

## TANDRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### FULL COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Full Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Station Road East, Oxted on the 17 October 2024 at 7:30pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Sue Farr (Chair), Blackwell (Vice-Chair), Allen, Black, Bloore, Bolton, Booth, Case, Chotai, Cline, Cooper, Crane, Damesick, Evans, Chris Farr, Fowler, Gaffney, Gray, Horne, Jones, Killick, Langton, Lockwood, Mark, O'Riordan, Patel, Rujbally, Sayer, Sharma, Sharp, Sherry, Shiner, Sowambur, Spencer, Steeds, Colin White, Nicholas White and Windsor.

**PRESENT (Virtually):** Councillors Pursehouse

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Councillors Bassett, Duggan, Prew and Smith

#### **142. TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING ON 18 JULY 2024**

The minutes of the special Council meeting held on 18 July 2024 were confirmed and then signed by the Chair.

#### **143. TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE ORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 18 JULY 2024**

The minutes of the ordinary Council meeting held on 18 July 2024 were confirmed and then signed by the Chair.

#### **144. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

##### Fundraising and events

The Chair explained she had enjoyed a busy summer, attending an array of different events. She had held a car boot sale to raise funds for the Rainbow Trust Children's Charity and the Air Ambulance Kent, Surrey and Sussex. She had also attended several community and civic events throughout the District and Surrey, including the inaugural Tandridge Business Awards at Lingfield Park Racecourse. This had been a very successful event, and the Chair thanked officers for their work in organising it.

##### Future Events

The Chair was organising a curry night in November and a quiz night in January to raise money for her charities.

#### **145. TO DEAL WITH ANY QUESTIONS SUBMITTED UNDER STANDING ORDER 30**

Questions had been submitted by Councillors Cooper and Windsor. The questions and responses are attached at Appendix A.

## 146. TO RECEIVE AND CONSIDER THE REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

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

**Audit & Scrutiny Committee** – 23 May 2024 and 16 July 2024

**Community Services Committee** – 3 September 2024

**Planning Committee** – 5 September 2024

**Housing Committee** – 12 September 2024

**Planning Policy Committee** – 19 September 2024

**Audit & Scrutiny Committee** – 24 September 2024

**Strategy & Resources Committee** – 26 September 2024

**Licensing Committee** – 23 May 2024 and 2 October 2024

**Planning Committee** – 3 October 2024

## 147. MOTION SUBMITTED BY COUNCILLOR GAFFNEY UNDER STANDING ORDER 7

Councillor Gaffney moved the following motion:

*“We deplore the demise of Surrey County Council’s Tandridge Local Area Committee. This has denied Tandridge District Councillors and residents of Tandridge the opportunity to have matters of concern around services provided by Surrey County Council addressed, and formally answered, in public. We consider this to be a serious deficit in the democratic process.*

*We demand the reintroduction of regular meetings, held in public, minuted and webcast, at which Tandridge District Councillors and members of the Tandridge public can address members of the Surrey County Council Administration, and Surrey County Council Officers, about their concerns and elicit a formal response.”*

The motion was seconded by Councillor Horne.

Upon being put to the vote, the motion was carried.

**RESOLVED** – that the motion be agreed.

Rising 8.41 pm

**COUNCIL – 17 OCTOBER – SO 30 QUESTIONS****Question from Councillor Windsor**Question to the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

This question has been prompted by difficulties my residents have experienced trying to pay their correct council tax, including a new resident trying to register.

In the last data report to Strategies and Resources it was reported that, at the end of Q1, targets for collecting council tax and processing changes had been met. Are we setting our target high enough? What is being done to ensure new residents can make arrangements for efficient payment of their council tax, difficulties in doing so are dealt with promptly and, where recipients of the single occupier discount are no longer living alone, the correct payment is collected?

Response from the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

The Council Tax team work to provide an efficient service for Council Tax payers and maximise income for the Council. The team is relatively small, consisting of 5 billing officers for c38,000 properties. However, we work with Reigate and Banstead Borough Council and the County Council to undertake exercises like Single Person Discount reviews. 90% of Council Tax income is collected on behalf of the County and Police and so there is limited funding available to the District to invest more in collection.

