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SOUTHEND-ON-SEA BOROUGH COUNCIL

Meeting of Place Scrutiny Committee

Date: Monday, 6th July, 2020
Place: Virtual Meeting via MS Teams

Present: Councillor A Moring (Chair)
Councillors B Ayling, J Beck, A Bright, K Buck, L Burton, A Chalk,
D Cowan, T Cox, M Dent, S George, D Jarvis, D Nelson*,
S Wakefield, C Walker, N Ward and P Wexham
*Substitute in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 31.

In Attendance: Councillors I Gilbert, A Jones, C Mulroney, K Robinson and
R Woodley (Cabinet Members)
Councillors M Borton and K Evans
A Lewis, J Chesterton, L Reed, J Williams, E Cooney, S Dolling,
G Halksworth, C Robinson, G Gilbert, A Grant, S Harrington,
N Hoskins, P Jenkinson, T Row, R Harris< N Laver, S Newman and
C Woodcraft

Start/End Time: 6.30 pm - 9.40 pm

116 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Flewitt (Substitute: Councillor Nelson).

117 Declarations of Interest

The following interests were declared at the meeting:

(a) Councillors I Gilbert, A Jones, C Mulroney, K Robinson and R Woodley (Cabinet Members) - Interest in the called-in items; attended pursuant to the dispensation agreed at Council on 19th July 2012, under S.33 of the Localism Act 2011;

(b) Councillor Buck - Minute No. 121 (Protection of Public Open Space) – Non-pecuniary interest: Member of Belfairs Golf Club which was mentioned in the debate; and

(c) Mr A Lewis – Minute No. 122 (Better Queensway Regeneration Project - Progress Update and Consideration of the Final Proposals) – Non-pecuniary interest: Council appointed representative on the LLP.

118 Questions from Members of the Public

There were no questions from members of the public.

119 Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday, 28th January 2020

Resolved:-

That the Minutes of the Meeting held on Monday, 28th January, 2020 be received, confirmed as a correct record and signed.

120 Parking Review

The Committee considered Minute 67 of Cabinet held on 16th June 2020, which had been called-in for Scrutiny, together with the report of the Executive Director (Neighbourhoods and the Environment) that:

- (a) provided an update on progress made against the Cabinet Report of 5 November 2019;
- (b) explored the risks and opportunities from the COVID-19 emergency;
- (c) sought approval for a new Parking Review 2020 Project Plan; and
- (d) provided an update on the introduction of the Key Worker Permit (temporary).

Resolved:-

That the following decision of Cabinet be noted:

“1. That the updates be noted and the revised Parking Review Project Plan as set out in the submitted report, be approved.

2. That the efforts to expand the function of the Traffic Regulations Working Party to act as a monitoring and advisory panel for the Project Management Team, be supported.”

Note: This is an Executive Function
Cabinet Member: Cllr Woodley

121 Protection of Public Open Space

The Committee considered Minute 68 of Cabinet held on 16th June 2020, which had been called-in for Scrutiny, together with the report of the Executive Director (Neighbourhoods and the Environment) informing Councillors of the increasing pressure on existing public open spaces and the increasing number of requests being received from sports clubs and other organisations to lease public open space and to limit, restrict or reduce public availability. The report proposed to establish clear and consistent guidance which could be applied by officers in dealing with requests for the disposal of public open spaces.

In response to a question regarding the potential scrapping of the proposals for the area of land at Lundy Close, the Leader of the Council undertook to provide a written response to all Councillors on the Committee and the relevant Ward Councillors.

Resolved:-

That the following decisions of Cabinet be noted:

“1. That the general presumption against the disposal of public open space in Southend-on-Sea and the ongoing protection of these areas, be continued.

2. That the existing agreements relating to areas of public open space or buildings within them continue during their term and on renewal or re-letting/procurement can be agreed when applicable.

3. That requests for the Council to dispose (by any means) of areas of open space to enable their enclosure (or any other restrictions on public use) by sports clubs or other organisations and the exclusion of the public from enjoying those spaces are not considered to ensure that free public access to open space is maintained. Whilst exceptions are not expected, should they arise, such exceptions will be a matter for Cabinet to decide upon.

4. That it be noted that from time to time, the granting of easements and wayleaves for services or highway widening or realignment may be required. In these situations, the preferred position is that public access is maintained or replacement land is sought.

5. That in a situation where an area of open space has been identified as a location which could enable the delivery of a key Council outcome, and the Council has determined that the area has no or minimal recognised benefit to the public, or a replacement space of the same or enhanced value can be provided, the disposal will be considered to enable the Council to deliver its outcomes.”

Note: This is an Executive Function
Cabinet Member: Cllr Mulroney

122 The Beecroft Trust

The Committee considered Minute 69 of Cabinet held on 16th June 2020, which had been called-in for Scrutiny, together with the report of the Executive Director (Adults and Communities) proposing improved governance arrangements and decision making for the Beecroft Trust (“the Trust”).

The Cabinet Member for Business, Culture & Tourism undertook to provide written responses to the questions on the following matters:

- (a) a breakdown of external funding which the Council has received to-date in respect of the scheme to convert the Station Road property into artist studios;
- (b) whether the funding in (a) would have to be repaid if the scheme did not proceed; and
- (c) details of any further external funding that had been sought for the scheme.

The Cabinet Member for Business, Culture and Tourism confirmed (subject to the proviso that it was procedurally possible to do so) that the Place Scrutiny Committee should be able to scrutinise any recommendation to Council made by the General Purposes Committee before a decision was taken by Council as trustee of the Beecroft Trust. This would enable the Council to have the benefit of the Scrutiny Committee’s views on relevant trust issues, as well as the recommendation of the General Purposes Committee, when reaching a decision as trustee.

Resolved:-

That the following recommendations of Cabinet be noted:

“1. That the Council’s General Purposes Committee act on behalf of the Trust and make recommendations for full Council to consider.

2. That independent advice be provided to the Beecroft Trustee (“Trustee”) through the General Purposes Committee to fulfil its objectives in the best interest of the Trust.

3. That specific independent advice be sought and provided on the Beecroft Art Gallery site at Station Road, Westcliff (“the Former Gallery”).”

Note: This is a Council Function
Cabinet Member: Cllr Robinson

123 Better Queensway Regeneration Project - Progress Update and Consideration of the Final Proposals (the report will be considered in conjunction with the minutes of the Shareholder Board, 25th June)

The Committee considered Minute 104 of the special meeting of Cabinet held on 30th June 2020, which had been referred direct to Scrutiny, together with a report of the Director of Regeneration and Growth providing an update following the consideration of a report to the Shareholder Board on the 25th June 2020. The Shareholder Board Report specifically considered the submission of the ‘final proposals’ alongside the progress being made in respect of additional affordable housing.

Resolved:-

1. That the matter be referred back to Cabinet for reconsideration, in particular because of concerns about the intention to fill in the Queensway underpass and construct a new road at ground level.

2. That the matter be referred to full Council for consideration in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 39.

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

124 COVID-19 - Parking Recovery Proposals

The Committee considered Minute 105 of the special meeting of Cabinet held on 30th June 2020, which had been referred direct to Scrutiny, together with a report of the Executive Director (Neighbourhoods and the Environment) setting out how Parking Services could support the Council’s intentions to lead and support its communities and businesses through the Covid-19 crisis and help them towards a sustainable recovery.

In response to questions regarding how these proposals were being funded and the amount of money received from Government to date in respect of the Council’s Covid-19 response, the Cabinet Member agreed to circulate details to the Committee after the meeting.

Resolved:-

That the following decisions of Cabinet be noted:

“1. That the proposed temporary parking concession approach by which the Council will lead and support its communities and businesses as set out in option 2 of the submitted report, noting the relevant financial impact and proposed funding of the option, be approved.

2. That the continuation of the additional 5 Civil Enforcement Officers at an additional monthly cost of £16K up to a maximum of six months (£96K) to support the increased parking pressures being identified as more vehicles are moving around the Borough, which would be self-funded, be approved. The increase of officers will support enforcement in Controlled Parking Zones where complaints are being received due to parking of vehicles without permits.

3. That authority be delegated to the Executive Director (Neighbourhoods and the Environment), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport, Capital & Inward Investment, to remove the schemes as and when the support for extended parking and reduced hours of enforcement are no longer required.”

Note: This is an Executive Function
Cabinet Member: Cllr Woodley

125 In-Depth Scrutiny Projects and Summary of Work 2019/20

The Committee received a report of the Executive Director (Legal & Democratic Services) which provided an update on progress with regard to the in-depth scrutiny projects due to have been completed during the 2019/20 Municipal Year. The report also provided information about the work that had been carried out by each of the Scrutiny Committees during the previous year.

Resolved:-

1. That the Scrutiny Committee note progress with regard to its in-depth scrutiny project due to have been undertaken during the 2019/20 Municipal Year.

2. That the completion of the in-depth scrutiny project be carried forward into the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

3. That no further topic(s) be selected by the Scrutiny Committee for additional in-depth review during 2020/21.

4. That the Committee note the summary of the work undertaken by each of the Scrutiny Committees during 2019/20, attached as Appendix 3.

Note: This is a Scrutiny function.

Chair: _____

