

PA support for the Chair of the Council and associated matters

Strategy & Resources Committee Tuesday, 6 July 2021

Report of: Jackie King – Executive Head of Corporate Resources

Purpose: To enable a recommendation to Full Council

Publication status: Open

Wards affected: All

Executive summary:

Councillor Pursehouse has requested that this item be considered by the Committee in accordance with Standing Order 18.

The Committee is asked to consider Councillor Pursehouse's proposals regarding PA support for the Chair of the Council; governance arrangements for the Chair's Charities Fundraising Committee; and a seminar to consider the future role of the Chair of Council and how it should be supported.

This report supports the Council's priority of:

Building a better Council

Contact officer Jackie King
JKing@tandridge.gov.uk, vsharp@tandridge.gov.uk –

Recommendation to Committee:

That the Committee makes a recommendation to Council in response to the proposals from Councillor Pursehouse.

Reason for recommendation:

This is not an Officer driven report with specific recommendations. However, Members are invited to consider Councillor Pursehouse's proposals in light of the comments provided by the Executive Head of Corporate Resources and the Chief Finance Officer, and to make a recommendation(s) to Full Council.

Introduction and background

- 1 Standing Order 18 states that, "*...any Member of the Council may give notice of any item of business for consideration at any meeting of a Committee ...*". Such notice has been given by Councillor Pursehouse as follows:

"I would like to exercise my right as a councillor to place an item on the Strategy & Resources agenda for the meeting on 6th July:

Support of Chairman of Council

Currently the Chairman of TDC is supported by a PA for only two hours per week, far less than any other Chairman or Mayor in Surrey, and does not allow the Chairman to perform the traditional role of someone who represents the District to other organisations outside and within the District and supports some fundraising for chosen charities.

It is proposed that:

- (i) **A dedicated part time PA be employed on a zero-hours contract, to provide support as and when necessary. This could be as little as the current two hours per week, when just processing correspondence, up to 20 in weeks with major events. A budget should be agreed which provides for an average of 7 hours per week.**
- (ii) **A voluntary Chairman's Charities Fund Raising Committee has been established. Officers to help with establishing this as an independent organisation through which money can pass and tickets be sold. This will save officer time and VAT on tickets.**
- (iii) **A seminar be held as soon as possible for the Council to explore how it wants its future Chairmen to represent TDC, what activities it wants them to undertake and how this will be supported.**

2 Councillor Pursehouse has also submitted the following additional information to support his proposals:

"Notes on proposal 1

3 *When I became Chairman two years ago, I was lucky enough to have the support of a PA , whose experience and knowledge was essential to my being able to perform my role outside the chamber. She explained what the role was and how to perform it.*

4 *As well as this, her duties were to:*

- Receive and reply to invitations in conjunction with the Chairman.*
- To get details of what the Chairman was expected to do at each event and to ensure this was in line with the council's principles and policies.*
- Help the Chairman organise civic and charity events.*
- Process invitations for those events and to handle payment.*
- Keep a database of businesses prepared to contribute raffle prizes.*
- To run the events*

5 *This could not have been performed within two hours per week. In addition, other officers supported the actual events to help here. Without this support, performing the accepted role of Chairman would not have been possible.*

6 *When she retired, she was replaced by someone performing a similar role The replacement was short lived and then Covid hit, which brought an end to all but virtual civic functions and all fund raising. The hours required to support the chairman reduced drastically, but this situation is, hopefully, about to come to an end.*

7 *However, the new Chairman's PA is only there for two hours a week. This has been a fait accompli and imposed without consultation with the Chairman or going through any of the democratic bodies of the Council.*

8 *This is not a plea for extra funds, but to reinstate an acceptable level of support.*

