

SOUTHEND-ON-SEA CITY COUNCIL

Meeting of Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee

Date: Thursday, 15th February, 2024

Place: Committee Room 1 - Civic Suite

Present: Councillor S Wakefield (Chair)
Councillors L Burton (Vice-Chair), B Beggs, S Buckley, C Campbell*,
P Collins*, M Dent, N Folkard, S George, J Harland, R McMullan,
M Sadza, J Warren and R Woodley*

(*Substitute in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 30.)

In Attendance: Councillors T Cox, D Cowan and J Moyies
A Barnes, J Chesterton, G Halksworth, C Shuter, L White and S Cox

Start/End Time: 6.30 - 10.40 pm

59 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 O Cartey (Substitute: Councillor Campbell), Councillor T Cowdrey (Substitute: Councillor R Woodley) and Councillor P Wexham (Substitute: P Collins).

Apologies were also received from Councillor J Lamb (Cabinet Member) and Councillor Buckley who advised he was running late to the meeting.

60 Declarations of Interest

The following interests were declared at the meeting:

- (a) Councillor S Wakefield – General business of the meeting – owner of a local business in Southend-on-Sea a sub-contractor of the Council and South Essex Homes. In relation to Minute 62 (Independent review of Southend Care Ltd and Vecteo), grandchild also a user of the Vecteo service.
- (b) Councillor M Borton – Minute 64 (Finance Performance Report 2023/24) – daughter works for the NHS, and concessionary bus pass holder.
- (c) G Hawksworth (Director of Regeneration, Housing & Regulatory Services) – Minute 62 (Independent review of Southend Care Ltd and Vecteo), council appointed board member of Vecteo.

- (d) Councillor R McMullan – Minute 69 (Southend-on-Sea Council Tenancy Strategy 2024), private sector landlord.
- (e) Councillor N Folkard – Minute 67 (Approval of the Annual Procurement Plan for 2024/25), daily user of the swimming pool at Garon’s Park (operated by Fusion leisure). In relation to Minute 64 (Finance Performance Report 2023/24), concessionary bus pass holder.
- (f) Councillor M Sadza- Minute 65 (Corporate Debt Management – Position to 30 November 2023), volunteer debt adviser at Kings Money Advice Centre (KMAC).

61 Questions from Members of the Public

The Committee noted the response of the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth and Investment to a question presented by Mr Webb.

62 Independent review of Southend Care Ltd and Vecteo

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Strategy and Change by way of pre-Cabinet scrutiny which had been referred direct by the Cabinet. The report presented the outcome of the independent review of two of Southend City Council’s wholly owned companies, with proposed changes to the governance, operational efficiency, commissioning, contract management and relationship management.

The Committee discussed the report and asked a number of questions which were responded to the relevant Cabinet Members. Discussions centred on:

- Southend Care Board Membership, the role of the Elected Member and date of review.
- “Tecktal” company status
- The operation of Project 49 Viking House under Southend Care Ltd.
- Concern that the Vecteo contract would be children focussed and the appropriateness of the commissioning and operating arms of the company being managed by children services.
- That the Home to School Transport policy should

Committee Members felt that the background reports of the independent review undertaken by 31ten should be shared with the Committee in order for an informed decision to be made. The Leader of the Council confirmed that the exempt reports under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, category 3, would be shared with the Committee as background papers but must be treated as confidential as both companies operated in a commercial environment and the information and within the reports were commercially sensitive.

The Leader of the Council referenced an amendment to the original recommendations that would be included on the report to Cabinet, which are set out below.

In addition, the Leader explained that in Appendix 1, a VEC2 Assessment would be made for ‘quick win’ savings through shared use of resources (i.e. office and depot facilities).

Resolved:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

1. Accept the findings of the independent reviews of Southend Care Ltd and Vecteo.
2. Approve the implementation of the proposed recommendations and that the Shareholder Board will monitor the progress against the action plan.

Note: This is an Executive Function

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

63 Corporate Performance Report - November 2023 (period 8)

The Committee considered a report from the Executive Director of Strategy and Change summarising the corporate performance to the end of November 2023.

A number of questions were asked by Committee Members, which were responded to by the Leader of the Council.

Resolved:

That the following decision of the Cabinet be noted:

1. Cabinet noted the Corporate Performance Report as at 30 November 2023 set out in Appendix 1.

Note: This is an Executive Function

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

64 Finance Performance Report 2023/24 - to end of November 2023 (Period 8)

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Finance and Resources which has been referred direct by Cabinet which summarised the latest forecast position to the end of November 2023 of the financial year and highlighting the need to make some difficult budget choices both now and across the medium term.

Resolved:

That the following decisions of the Cabinet be noted:

1. Cabinet notes the local government sector's reaction to the Government's Provisional Financial Settlement (issued 18 December 2023) (Appendix 1).

That, in respect of the 2023/24 Revenue Budget Performance as set out in appendix 2 to this report, Cabinet:

2. Note the forecast outturn for 2023/24 for the General Fund and the Housing Revenue Account as at 30 November 2023 (section 6).

