

Minutes of the Meeting of the STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE held at the Council Chamber, Epsom Town Hall on 25 January 2024

PRESENT -

Councillor Neil Dallen (Chair); Councillor Hannah Dalton (Vice-Chair); Councillors Chris Ames, Shanice Goldman, Graham Jones, Alison Kelly, Robert Leach and Alan Williamson

Officers present: Jackie King (Chief Executive), Andrew Bircher (Interim Director of Corporate Services), Brendan Bradley (Head of Finance), Piero Ionta (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), Debbie Childs (Head of HR and OD) (agenda items 32-36 only), Katherine Lloyd (Communications & Engagement Manager) (agenda items 32-35 only) and Phoebe Batchelor (Democratic Services Officer)

32 QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

One question was received and delivered verbally at the meeting by a Member of the Public.

The Chair informed the member of the public that a written response would be provided following the meeting.

In response to a point of order raised by Councillor Chris Ames, the Chair informed the Committee that he was not in a position to provide a clear response to the public question at the present time. The Chair invited the comments of the Head of Legal. The Head of Legal informed the Committee that there were particular circumstances where the council was not able to provide an answer to the question prior to this meeting and that an answer would be provided in writing as soon as practical after the meeting. The member of the public had been informed of these reasons in writing in advance of the meeting.

33 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair acknowledged that there was an item on the agenda regarding councillor pay and it was taken as read that this interest is declared by all Members of the Committee.

No declarations of interest were made in relation to any other items of business to be discussed at the meeting.

34 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee confirmed as a true record the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 14 November 2023 and the Minutes and Restricted Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Committee held on 12 December 2023 and authorised the Chair to sign them.

35 COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

The Committee received a report providing details of the newly developed Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Communications Strategy for the 2024-28 period.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Public access to information.** In response to a question from a member, the Committee was informed that Councillor Briefings were intended as a safe and confidential space obtain information and provide a steer to officers about matters that would come to committees for a decision. The Head of Legal and Monitoring Officer informed the Committee that councillors should feel able to disclose to third parties that they were attending a briefing but advised that they should not disclose the nature of the briefing, particularly if it is unclear whether it is a confidential briefing or not. The Committee noted that this matter was not an issue addressed by the Communications Strategy as it was a matter falling within the Council's Constitution.
- b) **Press releases.** In response to a question from a member, the Chair informed the Committee that press releases were prepared in advance of meetings to ensure that information was provided to the public promptly and effectively following a decision being made.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved with 7 votes for and 1 vote against to:

- (1) **Agree that the 2024-28 Communications Strategy be adopted as a living document.**

36 EPSOM & EWELL BOROUGH COUNCIL PAY POLICY STATEMENT

The Committee received a report introducing the draft Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Pay Policy Statement for 2024/25 and seeking approval of the Statement prior to its presentation to Full Council and subsequent publication on the Council's website.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Increase to national minimum wage.** In response to a question from a member, the Head of People and Organisational Development informed the Committee that the increase to the national minimum wage in April

2024 would affect very few of the Council's staff but that work to implement it would be undertaken prior to April.

- b) **Chief Officer loss of office.** In response to a question from a member, the Head of People and Organisational Development informed the Committee that in the instance of Chief Officer loss of service, each situation would be considered on an individual basis relevant to the circumstances. The Pay Policy Statement set out a consistent method for determining payment in cases of redundancy and the Council's Pension Scheme Discretions Policy would be applied in other situations according to the individual situation.
- c) **Returning redundancy payment.** In response to a question from a member, the Head of People and Organisational Development confirmed that if an employee is required to return a redundancy payment to the Council due to leaving the Council's employment and subsequently returning within 4 weeks, their continuous service would be maintained unbroken.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) **Approve the draft Pay Policy Statement for 2024/25.**
- (2) **Agree that the draft Pay Policy Statement for 2024/25 is referred to Full Council for approval.**

Following consideration of this item, the Chair informed the Committee that the Head of People and Organisational Development was due to leave the council's employment imminently to take up a position elsewhere. The Committee expressed its gratitude to the Head of People and Organisational Development for her work on behalf of the Council and wished her well in her new role.

37 ANNUAL PLAN 2024-2025

The Committee received a report asking the Committee to approve the Annual Plan for the council for 2024 – 2025. The Committee noted that a supplement to the agenda had been published in advance of the meeting to provide three items which had not been included previously due to a publication issue.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Budget implications.** Following a question from a member, the Head of Finance informed the Committee that a budget gap of c.£600,000 to be funded from reserves was projected for 2024/25. The Committee was informed that there might be a slight reduction in amount the following the recent announcement of funding from the government. The Council was still awaiting confirmation of the amount of funding to be provided.

The Head of Finance informed the Committee that the Council would need to continue to review its services, finding more efficient ways to deliver them or provide additional income.

