

MINUTES

CABINET

19 OCTOBER 2021

Present:

Members:

Councillors: Williams (Leader)
Griffiths (Deputy
Leader)
Anderson
Banks
Birnie
Douris
Tindall

Officers:

	Corporate Director – Finance and Operations
James Doe	Assistant Director - Planning, Development and Regeneration Assistant Director, Corporate and Contracted Services
Nigel Howcutt	Assistant Director - Finance and Resources Assistant Director – Housing Group Manager - Strategic Planning and Regeneration Group Manager, Strategic Housing
Paul Hunt	Supported Housing Lead Officer
Oliver Burrough	Corporate Graduate
M Kange	Corporate and Democratic Support Lead (minutes)

Also Attendance:

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

CA/69/21 MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2021 were agreed by Members present and signed by the Chair.

CA/70/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Elliot and Barrett and Claire Hamilton and Mark Gaynor.

CA/71/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

CA/72/21 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

CA/73/21 REFERRALS TO CABINET

There were no referrals to Cabinet.

CA/74/21 CABINET FORWARD PLAN

The forward plan was noted.

CA/75/21 ECONOMIC RECOVERY STRATEGY

Cllr Anderson introduced the report.

CTaylor added; this plan has a lot of ambition, it is evidence based, gathered through recent economic profile. Focused over 6 themes, each addressing an area highlighted by that evidence. Lots of robust business partnerships and the pooling their resources alongside our own to help our economy recover from the pandemic. Aim is to make sure benefits can be felt to our economy across the board and by everybody. Being overseen by a board, currently pulling together action plans under each theme to present to that board delivery within the next 12 months.

Cllr Williams commented that pre-COVID our town centres were changing and the pandemic has accelerated that change; anything we can do to help that recovery is commendable.

Recommendations Agreed.

To approve the Economic Recovery Plan as outlined in the report and at Appendix 1.

CA/76/21 FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

NHowcutt introduced the report and welcomed questions.

Cllr Birnie asked, with regard pg.46 and authorisation levels; what is there to stop a capital acquisition being divided into smaller chunks so it exceeds the level of authorisation and only becomes evident after the fact?

NHowcutt responded that there are financial controls in place for all acquisitions.

Cllr Williams commented his presumption that these sign offs and authorisations would have to go through due processes before they were able to complete sign off?

Cllr Birnie clarified his question, asking; would it be possible for this to happen inadvertently rather than a deliberate act?

NHowcutt gave reassurance that the same controls that are in place now will be in place under these new regulations. Stating that in relation to Council acquisitions, you have to have approved budget and financial control in place first, just having the want and/or will to authorise something is not as simple as just being able to do so.

Cllr Birnie referred to pg.83, and asked; what is Business World Unit approval?

NHowcutt responded to advise this is the name of the finance software system where all our sign offs are carried out.

Recommendations Agreed.

To approve the updated Financial Regulations 2021.

CA/77/21 RIVER GADE RESTORATION AND IMPROVEMENTS TO GADEBRIDGE PARK PROJECT

Cllr Anderson introduced the report in Cllr Barrett's absence.

Cllr Birnie referred to the fence, an item which he advised has been discussed in great detail at SPAE OSC and with the Environment Agency also being in favour. Cllr Birnie expressed that it was a concern that both children and dogs should be protected and commented that the sort of fencing we already have further down the park does not interfere with the view in any way and would be suitable.

Cllr Griffiths commented on the importance of this project, highlighting that this will go ahead whether we encourage it or not and clarifying that as a Council we want to ensure we get all the amenities in the park to make it an excellent scheme. It is important that we are involved in those discussions and able to fund those items to make it an enjoyable environment for our residents.

Cllr Williams agreed with Cllr Griffiths comments, adding that when we are agreeing to our contribution, a decision he advised would go to Council, any agreed payment will be about getting over and above what would have already been put in place following the work by the Environment Agency to the river; to enhance the experience for park users. We are increasing residential provision in the town centre, most of which do not have their own outdoor space, so the more we can do to enhance these public spaces the more provision we are making for everyone.

Recommendations Agreed.

1. To support the Environment Agency and Affinity Water Ltd in the restoration of the river Gade and improvements to Gadebridge Park project.

2. To approve access to Gadebridge Park for the Environment Agency and its contractors to carry out restoration and improvement works during 2022.
3. To approve, subject to Council, a contribution of up to a maximum of £130,000 for Environmental Amenity works as part of the project.
4. To delegate authority to the Assistant Director Neighbourhood Delivery in consultation with the Portfolio Holder of Environmental Services to agree expenditure up to a maximum of £130,000.
5. To delegate authority to the Assistant Director Neighbourhood Delivery in consultation with the Assistant Director (Corporate and Contracted Services), Legal Governance Management to approve legal agreements and documentation between the Council and the Environment Agency and Affinity Water Ltd.

CA/78/21 ADDENDUM TO RIVER GADE RESTORATION

See minutes under Agenda item 9

CA/79/21 COVID UPDATE

Cllr Williams introduced the report and handed to MBrookes.

