

DRAFT

Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

EXECUTIVE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 21 SEPTEMBER 2023

Councillors Present: Lee Dillon (Chairman), Jeff Brooks, Heather Codling, Martin Colston, Denise Gaines, Janine Lewis, Alan Macro and Tony Vickers

Also Present: Councillors Dominic Boeck, Richard Somner, Jo Stewart, David Marsh and Carolyne Culver,

Officers Present: Paul Coe (Executive Director – People) , Joseph Holmes (Executive Director – Resources), Sadie Owen (Principal Democratic Services Officer), Benjamin Ryan (Democratic Services Officer) and Nicola Thomas (Service Lead – Legal & Democratic)

In Attendance (virtually): Councillors Iain Cottingham and Ross Mackinnon, Clare Lawrence (Executive Director – Place) and Nigel Lynn

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillors Adrian Abbs and Howard Woollaston

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillors Adrian Abbs and Howard Woollaston.

2. **Minutes**

Councillor Dominic Boeck referred to item 8 of the minutes and requested a change from 'early years setting' to 'early years' service'.

Subject to the above amendment, the Minutes of the meeting held on 6 July 2023 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Leader.

3. **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest received.

4. **Public Questions**

A full transcription of the public and Member question and answer sessions is available from the following link: [Transcription of Q&As.](#)

5. **Petitions**

There were no petitions presented to the Executive.

6. **Capital Financing Report Financial Year 2023/24 Quarter One (EX4361)**

Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced a report (Agenda Item 6), noting a Quarter One underspend position of £15.1 million with reprofiling proposals of £14.1 million. Councillor Cottingham highlighted section seven of the report and in particular the s151 Officer's statement that he was confident that the capital expenditure would be affordable in the longer term.

Councillor Lee Dillon proposed the report.

Councillor Jo Stewart referred to page 27 of the report and the fact that no reprofiling had been requested in relation to Modernising Adult Social Care, and the Learning Disability Supported Living, Walnut Close Transformation projects. It was queried whether this

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reflected the facet that both projects had been halted. Paul Coe, Executive Director Adult Social Care, reported that certain elements of the projects had been withdrawn and that he would be happy to provide a full breakdown in writing.

Councillor David Marsh queried the status of the capital funding that had previously been allocated to the Sports Hub project. Councillor Cottingham responded that it was likely that the sum would be reprofiled into another project.

Councillor Carolyne Culver referred to section 5.11 of the report and queried why there had been an underspend on the joint venture with Sovereign Housing Association. Councillor Denise Gaines commented that negotiations were ongoing with Sovereign Housing Association, and it was hoped that projects would be proceeding in the near future.

Councillor Jeff Brooks seconded the recommendations within the report.

RESOLVED that: Executive

- Note the quarter one underspend position of £15.1 million and reprofiling proposals of £14.1 million. Reprofiling proposals are included in appendix D.
- Note the budget changes included in the quarter one position detailed in appendix A, and proposed external funding changes in appendix B. The proposed external funding changes result in a net increase in expenditure budgets of £1.9 million and a reduction in the Council funded element of the programme of £4.4 million.

Executive approved:

- A new Council funded project for the procurement of a new Adult Social Care client management system (£224k) is added to the 2023/24 capital programme (appendix C). The current contract is due for retender and procurement activity is due to commence in the current financial year with full implementation of a software solution in financial year 2025/26.
- A new Council funded project for installation of CCTV cameras at Market Street (£18k) to be added to the 2023/24 capital programme, as per Appendix C. This is to provide coverage of external areas not presently benefiting from CCTV, in response to an upward trend in theft of bicycles and vandalism to the plant room fencing and nearby street lighting.
- A new Council funded project to acquire polling booths to be added to the 2023/24 capital programme (£40.5k), as per Appendix C. This is to replace existing equipment in poor condition, and which will then incorporate an accessible level for ease of use by disabled voters.
- A new Council funded project to acquire accounting software to be added to the 2023/24 capital programme (£22.5k), as per Appendix C. This is required to support mandatory compliance with accounting requirements on adoption of the International Financial Reporting Standard 16 on lease accounting (IFRS16). Fees for future years licence costs will be included as part of the 2024/25 capital build process.

7. 2023/24 Revenue Financial Performance Quarter One (EX4360)

Councillor Iain Cottingham introduced a report (Agenda Item 7), which forecast a significant overspend across many services, particularly in the People Directorate, in Quarter One. It was noted that this was due to increasing demand on services, continued inflationary cost pressures and additional staffing costs caused by the use of agency workers.

Councillor Lee Dillon proposed the report.

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Councillor Jeff Brooks commented that he had been very disappointed in relation to the recruitment procedures and in particular the use of agency workers. Councillor Brooks reported that the Executive had already managed to reduce the number, however had noted that the managed service provider appointed by the Council (Comensura), had not been utilised sufficiently.

Councillor Tony Vickers commented that there were three causes beyond the Council's control which had affected budgets in the Place Directorate; notably the fact that the government had promised full recovery for planning fees and failed to deliver; the drop in planning application numbers; and the fact that budget setting in the previous year had set income at the highest range and expenditure at the lowest range.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon referred to Councillor Brooks' statement that 30% of agency staff had not been recruited through Comensura and queried whether there were legitimate reasons for any of that number.

Councillor Mackinnon reminded Councillor Vickers that the previous administration had left reserves £3.5m higher than had been left in 2019. Councillor Mackinnon suggested that Councillor Vickers should have raised any concerns in relation to planning budgets when the Council budget was set in March 2023.

Councillor Brooks commented that he did not know specifically why the staff had not been recruited via Comensura but suspected that it was because it was convenient. It was reported that any request for off panel workers now required formal approval from the Financial Review Panel.

Councillor Jo Stewart referred to the eleven members of staff that Councillor Brooks had reported as transferring from agency to permanent and queried what incentives had been offered. Councillor Dillon offered to share the information with Councillor Stewart on a confidential basis.

Councillor David Marsh referred to section 5.52 of the report and queried which assets the Executive were planning to sell. Councillor Marsh further urged the Executive to review the commercial property portfolio with a view to disposing of the assets. Councillor Cottingham confirmed that the commercial property portfolio was being reviewed in its entirety.

Councillor Carlyne Culver referred to section 5.15 of the report and requested further information in relation to the statement that the People Directorate 'continues to take action to suppress market demand'. Paul Coe explained that the People Directorate was trying to deal with demand with alternative solutions, noting that managing early interventions in a different way could lead to a reduction in long term needs.

Councillor Brooks seconded the recommendations within the report.

RESOLVED that: Executive

- Note the £6.3m overspend.
- Note the implementation of measures included in the report around recruitment, staffing and agency.
- Note the establishment of a Financial Review Panel (FRP) to meet weekly to ensure the spending limits are being adhered to.
- Request that opportunities for raising in year capital receipts are brought forward to a future Executive meeting.

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8. **Corporate Transformation Programme 2023-25 (EX4448)**

Councillor Jeff Brooks proposed and introduced a report (Agenda Item 8), which detailed the projects to be included within the Transformation Programme over the coming two years.

Councillor Lee Dillon noted that the six projects selected had all been chosen with cost mitigation in mind and suggested that Scrutiny Commission review the programme.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon queried why Children and Family Services had not been included as a key project. Councillor Brooks commented that a new Executive Director for the service would be joining in October and it was anticipated that work would be undertaken to transform the service and that whilst it wasn't specifically mentioned within the paper it would be looked at.

Councillor Dominic Boeck commented that he was concerned by the graph on page 76 of the agenda pack which focused on strategic alignment and savings. He stated that the Council had a duty to deliver best value, which should not be purely based on price, but also on quality of delivery. Councillor Brooks provided assurance that there would be quality of delivery, but also efficiency.

Councillor Carlyne Culver requested assurance that there would not be any redundancies associated with the programme. Councillor Brooks responded that all options remained open.

Referring to the accommodation section of the report Councillor Culver queried the timescale for re-location from the Market Street property. Councillor Brooks commented that the review encompassed all council owned properties and that it was too soon to determine a timescale.

Councillor Culver requested assurance that greater automation of services would not undermine the quality of service provided to residents. Councillor Brooks commented that 'user acceptance testing' had been missing from the Council's digital transformation and consequently he would be introducing a panel for any future change to ensure that it was fit for purpose.

RESOLVED that: Executive

- Note the report, which would be the first in a series of updates on the delivery of the programme.

9. **Results of Public Consultation - Potential Sports Pitch at Manor Park (EX4434)**

Councillor Janine Lewis introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 9), which recommended against creating a grass sports pitch at Manor Park.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon commented that the paper implied that the Sports Hub was still a possibility. He noted that Councillor Lee Dillon had told Newbury Rugby Club that it was not, and queried which version was correct. Councillor Dillon clarified that as Leader of the Council he had informed that Rugby Club that it was his view that the Sports Hub would not proceed, however that opinion would be subject to Executive approval. Councillor Dillon noted that a report concerning the future of the Sports Hub would be reviewed by Executive in November.

Councillor Mackinnon referred to section 11.2 of the report which emphasised the superior capacity of artificial grass pitches and queried why, if this was the case, the Executive had gone ahead with creating a grass pitch at Faraday Road. Councillor Lewis

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commented that phase one of the project was to return football to Faraday Road, and phase two would look at other options.

In response to a request from Councillor David Marsh, Councillor Lewis provided assurance that any such future scheme would recognise and react swiftly to public opinion.

Councillor Dillon seconded the recommendation within the report.

RESOLVED that: Executive

- Agrees not to progress with a planning application for the creation of a sports pitch at the Manor Park site and to explore alternative locations for the creation of new sports pitches.

10. **Community Forums (EX4427)**

Councillor Tony Vickers introduced a report (Agenda Item 10) which detailed the establishment of Community Forums. Councillor Vickers reported that an initial Community Forum had already been held on Faraday Road and announced that the next one would concern 'Country Matters'. It was reported that there would be four a year and that all would be hybrid.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon referred to section 4.1. of the report and queried how the initial Community Forum had been measured as 'successful'. Councillor Vickers suggested that those in attendance had appeared to value the session.

Councillor Mackinnon noted that in opposition the Portfolio Holder for Climate Action, Recycling and Biodiversity had repeatedly stressed the importance of transparency in meetings. As such, Councillor Mackinnon noted that the public were not invited to the EAG Open forum, that EAG still met in private, and queried whether the subsequent recording of the meeting uploaded to YouTube had been edited. Councillor Vickers responded that going forward there would be a public and private part to the meeting due to the confidential aspect of some of the matters discussed. Councillor Dillon confirmed that the recording had been edited and would revert to Councillor Mackinnon with a reason following the meeting.

Councillor Mackinnon suggested that there had been no change to arrangements since the last administration as it appeared that the Portfolio Holder ultimately still determined what was for public and what was for private discussion. Councillor Dillon commented that the meetings were now recorded which had not happened in the past.

Councillor Culver noted the Green group's support to the revisions made to EAG and queried whether there would be similar enhancements to PAG and TAG. Councillor Culver suggested that landowners and farmers should be invited to the next Community Forum. Councillor Vickers did not foresee that PAG would become a public meeting due to the confidential nature of information relating to the review of the Local Plan.

Councillor Jo Stewart reported that she had been present at the Community Forum and commented that it had been interesting, well chaired and on a subject that provoked a lot of passion. Councillor Stewart welcomed the County Matters topic and looked forward to attending the next Community Forum.

RESOLVED that: Executive note the establishment of Community Forums on the basis of the following operating model:

- Community Forums will take place as and when the need arises, but at least quarterly;
- These will be attended by a Member of the Executive;

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- The Chief Executive or relevant Executive Director will attend and be supported by the relevant Service Director or senior manager depending on discussion topics;
- These meetings should take place at various locations across the district on a roving basis with invitees attending in person, but must have the ability to be operated in a hybrid format;
- Topics for discussion will relate to matters of interest to communities in all or part of the district, which must be approved by the Leader; and
- A Community Forum Webpage will be developed to promote the meetings and to provide feedback and updates on items discussed at meetings.

Executive note the Community Forum Terms of Reference, produced at Appendix B.

Executive also note the EAG Open Forum Terms of Reference, which can be found at Appendix C.

11. **Response to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Task and Finish Group Report on the Customer Journey (EX4378)**

Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 11), noting that it presented the findings of a cross-party Customer Journey task group and highlighting that Appendix B was work in progress.

Councillor Carlyne Culver noted that proposal 19 stated that the current report a problem page would be retired with an easier to use replacement. Councillor Culver commented that the current system was simple to use and requested assurance that the system would remain simplistic. Councillor Brooks responded that he would be creating a cross-party user group to ensure user accessibility for the new page.

Councillor Culver referred to page 181 of the agenda pack and commented that not all deaf people used British Sign Language and that the Council should review generally how it supported and communicated with people from the deaf and blind community.

Referring to the same section of the report Councillor Ross Mackinnon queried whether such services would be commercially sourced. Councillor Brooks reported that the Council was facing a significant financial challenge, however would bear it in mind.

Councillor Mackinnon referred to proposal 37 and suggested that a planning e-newsletter was preferable to Councillor Vickers' retrograde step of returning to paper neighbourhood notification letters. Councillor Brooks commented that he had been surprised at the number of people who did not access the internet, was very aware of digital exclusion and suggested that paper still had a part to play in communications.

Councillor Stewart commented that she was glad to note the plans to improve digital inclusion. Councillor Stewart further commended proposal 30 to investigate the High Street presence in central and eastern areas to support ASC and other services.

Councillor Lee Dillon thanked former Councillor James Cole for chairing the task and finish group and seconded the recommendations within the report.

RESOLVED that: Executive:

- Agree the proposed action plan that has been developed in response to the recommendations raised by the Task and Finish Group.

12. **Response to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Commission Task and Finish Group Report on Fees and Charges (EX4379)**

Councillor Jeff Brooks introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 12), which presented the proposed action plan that has been developed in response to the

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recommendations raised by the Customer Journey Task and Finish Group. Councillor Brooks commented that commercialisation was one of the key aims of the Executive.

Councillor Ross Mackinnon commented that the previous administration had investigated commercialisation and that it had been very difficult to achieve but offered his assistance to the new administration. Councillor Brooks thanked. Councillor Mackinnon and asked officers for access to the papers of the Commercialisation Board.

Councillor Dominic Boeck referred to Proposal 4 of the report and suggested that it should refer to all Council leisure facilities within the district. Councillor Lee Dillon agreed.

RESOLVED that: Executive

- Agree the proposed action plan that has been developed in response to the recommendations raised by the Task and Finish Group, other than Proposal 4 which would include the entire leisure portfolio and not just the named sites.

13. Amendments to Public Protection Partnership's Inter Authority Agreement (IAA) (EX4415)

Councillor Lee Dillon introduced and proposed a report (Agenda Item 12), which delegated authority to the Service Lead for Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Service Lead for Public Protection, to amend the IAA to reflect the changes to the constitution in respect of the expanded membership of the Joint Public Protection Committee approved by Council on 20 July 2023.

Councillor Jeff Brooks seconded the recommendation within the report.

RESOLVED that: Executive

- Approves that the Service Lead for Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Service Lead for Public Protection, be authorised to make the amendments to the Inter-Authority Agreement of the 6th January 2017 to reflect the decisions of this Council and Bracknell Forest Borough Council.

14. Members' Questions

A full transcription of the public and Member question and answer sessions is available from the following link: [Transcription of Q&As](#).

(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 7.55 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature