

**REPORT TO THE STRATEGY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE – 9TH JULY 2020
AGENDA ITEM 9**

COUNCIL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

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Purpose of report:	To: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update Members on progress with key recovery workstreams underway in the Council • Update Members on the implications of COVID-19 on these workstreams and; • Seek endorsement of the Corporate Improvement Plan.
Publication status:	Unrestricted
Recommendations:	A. That progress in key workstreams related to Council recovery be noted. B. That the Committee endorse the Corporate Improvement Plan set out in Appendix A.
Appendices:	Appendix A: Corporate Improvement Plan
Background papers defined by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985	None

1. Background

- 1.1 At the meeting of this Committee in September 2019, the Acting Chief Executive stated that: *‘while some areas of the Council were working more efficiently because of Customer First, there were significant areas of under-performance. She emphasised that “Members and Officers needed to work together to make the Council financially sustainable and to provide residents with the best possible services”.*
- 1.2 The meeting agreed that the then Corporate Management Team should be allowed adequate time to plan and co-ordinate the recovery process. The priority should be to restore budgetary control, protect services and raise staff morale.
- 1.3 Members are reminded that at this point the Council was operating with gaps in all director roles due to Officers leaving or being away from the office on sickness leave. The Acting Chief Executive worked with the Senior Leadership Team to deliver ‘business as usual’ whilst also addressing the improvement areas for the Council. Some of this work has been supported by the Local Government Association (LGA). Some of these issues have now been addressed as set out in this report.

1.4 A progress update on a range of corporate improvement actions was provided to Strategy and Resources Committee at its meeting on 3rd February 2020. The Committee was advised that corporate improvement activity will be focused on the following areas:

- An external review of governance;
- Development of a strategic plan (with associated performance and risk management frameworks);
- Workforce review; and
- A financial recovery plan.

2 Progress Update

2.1 This report seeks to update Members on progress with key recovery workstreams underway in the Council and to seek endorsement of the Corporate Improvement Plan set out in Appendix A.

2.2 Since September 2019, the following progress has been achieved:

- i) The Officer Leadership team has been stabilised with a new interim Executive Leadership Team in place. These roles are all currently filled by a mixture of temporary promotions or interim appointments. However, with the recent resignation of the former Director of People, work can now commence to establish a longer term senior structure.
- ii) The Revenue Budget 2020/21 and the Capital Programme 2019 – 24 were approved by Council on 13 February 2020. This followed a lengthy budget process which included a series of Officer challenge meetings, Member budget workshops and the approval of committee budgets by Policy Committees in the January cycle.
- iii) Controls have been established on the recruitment agency/ temporary staff.
- iv) Internal governance has been improved, for example the establishment of:
 - The Corporate Procurement Board – all procurement of goods, works or services above the threshold of £3,000 are referred to the Procurement Board. The Board (which consists of the Chief Executive; s151 Officer; Head of Legal and the Procurement Specialist) decides which contracts for works need to be considered by it and aims to ensure that the Council's Standing Orders ('CSOs') are implemented in all cases and at all stages.
 - Investment Property Group – the Council has changed the way it manages its property acquisitions since 2018. This Group consists of senior Council Officers with a mandate to assess all potential property acquisitions using the agreed criteria and decide which ones to recommend for progression subject to thorough due diligence. Further improvements are in progress to strengthen the governance processes and these will also be informed by the governance review.

- v) Additional capacity has been commissioned from the Local Government Association (LGA) to support the workforce review, the development of a strategic plan, performance and risk management frameworks and the implementation of actions arising from the governance review.
- vi) The LGA has also provided support via Member peers to support the Council's Members in their roles in the improvement process.
- vii) CSOs have been reviewed and revised to ensure appropriate thresholds have been set for decision making.
- viii) A Data Protection Officer has been appointed. Their role amongst other things is to progress and improve Data Protection procedures and practices. This role is a legal requirement under s37 of the General Data Protection Regulations.
- ix) An external review of the Council's governance has been conducted by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS). This review has focused first on issues to be addressed in the short term, reflecting the Council's current focus on stabilisation and considering matters such as roles and responsibilities and organisational culture relating to good governance. Initial feedback was given to the three main Group Party Leaders (Cllrs Elias; Sayer and Botten) on 10th June. Work is in hand to complete the report and to disseminate key findings to Members.
- x) Collaborative working across the three main group leaders has begun and there are now fortnightly group leader meetings. Protocols are being produced on a number of matters including communications, media handling, planning and working groups. Some of these will be submitted to Committees for approval.
- xi) New rubbish collection arrangements were rolled out. Out of approximately 33,000 bins delivered and over 5,000 enquiries received only 76 formal complaints were made which equates to less than half a percent.
- xii) Full, up to date health and safety reports have been completed for all Council buildings, which confirmed that all essential requirements are met in relation to these buildings.
- xiii) A Residents' survey has been undertaken: this will give a baseline against which to measure resident satisfaction as the Council implements its strategic and improvement plans.
- xiv) A range of actions have been taken to raise staff morale:
 - Staff survey conducted
 - Staff suggestion scheme
 - Monthly staff briefings are being held via Microsoft Teams
 - The Acting Chief Executive held Meet the team sessions which are providing valuable information to consider for improvement

