

SOUTHEND-ON-SEA BOROUGH COUNCIL

Meeting of Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee

Date: Thursday, 11th June, 2020

Place: Virtual meeting via Microsoft Teams

Present: Councillor D Garston (Chair)
Councillors D McGlone (Vice-Chair), B Ayling, D Burzotta, D Cowan, T Cox, P Collins, M Davidson, M Dent, S George, S Habermel, H McDonald, D Nelson, I Shead, M Stafford, S Wakefield and P Wexham

In Attendance: Councillors I Gilbert, A Jones, K Robinson, M Terry, R Woodley (Cabinet Members), A Griffin, J Chesterton, T Forster, M Marks, L Reed, J Ruffle, J Williams, A Agba, P Bates, G Halksworth, A Keating, T MacGregor, S Meah-Sims, C Robinson, T Row, S Tautz and C Woodcraft

Start/End Time: 6.00 - 9.00 pm

40 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence from the meeting.

41 Questions from Members of the Public

There were no questions from members of the public relating to business included in the agenda for the meeting.

42 Declarations of Interest

The following councillors declared interests as indicated:

- (a) Councillors I Gilbert, A Jones, K Robinson, M Terry and R Woodley (Cabinet Members) - Interest in the referred items; attended pursuant to the dispensation agreed at Council on 19 July 2012, under S.33 of the Localism Act 2011;
- (b) Cllr D Burzotta - Minute 44 (Initial Local Financial Assessment of COVID-19) - Interests in local family business and as local property landlord - Interest;
- (c) Cllr P Collins - Minute 45 (Urgent Item of Business - SO46 Report) - Season ticket holder of Southend United Football Club - Interest;
- (a) Cllr M Davidson - Minute 43 (Council's Response to COVID-19) - Volunteer with Southend Food Bank - Non-pecuniary interest, Minute 43 (Initial Local Financial Assessment of COVID-19) - Director of South Essex Homes - Non-pecuniary interest;
- (b) Cllr I Gilbert - Minute 43 (Council's Response to COVID-19) - Council representative on the Board of Southend Association of Voluntary Services (SAVS) - Non-pecuniary interest;
- (c) Cllr A Jones - Minute 45 (Urgent Item of Business - SO46 report) - Council's representative on governing body of Southend Adult Community College - Non-pecuniary interest;
- (d) Cllr M Terry - Minute 45 (Urgent Item of Business - SO46 Report) - Season ticket holder of Southend United Football Club - Interest; and

- (e) Cllr R Woodley - Minute 45 (Urgent Item of Business - SO46 Report) - Wife is a season ticket holder of Southend United Football Club - Interest.

43 The Council's Response to COVID-19

The Chair reported that he had called the special meeting of the Committee pursuant to Paragraph 4 of the Scrutiny Procedure Rules in Part 4(e) of the Constitution, to consider the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its plans for recovery.

The Committee considered Minute 24 of the meeting of Cabinet held on 9 June 2020, which had been referred direct to Scrutiny, together with a report of the Chief Executive detailing the action taken by the Council to respond to the pandemic and its approach to the restoration of services and the provision of support for local residents, businesses, staff and the borough in general.

Councillors were advised that the report was to be considered by each of the scrutiny committees during the current cycle of special meetings and were reminded that, in considering the action taken by the Council in response to the pandemic, each scrutiny committee should focus on its specific areas of responsibility. The relevant members of the Cabinet and chief officers were in attendance to answer questions raised by councillors at the meeting. In response to questions raised by councillors that couldn't be answered at the meeting, the Chair requested that details be provided by way of written response.

The Committee received a presentation from the Policy Manager and the Interim Head of Corporate Strategy, together with an updated version of the report of the Chief Executive, which also set out proposals to address arrangements for local COVID-19 outbreak planning and highlighted the role of the Council in supporting the NHS test, trace, and isolate programme. The report also detailed a proposed approach to driving recovery from the impact of the pandemic, through the use of the Southend 2050 programme.

