

TANDRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

STRATEGY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes and report to Council of the meeting of the Committee held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices on the 30th November 2023 at 7:30pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Langton (Chair), Crane (Vice-Chair), Black, Botten, Cooper, Damesick, Gray, Groves (in place of Bloore), Hammond, Alun Jones, Pursehouse and Sayer

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Allen, Evans, Chris Farr, Sue Farr, Gaffney, Nicholas White and Wren

ALSO PRESENT (Virtually): Councillors Bloore, Booth and Smith

182. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 28TH SEPTEMBER 2023

These minutes were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

183. CHIEF OFFICER SUB-COMMITTEE - 30TH NOVEMBER 2023 - DIRECTOR OF RESOURCES POST

The Chair was pleased to confirm that, at the Sub-Committee's meeting earlier in the evening, Mark Hak-Sanders (currently the Chief Finance Officer) had been appointed to the new Director of Resources post as part of the senior management restructure. The appointment would become effective on the 1st December 2023.

184. QUARTER 2 2023/24 BUDGET MONITORING - STRATEGY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

An analysis of forecast expenditure against the Council's overall revenue budget of £11,935K as at the end of September 2023 (Month 6) was presented.

A £361K revenue overspend was forecast, split between the policy committees as follows:

- Community Services: £59K underspend
- Housing (General Fund): £24K overspend
- Planning Policy: £419K overspend
- Strategy & Resources: £108K underspend
- Corporate Items: £85K overspend

While contingencies totalling £921K meant that a balanced outturn was still expected, the report emphasised the need for mitigating actions to continue, especially in light of unquantified risks such as the impact of financial pressures on existing suppliers.

The capital programme was forecasting £1,237K of net slippage, comprising £1,135K General Fund and CIL schemes and £102K Housing General Fund items.

In response to questions during the debate, the Chief Finance Officer clarified that:

- any proposals to reduce discretionary spend would be taken in consultation with Members; and
- managers sought to fill staff vacancies as quickly as possible and that 'vacancy factor targets' included in the budget did not require managers to delay recruitment.

RESOLVED – that the forecast revenue and capital budget positions as at Quarter 2 / M6 (September) 2023 be noted.

185. QUARTER 2 2023/24 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS - STRATEGY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

An analysis of performance against the Committee's key indicators for the second quarter (July to September 2023) for 2023/24 was presented along with 'committee' and 'corporate' risk registers.

The Chief Executive confirmed that the Management Team was focused on ensuring that staffing resources were allocated appropriately to manage risks.

Particular attention was drawn to indicators SR5 and SR10:

SR5: The number of working days / shifts lost due to sickness absence (long and short-term) was off target by 1.14 days, although this was an improvement since the previous quarter and the overall trend was down (the target was 7.1 days). It was explained that the figures were impacted by a small number of long-term absences but that the situation was mitigated by a 'return to work' policy.

SR10: The percentage of calls answered within 60 seconds by Customer Services was off target by 31.84% at 48.16% (the target was 80%). This was an improvement on the previous quarter and more staff had been recruited to replace those who had moved to other teams, although time needed to train new staff impacted response rates. Data for average times taken to answer calls; average call handling times; and average time delays prior to calls being abandoned was also presented.

Discussion focused on the implementation of a new telephony system, now scheduled for late January 2024 which, it was hoped, would enable call handling performance to improve and better quality data to be extracted. The Committee was advised that:

- additional staffing resources would be deployed in Customer Services on a temporary basis to provide resilience during the implementation phase;
- Members (via the FTP Member Reference Group) would be briefed about when the new system is about to go live.

Action	Responsible Person	Deadline
Clarification of if / how interim staff are factored into the calculation of turnover statistics. (This question was raised during the debate).	Mark Hak-Sanders	22 nd January 2024

RESOLVED – that the Quarter 2 (2023/24) performance indicators and committee / corporate risks be noted.

186. 2024/25 DRAFT BUDGET AND FUTURE TANDRIDGE PROGRAMME UPDATE

A report was submitted which included:

- (i) progress against the 2024/25 budget preparation timetable, including a draft budget report and an updated medium-term financial strategy to 2026/27
- (ii) service review updates
- (iii) the outcome of the recent senior management restructure, including the creation of a Director of Resources post and a Transformation Programme Director post
- (iv) details of an emerging commercial strategy and the development of a commissioning and continuous improvement cycle
- (v) updates regarding the digital transformation and grounds maintenance workstreams
- (vi) reference to the initiation of a voids and housing repairs project
- (vii) presentation of the latest programme risk register.

Further discussion took place regarding the implementation of the new telephony system, including the reasons for the slippage from November 2023 to late January 2024 and the risks associated with the project.

It was confirmed that the ‘chatbot’ initiative was part of the more substantive digital transformation project to be implemented in June 2024. As far as that project was concerned, it was confirmed that:

- ‘users’ were being engaged to shape processes;
- a freeze in changes to in-house Salesforce applications had been imposed to provide capacity to deliver the project, although the Chief Finance Officer would consider (in consultation with the IT team and Extended Management Team) any requests from Members to make exceptions.

The Chief Finance Officer set out the key elements of the Draft Budget for 2024/25 and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, drawing particular attention to the pressures, savings and funding on which the budget was based. Attention was also drawn to the principles on which the budget was developed, including the need to avoid the use of the General Fund reserve in all but the most exceptional of circumstances. The Chief Finance Officer also highlighted the likelihood of further developments prior to the finalisation of the budget, including the need to review the budget for Planning Policy Committee, and the potential for funding to change in the Local Government Finance Settlement, due from Government in December.

In response to comments on the draft 2024/25 budget, the Chief Finance Officer:

- acknowledged the possibility that a further New Homes Bonus allocation would be forthcoming from Central Government for 2024/25, if only as a final one-off provision
- explained the rationale for the estimated 'collectability level' of Council Tax
- referred to on-going dialogue with the County Council about the scope for a financial contribution towards TDC's heightened efforts to maximise Council Tax debt recovery.

A discussion also took place regarding the commentary on the work of the Housing Committee within the draft 2024/25 budget report. This debate reflected upon the Council's house building programme and the challenges associated with the scarcity of Council owned land to enable an on-going supply of affordable homes.

Action	Responsible Person	Deadline
<p>Regarding the forthcoming implementation of the new telephony system:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • further information be provided to Members, including the associated risks and mitigation strategy • Members' views be sought about the proposed scope of an engagement session so that the itinerary can be tailored accordingly. 	Mark Hak-Sanders	31 st December 2023

RESOLVED – that:

in respect of the draft budget:

- A. the draft budget for 2024/25 and medium-term financial strategy to 2026/27 (to form the basis of reports to each Policy Committee in January 2024) be noted:
- B. the following elements be approved to form the basis of the budgets to be finalised during the January 2024 committee cycle:
 - the budget pressures (set out in section 6 and Appendix B of the report)
 - the overall savings plan (set out in section 7 and Appendix B of the report) noting that further consideration may be required pending the Local Government Finance Settlement or if any further budget pressures emerge

- C. the gross Council Tax Base for 2024/25 be approved, determined at 39,603.3 after taking account of the Council's agreed Council Tax Support Scheme, and the net Council Tax Base for 2024/25 be determined at 39,128.0 after adjustment by 1.2% to allow for irrecoverable amounts, appeals and property base changes.

in respect of the wider Future Tandridge Programme:

D. progress to date be noted on:

- developing a commercial strategy and activities to support commercial opportunities
- developing an approach to commissioning and continuous improvement
- delivering the Future Tandridge Programme, the direction of travel for the service reviews and associated savings targets for 2023/24 included in Appendix C and section 4 of the report.

187. EMERGENCY PLANNING AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY – THE COUNCIL'S PLANS AND RESPONSE ARRANGEMENTS

In accordance with a recommendation arising from an internal audit in 2022, a report was presented to inform Members about the Council's preparedness to respond to an emergency in accordance with statutory requirements. The report outlined:

- the provisions of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 which classified the Council as a 'Category 1 responder' with the full range of civil protection duties, including the preparation of emergency / business continuity plans and collaboration with other local responders, businesses and voluntary organisations
- the role of the Surrey Local Resilience Forum (SLRF) of which the Council was a member
- the Extended Management Team duty rota and training arrangements to enable strategic and tactical level responses to major and other incidents, including 24/7 access to senior officers and activating / staffing a District Emergency Centre for duration of an incident
- the main risks and threats identified by the Surrey Community Risk Register
- staffing and budgetary resources for fulfilling the Council's civil contingency duties, and related achievements and activities during the previous 18 months.

The report was accompanied by a list of the Council's emergency plans and others maintained by the SLRF, along with a full copy of the TDC's Corporate Business Continuity Plan.

The effective approach to engaging Parish Councils and community groups during the Covid pandemic was acknowledged during the debate. Arising from the discussion, the Emergency Planning Specialist confirmed his willingness to attend Parish Council meetings to advise about the development of local resilience arrangements. Clarification was also provided about the collaborative functions of the SLRF and the fact its members included representatives of the emergency services and a host of other key public bodies.

RESOLVED – that the Council’s arrangements for responding to and planning for an emergency be noted.

188. WELLBEING PRESCRIPTION SERVICE – FUTURE PLANS

The Wellbeing Prescription service allowed GPs and other local services to refer residents to a trained adviser to help improve their health and wellbeing. The service was staffed by the Council and funded by grants from the Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care Board (via the East Surrey Better Care Fund) and covered the Tandridge and part of the Reigate & Banstead Council areas. The current contract between the Council (as the employing authority) and the Surrey Heartlands ICB was due to expire at the end of March 2024 following the one-year extension approved by the Committee in January 2023.

A report was considered which advocated a further contract extension to 31st March 2025. The report:

- explained the benefits of the service (which had been provided since 2015) with performance and monitoring information since 2022/23 and the current means of service delivery
- detailed current staffing and resourcing arrangements, i.e. a team of 9 Full Time Equivalents overseen by the Head of Communities with direct costs covered by the Better Care Fund and support costs paid by TDC (the latter estimated to be approximately £161K for 2024/25, to be funded from a combination of the ‘wellbeing reserve balance’ comprising previous years’ underspends and the current year’s wellbeing grant)
- referred to the Memorandum of Understanding with Reigate & Banstead Borough Council whereby cessation costs arising from a non-renewal of contract (e.g. redundancy and enhanced pension costs) would be shared (TDC’s approximate liability being £64,000 which had been factored into the ‘wellbeing reserve balance’)
- explained the intention to incorporate the service within the ‘Integrated Neighbourhood Teams’ initiative in partnership with health, social care and voluntary sector partners.

Members supported a further contract extension and welcomed the enhanced monitoring regime which enabled more comprehensive assessments of the outcomes experienced by users of the service.

RESOLVED – that an extension to the current contract with Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care Board (for the Wellbeing Prescription Service) to 31st March 2025 be approved.

189. REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS

Various suggested revisions to 'Standing Orders for meetings and general governance' (which formed Part B of the Council's Constitution) were presented.

Amendments were moved as follows:

- (i) Councillor Groves argued against the suggested removal of the provision to vote on the Annual Policy Statement at the Annual Council meeting (delivered by the incumbent Administration under Standing Order 6(2)). He proposed that the provision be retained. Upon being put to the vote, this amendment was lost.
- (ii) Councillor Pursehouse argued against the suggested revision to Standing Order 12(1) whereby Members who attended meetings 'on-line' could propose or second motions. He moved that SO 12(1) be redrafted to state that only Members physically present in the meeting room can propose or second motions. Upon being put to the vote, this amendment was carried.
- (iii) Councillor Pursehouse proposed a further revision to Standing Order 11 to clarify that once a Member speaks to a committee minute at Full Council, the Chair shall open the debate to any other Member who may then also wish to speak. Upon being put to the vote, this amendment was carried.
- (iv) Councillor Pursehouse proposed that the suggested provision to require parent committees to "*endeavour to make their Working Groups politically balanced*" (new Standing Order 21(5)) be further qualified by the words, "*Unless there are practicable reasons not to do so, ...*". Upon being put to the vote, this amendment was carried.
- (v) Councillor Sayer proposed that the constitution be amended so that when a Committee had a choice between approving or rejecting a proposal to dispose of an asset (either by freehold or by leasehold) that a consistent approach to the decision be taken, and the matter either be resolved by the Committee or recommended to Full Council, regardless of the outcome. It was agreed that this matter should be addressed as part of a separate review of the Council's scheme of delegation to committees (Part E of the Constitution).

Action	Responsible Person	Deadline
The Council's scheme of delegation to committees be reviewed during the January 2024 cycle of committee meetings.	Vince Sharp	As per the relevant report writing deadlines as part of the agenda preparation timetables for the relevant meetings

COUNCIL DECISION
(subject to ratification by Council)

RECOMMENDED – that the amendments to Standing Orders attached at Appendix A, reflecting the amendments at (ii) to (iv) above, be adopted.

190. TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS FOR 2024/25

A draft timetable of Council and Committee meetings for 2024/25 was considered.

COUNCIL DECISION
(subject to ratification by Council)

RECOMMENDED – that notwithstanding the scope for additional meetings to be convened in consultation with relevant Committee chairs, the 2024/25 timetable of meetings attached at Appendix B be adopted.

191. INVESTMENT SUB-COMMITTEE - 3RD NOVEMBER 2023

RESOLVED – that the minutes of this meeting, attached at Appendix C, be received.

192. PROPOSED NEW SHOP LETTING AT QUADRANT HOUSE

The press and public were excluded from this item in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) on the grounds that:

- (i) the item involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act; and
- (ii) the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

The Investment Sub-Committee, following consideration of this matter on 3rd November 2023, had recommended that the offer from the prospective tenant be declined.

The original report to the Investment Sub-Committee was re-produced and supplemented with a summary of the arguments for and against the letting, together with the outcome of officers' subsequent dialogue with the prospective tenant.

The Committee was presented with the following options:

Option A: adopt the Investment Sub-Committee's recommendation that the lease not be taken forward; or

Option B: make a recommendation to full Council on 14th December that the letting be approved (the report explained that, in light of the Council's scheme of delegation regarding the disposal of leasehold assets, the Committee was not empowered to determine the proposed tenancy).

The Committee debated the matter following a presentation by the Principal Asset Manager, which included the latest information about the Quadrant House estate.

Councillor Sayer proposed an amendment to Option B whereby the letting would be subject to "*improvements to the service road being negotiated before final agreement to mitigate any traffic issues*". This amendment was agreed by virtue of the Chair's casting vote.

Councillor Cooper wished it recorded that he voted against the amended Option B and that he favoured Option A.

COUNCIL DECISION
(subject to ratification by Council)

RECOMMENDED – that the letting be approved, subject to improvements to the service road being negotiated before final agreement to mitigate any traffic issues.

Rising: 11.20 p.m.