Many of the issues which were raised in the staff survey relate to leadership, workload, resources, Member/Officer relationships and parking, most of which are being addressed through work referred to in this paper, including the refresh of the Council's values and behaviours. A number of good ideas from the staff suggestion scheme are currently being scoped in detail.

- xv) Throughout this challenging period, and while delivering the above improvement actions, the Council has kept day to day services running. For example, Tandridge maintained a very high Council Tax collection rate of over 98% for 2019/20.

3. Actions currently in progress

3.1 The following actions are currently being progressed:

- i) Recruitment to the post of s151 Officer.
- ii) A workforce review is currently underway to find an affordable staffing solution which will deliver 'business as usual' services for the Council. Now that interim arrangements have been made to stabilise the Council's senior management, work will commence to design and implement the longer-term solution.
- iii) Two workshops for Members to identify the Council's priorities for the next 3-5 years have been held, to inform the development of the strategic plan. Stakeholders and partners have also contributed their views on how the Council provides services and what will be important to them in the future. A range of opportunities have been provided for staff to contribute to the development of the plan. Work to draft the plan will continue in the coming months, using input from all of these sources in order that a final version will come to this committee.
- iv) The Interim Executive Team are working together with the wider workforce to ensure that service areas are focused correctly to deliver the functions that are required - Communities, Corporate Resources, Finance, Legal and Planning services. This work will be ongoing to get the right people in the right roles with the right level of accountability. Already some services have been realigned.
- v) Three workshops have been held with Staff Conference to support the development of a refreshed set of values and behaviours for the Council as the first part of a culture change programme. A questionnaire was sent out to all staff for their input and a workshop was held at the depot. The new values and behaviours will be in place will form part of the new People Strategy.
- vi) Work is now under way to stabilise and transform the Council's Planning Service. Resourcing has been a priority and this has been secured. The Pre-application service has been reintroduced and backlogs are being managed and reduced. Further work is underway to continue to improve the service.
- vii) Work on a financial recovery plan is currently underway and will be brought to committee in due course. This work will need to consider the impact of COVID-19 on the Council both in terms of its finances and also its priorities. A number of themes have been identified to be looked at. These can broadly be split between income generation and efficiencies. The recovery plan will look at how the Council uses its assets and identify ways to ensure the Council gets the best and most efficient use out of them. The Council's investment policy will be reviewed.

- viii) It is possible that more effective and efficient use of IT systems and processes can be used to drive cost out of the system and this will be considered. Managing customer demand by steering customer towards self-service and online will also lead to more efficient service provision. Major contracts will be reviewed to see if savings can be driven out of them however this is likely to be limited due to the recent work that has already been undertaken in this area.
- ix) The review will look at staffing levels to identify areas of under/over resourcing and significant savings have already been identified with the new interim senior management structure that has been put in place.
- x) The financial recovery plan will include work to look at the delivery cost of services by function and will benchmark these against performance by relevant Councils elsewhere in the country. This will enable the Council to focus its work on areas where there is most scope to achieve efficiencies. A detailed options appraisal in relation to shared services will also be conducted.
- xi) The development of the Council's use of technology to support service delivery and drive efficiencies will support the financial recovery and people plans. The LGA is funding an adviser to the Council to support the development of a technology and digital strategy: this work is underway.

4. The Impact of COVID-19

- 4.1 Members will be aware that, on 19th March 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic was declared as a major incident across Surrey. Nationally, Local Government was placed at the heart of the non-NHS COVID-19 response.
- 4.2 The consequence of this was that much of the Councils work was focused on the COVID- 19 response. For example, 35 of our employees were diverted to contact shielded and vulnerable people. Calls have been made to over 6500 people with follow up support of arranging food parcels etc.
- 4.3 The Council also administered the emergency business grants scheme. To date 1370 Tandridge businesses have received a total of £17m. A further £0.99m is being distributed as discretionary grants.
- 4.4 The social distancing arrangements put into place meant that the Council Offices are closed to the public. However greater use of telephony and online portals have meant that much business as usual has continued. The Councils approach to customer contact will form part of our improvement and a strategic plan in the light of these changes.
- 4.5 Due to the impact of COVID-19, in terms of limiting the ability to hold public meetings, legislation has been passed which enabled regulations to be made that councils to hold meetings via video or teleconference i.e. permitting the attendance of Members at Committee meetings via virtual means. The first virtual meeting was held in May 2020. The Council was one the first authorities in Surrey to hold a virtual full Council meeting. Officers continue to explore optimal solutions for holding virtual meetings.

