

TANDRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

FULL COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Station Road East, Oxted on the 20th April 2023 at 7.30pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Wren (Chair), Botten (Vice-Chair), Allen, Bilton, B.Black, Blackwell, Bloore, Booth, Caulcott, Chotai, Crane, Evans, C.Farr, S.Farr, Gaffney, Gillman, Gray, Groves, Hammond, Jones, Langton, Lee, Montgomery, Moore, North, O'Driscoll, Prew, Pursehouse, Robinson, Sayer, Shiner, Steeds, Swann, C.White and N.White

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors G.Black, Cooper, Flower, Pinard and Stamp

292. MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON THE 9TH FEBRUARY 2023

These minutes were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

293. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Deputy Chief Executive

The Chair was pleased to welcome the Council's new Deputy Chief Executive, Taryn Pearson-Rose, to her first meeting of Full Council since joining in February.

Members not standing for election

The Chair thanked those Councillors who were not seeking re-election (on 4th May) for their contribution to the work of the Council throughout their terms of office, and wished them well for the future.

Fundraising and events

The Chair was pleased to announce that her fundraising evening with the Jive Aces on 18th February had been a great success, with over £1750 raised for her charities.

She also thanked the organisers of 'Bletchfest Comedy Night' for allowing her to collect charitable donations at their comedy show on 1st April. This had raised £153.

Finally, the Chair invited all Members to her 'Farewell Celebration Party' on Saturday, 20th May at Bletchingley Golf Club.

294. QUESTIONS SUBMITTED UNDER STANDING ORDER 30

Questions were submitted by Councillors Bilton, O'Driscoll and Prew. Details of the questions and responses (from Councillors Swann, Wren and Blackwell respectively) are attached at Appendix A.

295. REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

RESOLVED – that the reports of the following meetings be received, and the recommendations therein be adopted:

Planning Committee – 2nd February 2023

Audit & Scrutiny Committee – 23rd February 2023

Planning Committee – 2nd March 2023

Community Services Committee – 9th March 2023

Housing Committee – 16th March 2023

Planning Policy Committee – 23rd March 2023

Strategy & Resources Committee – 30th March 2023

Audit & Scrutiny Committee – 4th April 2023

296. MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR NORTH UNDER STANDING ORDER 7

Councillor North introduced the following motion:

“On 21st July 2022, when the Strategy & Resources Committee asked Full Council to vote on the electoral cycle, scant information was provided resulting in many Councillors not understanding the full implications of the chosen electoral cycle on the size and combination of populations in a district ward. Many Councillors were unaware of the criteria beyond the ward Councillor numbers and were not briefed about these other criteria in the 2009 Act, nor the difficulty of achieving them.

In addition, the public consultation on electoral arrangements was also woefully insufficient, and only 217 people in the District (a 0.3% response rate of the current 65,461 electors) responded to this poorly communicated consultation, evidencing the vast lack of awareness. The consultation also did not explain the implications of electoral cycle change, something which would have vastly influenced both the outcome and the participation.

The view at that vote was that 3-year cycles would be less disruptive for TDC. However, the recent ward boundary review process has highlighted that trying to apportion 3 councillors across newly constructed wards meant that very little consideration was given to one of the three key boundary commission criteria i.e.: ward patterns should – as far as possible – reflect community interests and identities and boundaries should be identifiable.

By taking a vote on the electoral cycle at Full Council, Councillors have, inadvertently, agreed to putting in place a ward boundary system that is undemocratic for residents and doesn't serve their best interests. Changing the ward pattern for the sake of the electoral cycle weakens the democratic process more than it strengthens it. The political cycle should be reconsidered in light of the importance of ward needs, rather than the reverse. In particular, it is important for convenient and effective local democracy that smaller settlements retain their Councillors.

Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) recently faced much the same issue and asked the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) to suspend the consultation, whilst they consulted.

I therefore move that:

- (i) the Council's previous decision to retain elections by thirds, as opposed to whole council elections every four years, be reconsidered by the Strategy & Resources Committee on 29th June 2023*
- (ii) should that Committee consider whole council elections to be preferable in order that the Council can maintain single and double member wards, the legal process be followed culminating in the matter being determined at an extraordinary meeting of the Council shortly thereafter*
- (iii) in the meantime, the Council request the LGBCE to suspend their consultation."*

The motion was seconded by Councillor Allen.

Upon being put to the vote, the motion was lost. (In accordance with Standing Order 13(4) Councillor North had requested that her motion be subjected to a recorded vote. However, this was not supported by the required number of Councillors specified by that Standing Order (i.e. five)).

Rising 9.15 pm

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COUNCIL – 20TH APRIL 2023 – STANDING ORDER 30 QUESTIONS

Questions from Councillor Bilton

Questions to the Vice-Chair of the Community Services Committee (Councillor Swann)

One of our residents was recently unable to get a GP appointment for her 4 year old daughter who had conjunctivitis. She was instead referred to her local pharmacist as they are able to diagnose this and sell drops to treat the issue at a cost of £8. In order to get her daughter treated quickly, our resident did as she was recommended, attended Boots in Caterham Valley and bought the suggested medication. However, as the patient in question is a child, they should have been entitled to these drops free on prescription. The pharmacist commented on how it is a shame that no local GPs subscribe to the NHS minor ailment scheme as this would have saved our resident this cost.

