

THE DISTRICT COUNCIL OF TANDRIDGE

STRATEGY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes and report to Council of the meeting of the Committee held in the Council Chamber - Council Offices on the 22 September 2020.

PRESENT: Councillors Elias (Chair), M.Cooper (Vice-Chair), Botten (Vice-Chair), Bourne, Caulcott, Davies, Duck, Langton, Lee, Pursehouse, Sayer and Bloore (Substitute) (In place of Milton)

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Lockwood, Blackwell, Fitzgerald, Gray, Mills, N.White, Ridge, Steeds, Swann and Wren

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillor Milton

114. APPOINTMENT OF A 2ND VICE-CHAIR

Councillor Botten was appointed as the second Vice-Chair of the Committee for the remainder of the 2020/21 municipal year.

115. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 17TH AUGUST 2020

Subject to the minute number for the Local Government reorganisation item being amended (from 73 to 87) the minutes were approved as a correct record.

Regarding resolution C (v) of Minute 86 (Independent Review of Governance), the Chairman advised that the work of the Task & Finish Group (appointed to review the production of Committee papers) will now be reported to the Committee's meeting on 24th November for noting. In the meantime, the Group's recommendations regarding future report templates and report writing training for officers would be implemented.

116. TO DEAL WITH QUESTIONS SUBMITTED UNDER STANDING ORDER NO. 30

Three questions had been submitted, two from local residents (Emma Harris and Taylor O'Driscoll) and one from Councillor Connolly.

Question from Emma Harris

The following question was read out on behalf of Emma Harris (as she was unable to join the meeting):

"With many people suffering from mental health over this worldwide pandemic, why on earth is the opening to the public of the local Freedom leisure swimming pools not being discussed at this meeting? Before lockdown I was given advice from a physio therapist that swimming will help my back to strengthen, not only that, but it was also helping me to lose weight. Throughout this pandemic I have felt my mental health deteriorate without access to the swimming pools which is my main activity for exercise".

Question from Taylor O'Driscoll

Taylor O'Driscoll read out his question:

"Many residents are unable to access regular swimming for their exercise, putting their health at great risk and are not happy that Tandridge is the only authority not funding Freedom Leisure. A petition I started on the matter, as of 13:45 on 18 September 2020, has 344 signatures from residents who just want to start swimming again. Will Tandridge commit to funding Freedom Leisure so residents can have access to general swimming?"

Paul Smith, the Interim Transformation Lead, responded to both questions (at the request of the Chairman) as follows:

"There are several questions relating to the same topic so, if I may, I would like to answer them as one.

The national COVID pandemic has left the Councils finances in a difficult state and there is insufficient money to run all our services without drawing upon reserves which are already low.

The Council has many statutory services which must, by law, come first, including refuse collection, street sweeping and planning. Although providing leisure facilities is important to our communities, it is not one of these statutory services.

Freedom Leisure has taken the decision not to fully reopen their facilities and we are trying to help them in any way that we can. However, for each pound we give as support, then we must find a pound from elsewhere, either by reducing services or increasing income such as by charges or council tax.

We will be holding a member discussion meeting on 29th September, and a special meeting of this committee will then be convened to consider the matter. "

Taylor O'Driscoll asked the following supplementary question:

"There are certain councillors who are simply refusing to support the funding of Freedom Leisure. Do they realise they are responsible for the damage they are causing? There are a lot of accounts of residents suffering physically and mentally due to the lack of access to swimming. If they cannot exercise, they face severe health problems which can lead to death in some cases. Will these councillors commit to supporting Freedom Leisure and helping these residents who are suffering?"

Paul Smith, the Interim Transformation Lead, responded to the supplementary question (at the request of the Chairman) as follows:

"A tremendous amount of due diligence has now been completed by officers. In the first instance, there will be a briefing for Members of all political groups on 29th September. Following that, a special meeting of the committee will be convened at which councillors will have the opportunity to vote on options for financial support that are affordable and within the law".