A number of different contact channels are available, including email, online, via telephone and in person at the Council Offices. When annual billing was undertaken in February 2024, the team had the lowest backlog figures for the past 3 years following migration to our new NEC database. Backlogs have continued to decrease as we move through this financial year. Very recently, a significant amount of team resources has been diverted into testing and finalising the new My Account portal, which launches imminently. This has a short-term impact on workload but will have long term benefits for residents and workloads by enabling more queries (across Council Tax and other areas) to be managed online. The team have increased automation to work more efficiently and in April 2024, instigated a full timetable to ensure all discount/exemptions reviews are updated and all empty properties are inspected to ensure we are using the most up to date data.

Collection rates are holding steady despite cost-of-living difficulties.

Supplementary Question from Councillor Windsor

My concern is people moving into the area and I hope MyAccount will improve this. When something fails, for example, their online direct debit isn't set up correctly, how are problems dealt with promptly?

Response from the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

I don't have a specific response to that question, but the team have had a short-term workload pressure dealing with the new database and one would expect that peak to subside. As the team come off that peak, there will be more opportunities to tackle any problems faced by new residents. There are metrics available so in the event that there is not such a response we would know that quickly and ensure action is taken.

### **Question from Councillor Windsor**

#### Question to the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

Data for on call processing for Q2 is not yet available but in Q1 the average time to answer was 4.29minutes and 14.1% of calls were abandoned.

What is the longest waiting time, and do we have any data on how long callers who abandoned their call were waiting before giving up?

#### Response from the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

The average call handling times most recently reported were for quarter 1, at an average of 4.29 minutes. Details of abandoned calls weren't captured at the time and cannot be retrieved from the system. However, for the most recent three months, the longest wait for customer services prior to abandonment was 31 minutes. This was an exceptional case, as most were abandoned in less than 5 minutes.

- 99.9% of abandoned calls were at less than 30 minutes.
- 91% of abandoned calls were at less than 10 minutes.
- 78% of abandoned calls were at less than 5 minutes.

Customer dialling individual numbers, rather than the mainline, may experience longer waits. Officers are gathering statistics regarding these secondary phonelines and will consider as part of the overall project to improve customer contact.

Appropriate KPIs for call handling, and other channels are being considered and will be reported back to the Strategy & Resources Committee. Abandonment measures will be considered as part of this. The Council's online MyAccount will be launched imminently and will progressively allow residents to resolve queries online, where they are able to do so, as well as reducing the pressure on call answering.

#### Supplementary Question from Councillor Windsor

When Councillors make a direct call to an Officer, they are able to leave a voicemail if the Officer is unable to answer. Is that the same for residents?

#### Response from the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

I will ask Officers the question as to whether there is an opportunity for residents to leave voicemails on individual numbers.

### **Question from Councillor Cooper**

#### Question to the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

Under the Climate Change Strategy banner we received a list of items which are to be investigated to determine TDC's impact on climate change. (Scope 1,2 etc) Whilst these cover the day-to-day TDC operations they do not include the impact of the assets required which of course generate huge amounts of CO2 and SO2 in their creation and transportation for example, cars, lorries, laptops etc. Will we produce a comprehensive list of these items and the amount of CO2 etc that is generated in their production?

Not to do so ignores a huge amount of greenhouse gases and fails to indicate the actual impact of TDC on the environment.

Response from the Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee (Councillor Langton)

We do not report emissions data in the production of our assets. This would fall under the responsibility of the manufacturer to measure and report these emissions as part of their organisation's carbon footprint. These emissions fall under Scope 3 which are not in the council's control.

Our climate change strategy includes an objective to reduce waste and emissions across our own estate, assets and activities and use natural resources more efficiently.

Over the medium term the council will be taking action to develop a sustainable procurement policy and part of this will include reducing emissions from goods and services we purchase; sustainability measures will be added into existing and new contracts and environmental objectives will be considered when tenders are evaluated.

This page is intentionally left blank