3. Note the plans and intentions to try to further reduce the forecast overspend of the Council's revenue budget for 2023/24 and agree that the Chief Executive and Executive Director (Finance & Resources) continue to explore all opportunities within their delegated powers and authority to improve the financial position by the year-end (section 5).
4. Note the potential requirement to use earmarked reserves to balance the 2023/24 budget (Section 5.4 and Appendix 2).
5. Approve the planned budget transfers (virements) of £658,000 from earmarked reserves, as set out in section 5.69.

That, in respect of the 2023/24 Capital Budget Performance as set out in appendix 3 of this report, Cabinet:

6. Note the expenditure to date and the forecast outturn as at 30 November 2023 and its financing.
7. Approve the requested changes to the capital investment programme for 2023/24 and future years, as set out in section 4 of appendix 3.

Note: This is an Executive Function.

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

65 Corporate Debt Management - Position to 30 November 2023

The committee considered a report of the Executive Director of Finance & Resources which had been referred direct by Cabinet, informing Members of the current outstanding debt position to the Council as at 30 November 2023.

Resolved:

That the following decisions of the Cabinet be noted:

1. That Cabinet considers the outstanding debt position as of 30 November 2023 and notes the position of debts written off under delegation to 30 November 2023 as set out in Appendices A & B.
2. That Cabinet approves the two write-offs exceeding £25,000, as shown in Appendix B.
3. That Cabinet approves the updated Debt Collection and Recovery Policy, presented at Appendix C.

Note: This is an Executive Function

Cabinet Member: Councillor T Cox, Leader of the Council

66 Treasury Management Report - Quarter 3 (2023/24)

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Finance and Resources, by way of pre-Cabinet Scrutiny, presenting the Quarter Three Treasury Management Report covering the treasury management activity and

compliance with the treasury management strategy for both quarter three and the period from April to December 2023.

Resolved:

That the report to Cabinet be noted.

Note: This is an Executive Function
Cabinet Member: Councillor T Cox (Leader of the Council).

67 Approval of the Annual Procurement Plan for 2024/25

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director (Finance and Resources), by way of pre-Cabinet scrutiny, presenting the annual procurement plan for 2024/25 as well as draft information for the years 2025/26 and 2026/27.

Resolved:

That the report to Cabinet, be noted.

Note: This is an Executive Function
Cabinet Member: Councillor J Lamb

68 Corporate Risk Register January 2024

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Finance and Resources, by way of pre-Cabinet Scrutiny, which presented the Corporate Risk Register for the period to January 2024.

Members asked a number of questions which were responded to by the Leader of the Council.

Resolved:

That the report to Cabinet, be noted.

Note: This is an Executive Function
Cabinet Member: Councillor J Lamb (Cabinet Member for Regulatory Services).

69 Southend-on-Sea City Council Tenancy Strategy 2024

The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director (Environment and Place), by way of pre-cabinet scrutiny, presenting the updated tenancy strategy and the Council's position for 2024/25 onwards.

The Committee asked a number of questions which were responded to by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning.

Resolved:

That the report and recommendations to Cabinet, be noted:

It is recommended that Cabinet approve the updated Tenancy Strategy for 2024-2029 (Appendix 1), in particular:

1. The council's stance/ask of RPs with regards to the use of flexible/fixed term tenancies (see paragraph 3.1).
2. The council's position on how fixed term/flexible tenancies interplay with domestic abuse (see paragraph 3.2).
3. The council's proposal on affordable rent (see paragraph 3.3)

Note: This is an Executive Function.

Cabinet Member: Councillor D Garston (Cabinet Member for Housing & Planning)

70 Outside Bodies Task and Finish Group - Final Report and Recommendations

Councillor C Mulrone presented the final report and recommendations of the Outside Bodies Task and Finish Group. The Place, People and Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committees agreed to establish the Outside Bodies Task and Finish Group at the meetings held in July 2023.

Councillor C Mulrone was commended for leading on this work. As Chair of the Outside Bodies Task and Finish Group, Councillor Mulrone felt that Task and Finish groups were a good way of scrutiny undertaken short and effective pieces of work, rather than adopting a one in-depth scrutiny project approach.

Members felt that it was essential to have agreed mechanisms for reporting back and holding appointed Councillor representatives to account.

Resolved:

That the report and recommendations arising from the Outside Bodies Task and Finish Group, as detailed in Section 6 of the attached report, be agreed.

Note: This is a scrutiny function

Cabinet Member: Councillor J Moyies (Cabinet Member for Public Health, Adult Social Care & Constitutional Affairs).

71 South Essex Councils - Joint Committee

The Committee received the draft minutes of the meeting of the Joint Committee of South Essex Councils (SEC) held on 6 December 2023.

Resolved:

That the draft minutes of the meeting of the Joint Committee of South Essex Councils (SEC) held on 6 December 2023, be noted.

Note: This is a Scrutiny function

Chair: _____