

Minutes of a meeting of the Policy and Finance Committee held in The New Millennium Chamber, The Manor House, Church Street, Littlehampton BN17 5EW on Monday 16 December 2024 at 6.30 pm.

Present:

Councillor Butcher - Chair
Councillor Tandy
Councillor Lee
Councillor May
Councillor O'Neill
Councillor Dr Walsh KStJ
Councillor Woodman

In attendance:

Laura Chrysostomou – Town Clerk
Jon Short – Deputy Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer
Juliet Harris – Assistant Town Clerk
Sofia Chittenden – Communications and Marketing Manager

2024 to 2025

40. Evacuation Procedures

The evacuation procedures were noted.

41. Filming of Council Meetings, Use of Social Media, and Mobile Phones

The procedures were noted.

42. Apologies

There were apologies from Councillor Northeast and Councillor O'Neill attended as substitute.

43. Declarations of interest

Members and Officers were reminded to make any declarations of disclosable, pecuniary, or personal and prejudicial interests that they might have in relation to items on the agenda. The standing declarations were noted, and Councillor O'Neill also declared a personal interest in matters

across the agenda as a member of Arun District Council no further declarations were made.

44. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 October 2024 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

45. Chair's Report and Urgent Items

There were none.

46. Public Forum

There were three members of the public present.

46.1. North Macedonian Twinning Proposal

Councillor Dr Walsh, KStJ declared a personal interest in the following matter as Chair of the Littlehampton Twinning Association.

46.1.1. Members heard from a representative of the North Macedonian community in Littlehampton. Setting out the history of how this community had come to adopt Littlehampton as its home over several years, the Committee was asked to consider formally establishing a twinning partnership between Littlehampton Town Council and the Town of Resen in North Macedonia to strengthen relationships and cultural links with the wider community.

46.1.2. The Mayor had recently met with the North Macedonian Ambassador where this had also been discussed. Recalling that meeting, the Mayor spoke in support of strengthening the links with this section of the community on a social level. It was also understood that the North Macedonian community in Littlehampton was strongly supportive of establishing such a relationship. The Ambassador had subsequently written suggesting a twinning arrangement and that letter would be included in the papers for the next Council meeting.

46.1.3. The Committee was supportive of establishing a more meaningful link with the North Macedonian community on a social and cultural level. It was also acknowledged that the current local twinning association had undergone organisational changes in recent times to maintain the existing relationships which had highlighted that a lot of work was needed to support them. It was therefore considered that further research was needed to understand how this new partnership could be achieved.

It was therefore resolved that:



Officers take this forward and meet with representatives of the North Macedonian community in Littlehampton to explore options for establishing social and cultural links.

47. Officers Reports

47.1. Wayfinding Project

- 47.1.1. The Communications and Marketing Manager presented a report, previously circulated, which outlined the progress with this project. She explained that work to identify potential locations for the signage had highlighted the disjointed and outdated state of the current signage stock. Initial research had also shown that the process of implementing signage could potentially have land ownership, planning and licensing implications which needed further investigation. Therefore, whilst a steer in terms of the proposed locations was needed, it was also considered necessary to complete a detailed audit of the signage stock in the Town, including the river walkway and the seafront and to develop a strategic approach for signage in this 'triangle'.
- 47.1.2. In considering the way forward, Members recognised that this piece of audit work would deliver a key objective of the Town Centre Strategy and that a review was overdue. It was also considered important for the success of the Wayfinding Project that it be underpinned by a sound audit of the current stock and full understanding of the implementation process. In this respect the phased approach set out in the report was supported and would also ensure that the design work by Artsworld, and supported by their grant funding, could continue and meet delivery deadlines. This would see one beach box and up to five signs delivered before the end of March 2025.
- 47.1.3. The Committee proceeded to discuss potential locations and favoured sites which could deliver a clear route from the railway station to the river walkway and seafront. The consensus was for the beach box to be installed on the West Green in the proximity of the pumping station and for up to five signs to be sited at the railway station, one at each end of the High Street, one by the lifeboat station and one near the Harbour Board offices as outlined in the report. Where these sites were in the ownership / control of the District Council it was hoped this would ease the implementation process. It was also suggested that Officers contact the County Council as these proposals could have implications for them as the Highways Authority for the Town. It was agreed that focus should be on implementation of those signs which could be achieved within the timescale required for the funding.
- 47.1.4. In terms of taking the audit work forward, a mechanism would be required to ensure that the timetable for delivering the project was met. It was therefore proposed that a Member Task and Finish Group be formed to assist officers in the audit and developing the strategy. It was also noted that a meeting of the

committee would be needed at the end of January / early February 2025 to approve the final designs for the Wayfinding Project.

