

# TANDRIDGE DISTRICT COUNCIL

## STRATEGY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Minutes and report to Council of the meeting of the Committee held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Station Road East, Oxted on the 7<sup>th</sup> April 2022 at 7.30pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Bourne (Chair), Langton (Vice-Chair), Bloore, Cooper, Davies, Elias, Gillman, Morrow (substitute in place of Caulcott) and Pursehouse

**PRESENT (Virtually):** Councillors Botten and Stamp

**ALSO PRESENT:** Councillors Ridge and Steeds

**ALSO PRESENT (Virtually):** Councillors Crane, Farr, Lockwood and Mills

**APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Councillors Black and Caulcott

### **304. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THE 1ST FEBRUARY 2022**

These minutes were confirmed and signed as a correct record.

### **305. QUESTION SUBMITTED UNDER STANDING ORDER 30**

A question was submitted by Councillor Gillman, a copy of which is attached at Appendix A, together with the response from the Chair.

### **306. STRATEGY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 2022/23 BUDGET – TRANCHE 2 PRESSURE AND SAVINGS DISTRIBUTION**

As explained during the previous cycle of meetings, the following approach had been taken to the allocation of pressures and savings to the respective policy committees as part of the 2022/23 budget setting process:

Tranche 1 – savings and pressures which were straightforward to allocate (these had been agreed by the respective policy committees during the previous cycle of meetings)

Tranche 2 – pressures regarding inflation (£174k), salary increments / National Insurance staffing costs (£193k) which were being held as 'corporate items', pending allocation to policy committees during the March / April 2022 cycle of meetings - a £200k saving associated with staff vacancies would also be distributed across the four policy committees

Tranche 3 – the more complex cross-cutting savings (also being held as 'corporate items') which would require service reviews and business cases to ensure accurate distribution to policy committees during the June 2022 cycle of meetings.

A report was submitted which proposed that this Committee's:

- share of Tranche 2 pressures and savings be £107k net as per Appendix B; and
- fees and charges be as per Appendix C.

The report also included a summary of the allocations of tranche 2 pressures and savings, as agreed by the other three policy committees at their respective March 2022 meetings.

Upon introducing the report, the Chief Finance Officer explained that the proposed 2022/23 court costs at the end of Appendix C could not be implemented as the necessary consultation process had not been undertaken with HM Court Services. Those fees, which could not be set unilaterally by the Council, would have to remain at the 2021/22 levels and could not be adjusted 'in-year'. There was no budgetary impact.

In response to Members questions, it was confirmed that:

- the non-implementation of the court fees, as referred to above, was not a reflection of the Northgate software system and that the necessary dialogue with HM Court Services regarding updated 2023/24 fees would begin in the Autumn of 2022 with a view to ensuring implementation from April 2023;
- the interface issues between the Orchard and Agresso software systems (which had prevented the correct allocation of Council housing repair costs) had been resolved.

**RESOLVED** – that:

- A. the revised 2022/23 net budget for the Strategy & Resources Committee and corporate items at Appendix B be approved;
- B. subject to the court costs having to remain at 2021/22 levels, the uplifted fees & charges for the Strategy & Resources Committee at Appendix C be approved; and
- C. in light of A above and the decisions of the other policy committees at their respective March 2022 meetings, the overall Tranche 2 budget, as set out at Appendix D be noted.

## **307. STRATEGY & RESOURCES Q3 2021-2022 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Committee was presented with an analysis of progress against its key performance indicators, together with updated risk registers, for the third quarter of 2021/22.

Upon introducing the item, the Chief Executive acknowledged that the process for reporting performance and risk management to Members would need to be improved, including a review of KPIs with achievable targets and ensuring that relevant managers were accountable for performance outturns. In this respect, Members commented that KPIs should focus on issues that the Council could realistically influence.

Regarding actions to mitigate risk, it was suggested that these should be refreshed on a regular basis in view of prevailing circumstances, including pro-active measures to reduce risks during the short to medium term where possible.

The Chief Executive also explained the priorities and challenges associated with:

- reducing the proportion of sickness absences attributed to mental health related illnesses; and
- addressing staff recruitment and retention challenges, especially in respect of the planning (development management) service.

In response to other questions, Members were advised that:

- measures were in place to improve performance against processing targets for the housing / council tax benefits service;
- the forthcoming service review of the procurement function would assess alternative delivery options, including the potential for joint working with other councils to achieve greater staffing resilience;
- the rating for Risk CS6 regarding the waste collection service could be reduced.

**RESOLVED** – that the Quarter 3 (2021/22) performance and risks for the Strategy & Resources Committee be noted.

### **308. FUTURE TANDRIDGE PROGRAMME - PROGRESS UPDATE**

The Committee received a presentation about the progress of the Future Tandridge Programme since the beginning of February. This confirmed that the project team was now in place, comprising both Tandridge and Surrey County Council staff and external specialists. The Programme sought to engage Tandridge staff throughout and to enable them to shape the Council's future, while utilising external support as and when necessary. The presentation also included:

- an analysis of risks and associated mitigations
- reference to the management restructure, which was currently the subject of a consultation process, and the rationale for developing a new strategic plan (both comprising the 'leadership' workstream) and its role in:
  - informing service planning and individual staffing objectives
  - identifying the role of partners in delivering the Council's priorities
  - providing an effective recruitment tool
- a timeline and process framework for the 'service review' workstream, which would be conducted against robust assessment criteria, including:
  - the need to achieve financial savings
  - identification of alternative service delivery options, including 'what can we stop', partnership / outsourcing opportunities, and how retained functions could be improved
- emerging themes from the current review of enabling/support services, including the need for:
  - support services to provide 'added value' to front line services

- more effective and efficient support systems and procedures
  - a better understanding of front line service requirements with clear service specifications to reflect corporate priorities
  - a training and management development programme to be aligned with the new management structure
- an explanation of the 'organisational and workforce change' workstream and the intention to reinstate a staff appraisal regime, with objective setting and personal development plans
  - an overview of the 'finance and benefits delivery' workstream.

