

# **TANDRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

## **AUDIT & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Minutes and report to Council of the virtual meeting of the Committee held on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 7.30pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Bourne (Chair), Allen (Vice-Chair), Bloore, Dennis, Milton and Sayer (substitute in place of Davies)

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillors Farr, Lockwood, Mills, Parker, Swann, Vickers and N.White

### **253. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 26<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2020**

These minutes were approved as a correct record.

### **254. COMMUNITY SAFETY REVIEW**

Amanda Bird (Policy & Projects Specialist) presented a report which updated Members about community safety activities in the District. This focused on the newly formed Tandridge Community Safety Partnership Board which comprised representatives from TDC, Surrey County Council, Surrey Police, Surrey Fire & Rescue, Tandridge Voluntary Action, the Probation Service, and the Office of the Surrey Police & Crime Commissioner. The Committee was advised about the Board's priorities (i.e. to combat rural crime, domestic abuse and serious organised crime, and to promote 'contextual safeguarding') and its work programme for 2021.

Presentations (summarised at Appendix A) were then given by:

- Inspector Karen Hughes (Surrey Police - Borough Commander); and
- David Munro (Police & Crime Commissioner for Surrey).

In response to Members' questions, Inspector Hughes explained the Force's approach to policing Covid lockdown breaches, including the identification of local 'hotspots'.

Discussion focused on the use of CCTV in the detection of crime and the scope for utilising PCC funds for installing CCTV facilities in Master Park, Oxted. Inspector Hughes would arrange for a sergeant to contact Councillor Sayer regarding ASB issues affecting Master Park.

The use of social media as an effective communication channel between residents and the police was also discussed. David Munro commented that 'tweets' and other messages posted on social media to the police were processed by trained operators and that such channels were an important supplement to the 999 and 101 telephone lines. Inspector Hughes acknowledged that Facebook was one of several valuable platforms, but that direct face to face contact (subject to Covid precautions) supported by more frequent foot patrols, was still a critical aspect of community policing.

Regarding the Force's increased staffing complement, David Munro explained that the 'support staff' element performed vital, specialist roles (e.g. Police Community Support Officers and intelligence analysts) and were not dedicated to back office administration.

The importance of residents reporting crimes or suspicious activities to the police was emphasised during the debate.

Reference was made to the 68% public satisfaction rate regarding the performance of the police in supporting the victims of crime. It was suggested that the Force should be doing more to increase this percentage, although David Munro considered that, while there was no room for complacency, 68% was a positive rating given the traumatic situations often encountered by crime victims upon initial interaction with the police. Nevertheless, both he and Inspector Hughes confirmed their commitments to further improving the rating.

Councillor Milton explained his roles on the Tandridge Community Safety Partnership Board and the Surrey Police & Crime Panel. He emphasised the significance of effective partnership working and encouraged all Members to engage with the Board (via Amanda Bird) about any relevant matters of concern within their Wards. At the request of the Chair, he agreed to provide feedback for the Committee from future Board meetings.

## **255. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT - ACTION PLAN UPDATE**

The Annual Governance Statement (AGS) for 2019/20 and action plan had been agreed by the Committee on the 26<sup>th</sup> November 2020. A report was presented which updated the Committee on progress against the delivery of the action plan, now including completion dates and other timescales. This explained that most of the actions were either complete, ongoing, or not yet due and on track for future delivery. However, some actions had not been completed as quickly as originally planned, namely:

- explore the use of '360 degree techniques' to help build relationships and a more open culture for Members and officers (to be explored in September 2021 following the induction of new Members);
- additional staffing resource to support effective project management and governance (an officer may not be in post until April 2021);
- training for Parish Clerks (deferred to September 2021);
- enhanced systems for processing and publishing FOI requests (a new workflow for dealing with FOI was due later in February 2021 with the potential for publishing FOI details on the website in June 2021);
- explore the potential for a local partnership involving the health, social care, business, voluntary and community sectors to deliver shared objectives (deferred, pending the appointment of a permanent Chief Executive);
- corporate peer challenge (deferred, pending the appointment of a permanent Chief Executive).

The action plan included an objective to develop a code of corporate governance. Officers had now prepared such a code (appended to the report) with reference to good practice in other authorities.

The report confirmed that work to prepare the AGS for 2020/21 was due to begin early in the new municipal year.

During the debate, Members suggested the use of track changes in future updates to highlight revisions, and clearer language within the action plan to help explain certain terms and expressions.

**RESOLVED** – that progress against the governance action plan, and the code of governance, be noted.

## **256. INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT – JANUARY 2021**

Natalie Jerams of the Southern Internal Audit Partnership (SIAP) presented a report which provided an overview of:

- (i) audit activity against assurance work completed in accordance with the approved audit plan for 2020/21; and
- (ii) outstanding management actions.

Regarding (i) above, Natalie Jerams explained that 93% of actions within the 2020/21 audit plan were now in progress. She also confirmed that two audits would be added to plan to review the processes for receiving grants and the methodology / accuracy of the Council's submissions for funding from the Local Government (Covid) Compensation Scheme. These would be in place of the 'Housing Rents' and 'Development Management' audits, the latter of which had been removed from the plan in view of an imminent peer review by the Planning Advisory Service.

