

FINANCE ADVISORY GROUP

Minutes of the meeting held on 23 April 2013 commencing at 9.30 am

Present: Cllr. Ramsay (Chairman)

Cllrs. Firth, Fittock, McGarvey and Scholey

46. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Finance Advisory Group held on 23 April 2013, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

47. Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were made.

48. Matters arising including actions from last meeting

The completed actions were noted.

49. Referrals from Performance & Governance Committee:

There were none.

50. Forward Programme

It was noted that the meeting of Cabinet scheduled to be held on 9 May 2013 had been cancelled due to lack of business. Any items on the forward programme would be built into any new committee structure that may arise out of current discussions.

51. Development Control Finance

The Group Manager Planning presented a report which provided information on the Development Control budget and its management, including consideration of efficiency savings.

He updated Members on the progress of the proposed changes to permitted development rights (Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (SI 418)). The proposals could see some loss of fee income. At the moment under the proposals the local authority would still be contacted and neighbours written to, if there were objections the development would have to be treated as an application. However the Minister had said this would be done at no cost to the householder, which meant the local planning authority would incur the costs of administration etc. Without knowing details it not would be possible to estimate costs. It was suggested that a 'ball park' figure could be estimated from the Validation Team. The House of Lords had commented on the impact to local planning authorities, and it was possible further consultation would be required on the new amendments. It appeared the development would apply to the size of the original dwelling not any further development, and building control approval would still be required. At the moment there was not enough detail

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known or information on how this would work in practice. Hopefully more would be learnt the following week.

Action 1: The Group Manager Planning to provide an estimate of potential costs that might be involved under proposed amendments to permitted development rights by the next meeting, and circulate an update on the proposed changes.

Members discussed the cost of public planning inquiries and whether there was a means to measure performance and outcome against costs. The Group Manager Planning advised that he held statistics on planning appeals where the Development Control Committee had overturned Officer recommendations, which could be provided on request.

Action 2: Group Manager Planning to provide a breakdown of appeals.

A Member commented that more needed to be done to lower the number of applications going to the Development Control Committee, and how to make s.106 agreements more enforceable. He also queried that as payment was not required for repeat applications, more should be done at the pre application stage; and that the indices of quality management with regards to appeals needed to be looked at again when up for review. The Chairman asked whether planning were able to keep any of the finances gained from affordable housing agreements.

In response, the Group Manager Planning advised that applicants were encouraged to use the pre application stage to avoid repeat applications. Work had been done conversing with Agents and advertising the process in 'In Shape.' With regards to the affordable housing contributions they kept a monitoring fee only, however they were also working with Legal Services to form standardised agreements to be able to spend less time on individual cases.

52. Big Community Fund Review

The Head of Community Development presented a report informing Members of the results of a review of the Council's Big Community Fund.

In response to questions she advised that more than half of the Members consulted thought it should be mandatory to have support from all Members in multi-Member wards. However, many had commented that this would disadvantage some wards where Members may not be able to agree. It was therefore recommended that the applicants should continue to seek support from fellow-Members. However, where this was not forthcoming, Officers should ensure that any Member in a Ward who has not signed the application form is made aware of the application and given an opportunity to comment.

Members discussed and agreed that landowner should be replaced by delivery organisation in the recommendations.

It was noted that the report would go to Cabinet in June as the meeting in May had now been cancelled.

Resolved: That Cabinet be RECOMMENDED to agree that:

- a) the Guidelines be amended to include specific mention that the work involved is not the responsibility of the delivery organisation;
- b) the appraisal score sheet be revised to place most importance on physical improvements and even more than the current emphasis on whether an application should more appropriately be funded elsewhere; and
- c) the application form be revised to ask applicants specifically to address how a proposed application is additional to usual maintenance arrangements and landowner responsibilities to help Members during the appraisal process.

53. Financial Results 2012/13 - to the end of February 2013

The Budget Monitoring report showed an expected favourable year end forecast of £136,000. to the end of February The majority of this was due to investment income achieving £116,000 better than budget. Income from Building Control, Land Charges, Car Parking and Planning fees were down. With regards to car parking she had been advised that this was due to lack of footfall. The Finance Manager updated Members on the repayment situation with the operators of the previous Swanley and Sevenoaks markets. She explained that the supplementary appropriation from reserves had been for Christmas car parking, as approved by Council in February 2013.

A Member pointed out that, previously, codings had been an issue with car parking but this seemed to have been resolved. He also stated that footfall was down nationally, evidence by falling petrol consumption. Concerns were voiced as to whether the increase in parking charges was to blame. The Chairman suggested that it may be time to remove expectation of increased revenue from increased car parking charges, and look more closely at other sources for future budgeting. It was noted that Environment Select Committee should consider fees in the next annual review.

The Group asked that their appreciation for Roy Parsons' work on the investment fund income be conveyed, and congratulations to Management Team for the favourable forecast.

54. Financial Performance Indicators 2012/13 - to the end of February 2013

Financial Performance Indicators 2012/13 to the end of February 2013 were noted.

55. Financial Performance Indicators 2012/13 - to the end of March 2013

Members considered the financial performance indicators as at end March 2013.

The Finance Manager advised that the percentage figure drop for Council Tax collected by Direct Debit was caused by the increase in number of people eligible to pay by Direct Debit.

With reference to Sundry debts over 21 days, this was worse than target but was affected by a single debt; in this instance a late rent payment. In response to questions she advised that debts were not included if the company was in liquidation or the debtor had an arrangement to pay in instalments.

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THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 11.40 AM

CHAIRMAN