

**Minutes of a meeting of Cabinet
held on Monday, 23rd November, 2020
from 4.00 pm - 4.36 pm**

Present: J Ash-Edwards (Chair)
J Llewellyn-Burke (Vice-Chair)

J Belsey
R de Mierre

S Hillier
A MacNaughton

N Webster

Also Present: Councillors R Bates, A Bennett, R Clarke, A Eves, S Hatton and
J Henwood

1. ROLL CALL AND VIRTUAL MEETINGS EXPLANATION.

The Leader introduced the meeting and advised that only Cabinet Members and Senior Officers have their cameras turned on but other Democratic Services Officers and observers are present at the meeting.

The Leader conducted the roll call to confirm the Members present.

Tom Clark, Head of Regulatory Services, advised that regulations have been introduced to enable the Council to hold its meetings to include those participants attending remotely. To ensure the smooth running of such remote meetings it has been necessary to amend some of the Council procedure rules and such rules have been amended in accordance with urgency powers in the scheme of officer delegation to keep the Constitution legally updated.

2. TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS IN RESPECT OF ANY MATTER ON THE AGENDA.

No declarations were made.

3. TO CONFIRM MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON THE 14TH SEPTEMBER 2020.

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2020 were agreed as a correct record.

4. TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

No apologies were received.

5. TO CONSIDER ANY ITEMS THAT THE LEADER AGREES TO TAKE AS URGENT BUSINESS.

The Leader had no urgent business.

6. BUDGET MANAGEMENT 2021-22 - HALF YEAR PROGRESS REPORT.

Peter Stuart, Head of Corporate Resources introduced the report noting that the forecast revenue outturn overspend is approximately £1.8m after Government support has been factored in. This is related to a significant reduction in income as a result of the pandemic.

He noted that treasury management income is projected as being under target by £206k this year, as it is the start of minimal interest returns for the period. It is foreseen that there may be a long period where interest income may be below target. He acknowledged that the forecast outturn will vary by the end of the year as things are changing at pace. The financial impact of the second lockdown and the Government's spending review is yet to be seen but the Council remains alert to the changes and agile in its response.

The Deputy Leader acknowledged that the Council's prudent financial planning has enabled the ability to draw on reserves and noted that the Council isn't forecasting a loss in ground rent income. It was clarified that this ground rent relates to outdoor facilities income such as playgroups. The Deputy Leader also noted that although some revenue projects have been delayed, work is continuing, for example at Silver Birches where drainage work is now complete, at an underspend.

The Cabinet Member for Community acknowledged the increase in unemployment, and commended Officers for the support provided to businesses particularly with the speed that grants have been issued. He noted that the Council has a very productive relationship with the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership and Homes England, who are financing a significant number of the Council's capital projects. He also highlighted the positive news of £45k allocated to new play equipment at King George's Field, and £32k allocated for a new skatepark.

The Head of Corporate Resources confirmed that the 4th tranche of the Covid Emergency Grant has been received from the Government and that the first 6 months of the budgeted pay award has been paid to Officers in October.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Growth noted that Officers continue to look at ways to mitigate the forecast net overspend and thanked Officers for the high volume of work that continues on capital projects despite the pandemic. In response to his query on the £85k bad debt rental income amount, the Head of Corporate Resources confirmed that retailers are asking for more deferments or holidays and the Council continues to negotiate. At a certain point the debt becomes a bad debt book entry and there is hope that as the year progresses some of this can be recovered. The Cabinet Member expressed a wish for the Council to remain supportive of retailers wherever possible – acknowledging that there was a fine balance between support and doing the right thing by the public purse and the Council's estate.

The Assistant Chief Executive confirmed that it is too early to assess the impact of the second lockdown on parking income, however parking charges have not been suspended and some shops remain open for click-and-collect so the impact may not be as severe as earlier in the year.

The Cabinet Member for Customer Services reiterated the speed at which the Council is working to distribute grant funding to those in need and thanked the Officers for their work in this respect.

In relation to outdoor facilities income, the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning noted that nurseries and playgroups are able to operate quite successfully with less restrictions if they are the sole users of a property. They are therefore in a position to still get full income without higher costs.

The Leader concluded that although it is unprecedented times, the Council's current position is not uncommon among Local Authorities and work continues to manage the financial challenges due to falling income and rising service costs partly with the use of Government grants and the use of reserves.

He took the Members to the recommendations contained in the report which were agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

The Cabinet agreed to recommend to Council for approval:

- (i) that £3,862 grant income relating to Rough Sleepers Initiative be transferred to Specific Reserve as detailed in paragraph 36;
- (ii) the variations to the Capital Programme contained in paragraph 53 in accordance with the Council's Financial Procedure rule B3.

And noted:

- (iii) the remainder of the report.

7. PERFORMANCE MONITORING FOR THE 2ND QUARTER OF 2020/21.

Emma Sheridan, Business Unit Leader, Community Services, Policy and Performance introduced the report and noted that despite the pandemic, the overall performance results are positive.

In response to a query by the Deputy Leader, she confirmed that where areas are underperforming, it is mainly related to the pandemic, for example with the Leisure Centre closures or where face-to-face wellbeing services have not been able to take place. The Council has renegotiated targets with Public Health and realigned services that can be provided online.

The Deputy Leader noted the positive achievement of the percentage of undisputed invoices paid.

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Service Delivery welcomed the news that the amount of waste going to landfill is less than the target, especially considering the increased amount of people currently at home. He acknowledged that work is still required to increase recycling. To assist with this, he highlighted the imminent launch of the small waste and electrical items project and the employment of service redesign consultants – welcoming the possibility of the Council being able to move forward with a wider food waste project in the future.

The Cabinet Member for Community noted that the pandemic has led to overperformance in some areas, particularly in a surge of antisocial behaviour incidents. However, the amount of cases being resolved is positive. He noted that the Land Charges team has also experienced a busy period as they respond to personal search queries whilst the search companies are not able to carry these out

in person at the Council Reception. He also raised concern that fewer people with chronic or long-term conditions are seeing their GP which will have repercussions for the long term.

He noted that overall, the performance of the Council has been phenomenal and hoped that Officers are working at a sustainable pace to cover potential future uncertainties. The sentiment was reiterated by the Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning who thanked Officers for their hard work.

The Leader thanked the Scrutiny Committee for Leader, Finance and Performance for their comments, following discussion of the report at the meeting held on 11 November. He concluded by noting that the percentage of indicators at green is higher than the same point in 2019, which is excellent considering all the additional responsibilities from the Government and the support needed by local businesses.

The Leader took Members to the recommendations contained in the report, which were agreed unanimously.

RESOLVED

The Cabinet noted the Council's performance and progress with Council Priority Projects in the second quarter of the year and identified areas where further reporting or information is required.

The meeting finished at 4.36 pm

Chairman