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SOUTHEND-ON-SEA BOROUGH COUNCIL

Meeting of Housing & Communities Working Party

Date: Thursday, 22nd April, 2021

Place: Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Present: Councillor I Gilbert (Chair)
Councillors H McDonald (Vice-Chair), A Chalk, M Davidson and
C Mulroney

In Attendance: Councillors D Garston and K Mitchell
S Brown, R Dawson, T Forster, L Goldsmith, G Halksworth, S Moore,
T Nicola and S Tautz

Start/End Time: 6.00 pm - 7.00 pm

22 Apologies for Absence & Substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M Stafford (no substitute).

23 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were made at the meeting.

24 Minutes of the meeting held on 15 February 2021

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Working Party held on 15 February 2021 be received and confirmed as a correct record.

25 Notice of Motion - Fuel Poverty

The Working Party considered a Notice of Motion referred by the Council at its meeting on 4 March 2021, concerning action to reduce fuel poverty in Southend. It was reported that fuel poverty occurred when a household was unable to afford adequate warmth and that factors that contributed to fuel poverty included low income, poor insulation of dwellings and expensive forms of heating.

The Executive Director (Neighbourhoods and Environment) advised the Working Party of the support that was currently available to local residents to improve the energy performance of fuel poor homes and reduce energy costs, through a number of current initiatives and programmes.

The Working Party was advised that although improvements to the energy efficiency of homes could address many instances of fuel poverty, it was important that a broader approach was taken to addressing fuel poverty, alongside other forms of poverty. It was reported that the Council was already developing a coordinated response to other areas of poverty such as digital inclusion and food poverty, and that fuel poverty could be included within the scope of this emerging work to address the measures proposed in the Notice of Motion and broader actions around the provision of targeted advice and information, support for economic recovery across communities, and the linking of fuel poverty with broader themes around financial security and affordable housing.

Councillors asked a number of questions in relation to the causes of fuel poverty which were responded to by officers. The Executive Director (Neighbourhoods and Environment) indicated that a written response would be provided to several questions raised by members in relation to the improved energy efficiency of local homes, that could not be fully responded to at the meeting.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Notice of Motion concerning action to reduce fuel poverty in Southend, be noted.
- (2) That the Cabinet be recommended that existing work to support local residents to improve fuel poor homes through the Local Energy Advice Programme and REMeDY consortium, be maintained, and that the factors that contribute to fuel poverty be included within ongoing wider work to tackle poverty related issues.

26 Notice of Motion - Local Welfare Assistance

The Working Party considered a Notice of Motion referred by the Council at its meeting on 4 March 2021, concerning the establishment and maintenance of a Local Welfare Assistance Scheme.

The Executive Director (Adults and Communities) advised the Working Party that a Local Welfare Assistance Scheme was currently delivered locally as the Southend Essential Living Fund (ELF), to help people to remain in their home, to set up home in the community and to be self-sufficient in times of financial hardship.

The Working Party was advised that there had been a 50% increase in applications to the ELF during the COVID-19 pandemic, primarily from people in financial and emotional crisis and from campaigns supporting rough sleepers. The Executive Director (Adults and Communities) reported that the Council had been awarded £212,000 from the Emergency Assistance Grant for 2020/21, the whole amount of which had been allocated to the ELF to provide support during 2021/22, alongside the allocation of £573,000 from the COVID Winter Grant Scheme to provide free school meal programmes and to support services provided by local voluntary organisations. The Working Party noted that, based on the demand for the ELF prior to the pandemic, the Council expected to continue to deliver the service going forward, although the extent of additional demand could not currently be quantified as the effects of the pandemic were likely to have an impact in the short term.

Councillors asked a number of questions in relation to the operation and delivery of the ELF which were responded to by officers.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Notice of Motion concerning the establishment and maintenance of a Local Welfare Assistance Scheme, be noted.
- (2) That the Cabinet be recommended that the current Essential Living Fund (ELF) programme be maintained as the Council's Local Welfare Assistance Scheme and that ongoing demand for the fund continue to be tracked and monitored in order to determine the extent to which additional funding for the ELF programme may be required going forward.
- (3) That the Cabinet be recommended that the Council continue to provide the Government with detailed data on the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the services that it provides, in order to highlight areas of financial need.

- (4) That the Cabinet be recommended that the Council continue to lobby the Government to provide appropriate additional financial assistance to support the future delivery of the ELF programme.

27 Notice of Motion - Membership of Development Control Committee

The Working Party considered a Notice of Motion referred by the Council at its meeting on 4 March 2021, concerning current requirements for the appointment of members of the Development Control Committee.

The Working Party was reminded that requirements for membership of the Development Control Committee, which was a regulatory non-executive committee, were set out within the Council's Constitution (Part 3, Schedule 2 - The Constitution and Terms of Reference of Cabinet, Committees, etc.). It was reported that a full review of the Constitution, which set out how the Council operated and how decisions were made, was currently being undertaken.

Resolved:

- (1) That the Notice of Motion concerning current requirements for the appointment of members of the Development Control Committee, be noted.
- (2) That the Cabinet be recommended that requirements for the appointment of members of the Development Control Committee be considered as part of the review of the Constitution that was currently being undertaken.

Chair: _____

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