The minor ailment scheme is widely available across Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland but only in selected pharmacies in England. Under the scheme, GPs can refer patients such as this to local Pharmacists, who are able to diagnose and prescribe appropriate treatments for a variety of minor ailments, such as hay fever, heartburn, eczema, coughs and colds etc. free of charge to customers who are exempt from NHS prescription charges. Our local GP surgeries need to subscribe to the scheme in order for our residents to benefit from it. As it currently stands, the closest GP and pharmacy is in Kent, with no local GPs or Pharmacists subscribing.

At a time when the cost of living is so high, and the pressure on GPs and the wider NHS at crisis point, please can:

1. The council's representatives raise the NHS minor ailment scheme through the local health and wellbeing board?
2. The representatives push the local health and wellbeing board to encourage all local GPs to sign up to this scheme?
3. Our representatives advise councillors at the next available Community Services meeting of the outcome?

Response from Councillor Swann

Firstly, thank you to Councillor Bilton for bringing this to our attention. I completely agree that we should be considering the cost of living for everyone, but especially children, when it comes to prescription services. I had recently had a very similar situation with my son where I questioned paying for medication because they could give me a 'diagnosis' across the counter.

As the NHS has progressed, we have found there are lots of examples where we can now refer to a pharmacist, rather than a doctor, but we need to make sure the entire journey imitates the journey that you would experience through a GP. And although I cannot give you a reason why the Minor Ailment Scheme isn't more widely available in England, more specifically in Surrey, at this time, I have added it as an AOB for discussion at next week's Tandridge health & wellbeing board meeting. I will also highlight this to the Chair of the Surrey health & wellbeing board to make sure it is more widely known about and to improve this service. I'm happy to bring all responses back to the Community Services Committee.

Question from Councillor O'Driscoll

Question to the Chair of the Community Services Committee (Councillor Wren)

There has been a noted increase in anti-social behaviour within the community in recent weeks with young people being robbed on Westway Common and criminal activity happening in both Warlingham and Westway. Can this Council take steps to work with Surrey Police to address this?

Response from Councillor Wren

As ward councillors, it's extremely important we have communication with our local Tandridge beat officers. I meet with local officers regularly and we also all have each other's phone numbers so we can assist each other with information and intelligence as incidents are happening. Myself; the Leader & Deputy Leader; and Councillor Mick Gillman (who represents TDC on the Surrey Police & Crime Panel) also have regular meetings with Amanda Bird (our Community Safety Officer) and the Borough Commander Lyndsey Whatley. Amanda would be happy to speak to you at any time to let you know who your local officers are and how to contact them, so that you can work with them on a local level.

Relating specifically to the crimes you mention in your question, our Community Safety Officer was unaware of these, and I would stress the importance of speaking to Amanda immediately about them and not waiting to raise them at a meeting. I would also urge all ward councillors to work with their residents to make sure ALL crime is reported to the police immediately.

Questions from Councillor Prew

Questions to the Chair of the Planning Committee (Councillor Blackwell)

1. The Council has had some success recently in reducing the backlog of overdue planning applications. In light of the lack of more recent performance monitoring data, can the Council tell me what the current backlog is and provide an aged profile for the overdue applications - those awaiting validation and those that have exceeded their decision due date?
2. Can the Council also tell me whether overdue applications are being processed in chronological order and what the current level of unanswered planning query is, from both Councillors and residents?

Responses from Councillor Blackwell

1. *I am very pleased that the recent success in reducing the backlog of work within our planning service is recognised and I am also pleased to report that overall outstanding cases continue to reduce, albeit slowly. The recovery is not complete and further work needs to be done. At present, there are 386 undetermined planning applications, plus 73 undetermined Lawful Development Certificates and 10 Prior Notifications, as well as pre-apps, notifications and consultations not monitored in published performance data. There are a further 117 cases that are either pending validation or have been made invalid due to not meeting the required criteria. The validation timescales have reduced substantially from those experienced in 2022 and the process is working better. But further work needs to be done to ensure we can maintain the timely validation of new cases. In terms of the age profile of outstanding cases, 30 applications are more than one year old and, of the 386 outstanding planning applications, 254 are overdue.*

2. *Officers seek to deal with applications in sequence when they are received and are within their statutory time limit. However, there are many different reasons why an application will be delayed, including the need to request further information or amendments; awaiting specialist advice; responses from key consultees; or a re-consultation on revised information. Timescales get further disrupted by staff turnover and the need to reallocate work. The outstanding cases are not therefore necessarily being dealt with in chronological order. In response to the final part of the question, the unanswered planning queries to the Planning Inbox (including those from Councillors) currently stand at 82 in number, the oldest of which was received on 21st March 2023. Officers continue to work hard to improve performance and to sustain the current upward trajectory.*

Supplementary question

Do we have the situation under control and do we need a further action plan to address the backlog?

Response from Councillor Blackwell

Yes, we are definitely getting this under control and there ARE plans in place to relieve the backlog with the provision of additional resources. Officers are working hard to make sure the backlog continues to reduce over the next few weeks. We can give you a further update in due course.

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