

TANDRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

Minutes and report to Council of the meeting of the Committee held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Station Road East, Oxted on the 16 January 2024 at 7:30pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Wren (Chair), Shiner (Vice-Chair), Black, Crane, Lee, Sharp, Windsor and Gaffney (Substitute) (In place of Bilton)

PRESENT (Virtually): Councillors North, O'Driscoll and Pinard

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Allen, Gray and Pursehouse

ALSO PRESENT (Virtually): Councillors Chris Farr and Sue Farr

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors Bilton

206. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 9 NOVEMBER 2023

The minutes were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

207. ONGOING MANAGEMENT OF GREAT FARLEIGH GREEN

The Committee received a report in relation to the ongoing management of Great Farleigh Green. Under officer delegated powers, the Council served notice to the landowner, Merton College, to terminate its lease, effective 29 September 2023. This had been to reduce costs and risks to the Council. Ward Members and Parish Councillors have since lobbied for the Council to continue management and maintenance of Great Farleigh Green. Officers had, in discussion with ward councillors and Parish Councillors, developed some future management options which were set out in the report. The report invited the Committee to decide whether the Council should be involved in the ongoing management of Great Farleigh Green and, if so, what the nature of that involvement should be.

Councillor Neil Chambers, a Member of Chelsham & Farleigh Parish Council, addressed the Committee (as permitted under Standing Order 31). Councillor Chambers explained that the land was of great value to the local community and there had been concern about the future of the land when the District Council had given notice to terminate the lease. The Parish Council was unable to maintain the land without support, but was prepared to make a contribution of £2,000 per annum, a tenth of the Parish Council's precept, for a five year period. This would be matched by Warlingham Parish Council, and Merton College was considering a contribution of £2,830. Annual surpluses would be carried over to deal with contingencies. The Parish Council favoured the formation of a simple commons association, and urged the Committee to agree that the District Council make a financial contribution alongside the other organisations.

During the debate, Members made the following comments:

- That the land was of national and regional importance with very rare species growing on it, and that it should be looked after locally. If there was no agreement, Merton College may seek a third party to maintain it.

- It was pleasing that the Parish Councils were willing to contribute to the cost. This indicated that the land mattered to the community. The Parish Council had paid for the land to be banded several years before in order to protect it from traveller infringement.

Officers provided the following explanations throughout the debate:

- If the Council were to pursue option 5, a new lease, the Council would be fully responsible for the maintenance of the land and managing risk issues.
- The cost for maintenance of the land was estimated to be £11.3k. That did not include costs for maintaining trees or managing other risks.
- There was some disagreement from the residents about how the land should be maintained, particularly around mowing, but it was not felt this was insurmountable.
- Whoever maintained the land would have the same legal powers to remove travellers.

Councillor Lee, seconded by Councillor Gaffney, proposed the following motion:

This Committee believes Tandridge District Council has a duty to play its role in protecting the future of Farleigh Common. The Committee instruct the officers to work on options 4 and 5, of the report, and prepare a report on the outcome of the negotiations at the earliest convenience.

Councillor Crane, seconded by Councillor Shiner, proposed an amendment to the motion to remove option 5.

Upon being put to the vote, the amendment was not agreed.

RESOLVED – that this Committee believes Tandridge District Council has a duty to play its role in protecting the future of Farleigh Common. The Committee instruct the officers to work on options 4 and 5, of the report, and prepare a report on the outcome of the negotiations at the earliest convenience.

208. HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE TRADES LICENSING POLICY - FOR APPROVAL

The Committee received a report recommending the approval of a proposed Private Hire Trades Licensing Policy. This followed the publication of the Statutory Taxi & Private Hire Vehicle Standards by the Department for Transport which required licensing authorities to review their licensing policies in respect of Hackney Carriage and Private Hire licensing.

The new policy would incorporate all existing policies and additional requirements placed on licensing authorities within the Statutory Standards.

The policy had been the subject of a consultation, with only minor amendments requested. In the main, these had been incorporated into the proposed policy.

Members were pleased that variances between the Council's policies and the Department for Transport recommendations would be resolved through the adoption of this policy.

RESOLVED – that the Committee approve the proposed Private Hire Trades Licensing Policy and determine the implementation date as 1st April 2024.

209. COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE – 2024/25 PROPOSED GENERAL FUND BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY

A proposed 2024/25 revenue budget and capital programme for the Community Services Committee was presented as part of the overall Council's budget. The overall budget would be presented to the Strategy & Resources Committee on 30 January and Full Council on 8 February. The budget had been proposed in line with principles set out in paragraph 1.6 of the report, including a balanced revenue budget without a call on general fund reserves.

The report set out a proposed revenue budget of £4.574m for 2024/25. This included tactical savings of £208k, which were part of the overall Council proposed savings of £0.6m, and pressures of £221k. Whilst appendix B of the report showed a £39k reduction in the Committee's budget, distribution of the Council's pay award, once agreed, would result in an increase in the Committee's budget.

The report also set out proposed Fees and Charges for 2024/25 and a capital programme of £1.4m.

In response to questions from Members, Officers explained that:

- the inflation pressures for 2024/25 stated in Appendix A to the report followed a review of the Biffa contract. Pressures listed for 2025/26 and 2026/27 were indicative placeholders, and would be reviewed as part of the budget setting process for those years.
- parking charges were last increased in 2023/24. The increase was 10% for most charges but these had not been implemented due to disruption to parking enforcement as a result of Surrey County Council withdrawing the agency agreement. It was planned that these be implemented this year.
- the Council gave a grant of £19k to the East Surrey Domestic Abuse Service for the administration of the IRIS programme which trained local GPs on awareness of domestic abuse. The Council used a national grant to fund this was looking for alternative funding with partners.
- the proposed Capital Programme contained slippage from previous years. The slippage had been as a result of capacity issues. The Council had recruited a project manager to manage the Capital Programme and oversee the delivery of the projects within in.

RESOLVED – that:

- A. the Community Services Committee's proposed Revenue Budget for 2024/25 of £4.574m, as shown in Appendix A to the report, taking account of pressures and savings allocated to the Committee, be agreed, and it be noted that further allocations will be made to distribute an amount equal to increments and the agreed Council pay award, subject to approval by Strategy & Resources Committee and Full Council;
- B. the Community Services Committee's Fees and Charges for 2024/25 as shown in Appendix C to the report, be agreed.

- C. the Community Services Committee's Capital Programme for 2024/25 being the sum of £1.4m, as shown in Appendix D to the report, be agreed, subject to approval by Strategy & Resources Committee and Full Council.
- D. the Subjective Revenue Budgets, in Appendix B to the report, setting out movements from 2023/24 to 2024/25 and an estimated movement to 2025/26, be noted.

210. ANY OTHER BUSINESS WHICH, IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY

The Chair provided an update on the Council's commitment to encourage responsible dog ownership. The Council was planning to launch a scheme called Green Dog Walkers, which had been adopted by over 40 councils across the country. It offered a proven, non-confrontational and friendly way to change attitudes about dog fouling and encouraged responsible dog ownership. The scheme would be launched in the Spring.

Rising 9.06 pm