

ECONOMY COMMITTEE

5 October 2023 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Nash (Chair), Dr Walsh (Vice-Chair), Cooper, Edwards, Gunner, Lawrence, Needs, Northeast, Penycate and Stanley

Councillors Butcher, Mrs Cooper, Goodheart, Greenway and Tandy were also in attendance for all or part of the meeting.

277. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillor Lloyd.

278. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

279. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 June and the Extraordinary meeting held on 19 June 2023 were approved by the Committee and signed by the Chair.

280. ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA THAT THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

There were no urgent items for the meeting.

281. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair advised that one question had been submitted in line with the public question time procedure, however the member of the public subsequently withdrew their question, therefore there were no public questions to be heard or responded to at the meeting.

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282. BUDGET PROCESS REPORT

The Group Head Finance and Section 151 Officer introduced his report to members, where he explained that the report outlined the budget process for 2024/25 that would be followed, members were being asked to note its content and that the process had been approved by Policy and Finance Committee at its meeting on 11 July 2023. He confirmed that the detailed committee budget was due to be presented to the committee on 1 February 2024. A medium term financial report was due to be presented to Policy and Finance Committee at its 26 October meeting and a further update report would also be presented at its scheduled meeting on 6 December 2023, which would provide much more detail for members. In summing up he reminded members that the budget challenges that had been reported last year and were now well documented, still remain.

The Chair then took questions from members where it was commented that officers had been asked to review and make additional departmental savings of between 10% and 20%, when would these be reported to members. It was confirmed that more details on these matters would follow in due course and be clearly documented in all committee reports presented as the council moved through its budget process. Clarity was sought regarding any proposed savings that were put forward by officers and the consultation that would take place with members on these. It was confirmed that the process was still being agreed and further information would come forward at a later date.

283. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT Q1

The Group Head Finance and Section 151 Officer introduced his report to members, where he explained that the report outlined the committees forecast out turn against the 2023/24 budget. It asks for members to approve a virement of £190,900 from the Corporate Support budget to this committees budget, he confirmed that this exercise was presentational and did not document any form of growth or additional cost. He explained that this was a new report being presented to members and it detailed a forecast spend against the budget as at the end of quarter one. He highlighted that the revenue budget overspend was forecast was expected to be approximately £128,000 and was detailed at section 3.5 in the report. There was a need to continue the engagement of a Regeneration Consultant to deliver key regeneration projects across the district and there was a documented underspend of £14,000 in the Property and Estates department which was due to a vacant post. In terms of the Capital Programme there were no spending/budget issues, however there was slippage from last year's budget due to capacity issues in carrying out work. However, he confirmed this was not additional spending, it was a reprofiling of expenditure.

The Chair invited questions from members where it was queried what was being considered regarding Phoenix House. It was confirmed that there was a 'future accommodation use' project underway and this would fall into this project and information would be presented to members at a later date.

The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer urged members to ask questions on these new reports and process moving forward. He expressed the importance of ensuring members understood the detail being presented, so questions were welcome at any time as well as before and after meetings.

The recommendation was proposed by Councillor Stanley and seconded by Councillor Walsh.

The Committee noted the report and

RECOMMENDS TO POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE that

1.3. it approves a virement of £190,900 from the Corporate Support Committee budget to the Economy Committee budget.

284. PIER ROAD, LITTLEHAMPTON - PROPOSED ROAD CLOSURE

The Business Development Manager reminded members that during the pandemic, Pier Road had been closed under emergency legislation and after several reports members of the committees at its June meeting instructed to submit the preferred scheme for the permanent closure of Pier Road to West Sussex County Council (WSSCC) as a Community Highway Scheme. The report before members provided the outcome of the submission which had not been successful.

The Chair invited comments from members where it was stated that there had been huge support for a temporary closure, throughout the work leading up to this report we were informed that there was no seasonal closure option available. The compromise members agreed due to this was that a permanent closure was applied for. It was disappointing that the report made clear that the County Councillor was not supportive of this option. It was also commented that Brighton have recently announced a closure of a part of the lanes, so the query was if they had been able to do this, why have Arun been stopped. It was then suggested that a letter from the Chair raising this issue with the local MP could be sent on behalf of the committee and residents to challenge the decision. Further comments of support for the permanent closure were made by other committee members. One member confirmed that that the road closure in Brighton had been achieved under a 'permanent weekend' closure and potential this could be an option to be explored. Thanks was expressed to the team and the Business Development Manager for their work and dedication on this item.

The Chair then revisited the suggestion of sending a letter to the local MP to challenge the decision, the committee were in agreement, this was then formally proposed by Councillor Northeast and seconded by Councillor Walsh.

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The Committee

RESOLVED

That it noted the content of the report and instruct the Chair to send a letter to the local MP to challenge the final decision made on the council's application.

285. LITTLEHAMPTON TOWN CENTRE ACTION GROUP AND PLAN

The Business Development Manager advised members that Littlehampton Town Council had formed this action group and Arun District Council were being asked to join as a partner. An amended Action Plan and Strategy had been circulated ahead of the meeting and she confirmed that the Councils representatives on the group as documented in the report had changed from Councillors Nash and Wiltshire to Councillors Walsh and Wiltshire. She explained that by agreeing to become a partner the council had not been committed to any additional expenditure, but rather would refocus current budgets and efforts into coordinated regeneration action.

The Chair stated that he felt this was a solid plan and a good foundation to start from. He then invited comments from members where it was clarified that the action plan did not commit Arun District Council to take action on anything in the document unless it agrees with it, this was confirmed. One member vocalised that he had concerns about the document in its current format. The Chair responded to the concern raised by stating he believed the purpose of the of the action plan would be to work through it and make changes where needed. Further statements made stated that the first meeting was found to be very useful and widely attended.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Northeast and seconded by Councillor Stanley.

The Committee

RESOLVED

1.1. that it agreed to the Councils involvement in the Littlehampton Town Centre Action Group and note the Action Plan and Strategy that has been drawn up for consideration at the Group's first meeting on 4 September 2023.

286. CREATIVE VISION FOR BOGNOR REGIS

The Economic Regeneration Project Officer advised that the report before the committee was to seek approval from members to pursue a creative vision document for Bognor Regis, which sought to capitalise on the ongoing regeneration and development in the town. He explained that the application for funding to Arts Council, England had been successful and will be used for the purpose outlined in the report.

The Chair congratulated the officer on the successful application for the grant. He then invited comments from members where it was queried what regeneration plans were in place. It was confirmed by the Chair that there were a number of things being completed in Bognor Regis and the next meeting of the committee would contain reports that would provide further clarity on the regeneration work being undertaken. It was also expressed that this funding would help provide the council with additional opportunities to further enhance the area and tap into another side of the available economy in attracting more investment and interest to the area.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Needs and seconded by Councillor Stanley.

The Committee

RESOLVED

2.1 To provide approval for officers to commission and draft a 'Creative Vision for Bognor Regis' document.

2.2 To support an application for funding from Arts Council, England to facilitate this activity.

2.3 That should the authority receive the funding, that the committee accepts the grant to be used for this purpose.

287. ARUN VISITOR STRATEGY

The Group Head of Business and Economy explained to members that there had been an error with the background document links that had been provided in the agenda. She apologised to members and advised that if members that the information would be provided after the meeting, however if members did not feel that they were fully informed enough to make a decision at the meeting, the report could be deferred to another meeting of the committee.

The Chair asked members if they wished to discuss the item or would prefer for it to be deferred, it was the proposed by Councillor Gunner that the report be deferred to the next meeting of the committee. This was seconded by Councillor Walsh.

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The Committee

RESOLVED

That the report be deferred to the next meeting of the committee scheduled to be held on 1 November 2023.

288. OUTSIDE BODIES

A query was raised regarding two former outside bodies that were no longer documented on the list, these were the West Sussex Leaders Board and the Arun Growth Board. It was confirmed that this would be looked into, and an answer would be provided outside of the meeting.

289. WORK PROGRAMME

It was queried if the report on the Harvester currently documented as feeding into the Special Committee meeting on 1 November would contain clear guidance on what action would be being taken. It was confirmed that, the intention for the report was to allow for members to discuss the potential options that would be documented, however, there needed to be a direction from the lease holders of which this had not been received yet and therefore the report had been pulled from the meeting on 1 November at the current time. Further discussion was had on what this meant for the Windmill and Theatre and a request for improved communication on this was made. It was confirmed that until discussions with the lease holder had taken place and direction had been received, holding a meeting wouldn't be of help for members as officers would not have the answers to questions. It was explained that all teams involved in this element of work were all working very hard to provide everyone with the answers that were wanted and needed.

Additional discussion was had regarding the Brewers Fayre site in Bognor Regis where it was confirmed by the Chair that an update report on this matter would be brought back to committee at its 1 February 2024 meeting.

(The meeting concluded at 7.07 pm)