

SOUTHEND-ON-SEA CITY COUNCIL

Meeting of Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee

Date: Thursday, 1st December, 2022

Place: Council Chamber - Civic Suite

Present: Councillor D Garston (Chair)
Councillors D Nelson (Vice-Chair), M Borton, H Boyd, D Cowan,
T Cowdrey, T Cox, M Davidson, F Evans, A Jones, A Line, R McMullan,
M Sadza, I Shead, C Walker and P Wexham

In Attendance: Councillors S George, P Collins, C Mulroney and S Wakefield (Cabinet Members), Councillors K Evans and R Woodley, J Chesterton, S Meah-Sims, A Richards and S Tautz

Start/End Time: 6.30 pm - 9.20 pm

531 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence from the meeting.

532 Declarations of Interest

The following interests were declared at the meeting:

(a) Councillors S George, P Collins, C Mulroney and S Wakefield (Cabinet Members) - Interest in the called-in items, attended pursuant to the dispensation agreed at Council on 19 July 2012, under S.33 of the Localism Act 2011.

(b) Councillor A Jones – Minute 535 - Resourcing Better Outcomes: Finance and Corporate Performance Report 2022/23 (Period 6)) - Family member employed by the Council. Councillor Jones withdrew from the meeting during the discussion of all matters related to officer pay.

533 Questions from Members of the Public

The Committee noted the responses of the Cabinet Member for Corporate Matters and Performance Delivery to questions presented by Mr David Webb.

534 Minutes of the Meeting held on 13 October 2022

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 13 October 2022 be confirmed as a correct record and signed.

535 Resourcing Better Outcomes - Finance and Corporate Performance Report 2022/23 - Period 6

The Committee considered Minute 453 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 8 November 2022, which had been called-in for scrutiny, together with a report of the Executive Director (Finance and Resources) reviewing the Council's financial performance.

The relevant Cabinet Members undertook to provide written responses to questions raised by members of the Committee, with regard to:

- (a) Whether the budget provision of £80,000 allocated for the work being undertaken by Grant Thornton was a one-off cost, or whether further resources would be required to support this work.
- (b) The cost of the engagement of interim/agency staff to fill Executive Director positions, compared with the cost of the recruitment of permanent officers to such establishment positions and the process for the appointment of existing interim Executive Directors to permanent positions.
- (c) The process applied to the procurement and award of the Council's new waste disposal contract (including the circulation of the report considered by the Cabinet in this respect to all members of the Committee).
- (d) Whether the current budget provision for ensuring that dwellings across Southend-on-Sea meet the Decent Homes Standard is sufficient, and the arrangements currently in place for the assessment of Council dwellings to ensure that they meet the Decent Homes Standard.

Resolved:

That the following recommendations of the Cabinet be noted:

"That, in respect of the 2022/23 Revenue Budget Performance, as set out in Appendix 1 to the submitted report:

1. That the forecast outturn for 2022/23 for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account as at 30 September 2022, be noted.
2. That the management action taken and to be taken to reduce the forecast overspend of the Council's revenue budget for 2022/23, be noted.
3. That the planned budget transfers (virements) of £400,000 from earmarked reserves, be approved.

That, in respect of the 2022/23 Capital Budget Performance, as set out in Appendix 2 to the report:

4. That the expenditure to date and the forecast outturn as at 30 September 2022 and its financing, be noted.
5. That the requested changes to the capital investment programme for 2022/23 and future years, be approved.
6. That the Corporate Plan Performance Report as at 30 September 2022, as set out at Appendix 3 to the report, be noted."

Note: This is a Council Function

Cabinet Members: Councillors S George and Councillor P Collins

536 The Victoria Shopping Centre and Utilisation of Council Buildings

The Committee considered Minute 459 of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 8 November 2022, which had been called-in for scrutiny, together with a joint report of the report of the Executive Director (Growth and Housing) and the Executive Director (Finance and Resources) setting out the range of opportunities the Victoria Centre presented in the context of the City Centre, the centre itself and other parts of the Council's operational estate including the Civic Campus and the Tickfield Centre.

At the request of the Committee, the Cabinet Member for Asset Management and Inward Investment agreed to include a position statement on the financial performance of the

Victoria Centre within the regular Finance and Corporate Performance report made to the Cabinet.

The relevant Cabinet Members undertook to provide written responses to questions raised by members of the Committee, with regard to the income streams generated to the Council arising from the purchase and operation of the Victoria Centre, the annual level of any income received and whether such income covered the interest applied to the cost of the purchase of the Victoria Centre.

Resolved:

That the following decisions of the Cabinet be noted:

“1. That the following guiding principles to develop plans for the work to proceed, be approved:

(a) The Victoria Centre provides a thriving mix of uses right in the heart of the City Centre with opportunities for businesses to thrive, and residents and visitors to shop, play, live and work.

(b) That the Council will seek to move administrative (and where appropriate other) functions into the Civic Centre, to establish the optimum volume and type(s) of space required for its future operations and then, subject to detailed feasibility, relocate the Council to the Victoria Centre. This will in turn release the Civic Campus for regeneration and provide opportunities to redeploy, sell, develop or lease other buildings with the Council’s estate vacated as part of the rationalisation and to exit leased-in premises.

2. That a feasibility budget of £250,000 to support the next stages of work and enable the propositions to be developed and progressed, be approved. This will be funded by £75k from existing Civic Centre efficiencies capital budget with the balance of £175k met from the Business Transformation Reserve initially. This budget will be paid back through estate efficiencies and capital receipts as the project progresses.

3. That the procurement options be developed.

4. That the officers actively seek out external funding sources which may support this work.”

Note: This is an Executive Function
Cabinet Member: Councillor P Collins

537 Association of South Essex Local Authorities - Joint Committee

The Committee received the draft minutes of the meeting of the Joint Committee of the Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA), held on 20 October 2022.

Resolved:

That the draft minutes of the meeting of the Joint Committee of the Association of South Essex Local Authorities held on 20 October 2022, be noted.

Note: This is a Scrutiny function

538 In-Depth Scrutiny Project 2022/23 - ‘Developing Strong Governance & Strengthening Joint Working between all Councillors and Officers’

The Committee received an update on progress with regard to the in-depth scrutiny project for 2022/23.

Resolved:

That the report be noted.

Note: This is a Scrutiny function

Chair: _____