

TANDRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

PLANNING POLICY COMMITTEE

Minutes and report to Council of the virtual meeting of the Committee held on the 1st February 2021 at 7.30pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Jecks (Chair), Duck (Vice-Chair), Sayer (Vice-Chair), Black, Bloore, Botten, Dennis, Farr, Jones, Lockwood, Swann and Vickers

ALSO PRESENT: Councillors Allen, Blackwell, Davies, Elias, Fitzgerald, Mills, Milton, Ridge, Steeds and N.White

258. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 20TH JANUARY 2021

These minutes were approved as a correct record.

259. PLANNING POLICY COMMITTEE DRAFT 2021/22 REVENUE BUDGET - SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

A report was submitted to enable the Committee to reconsider its draft 2021/22 revenue budget. This followed the rejection of the budget presented at the Committee's previous meeting on the 20th January 2021 on the grounds that:

- the provision for staffing for the planning function was considered insufficient; and
- the Local Plan budget should include provision for additional major areas of expenditure which would be incurred irrespective of which future option presented by the Inspector is pursued.

The report advised that the Chief Finance Officer (CFO) had agreed to transfer £100,000 from the 2021/22 Local Plan budget to the salaries budget to enable:

- (i) the current vacancy to be upgraded and re-advertised as an M4 post which will require an additional £10,000
- (ii) an additional enforcement officer to be recruited at a cost of circa £45,000
- (iii) one of the planning assistants to become to a tree officer/tree assistant at a cost of circa £5,000 for training and development; and
- (iv) the remaining balance of circa £40,000 to fund backfilling in the validation and appeals administration functions, with some additional resource which could be allocated to the strategy team, either at a graduate entry type level or on a part time basis.

A revised revenue budget was presented accordingly. An organisation chart had also been circulated to Committee members prior to the meeting to help explain the proposed new staffing structure.

Since the previous meeting, additional support had been secured for the validation team, while a team leader and six case officers would be transferring to the strategy team. Reference was also made to a peer review of the development management function by the Planning Advisory Service which had just begun.

The report also updated Members regarding financial provisions for the Local Plan. The possibility of utilising CIL funds to cover the cost (initially £20,000) of transport modelling for Junction 6 (M25) improvements was being considered. Furthermore, the CFO had agreed to transfer any unused surplus from the 2020/21 Local Plan provision to a Local Plan development reserve for 2021/22 (between £100,000 and £200,000) which would be added to the £190,000 Local Plan budget for next year.

The report advised that the financing of the Local Plan in 2021/22 would be subject to a robust governance and business case assessment process and that a full options paper would be developed following the Inspector's response to the Council's recent submission of information. The options paper would identify immediate recommended work; an appraisal of whether previous work can be relied upon; and best estimates of future timescales and costs. It was envisaged that, once a business case for Local Plan expenditure was complete, Members would be engaged regarding the question of in-year affordability, the possible re-prioritisation of budgeted expenditure, and whether medium term financial provision beyond 2021/22 would be required. The possible need for utilising General Fund reserves would also be considered as part of the business case assessment process.

The Chief Planning Officer clarified that the M4 post referred to in (i) above would be deployed within the strategy team, although initiatives (ii) to (iv) would provide valuable additional resources for the development management team.

While some Members supported the revised budget, others expressed the view that the budget still needed to include costs associated with the Local Plan options identified by the Planning Inspector (and that it was otherwise impossible to make an informed decision on the budget) and that the development management team should benefit from the additional M4 post.

In response to other questions, the Chief Planning Officer explained that:

- the 'ringfenced CIL money' (paragraph 2.5 of the report) referred to the countywide Infrastructure Feasibility Fund and that the potential for utilising it to support the Junction 6 transport modelling was yet to be explored; and
- she was confident that delivery against the key performance indicators for development management (set for 2020/21) would continue to be maintained given the additional resources to be made available.

The report recommended that, subject to consideration by the Strategy & Resources Committee on the following evening as part of the Council-wide budget setting process (to be ratified by Full Council on 11th February 2021) the proposed revenue budget at Appendix A to the report be agreed. Upon being put to the vote, the Committee voted against the recommendation.

RESOLVED – that the proposed budget at Appendix A to the report be rejected.

In accordance with Standing Order 25(3), the following Members requested that their votes in connection with the above-mentioned recommendation be recorded:

For: Councillors Duck, Black, Bloore and Vickers

Against: Councillors Botten, Dennis, Farr, Jones, Lockwood, Sayer and Swann

Rising 8.06 pm