In response to Members' suggestions / questions, Natalie Jerams confirmed that:

- future analysis of live audit reviews would include totals for 'total management actions', 'actions not accepted', 'actions not yet due', and 'actions completed'
- SIAP had now received priority classifications (i.e. high / medium / low) from the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) for the actions arising from the Customer First audit. It was confirmed that such priority ratings were set by officers in the first instance and then sense checked by SIAP.

A schedule regarding (ii) above, with Executive Leadership Team updates regarding each action in respect of the following audits, had been circulated to committee members prior to the meeting:

- Procurement (most of the actions had been addressed by the submission of a report to the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 Strategy & Resources Committee)
- HR policies and procedures (it was explained that, while the previous regime of annual performance appraisals and objective setting would not be reinstated, the new system of regular check-ins with managers would be enhanced through improved monitoring and documentation to help identify skills gaps and training needs – a corporate training plan was also being developed)
- Payroll / Authorisation and check controls (a consequent review of Financial Regulations would be undertaken and was scheduled to be reported to the Committee's next meeting)

- IT / Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity (the schedule would be updated to clarify the timescale for testing – it was also clarified that cyber security was the subject of a separate review in the 2020/21 audit plan which was still in progress)
- National Non-Domestic Rates
- Accounts Receivable and Debt Management

The Committee welcomed the schedule but suggested that more detailed narratives should be provided to explain why target dates had slipped. Members also considered that the information should be made public in the interests of transparency. Following a proposal from Councillor Allen, it was agreed that updated versions be submitted to future meetings of the Committee.

**RESOLVED** – that:

- A. the report be noted; and
- B. schedules of outstanding management actions arising from internal audits, with commentaries from respective Executive Leadership Team leads, be appended to future internal audit reports to the Committee (to form part of public agenda packs).

## **257. ANY OTHER BUSINESS – 2019/20 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS**

The Chief Finance Officer updated the Committee about the progress of Deloitte's audit of these accounts. She hoped that outstanding issues would be resolved within the next two weeks and that the accounts could then be signed off in accordance with the delegation arrangements agreed at the previous meeting.

Rising 9.44 pm

**Presentation by Inspector Karen Hughes (Surrey Police) – key extracts**

- the Force's staffing complement for serving the District (1 inspector, 3 sergeants, 7 neighbourhood specialist officers, 2 youth engagement officers and 12 community support officers) reflecting an increase in the number of police officers since last year
- the support of voluntary community groups, i.e. neighbourhood watch groups and community speed-watch initiatives
- the Force's priorities to protect the most vulnerable residents and to reduce anti-social behaviour (ASB), burglaries, serious violent crime and rural crime
- an explanation of:
  - the use of 'partial closure orders' using ASB legislation to protect those at risk from domestic violence by preventing individuals from entering properties / locations
  - a multi-agency 'Super Joint Action Group', dedicated patrols and other measures to combat burglary
  - the use of dispersal measures in Oxted in November 2020
- key statistics / trends, i.e.:
  - a slight decrease in vehicle crime, despite continuing thefts of catalytic converters
  - a significant increase in ASB in light of the first Covid lockdown
  - a decrease in burglaries, despite a rise in the number of thefts from sheds etc
  - an overall 16% decrease in the reported crime in Tandridge in the previous year
- the Force's objectives for the coming year, i.e.:
  - increase crime prevention initiatives
  - ongoing partnership working to tackle local issues
  - increased engagement with schools, colleges etc
  - ongoing cross border initiatives

**Presentation by David Munro (Police & Crime Commissioner for Surrey) – key extracts**

- role of the PCC to hold the Surrey Police to account on behalf of residents (e.g. responsible for the police & crime plan; performance monitoring; budget setting; and funding crime prevention and victim support measures)
- an additional 100 Surrey police officers and front-line staff were already in post, with over 50 more to be appointed by March 2021, including neighbourhood specialists and rural crime officers
- public engagement measures, including the current consultation on a proposed 5.5% increase in the Council Tax police precept (this, together with additional government funding, would enable the Force to benefit from 150 extra police officers and staff by March 2022)

- creation of a central unit aimed at solving more crimes
- improved public satisfaction rates (victim satisfaction rating of 68%)
- measures to support the community, e.g.:
  - £427,000 to over 30 organisations through the PCC's Coronavirus Support Fund
  - New refuge space created with Surrey partners for survivors of domestic abuse
  - Additional support to tackle anti-social behaviour, anti-social driving and speeding
  - Further £2.5m invested in supporting victims and promoting community safety
- a balanced approach to policing issues associated with the Covid pandemic, including the use of enforcement powers where appropriate
- priorities to achieve a more visible police presence in communities; preventing crimes; and solving crimes
- concerns about the impact of the pandemic upon the criminal justice system, with a significant backlog of trials in Surrey resulting in delays of up to a year and a significant rise in the number of criminal proceedings being dropped by individuals no longer prepared to wait for their cases to be heard.