
POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held in The Sapling Room, The Appleyard, Avenue of Remembrance, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 4DE on Wednesday, 30 November 2022 from 7.00 pm - 7.51 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Mike Baldock (Chair), Monique Bonney (Vice-Chair), Lloyd Bowen, Derek Carnell, Mike Dendor, Tim Gibson, Mike Henderson, Alan Horton, Elliott Jayes (Substitute for Councillor Corrie Woodford), Julian Saunders, Bill Tatton, Roger Truelove, Tim Valentine and Mike Whiting.

PRESENT (Virtually): Councillor David Simmons.

OFFICERS PRESENT: Philippa Davies, Lisa Fillery, Larissa Reed and Claire Stanbury.

OFFICERS PRESENT (Virtually): Martyn Cassell, Flo Churchill, Duncan Ellis, Charlotte Hudson, Joanne Johnson, Zoe Kent, Jo Millard, Jill Peet and Emma Wiggins.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Angela Harrison.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually): Councillors Cameron Beart, Steve Davey, James Hunt, Pete Neal and Richard Palmer.

APOLOGY: Councillor Corrie Woodford.

458 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

459 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

460 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 19 October 2022 (Minute Nos. 395 – 402) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

Part A Minutes for recommendation to Council

461 **Constitution amend: Petitions scheme**

The Chief Executive introduced the report which set out an updated version of the constitutional petitions scheme and the constitution working group's reasons for preferring it to the current version. The report asked the Committee to recommend the updated version to council for adoption. The Chief Executive explained that the cross-party constitution working group had considered the petitions scheme and had reviewed the petition thresholds as set out in paragraph 3.2 and Appendix II of the report.

In the discussion that followed, Members made points which included:

- Clarification sought on whether a signatory needed to have an email address to sign a petition;
- how would members of the public know about an online petition, would the Council publicise it?;
- could a petition be part-online/part-paper version to include signatories not on email?;
- welcomed the revised petitions scheme;
- considered three minutes to speak by the petition organiser at the relevant meeting was not sufficient and suggested this be increased;
- supported the proposals;
- sought more information on what would be classed as an 'inappropriate' petition; and
- congratulated the working group on their work on this part of the constitution, and other work they had carried out on updating the constitution.

In response, the Chief Executive explained that an email address was required from the petition organiser, but those signing it were only required to submit their name, address and signature. She said it needed to be clear that any paper version was linked to a particular online version of a petition, and that it was one and the same, and a check would be in place to ensure a signatory did not sign the same petition twice. The Chief Executive explained that it was the Chair's discretion to allow more than three minutes for the petition organiser to speak on their petition. Petitions could be deemed to be inappropriate if they were personal to staff or unlawful, and this would be decided by the proper officer.

Councillor Mike Whiting proposed the recommendation which was seconded by Councillor Elliott Jayes.

Recommended:

(1) That council incorporated the revised petitions scheme at Appendix II into the constitution.

Part B Minutes for information

462 Draft Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan including fees and charges

The Director of Resources introduced the report which set out the draft 2023/24 revenue and capital budgets and the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS). There was a tabled update for Appendix 2. She explained that there was a £2m budget gap, and there were still some uncertainties set out within the report, which could not be confirmed until 21 December 2022 when the Provisional Settlement was announced. The Director of Resources outlined the delay in the business rate position, and said there would need to be an increase in fees and charges. Council Tax would increase from 1.99% to 2.99%. She gave an overview of the appendices within the report. There would be a six-week consultation and a further budget report would be submitted to the Policy and Resources Committee and Full Council in February 2023.

In the discussion that followed, Members made points which included:

- Considered the wording in paragraph 3.1 should be amended so that it did not look like the consultation was only open for the business community;
- was the 55% percent response to the staff survey on pay and potential savings disappointing?;
- considered there was a lack of detail on grants to third party organisations;
- concerned with the cut to parish grants;
- the increase in car parking charges to 65p, where people were unlikely to have a 5p coin, made it difficult for people paying by cash and the machines not giving change made this unfair to customers;
- against the increase in burial charges;
- hire of sports facilities should be frozen so that more people could be encouraged to use the facilities;
- acknowledged the difficult decisions that had to be made;
- in terms of the staff survey, it was important that the suggested option of reduced hours was a genuine reduction;
- the report indicated a good and clear position on the information the Council knew so far;
- it might be worth officers doing some preliminary work on the way it looked as though the Council Tax rate was going;
- considered there should have been more detail in the report on the staff survey and the consequences of reduced hours; and
- a reduction in staff hours could mean that projects took longer to complete.