It was therefore resolved that:

1. The phased approach to delivering the Wayfinding Signage Project as set out in paragraphs 3.4. and 3.5. of the report be supported.
2. The locations for the beach box and the first five signs as set out in minute 47.1.2 and 47.1.3. above be progressed.
3. An Extraordinary meeting of the Committee be arranged for late January/ early February to approve the signage designs.
4. A Member Task and Finish Group be formed to assist officers in the audit and developing a Signage Strategy and that a draft Terms of Reference be brought back to the Committee for approval at the next meeting.
5. The contents of the report be otherwise noted.

47.2. Quarterly Business Plan Progress Report

47.2.1. Members had before them a report, previously circulated, providing an update on progress with delivering goals as they related to the work of the committee. Members proceeded to review the action plan, and it was noted that work on the Communications Strategy Review would begin in the new year.

It was therefore resolved that:

The updated Action Plan and progress to date be noted.

47.3. Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan Periodic Update

47.3.1. The Communications and Marketing Manager presented a report, previously circulated, which contained updates on work being undertaken as part of the Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan. Highlighting the very positive nature of the recent Business Community meeting she explained how the Town Council's recent success in securing additional UK Shared Prosperity funding (UKSPF) would enable work to develop a library of digital content to build upon the material developed for Small Business Saturday. Local businesses had been very engaged in the development and delivery of the shop window wraps and the Small Business Saturday initiative both of which had been successful and helped invigorate the Business Community meeting which now had meetings scheduled through to April 2025.

47.3.2. Members welcomed the positive report and the advances that had been made regarding developing links with the local business community, positive

action to tackle anti-social behaviour, presenting a more positive image of the Town and progression towards establishing a Business Forum. It was also pleasing to note how the UKSPF work was progressing and the plans for it to be used to deliver the priorities in the Town Centre Action Plan relating to promoting the Town and developing the visitor economy. It was noted that the process for the recruitment of the Business Crime Reduction Partnership Manager was underway with interviews planned for January 2025.

It was therefore resolved that:

The updates regarding progress with the UKSPF Town Centre Support Project, recent Town Centre initiatives and the financial implications be noted.

47.4. Consultation on Remote Attendance and Proxy Voting at Local Authority Meetings

47.4.1. Members had before them a report, previously circulated, which contained a summary of the discussion at Full Council regarding this consultation. The Committee was asked to consider the proposals with a view to agreeing a response on behalf of the Council. The Assistant Town Clerk explained that following publication of the agenda, the consultation had been re-circulated to all members to ascertain the proportion of current elected members that might seek to attend meetings remotely.

47.4.2. This had elicited a range of views that was reflected in the subsequent discussion. It was observed that the Council's experience of remote meetings was limited to the period during the pandemic when the Government had introduced temporary regulations allowing all local authorities to meet remotely. Whilst that had demonstrated greater accessibility for members, there was no evidence to suggest it had encouraged public participation. The circumstances were also unprecedented and whilst it was acknowledged that over time hybrid meetings could work, they required significant resources including staff time and investment in technology.

47.4.3. On the matter of proxy voting, views were also varied with the Committee concluding that the ability to webcast meetings was more of a priority which the Council had acknowledged through its move to the digitisation of its processes. Overall, in view of the wide range of opinions on both the subject of remote / hybrid meetings and the introduction of proxy voting, the Committee considered the way forward was to encourage members to respond individually to this consultation.

It was therefore resolved that:

1. The details of the consultation be re-circulated to all members to enable them to respond individually.

2. The contents of the report be otherwise noted.

47.5. Littlehampton Town Council / Arun District Council Liaison

47.5.1. The Town Clerk presented a report, previously circulated, and explained the proposals for the continuation of liaison meetings with the District Council. Commenting on the new arrangements, the Committee held the view that members should still be represented in the forum. Noting that the Chief Executive of Arun District Council was willing to meet councillors on matters that could not be resolved in this forum, the Committee proceeded to consider items for discussion. The following points were noted:

- The Community Hub
- The Wayfinding Project
- Joint site arrangements at K2 and the Southfields Jubilee Centre
- North Littlehampton

It was therefore resolved that:

The items listed in Minute 47.5.1. above be put forward for discussion at the liaison meeting on 30 January 2025.