Notes on proposal 2

- 9 *It is recognised that money has to be saved, so while proposal 1 is required immediately, proposal 2 should reduce the pressure on the PA and save costs in the longer term. The aim of this proposed committee is to take on as much of the support role as possible with regard to charity fundraising. It cannot take on the civic role, this has to remain with the PA. Just how much of the support role this committee will be able to take on, will depend on discussions with various officers; including legal and finance.*
- 10 *Hopefully, it would be able to sell tickets to event, which will mean that VAT would not need to be added to the price of the tickets, which would be a considerable boost to fundraising efforts.*
- 11 *Most officer time involved with this would be an initial one-off, to help set it up in a way that is acceptable to the Council. However, it is obviously essential that this committee, using some non-councillors, retain as close a link as possible to the Council; the obvious liaison being the Chairman's PA.*

Notes on proposal 3

- 12 *While the position of the Chairman as far as presiding at Council is concerned is set out in legislation and Standing Orders, the only reference to his/her civic role is that, within the District, no other person takes precedence other than the Monarch or the Lord Lieutenant of the County.*
- 13 *To my knowledge, no consideration has ever been given to the expected civic and charity role. Many other councils have this role defined on their web sites, we do not.*
- 14 *This proposal would give members a say in what role they want their chairman to play and the level of support he/she should receive.*

Key implications

Comments of the Executive Head of Corporate Resources

Up until December 2019 the Council employed a full time Executive Assistant who provided support to the Chief Executive and the Leader, Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council. Following her retirement, a part time (25 hours per week) Personal Assistant (PA) was recruited to continue this support for all except the Chief Executive. After a few months that person left the Council and a decision was taken to give up that post in the budget savings rounds in 20/21 and to instead provide a minimal level of admin support to the Chairman only, as neither the Leader or Vice Chairman were in need of this. This was provided through one of the Council's Case Officers initially and then recently moved to the current PA to the Executive Leadership Team on the basis of around 2 hours per week to assist with email and diary management. There is no capacity to offer additional time as the PAs workload is already extremely high and there are no other officers within the Council with free capacity to assist with these duties or to support the fund-raising Committee which has been established.

The part time PA was employed on a TA2 grade and, therefore, the costs to employ a casual worker at the same level would be £25,767 = £13.36 per hour. This would also attract an element of holiday pay at 12.07% which equates to £1.61 making the overall hourly rate of pay £14.97 per hour. Employer's National Insurance contributions would not apply as the first £8,788 of payments are exempt. The casual worker would not be entitled to join the pension fund.

The suggested 7 hours per week would be an expense to the Council of £5,463. It should be noted that, as the budget for 21/22 has already been approved by Full Council, any costs associated with bringing in additional staff would have to be met by a corresponding reduction of an 'in-year' service budget.

Comments of the Chief Finance Officer

The General Fund budget is under severe financial pressure. There is no budgetary provision for the cost of the support post, so the expense would have to be met by finding offsetting savings in the year.

Establishing the Chairman's Charities Fund Raising Committee as an independent organisation is likely to require significant resources in terms of cost and officer time. It would be important to fully evaluate what type of organisation would serve the needs of the committee best to achieve the outcomes desired. If an independent organisation is formed there will be ongoing administration costs and it needs to be understood what these will be and how they will be financed. Examples could include, but are not limited to, completion and auditing of annual accounts, data protection, Charity Commission returns and VAT returns. Any independent organisation will also need ongoing legal and finance support and it needs to be understood where this will come from and how it will be financed.

It is important to weigh up the additional benefits from forming an independent organisation against the likely costs to ensure there is sufficient scale for the desired benefits will be achieved.

Comments of the Head of Legal Services

There are no specific legal implications arising from the contents of this report, save for noting that a local council is required by S112 of the Local Government Act 1972 to appoint such officers as it considers necessary for the proper discharge of its functions. At present, the Council does not have the capacity to provide the additional assistance requested by the Chairman as there are many teams under-resourced.

It is also envisaged that additional legal support may well be needed to advise on charitable fundraising activities and all relevant legislation. The small in-house legal function may not be perfectly placed to advise the Chairman and Members on how the changing legal and regulatory outlook may influence their fundraising activities as it is a specialised area of charity law.

Climate change

There are no significant environmental / sustainability implications associated with this report.

Appendices

None

Background papers

None

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