Question from Councillor Connolly

Councillor Connolly read out her question:

“I am getting very concerned at the amount of officer time and thus taxpayers money being spent on internal procedures. It seems that meetings are being dominated by governance issues rather than addressing the needs of our residents. Could the Chairman please advise me of the total cost to the taxpayer of the officer time spent on the reports produced over the last four months which only address council management and the work spent on reworking the constitution, organising a Special Council Meeting purely to discuss governance issues, meetings to ensure our reports look pretty etc etc. We should be working for our residents who elected us, not on costly internal vanity projects. “

Paul Smith, the Interim Transformation Lead, responded to the question (at the request of the Chairman) as follows:

“The Council undertook, as part of the Council Improvement Working Group, to review its governance arrangements following the Customer First reorganisation. The Independent Governance review made a series of recommendations to improve how the Council works and to take into consideration the fact that it is currently in no overall control.

Officers have been working with all Group Leaders to make sure that processes are in place that reflect the democratic make-up of the council and to enact the wishes of Councillors who have made recommendations and suggestions through the committee process. By the very nature of this work, the Council has in place decision making that represents how the residents have voted.

The work to review the report format is to ensure that the information that Councillors are presented with is of a sufficiently high level to allow Councillors time to discuss more strategic issues which, in turn, effect residents.

Calculating officer time on this work will in itself be an exercise that will not add value and will not take the Council forward. Officers have been given a very challenging agenda to not only manage existing services in this new world but have also had to manage a new function to manage COVID to keep our residents safe.”

Councillor Connolly asked the following supplementary question:

“It is now time ... that officers fill in time sheets to identify the areas they are working in and where, potentially, time needs to be spent and not spent. This needs to be instituted as soon as possible. Apparently, in the new regime, there is capacity for recording officer time and allocating it to specific projects. I hope you agree Chairman that we should do this without delay to understand and explore whether officers’ time is spent wisely and in the interests of our residents?”

Paul Smith, the Interim Transformation Lead, responded to the supplementary question (at the request of the Chairman) as follows:

“A time recording system could be considered although this would be an activity in itself. I am happy to speak to Councillor Connolly after the meeting to ascertain what she would be looking for.”

117. REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

A report was submitted to enable the Committee to review the operation of Standing

Orders in connection with virtual meetings. Such a review was requested by Council, at its meeting on 7th May 2020, when the Standing Orders were originally amended in light of the 'Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020'.

Members asked about the possibility of returning to attending meeting in the Council Chamber or 'hybrid' meetings. Officers responded that hybrid or in-person meetings were not taking place in other authorities throughout Surrey and that the Local Government Association had advised against holding hybrid meetings. Therefore, it was not possible for Councillors to attend meetings in person.

Councillor Sayer moved that to ensure transparency, 'A voting procedure be explored that, as well as recording the vote electronically, allows members of the public to see how their Councillor has voted.' This was seconded by Councillor Bourne. Upon being put to the vote, this was carried.

Councillor Pursehouse moved that the following should be added under item 6, 'Etiquette for joining and participating in the meeting', in the protocol:

'Members should behave and dress in a similar way that they would if attending a live meeting in the Council Chamber. They should also refrain from carrying out any activity that they would not do in the chamber'

This was seconded by Councillor Cooper. Upon being put to the vote, this was carried.

RECOMMENDED – that

- A. the revisions to Standing Orders, previously agreed at the 7th May 2020 Council meeting, remain in force for as long as legislation permits the Council to hold virtual or part virtual meetings.
- B. a voting procedure be explored that, as well as recording the vote electronically, allow members of the public to see how their Councillor has voted.
- C. the additional wording be added under item 6 of the protocol 'Members should behave and dress in a similar way that they would if attending a live meeting in the Council Chamber. They should also refrain from carrying out any activity that they would not do in the chamber.'

118. ANNUAL RIPA REPORT

A report was submitted to provide an annual update and proposed amendments to the Council's RIPA Policy. The report also provided a summary of the visit from the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office in early 2020 and outlined the recommendations and actions the Council is taking as a consequence.

RECOMMENDED – that:

- A. the report be noted; and
- B. the Council's updated RIPA policy be approved.

119. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

A report was presented regarding the Council's 2020/21 financial position as at 31st July 2020 (period 4) for revenue and capital budgets and the expected outlook for the remainder of the financial year taking into account the financial implications from the Covid-19 pandemic. This report provides the details of the Council's 2020/21 financial position.

At the end of July (P4) the Council was forecast to have an overall deficit of c£1.3m against the £10.6m budget approved by Council in February 2020. The deficit consists of a c£0.6m improvement in the BAU position and a £1.9m adverse movement in COVID-19 related costs and income loss.

Officers confirmed that from period 3 to period 4 there had been an improvement of £0.7m in the position. This was due to the following:

- £0.3m - changes in assumptions on the impact of COVID-19 on Waste Service with respect to additional costs of social distancing in refuse vehicles which are now unlikely to occur;
- £0.3m - additional New Homes Bonus of c£0.3m;
- £0.1m - improvement in forecast salaries outturn of c£0.1m
- £0.1m - receipt of tranche 3 COVID-19 grant of c£0.1m.

Offset by:

- £0.1m – increase in Local Plan costs.

At period 4, the Council's Capital Programme was forecast to have an underspend of c£102m. This remains unchanged from June (P3), of this:

- c£98m is due to the General Fund Capital Programme, the majority of which is related to the Property Development Fund; and
- c£4m relates to the HRA Capital Programme, predominantly due to delays in the Council House building programme and the programme of planned repairs and maintenance as a result of COVID-19.

At period 4 the HRA was forecast to have a surplus of c£137k against the c£10.6m budget approved by Council in February 2020. This forecast is a result of savings on interest payments and repairs and maintenance costs, which more than offsets the anticipated reduction in income resulting from COVID-19.

Members welcomed the report and Officers confirmed that a Council wide report with up to date information would be sent to members each month.

During the debate, Councillor Sayer moved that an additional recommendation be added:

That 'a budget and project plan is produced immediately for Planning Policy Committee spending and that it is updated and notified monthly to the Planning Policy Committee and added to that Committee's agenda on a regular basis'

Councillor Bourne seconded and upon being put to the vote it was carried.

RESOLVED – that:

- A. the Council's overall financial position for revenue, capital and the Housing Revenue Account be noted.
- B. A budget and project plan is produced immediately for Planning Policy Committee spending and that it is updated and notified monthly to the Planning Policy Committee and added to that Committee's agenda on a regular basis.

120. Q1 CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RISK REPORT

Members considered a report regarding progress against the Committee's key performance indicators and risks for Quarter 1 2020/21.

RESOLVED – that the Quarter 1 2020/21 performance and risks for the Strategy & Resources Committee be noted.

121. CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION REPORT

A report was presented to the Committee to update progress made against the Council's declaration of a climate emergency on 13th February 2020.

At the 13th February 2020 Council meeting, a target was set for the Strategy and Resources Committee to agree a climate change action plan as soon as possible. It was noted that, due to staff being redeployed as part of the Council's Covid-19 response, the work had been delayed.

Members welcomed the report and Officers confirmed that a climate change workshop would be held in October 2020 for Councillors to discuss and review the draft action plan and their strategic priorities will be incorporated into a revised version. The revised plan will be brought to the next scheduled Strategy & Resources Committee for Councillors to formally consider for approval.

RESOLVED – that the progress made against the Council's declaration of a climate change emergency in February 2020 be noted.

122. CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS FUNDING FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

A report was presented to the Committee seeking a further £20,000 for consultancy and PR support work on a joint District and Borough Council outline proposal for the development of alternatives to a single unitary structure for Local Government in Surrey. However, since publication of the report, there were indications that Surrey would not be included in the first authorities to be considered and therefore, a unitary solution was not being promoted.

Officers confirmed that work was still being undertaken by KPMG to review the feasibility of one or two unitaries or an enhanced two tier system. However, due to the new scope, the cost of completing the work would be less than previously anticipated.

RESOLVED – that no further contribution be made towards consultancy and PR support work on a joint District and Borough Council outline proposal for the development of alternatives to a single unitary structure for Local Government in Surrey.

123. APPLICATIONS FOR COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY FUNDING

The Committee had resolved to move into confidential session for this item in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act and that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

RESOLVED – that

- A. an award of Community Infrastructure Levy funds be made to expand Whyteleafe Surgery in the sum of £502,000 in accordance with the terms set out in Appendix A;
- B. an award of Community Infrastructure Levy funds be made to Master Park Pavilion in the sum of £500,000 in accordance with the terms set out in Appendix A;
- C. consideration of the application for Community Infrastructure Levy funding in respect of Grange Meadow Access Works, be deferred.
- D. no award of Community Infrastructure Levy funds be made for Bletchingley Cemetery for the reasons set out in the report.

Rising 10.26 pm

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By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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