Members' comments included the importance of staff being engaged throughout the process and being utilised and appreciated for 'what they are good at'. The proposed restoration of an effective staff appraisal system was welcomed.

### **309. PROCUREMENT UPDATE / CONTRACT STANDING ORDERS**

The Committee considered a report which proposed updates to the Council's Contract Standing Orders (CSOs) and presented additional information regarding:

- progress against procurement related KPIs
- waivers from CSOs since December 2020
- the procurement improvement project.

The most significant CSO amendments included changes to contract value thresholds following Brexit and a requirement to include VAT in the estimated value of contracts above the 'Find-a-Tender' Service (FTS) threshold. Members were also advised that anticipated changes to government public procurement regulations could require a more significant revision of CSOs in future.

Officers explained the rationale for the £5,000 contract value threshold and confirmed that all contracts were subjected to the same processes relative to value (i.e. regardless of contract type).

Further measures to improve the transparency of the waiver process were suggested, including a metric for reporting the value of contracts for which CSOs had been waived as a percentage of the aggregate value of all contracts. Officers agreed to provide such analysis in future. The report explained that waivers from CSOs (e.g. seeking a single supplier or extending a contract term) are agreed by the Corporate Procurement Board. A table of such waivers since October 2020 was provided at Appendix B to the report.

**RESOLVED** – that:

- A. the procurement performance referred to in Section 2 of the report be noted;
- B. the volume and value of waivers from CSOs at Appendix B to the report be noted;  
and
- C. the progress of the Procurement Improvement Plan at Appendix C to the report be noted.

**ACTION:**

		<b>Officer responsible for ensuring completion</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
1	Future reporting of waivers from Contract Standing Orders to include a metric showing the proportionate value of such contracts, expressed as a percentage relative to the total value of all contracts.	John McGeown	Publication of the next procurement report to the committee
2	Summaries of waivers from Contract Standing Orders (as per Appendix B to the report, subject to the future addition of the metric referred to in 1 above) be circulated to Committee members on a quarterly basis.	John McGeown	TBC

**COUNCIL DECISION**  
(subject to ratification by Council)

**RECOMMENDED** – that the changes to the Contract Standing Orders, as set out in Appendix E be agreed.

### **310. PROPOSED CONSULTATION ON THE COUNCIL ELECTION CYCLE**

The Committee was invited to consider the merits of undertaking a public consultation about whether the Council should:

- (i) change its election cycle to whole Council elections every four years; or
- (ii) continue to elect a third of its Members in three out of every four years.

This was in light of the imminent review of the Council's ward boundaries to be conducted by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England.

The officer report explained that the Commission was required to begin its review with a presumption in favour of a uniform pattern of three-Member wards throughout the District. Any departure from such a pattern would only be permitted in exceptional circumstances with regard to statutory criteria. While the three-Member ward presumption would not apply if the Council chose to move to a four-year cycle of whole Council elections, changes to warding arrangements would still arise if deemed necessary (e.g. to reflect demographic changes since the Commission's previous ward boundary review).

The report provided a comparative analysis of electoral arrangements in other Surrey authorities; the advantages and disadvantages of the two alternative electoral cycles (including financial implications); and the impact of moving to whole Council elections upon future polls to 2029, including the fact that Parish Council elections would also mirror the same four-year cycle. The report also explained the legislative process for changing the electoral cycle, as defined by the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. This included a requirement to consult interested parties, culminating in a special Full Council meeting to consider the change at which two-thirds of Members present would need to vote in favour. It was envisaged that should the consultation exercise proceed, a report, informed by the responses, would be presented to the Committee on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022. Any recommendation to switch to a four-year election cycle would then be submitted to a special Council meeting during the following month.

Councillor Pursehouse, seconded by Councillor Gilman, proposed that the merits of moving to whole Council elections every four years should be the subject of a statutory public consultation. Opposing views on the relative merits of this proposal were expressed, including reservations that it was premature to consult at this stage without supporting information about the likely impact upon ward boundaries. The Chair expressed the view that, should the current process of electing by thirds be retained, it was highly unlikely that the Commission would be persuaded to accept special circumstances to justify retention of single or two Member Wards and that the presumption of three Member wards throughout the District would prevail. This was based on advice given by the Commission's review team at recent Member briefings.

Arising from discussions about the consultation process, it was confirmed that:

- paper copies of reply forms would be available for those unable to engage on-line
- the Electoral Commission document, "*The cycle of local government elections in England*" would not be included
- the material would be based on the proposed consultation methodology at Appendix C to the report
- additional information would be included to summarise the implications of the two options before the Council, i.e. whether to switch to all out elections every four years or retain the existing process of electing by thirds.

Upon being out to the vote, the proposal to undertake a public consultation on the two options was carried.

**RESOLVED** – that a consultation process be commenced (in accordance with the Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act 2007) on whether the Council should:

- (i) change its election cycle to whole Council elections every four years from 2024; or
- (ii) retain the current scheme of elections by thirds.

Rising 9.48 pm