MBrookes advised this is an update on the work that services have been doing in response to COVID. Section 1 focuses on financial, Section 2 on the work being delivered as we move into the recovery stage. There is a £2m pressure this year; in line with what is in reports presented to Cabinet. COVID is an ongoing concern, need to start looking at medium term recovery.

Cllr Birnie referred to pg.193, para.1.13, with reference to the pressure of £130k for temporary accommodation and asked; has this now been mitigated by the relaxation of social distancing?

NHowcutt responded that the data we are looking at in the report is period 5, so the data and costs are pre relaxation of COVID measures. He went on to explain that a lot of refurbishment work was planned to adhere to COVID safety and make single person units which are more expensive and slower, however we are now looking to reshape that. There is an inherent problem in the budget this year linked to socially distancing measures, large part of that is owing to safety of staff and residents; some of those social distancing measures remain in place.

Cllr Birnie referred to the mention of the leisure services and the effect of the pandemic on them, as pg.197 para.2.21. Specifically there is a statement that the position will be monitored on a quarterly basis and the information will be given to Members. Cllr Birnie asked; how will that information be disseminated to Members?

MBrookes responded to advise that reports will go to F&R OSC on these matters, then possibly on to Cabinet if there is any decision to be made on next year's funding.

Cllr Birnie referred to pg.197/198, para.2.23 and the statement about problems of opening communal rooms in sheltered accommodation, which he observed appears

to be due to a shortage of cleaners. The Cllr asked; are Cabinet aware that residents are very upset about this and a number of them have stated that they would be perfectly happy themselves to take part in the cleaning to open these rooms on a more regular basis?

Cllr Williams responded to confirm he is aware and commented that the good news is they are open 2 days a week. Additionally we have funding from County through Health Board to recruit additional cleaners. We are not able to allow residents or volunteers to clean the areas as we are responsible for ensuring they meet the required safety standards.

FWilliamson added that they are in the process of appointing some new cleaners. On the balance of safety risk it was determined it was safer to have a gradual reopening. They have been working with Age UK to look at them running some additional functions in those lounges as they have the correct method statements in place to undertake the cleaning for events they run at those schemes. We recognise the importance of these spaces and are working to get those schemes reopened.

Recommendations Agreed.

- (a) The projected financial impact of Covid-19 for 2021/22 as set out in section 1.
- (b) The service updates provided in section 2.

CA/80/21 ANNUAL INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING STATEMENT

Cllr Anderson introduced the report, explaining that this is annual statement that the Council is required to publish on their website.

Cllr Birnie referred to payment of £36k on pg.223, table c, asking what that means.

JDoe responded to advise this is a payment in kind.

Cllr Birnie asked; does that mean someone has given the land in lieu of payment?

JDoe confirmed.

Cllr Tindall referred to the sums of money involved and asked; would normal treasury management rules apply or are there specific requirements on how this money is held? Is there an extra income opportunity via interest accrual?

NHowcutt responded that in terms of interest, this would be a very small amount and advised this has to sit in our cash balances and be managed via treasury management.

Recommendations agreed.

Cabinet Notes:

The information provided in the Infrastructure Funding Statement in Appendix 1 and approves its publication as required under the CIL Regulations 2010 (as amended).

CA/81/21 HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

Cllr Griffiths introduced the report, advising that we currently have 6.5 to 7k people on our register. It is necessary to revise our policy to be in line with the law; when we do, there are always going to be some people who will gain and some who will lose points. There is no change in how many homes we deliver, but about ensuring we are delivering the homes we have to those in the greatest need.

NBeresford confirmed the Housing Allocations Policy is linked to statutory function 6 of Housing Act 1966; we are required to make sure we have an up to date policy and this is a 3 year refresh bringing the strategy up to date. There has been extensive consultation. There are 4 key proposed changes; 1. In terms of capital thresholds to access sheltered accommodation, which is to be removed. 2. Reducing village criteria from 10 to 5 years. 3. Introducing tiered income thresholds for new applicants. 4. Increasing threshold for ages for shared rooms of children of different sexes.

Cllr Birnie referred to pg.270, Appendix H where he referred to a list of figures in regard to waiting lists and it is a comparison between DBC, Hatfield, Stevenage and St Albans. The Councillor commented that it is quite striking how much larger our own waiting list is, and asked; is there any obvious reason for this?

NBeresford responded that DBC is the largest stock retaining authority of the 4 listed. The proposed changes will bring us more in line with those other authorities. Expect to see a reduction in approx. 3,000 applicants on our register.

Cllr Birnie asked, are we changing our policy to align with the others?

NBeresford stated that not directly but that there would be some alignment.

Recommendations agreed.

Cabinet Approves:

The implementation of the new Housing Allocations policy.

CA/82/21 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

There were no Part II items on the Agenda.

Cllr Williams closed the meeting by advising the committee that this is the last meeting for JDeane prior to his departure and thanked JDeane for his service to DBC, wishing him well for the future.

The Meeting ended at 8.10 pm