48. Finance

48.1. Debtors Review Update

48.1.1. The Committee had before it a report, previously circulated, which contained an update on the progress with debt recovery. Whilst progress in lowering the over 60-day debt had been limited due to staffing constraints, these had been addressed and work to reduce the outstanding balance was now picking up.

It was resolved that:

The report be noted.

48.2. Committee Budget Monitor

48.2.1. Members received a report, previously circulated, which highlighted any significant variances from budget in Income and Expenditure relating to the Policy and Finance Committee's budget for 2024 to 2025.

It was resolved that:

The report be noted.

48.3. Committee Draft Budget Proposals 2025 to 2026 and projected funding 2026 to 2027 and 2027 to 2028

48.3.1. The Committee considered a report, previously circulated, setting out proposals for this Committee's Budget for the next three years. The Deputy Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer reported that the proposals for this Committee would see its budget increase by 21.48% for 2025 to 2026 and that the overall Full Council budget currently showed a 4.37% increase in Band D council tax for 2025 to 2026. It was noted that the inclusion of expenditure from Earmarked Reserves (EMR) was an error as the Scheme had been superseded by the Business Crime Reduction Partnership initiative. He confirmed that this had no impact on the Committee's budget proposals and that this would be corrected in the final budget presented to Council in January. Acknowledging the hard work by the committee chairs, members at their meetings and staff in facilitating the process, the Committee recorded its thanks to all those involved in achieving a sensible budget proposal.

It was resolved that:

1. The draft Committee budget for 2025 to 2026 and the projected budgets for 2026 to 2027 and 2027 to 2028 be approved and recommended for inclusion in the Full Council Budget.
2. The Committee's Earmarked Reserve Position be noted.

48.4. Capital Programme Draft Funding 2025 to 2026, and projected funding 2026 to 2027 and 2027 to 2028

48.4.1. The Committee received a report, previously circulated, which set out the funding arrangements to meet the Capital Programme including the financial implications of the major projects that were a priority for the Council. It was noted that £100,000 drawn from the Converted Capital Receipts Reserve had been included for the purpose of developing a space within which to operate a High Street Hub. The Town Clerk provided clarification regarding Capital Receipts Reserves, and it was noted that the balance reflected the completion of the K2 construction project. Regarding Community Infrastructure funding, it was observed that the District Council's monitoring reports required updating to reflect the Town Council's priorities. This was noted and would be actioned by officers.

It was resolved that:

The draft Capital Programme for 2025 to 2026 and the projected programme for 2026 to 2027 and 2027 to 2028 be approved and recommended to Council, as part of the overall Council Budget.

48.5. Full Council Budget Proposals 2025 to 2026 and projected funding 2026 to 2027 and 2027 to 2028

48.5.1. The Committee received a report, previously circulated, which set out the proposed Council budget for 2025 to 2026 and the projected funding for 2026 to 2027 and 2027 to 2028. The budget had been drafted following meetings held with political group leaders and the Chairs and Vice Chairs of each Committee. As reported earlier in the meeting, should the overall draft Council budget for 2025 to 2026 be approved, this would result in a precept increase for 2025 to 2026 of 4.37 percent. This equated to an additional £6.43 per household per year in Band D Council Tax.

48.5.2. The Committee proceeded to examine the budget proposals. Regarding the Manor House Room Hire, it was observed that despite a projected increase in hire income, the deficit on this budget head had increased. The Town Clerk explained whilst the hire charges had been reviewed in line with the Council's venue hire action plan, this reflected the ongoing costs of maintaining a complex building. The Committee proceeded to vote on the budget proposals for 2025 to 2026.

It was resolved that:

1. The draft Budget for 2025 to 2026 and the projected budgets for 2026 to 2027 and 2027 to 2028 be endorsed and recommended to Council for approval.
2. Council be recommended to set a Precept of £1,621,543 for 2025 to 2026 which equates to Band D Council Tax of £153.51 per annum for 2025 to 2026, an increase of 4.37% or £6.43 per household per year (£0.123 per week).

49. Exempt Business

There was none.

The meeting was closed at 7.30 pm.

Chair