In response, the Director of Resources explained that the consultation was open to everyone borough-wide and the wording could be changed to reflect this. The Chief Executive explained that the response rate to the staff survey was an acceptable return. The Director of Resources explained that there was direct consultation to bodies with discretionary grants and this could be broken down into more detail, once the consultation had taken place.

The Chief Executive gave an overview of the options within the recent survey on staff pay and potential savings. With options of increased salaries, resulting in reduced staff and fewer people to do the job, or reduced hours and endeavouring to keep as many people as possible, it was a difficult choice. A reduction in staff numbers impacted the Council's services. She added that the Council was trying to be as resilient as possible.

Councillor Derek Carnell proposed the recommendations and these were seconded by Councillor Tim Gibson.

Resolved:

- (1) That the draft 2023/24 revenue and capital budget forecasts be noted.***
- (2) That the Medium-Term Financial Strategy be noted.***
- (3) That the proposals for the fees and charges increase be noted.***
- (4) That the proposed budget consultation be approved.***

463 **Performance Monitoring & Priority Projects Report - 2022/23 half year**

Members agreed that this item be deferred so that they had more time to consider Appendix II which had been tabled.

Resolved:

(1) That the Performance Monitoring & Priority Projects Report – 2022/23 half year be deferred to the Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 14 December 2022.

464 **Boughton & Dunkirk Neighbourhood Plan - Examiner's report and next steps**

The Interim Head of Planning Services introduced the report which endorsed and accepted the recommended modifications to the Boughton and Dunkirk Neighbourhood Plan contained in the Examiner's Report. The designation of the neighbourhood plan area was confirmed in February 2014, and since then the group had gathered evidence, undertaken public consultation and submitted a final draft of the neighbourhood plan to the Council in May 2022. A consultation on the plan took place and the examiner's report was received by the Council on 21 October 2022. He had concluded that, with some modifications, the Plan should go ahead to referendum. The Interim Head of Planning Services explained that there were 22 amendments proposed in the examiner's report and these were set out in Appendix I of the report. The Neighbourhood Planning Group and officers considered the amendments to be reasonable.

The Chair invited a representative from Dunkirk Parish Council to speak. Parish Councillor Jeff Tutt explained that it had been a long process, but they had 'got there in the end'. He said the examiner had been very thorough and he hoped the Committee would approve the recommendations and take the Plan forward.

In the discussion that followed Members made points which included:

- In terms of the cost, considered it could be cheaper to hold the referendum in May 2023, when the local elections were being held; and
- clarification sought as to whether the Committee was being asked to approve the Plan as is, or the amended version.

In response, the Interim Head of Planning Services explained that the Committee was being asked to approve the modified Plan. She added that the Council paid for the referendum and received grant aid for this.

A Ward Member congratulated the Neighbourhood Plan Group and Parish Councillor Tutt for the work they had carried out on bringing the Plan forward. He considered the examiner's report to be very thorough and the changes to be reasonable.

Councillor Tim Valentine proposed the recommendations which were seconded by Councillor Alan Horton.

Resolved:

(1) That the modifications to the Boughton & Dunkirk Neighbourhood Plan as set out in the Examiner's Report (Appendix I) be agreed.

(2) That it be agreed that the Neighbourhood Plan meets the basic conditions and complies with the provision made by or under Sections 38A and 38B of the Planning and Compulsory Act 2004.

(3) That the decision to accept the Examiner's recommendations be publicised.

(4) That the organisation of a local referendum to cover the areas of Boughton and Dunkirk parishes be approved.

465 **Forward Decisions Plan**

Resolved:

(1) That the report be noted.

Chair

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All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel