

RECORD OF DECISIONS of the meeting of the Cabinet held on Tuesday 6 February 2024 at 2.30 pm at the Guildhall, Portsmouth

Present

Councillor Steve Pitt (in the Chair)

Suzy Horton
Dave Ashmore
Kimberly Barrett
Ian Holder
Lee Hunt
Hugh Mason
Darren Sanders
Matthew Winnington

10. Apologies for Absence (AI 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gerald Vernon-Jackson. Chris Ward, Director of Finance & Resources, gave apologies as he had to leave early for another meeting. Members agreed to consider agenda items 9, 10 and 11 first to accommodate the request. For ease of reference the minutes will be kept in the original order.

11. Declarations of Interests (AI 2)

Councillor Winnington declared an interest in agenda item 6 (Community Inclusion Grants) as he worked for one of the organisations that had been awarded a grant. The City Solicitor confirmed that this was not a pecuniary or prejudicial interest as it was an information report.

12. Record of previous decision meeting - 9 January 2024 (AI 3)

The record of the previous decision meeting held on 9 January 2024 was agreed as a correct record.

13. Portsmouth Cemeteries Delivery Plan (AI 4)

Claire Watkins, Business Manager, introduced the report

Councillor Pitt said working on the Delivery Plan now was important and timely in order to future proof the service.

DECISIONS

The Cabinet

- 1. Approved that the Cemeteries Delivery Plan is distributed to key user groups for consultation.**
- 2. Agreed that the Delivery Plan will be reviewed following receipt of any responses and brought back to Cabinet at a future date for adoption.**

14. Parks and Open Spaces Strategy (AI 5)

Claire Watkins, Business Manager, introduced the report. She thanked staff across the council and external stakeholders for their work on the Strategy. Councillor Pitt asked that the references to the Traffic, Environment & Community Safety Scrutiny Panel's review into reducing the use of pesticides

on council land in the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy be brought up to date. Claire confirmed she would action directly.

Members thanked officers for the very thorough report and the tremendous work they had done. In one of the most densely populated cities in Europe parks were very important. It was good to see apprenticeships and training offered in the parks service and the renewal of play parks for parents and young children. Members acknowledged that no-one liked seeing trees removed, which improvements sometimes entailed, for example, the government wanted 14,000 to 17,000 new homes in the city, but parks would not be built on.

DECISION

The Cabinet formally adopted the Parks and Open Spaces Strategy.

15. Community Inclusion Grants update (AI 6)

Natasha Edmunds, Director of Corporate Services, introduced the report.

Members said the scheme was a massive success and great work had been done this year. The process was geared towards making sure community projects are sustainable and so groups could continue their work and provide value for money for taxpayers. Members did not realise so many groups would apply for a grant of up to £1,000 which showed how far a relatively small sum would go. With the thirty or so groups that were not awarded a grant officers were supporting them on how they could improve their applications and also signposting them to other grants they could apply for. Members emphasised that for groups whose applications were unsuccessful it was nothing to do with the quality of the group or the important work they were doing so members were glad to see they would be supported. As with job applications, the best candidates might not get the job if they could not jump through the hoops.

Councillor Pitt had met two groups last week (432 Nomads and Portsmouth City of Sanctuary) and reiterated it was a matter of who met the criteria, not winners and losers, and hoped others would meet it next year as the council wanted a resilient voluntary and community sector. He thanked everyone involved, particularly The Hive, the council's partner in the scheme.

DECISION

The Cabinet noted the report.

16. UK Shared Prosperity Fund Spend (Year 2) (AI 7)

Steve Curtis, Bid Manager, introduced the report, noting that the government was pleased with the outcomes of the spending allocation plan.

Councillor Pitt thanked officers for the huge amount of time and effort they had spent on navigating the way the funding was allocated. The dividend this year was support for the creative industries as £30,000 had earned more than £250,000 through external match funding. Along with other sources investment was approaching £1.5m in the creative industries within three

years so the council could achieve outcomes from the Shared Prosperity Fund if it could navigate the funding process.

Jane Lamer, Head of Economic Growth and Skills, explained that funding after Year 3 was unlikely to be known until after the general election although the Local Government Association was asking for clarity.

Members noted that at least there was funding for three years, unlike for social care which was nearly all allocated annually. The way funding was allocated showed that central government thought Portsmouth did not matter.

Councillor Pitt gave an example of the value of the funding. Further education students exhibiting at the We Create market at Christmas had benefitted from a grant of £850 as it had given them the opportunity to expand their creative vision and bring their work to the marketplace. The change in their confidence was amazing and they developed soft skills like dealing with customers that would last a lifetime. The Future High Streets fund project was a first step towards improving Commercial Road where the council would support and be a partner to retailers rather than just a landowner. Some of the funding would create more unified branding for the market stalls. A pop-up shop would let retailers see if they had a market for their goods. The former Job Centre at the northern end of Commercial Road was being converted into an enterprise centre. Consumers were moving away from identikit chains and wanted unique experiences. Councillor Pitt requested an interim progress report for 2024/2025.

DECISION

The Cabinet noted the report.

17. Update on the Household Support Fund and supporting residents with the cost of living (AI 8)

Mark Sage, Tackling Poverty Co-ordinator, introduced the report

Members hoped that the Household Support Fund (HSF) would continue after 31 March. Depending on the council's budget setting, some council funding, including a contribution from the Housing Revenue Account would be set aside to support with the cost of living. It was appalling that the two main national parties would not help. It was a disgrace that in the 21st century and the world's sixth biggest economy that food banks, larders and pantries were needed. Too many people had suffered for too long.

Portsmouth had become poorer because of cuts in Universal Credit and other welfare benefit entitlements. The city had an amazing heart and managed as it had long-term stable relationships with the voluntary and community sector. Current Council Tax banding was so far out of date that areas with the least valuable properties had the least money to spend on services.

All over the country councils were trying to make things work but could not plan long-term. The difficulty for local government in planning because of short-term funding was a theme of today's meeting. The council would only find out on 6 March in the Spring Budget if the HSF would continue or not; the

support outlined in Appendix 1 would apply if it stopped. Organisations may have to make some staff redundant then find that they keep funding. Members thanked Mr Sage and his team for their work which was hugely appreciated.

DECISIONS

The Cabinet

- 1. Approved the plan to deliver cost of living support to residents through the service delivery outlined in Appendix 1, subject to the Council budget-setting process and any announcement from Government on HSF or other funding for local authorities to provide cost of living support.**
 - 2. Delegated to the Director of Housing, Neighbourhood and Building Services, the implementation of the plan and adjustments to the plan and spend, in the event that other funding sources become available, in agreement with the Leader and S.151 Officer.**
 - 3. Asked the Tackling Poverty Coordinator to continue to work with partner agencies and residents to ensure we have a joined up, partnership approach to cost of living support, making best use of resources across the statutory, voluntary and community sectors.**
 - 4. Noted the Leader's letters sent to the Secretaries of State at the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities shown in Appendix 2, and agreed to continue to lobby Government for additional funding for Local Authorities, to enable us to provide more comprehensive local welfare provision and support to residents affected by the ongoing cost of living crisis.**
 - 5. Placed on record their thanks for the cross-directorate working group which has supported the implementation of the delivery of the Household Support Fund in 2023/24 and produced a plan to sustain a package of cost of living support throughout 2024/25.**
 - 6. Also placed on record a note of special thanks to the teams across the Council who have delivered support to residents affected by the cost of living crisis, and to the Council's Tackling Poverty Coordinator and the Household Support Fund delivery team who have administered the HSF in 2023/24. The setting up of a delivery team, designing application processes to deliver the grant to households throughout the city in the same financial year the grant was received is noted as exemplary work.**
- 18. Council Tax Support Fund (AI 9)**
Chris Ward, Director of Finance and Resources, introduced the report

DECISION

The Cabinet

- 1. Agreed that where funds remain available after making reductions as outlined in the core scheme's provisions, that Portsmouth City Council apply the discount as described within the core scheme to those chargepayers who become eligible for LCTS in respect of the 2023/24 financial year between 03 March 2023 and 31 March 2024. Any award will be calculated in the same way as those residents that received**

support from the core scheme within their 2023/24 annual bill. This will, in effect, treat all new recipients of LCTS in the same way as those that were receiving LCTS when annual council tax bills were prepared.

2. Agreed that should it become apparent that funding will be remaining above what is required for the activity detailed in 2.1, the Council will use its discretion to further support vulnerable households in receipt of LCTS where hardship has been identified through the council tax recovery process.
3. Approved the proposed policy accompanying the report.

19. Council Tax Premiums: Premiums for Second Properties and Empty and Unfurnished Homes (A 10)

Chris Ward, Director of Finance and Resources, introduced the report, noting that the full financial implications were taken into account in the budget proposals and subject to approval by Full Council. He confirmed that the council had to give a full year's notice of the Council Tax Premiums policy and then put it in the public domain within 21 days of resolving to implement the policy.

Members welcomed the policy as it was an incentive to bring back empty homes into use.

DECISIONS

The Cabinet

1. Recommended that Full Council resolves to implement a 100% premium for second homes which will be effective from 01 April 2025, the earliest opportunity for the Council to introduce this change.
2. Further recommended that Full Council resolves to implement a 100% premium for properties that have been empty and unfurnished for a period between 1 and 5 years. This will change to current policy of charging a 100% premium where a property is empty and unfurnished for period between 2 and 5 years.

20. PCC Budget and Council Tax 2024/2025 and Medium Term Budget Forecast 2025/2026 to 2027/2028 (A 11)

Chris Ward, Director of Finance and Resources, introduced the report. The local government settlement had been published yesterday but there were no changes to the report. He read out two recommendations made by the Scrutiny Management Panel (SMP) at its meeting on 5 February:

- The Scrutiny Management Panel asks for assurance from Cabinet that the current proposals for the funding of the Bransbury Park Leisure Centre represent value for money and an acceptable level of financial risk;
- The Scrutiny Management Panel asks for assurance from Cabinet that the Council's Capital Assets will continue to be managed in a responsible way so as to reduce the future cost pressures.

Councillor Pitt was pleased that the SMP had endorsed the budget. He had been present at the meeting and had provided the assurances requested; more details could be provided at Full Council on 13 February.

Members noted that the budget represented much hard work by officers and was a great achievement. Despite problems caused by central government, such as the border control posts, the council still managed to deliver many non-statutory services. In addition, the council did not know until late what funding it would receive, for example, public health funding was only announced last week, and despite being nearly at the end of the financial year it did not know what funding it would receive next year. If there were changes it would have to deal with them but was in a better state to do so.

Councillor Pitt said the council started the year not expecting to make savings but inflation and demand for temporary accommodation, adult and children's social care services had changed this. The Administration had managed to propose savings without cutting services so when it brought forward its proposals it meant that it and did not have to use reserves like other councils who were now having to make cuts. The decision to raise council tax and apply the 2% precept for social care was not taken lightly and other upper tier local authorities were expected to do the same. There were demand led pressures from social care in particular and without the precept there would be a larger structural deficit. Rises were not made lightly but they were needed to provide the services residents said they wanted.

DECISIONS

The Cabinet recommended to Council that the recommendations set out in section 3 of the report be approved.

21. LEP Integration of Functions into Upper Tier Local Authorities (AI 12)

Paddy May, Corporate Strategy Manager, and Ian Maguire, Assistant Director for Planning & Economic Growth, introduced the report, explaining that as Portsmouth was an accountable body the situation was even more complex so legal advice was being sought. The subject was also being discussed at the Isle of Wight Council today and at Southampton City Council in March. It was not known yet whether delegation to the Leader and Chief Executive would be allowed but, if so, there would only be about six weeks to make any necessary changes.

Councillor Pitt said the three unitary authorities had worked very closely together and thanked the Leaders and Regeneration officers at Southampton and Isle of Wight Councils. Portsmouth was absolutely determined to stay strong and united based on the Solent's geography as its residents lived and worked across a broader area and not within unitary boundaries. He thanked colleagues at Southampton and the Isle of Wight for their collegiate approach.

Members noted that authorities of different political colours could work together and the Solent region had so much potential. In contrast, Hampshire County Council could not always see beyond the county. It had £12m to be spent in the LEP (Local Economic Partnership) area and it was hoped everyone would work together and not use the money to fill budget gaps. Councillor Pitt had concerns where the money would go and it was worth noting that although some councillors agreed with Hampshire the Leaders of those councils had different views. He thanked officers, particularly Mr May,

Mr Maguire and Ms Lamer for their work, and requested thanks to be placed on record to Natalie Brahma-Pearl, Chief Executive, who had been heavily involved in the matter since she started at the council.

DECISIONS

The Cabinet

- 1. Noted that subject to meeting certain conditions (see paragraph 3.3) the Government is looking to integrate a number of existing LEP functions into UTLAs.**
- 2. Noted that to meet the conditions, and to maintain a focus on the Solent area, Portsmouth City Council (PCC) will need to work with Southampton City Council and the Isle of Wight Council to take on these functions through the creation of a new joint UTLA Board.**
- 3. Agreed that, subject to the three Solent UTLA area being recognised by the Government as an area for LEP integration, with appropriate due diligence, PCC should become a Member of Solent Partners (SP), a company limited by guarantee, that is a successor body to the Solent LEP, to help drive economic growth in the sub-region. This agreement to be conditional on Isle of Wight Council and Southampton City similarly agreeing to become Members of Solent Partners.**
- 4. Agreed that PCC should not appoint a Director to the Board of Solent Partners to ensure that there is no conflict of interest with the wider governance needed for the new LEP integration arrangements. PCC will seek appropriate requirements, within the articles of Solent Partners, to ensure representatives of the three Solent UTLAs are entitled to observe board meetings.**
- 5. Noted the proposed draft governance structure attached as Appendix 1 that shows how PCC should work with partners to achieve our economic growth ambitions which will need to be outlined in an updated Solent 2050 Strategy.**
- 6. Agreed that subject to the agreement of SCC and IOWC, PCC is confirmed as the Accountable Body for Solent Partners.**
- 7. Agreed that PCC, as the accountable body, agrees that any existing LEP funding, disaggregated to the three Solent UTLAs can be pooled (subject to the agreement of Isle of Wight Council and Southampton City Council), for the benefit of economic growth of the region.**
- 8. Agreed that PCC, as one of the three UTLAs, will work with partners to develop an agreement on how Solent Partners will deliver economic growth for the functional economic area.**
- 9. Agreed that delegated authority be jointly given to the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Director of Finance and S151 officer, to agree the final details of the transfer of LEP functions to the UTLAs including future governance arrangements.**
- 10. Agreed that PCC should seek to support the creation of a Solent Economic Partnership, inviting adjacent Districts and Boroughs, Hampshire County Council, and other key public sector stakeholders, to enable Local Authorities leaders and leaders within the business community to have a regular opportunity to discuss and support economic growth in the region.**

11. Noted the intention to agree disaggregation of assets held by the LEP to the Accountable Body on behalf of the Upper Tier Local Authorities (subject to the agreement of the three Solent unitary UTLAs).

22. Southsea and North Portsea Island Coastal Schemes update (AI 13)
Guy Mason, Project Director, introduced the report

Councillor Pitt said the report was an important reminder of progress since 2018 when there had been scaremongering about the coastal defences. The council has regularly collaborated with residents and engaged with their concerns; residents have congratulated the council about Frontage 1 (Long Curtain Moat).

In response to questions from members, Mr Mason had every confidence that funding for the Coastal Schemes was adequate in view of inflation and rising costs for labour and materials. A couple of weeks ago the Environment Agency had given an increase of £17.5m to cover inflationary pressures up to 2028. A bid for an additional £14.5m had passed their area endorsement and progressed to further review. Modelling had been undertaken on the stretch of shore eastwards to Fort Cumberland and the beach was sufficiently established for the next 50 years.

Members noted preparatory work had started 20 years ago and that the Coastal Schemes illustrated long-term planning by local government in contrast to central government's short-term thinking. It was a huge project that was being done sensibly and methodically but the government had the temerity to say the council needed a productivity plan to obtain funding. There may be some cynicism but communications with residents were good and the vast majority appreciated the work. In addition, there were benefits such as the greatly improved area around Southsea Castle.

Councillor Pitt thanked all the Coastal Partners and noted that the Seafront Arts Programme Officer had started working with them.

DECISION

The Cabinet noted the report.

23. Corporate Parenting Strategy (AI 14)

Councillor Pitt welcomed children, care experienced adults and foster carers who were attending for this agenda item.

Mark Jowett, Head of Children We Care For, and Adam Murphy, Participation Officer, introduced the report. Mr Murphy explained his role was to ensure that the voice of children and young people was heard and that they were all involved in co-production of the Corporate Parenting Strategy. He read statements from care experienced young people and carers and some of those present spoke about what makes a good corporate parent:

- They will always be there and be loyal.
- They need to be as open as possible for trust and support.

- My personal advisor is a corporate parent and the council could learn from them what is needed.
- After a poor start in life children need positivity and support towards independence.
- Not put limits on children; support their dreams and truly listen to them.
- Help children make their own way.
- If children have not had examples of good role models they rely on their corporate parent to teach them morals; they may not be in such a good place without their corporate parent.
- A corporate parent provides a stable, loving home despite trauma and should not see children in their care as a burden or a pay cheque; foster carers should not see fostering allowances as a way of paying bills or expect the council to pay for everything.
- Children depend on corporate parents as they cannot fend for themselves.
- Foster carers know how they give the best possible outcomes.
- Carers were like the three hands on the clock in that if one does not move, none of them do.
- Children in their care were the future and would be taxpayers so the council needs to invest in them. Everyone could think how to develop the Strategy.

Councillor Pitt read out the 11 promises in the Portsmouth Pledge. All 42 councillors were corporate parents so if the promises in the Pledge were not being done councillors needed to be told. Councillor Horton, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education, thanked the young people and carers for attending and said hearing their words was more powerful than they would ever know. Corporate parenting was the most important part of the job. Hundreds of lives were within councillors' hands. The promise of "as if you are our own" needed to be genuine. Councillor Horton attended as many events for foster carers as possible and was humbled by what they were doing. The children in their care might not have the greatest start in life but they could lead the best lives.

Members thanked the young people and carers for attending today. It was important they were reminded of their responsibilities to the 400 or so children in the council's care. If care was not right now children may need help from adult care services later on which was in no-one's interest. Foster carers' families had an important role as well as the carers themselves. As members were one step removed from the children's experiences they asked what the children expected from them. Members were elected to represent residents so children and young people could approach any of their ward councillors. One of the young people said if the promises in the Pledge were done then they would not need to contact councillors. If they did it would be a worst case scenario.

Councillor Pitt requested that the Pledge Board be brought to Full Council on 13 February along with coloured laminated copies of the Pledge so that they could be given to all 42 councillors to remind them of their responsibility as a corporate parent.

DECISION

The Cabinet agreed that Portsmouth City Council adopt the Corporate Parenting Strategy.

The meeting concluded at 4.26 pm.

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Councillor Steve Pitt
Leader of the Council