- 4.6 The Council's finances have been impacted by this. The budget monitoring report elsewhere on this agenda covers this in more detail but it does mean that the Council will have to reshape its priorities and services in the light of this and the new demands that COVID-19 recovery will bring.
- 4.7 This has meant that much of the work on both the strategic plan and the improvement plan has had to be put on hold. In addition, many things that were considered normal prior to COVID-19 are no longer normal. In addition, the financial impact upon the Council both short and longer terms means that we have to rethink our priorities and how we deliver our priority and statutory functions.

5. Corporate Improvement Plan

- 5.1 The pandemic also has an impact upon the work on the improvement plan. Although much progress has been made on the improvement plan, some issues have been delayed and other new ones have emerged.
- 5.2 Given the strategic significance to the Council of the various improvement workstreams, an Improvement Plan has been developed which is intended to:
- i) Set out the improvement actions which the Council is taking and their timescales for delivery
 - ii) Enable Strategy and Resources Committee to monitor the delivery of the Plan
- 5.3 The Plan also includes workstreams that will:
- Enable the Council to assure itself that key statutory responsibilities are met
 - Address particular service improvement challenges
 - Take into account the Council's position post COVID and the "new normal"
 - Enable and progress partnership working through which the Council's resilience, influence and ability to address strategic priorities will be enhanced
 - Enable it to receive external challenge and support through a Corporate Peer Challenge
- 5.4 The plan, including achievements to date and also the impacts of COVID-19 is attached at Appendix A.
- 5.5 While the various workstreams have been identified for the Plan, some are well progressed, and others are in various stages of development. Future versions of this Plan will give more detail about milestones and timescales for delivery.
- 5.6 It is anticipated that during the current Municipal Year, the Council will wish to review the progress against this Plan and to take a view on what member oversight should be going forwards. Regular reports on progress will be brought to this committee as well as discussed at Group Leaders briefings.
- 5.7 As part of the ongoing improvement, capacity for a Programme Management Office will be identified for this programme and other non 'Business as Usual' activities to ensure delivery and to maintain focus and pace. Work is underway to identify how to free up and develop existing resources to undertake this role, as part of the new staffing structure.

5.8 An officer-level Corporate Improvement Programme Board will be created to oversee the Plan's implementation and ensure appropriate management of its risks.

6 Financial / risk implications

6.1 Like many Councils, Tandridge District Council is now facing the most difficult financial position for many years. The results of the financial and COVID-19 recovery plan are likely to lead to some challenging and difficult decisions that will need to be taken by Members and senior officers.

6.2 Failure to agree and implement an achievable improvement plan could lead to a deterioration in the Council's finances and the reduction of services to all but the statutory minimum provision possible. However, the adoption of an achievable plan offers a great opportunity to more efficiently provide Council services and therefore target valuable resources to the areas of greatest need.

7 Legal implications

7.1 The coronavirus pandemic is one of the most profound challenges society has faced in more than a generation. The Council has to anticipate that society will be affected by COVID-19 for some time to come. It is therefore critical that the Improvement Plan delivers change across all parts of the organisation.

7.2 Delivery of the Improvement Plan will involve reviewing and refreshing a number of core documents including the Council's Constitution and policies.

8 Equality impacts

8.1 As each individual workstream is progressed (e.g. strategic plan, workforce review) the equalities impact for each will be considered, and actions put in place to address any potential negative impacts. These will be reported as appropriate as each workstream is progressed.

8.2 The Improvement Plan also contains an action to develop the Council's overall approach to equalities and diversity, in order to ensure that both statutory requirements are met and good practice is implemented. In particular we will ensure that our actions do not adversely impact upon our BAME communities and staff. This action will include the development of appropriate mechanisms to monitor and report progress.

9. Data Protection impacts

9.1 Following the completion of a Data Protection Impact Assessment, consideration of potential data protection implications arising from this report are as follows:

Questions	Answer
Do the proposals within this report have the potential to contravene the Council's Privacy Notice?	No
Is so, what steps will be taken to mitigate the risks referred to above?	

10. Conclusion

10.1 This report provides a summary of work underway on the Council's Corporate Improvement Plan and sets out the detail of that plan. Further progress updates will be brought to this committee.

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