On behalf of the Cabinet, the Leader thanked all officers of the Council for their commitment in responding to local issues arising from the pandemic and for their contribution to the delivery of new, adapted and existing services in difficult circumstances. The Leader also extended his thanks to National Health Service staff and other key workers for their dedication in responding to issues arising from the pandemic

Resolved:

That the following decisions of the Cabinet be noted:

- "1. That the action taken to date in response to the Covid-19 crisis, be noted;
2. That, in the light of the impact of Covid-19, the proposed approach to recovery, including the use of the Southend 2050 programme to drive the Borough and Council's recovery phase and in that context undertake a review of the Southend 2050 outcomes and roadmap content, be approved;
3. That the residents, staff, businesses and partners be thanked for all their efforts to date in responding to the pandemic;
4. That the governance arrangements for overseeing preparations for a local outbreak of Covid-19 and the production and implementation of a Local Outbreak Control Plan be put in place, as outlined in paragraph 4.15.5 of the submitted report. This will see the establishment of an Outbreak Control Oversight Board and a Local Health Protection Board as sub-groups of the Health and Wellbeing Board; and

5. That it be noted that the executive decisions, that would otherwise go to Cabinet, relating to the arrangements for local outbreak planning, the Council's role in supporting the NHS test, trace and isolate programme and associated matters, will be dealt with under the Council's SO 46 procedure, with additional consultation with the 4 Group Leaders in the case of strategic matters."

Note: This is an Executive Function
Cabinet Member: I Gilbert

44 Initial Local Financial Assessment of COVID-19

The Committee considered Minute 25 of the meeting of Cabinet held on 9 June 2020, which had been referred direct to Scrutiny, together with a report of the Executive Director (Finance and Resources), which provided a high-level initial assessment of the local financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the minimisation of its impact on local residents and businesses and the future sustainability of service provision. The report also outlined the Council's initial response to the financial challenges presented by the pandemic over the short and medium term, although councillors were advised that assumptions and understanding of many contributory factors were under constant review.

Councillors were advised that it was currently too early to assess the overall economic impact of COVID-19, but that it was currently estimated that the original lockdown arrangements could cost the authority around £2.5m-£3.0m each month and that effective management of the short and medium-term financial challenges arising from the pandemic would be important going forward, whilst continuing to provide support for local residents and businesses.

The Executive Director (Finance and Resources) highlighted areas of central Government support that had been received by the Council, including a number of elements of passported funding and reported that the pandemic had had a significant effect in terms of a number of universal income areas. The Executive Director (Finance and Resources) also gave an oral update on the latest announcements by the government regarding potential emergency grant funding since the publication of the report.

The relevant members of the Cabinet were also in attendance to answer questions raised by councillors at the meeting.

Resolved:

That the following decisions of the Cabinet be noted:

"1. That the Council's initial assessment of the local financial impact of the unprecedented challenges that has been caused by the pandemic, be noted;

2. That the proposed tactical and strategic response to managing the financial challenges, be noted; and

3. That regular reports be presented to future Cabinet meetings, which will provide updated assessments on the Council's financial position and outline any changes to the Council's strategy and range of assumptions."

Note: This is an Executive Function
Cabinet Member: I Gilbert

45 Urgent Item of Business - SO46 Report

This matter was considered at the meeting as an urgent additional item of business on the basis of its relevance to the report on the Council's response to COVID-19. The Scrutiny Committee had before it the report made to the Cabinet at its meeting on 9 June 2020 and the associated Minute 26 of that meeting.

With the agreement of the Chair, the Committee considered a report setting out details of the following decisions that had been implemented pursuant to Standing Order 46 (Urgent Action) during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic and were of relevance to the earlier report on the Council's response to the pandemic:

- (a) 1.1 Covid-19 - Rent Arrangements for Council Commercial Tenants; and
- (b) 1.2 Roots Hall and Fossetts Farm – Tenants

There was no debate on the report by councillors.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

Note: This is an Executive Function
Cabinet Member: As appropriate to each item

Chairman: _____