

Note: This is a Scrutiny function

**Chairman:** \_\_\_\_\_