- b) **CIL Protocol.** Following a question from a member, the Chair informed the Committee that a new Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Protocol had been approved by the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee last week. The Chair informed the Committee that the target date for consideration and response to CIL applications was November 2024.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved with 6 votes for, 1 abstention and the Chair not voting to:

- (1) Approve the Annual Plan 2024-2025 at Appendix 1.**

38 POLLING DISTRICT AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW

The Committee received a report setting out the outcome of the consultation process on Polling Places and Districts and making recommendations for proposed changes.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) Agree the location of the polling places and districts as set out in Appendix 1 to the report for a five-year period from 1st March 2024, or until it is superseded by any subsequent review of any polling place or district; and**
- (2) Delegate to the Chief Executive in their capacity as the Council's Returning Officer any ongoing review or change of polling places during this period, to ensure that polling arrangements in the Borough remain fit for purpose for each election called.**

39 REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

Further to the appointment of an Independent Remuneration Panel ('IRP') by Full Council at its July 2023 meeting, a report outlining their review of the Council's Member Allowance Scheme and recommended changes was brought to the Committee for its review and recommendation to Full Council.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Comparison with historical data.** A member informed the Committee that from their analysis of historical data, the basic Members Allowance had increase by an average of 2.1% per year since 2014. The member informed the Committee that on the basis that a councillor spent 15 hours a week working on Council duties, the current basic allowance equated to £5.17 per hour. The member expressed that this amount was half the national minimum wage.

The member informed the Committee that if Option B, as set out in the IRP's report was adopted, it would provide an annual increase of 5.5% since 2014 and an hourly rate of £7.36. The member informed the Committee that if Option B + 6% indexation for 2024/25 was adopted as set out in the report, it would provide an annual increase of 6.17% since

2014 and an hourly rate of £7.80. The member expressed that these figures were still lower than the national minimum wage.

- b) **Diversity of councillors.** A member expressed the view that members allowances needed to be at a sufficient level to enable a diverse range of people to undertake the role of a councillor.
- c) **Standards and Constitution Committee.** The Committee considered the recommendation of the IRP that the Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chair and Vice Chair of the Standards and Constitution Committee be increased.
- d) **Thanks to Panel and Officers.** The Committee requested that it's thanks to the members of the IRP and the Council's Democratic Services Manager and Democratic Services Officer for their work in undertaking the review of allowances be recorded in the minutes.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved that:

- (1) The report and recommendations of the IRP are noted.**

Resolved with 5 votes for, 1 against, 1 abstaining, and the Chair not voting that:

- (2) The Members Allowances Scheme be updated to accept Option B (as set out in para 2.6 and Appendix 1 to the report)**
- (3) The SRA for the Chair of the Standards and Constitution Committee should be increased from 10% to 30% of the Basic Allowance from 1 April 2024.**

Resolved with 4 votes for, 1 against, 2 abstaining, and the Chair not voting that:

- (4) The SRA for the Vice Chair of the Standards and Constitution Committee should be increased from 5% to 15% of the Basic Allowance from 1 April 2024.**

Resolved with 5 votes for, 2 abstaining, and the Chair not voting that:

- (5) The SRA for Chair of Human Resources Panel should be withdrawn from the end of this municipal year.**
- (6) The SRAs for 2024/25 to be in accordance with those listed in Appendix 1 of the IRP report.**

Unanimously resolved:

- (7) That the Council's existing Dependants Carers Allowance continues without amendment.**

Resolved with 5 votes for, 2 abstaining, and the Chair not voting that:

- (8) **The Annual Indexation of Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances in line with the ‘cost of living’ percentage increase in staff salaries should be implemented from 1 April 2024 /or 1 April 2025 for the next two financial years.**

Unanimously resolved:

- (9) **To fund any increases to the Members Allowances Scheme that arise from the above recommendations, officers will need to be tasked with identifying compensating savings/additional income within services.**
- (10) **The Panel be instructed to review the Scheme on or before December 2025, as to the following specific issues:**
- (a) **A full review of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) be undertaken, in particular the ‘One SRA per Councillor’ rule;**
 - (b) **Explore awarding a SRA for the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, and**
 - (c) **To review and propose a policy for pre-approved payments for travel, subsistence and attendance at conferences, seminars and other official Council business outside of the borough, having reviewed how this should work in future.**

40 REVENUE BUDGET AND CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2024/25

The Committee received a report setting out estimates for income and expenditure on services in 2024/25 and recommending fees and charges for which the Committee is responsible, with the new charges being effective from 1 April 2024. The report also detailed council tax discount bands for 2024/25, a capital scheme proposal and seeks approval to include the project in the capital programme to be submitted to Full Council in February 2024.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Pay inflation.** In response to a question from a member, the Head of Finance informed the Committee that over the long term, it was anticipated that progression-related pay inflation would eventually become neutral due to staff who had achieved progression leaving the Council and new staff joining on lower pay points.
- b) **Hire of the Town Hall.** In response to a question from a member, the Chair informed the Committee that charges for hire of the Town Hall rooms were included in the report, but that external hire was rarely undertaken. The Chair informed the Committee that the charges were present in case an enquiry for hire was received.
- c) **Cost of Homelessness services.** The Committee noted the cost of homelessness services to the Council and the work of the Council’s Housing department to reduce the impact of homelessness in the

Borough. The Council was considering a number of initiatives to reduce homelessness.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved with 5 votes for, 2 abstaining and the Chair not voting to:

- (1) **Recommend the 2024/25 service estimates for approval at the budget meeting of Full Council in February 2024;**
- (2) **Recommend the 2024/25 fees and charges, as set-out in Appendix 1 of the report, for approval at the budget meeting of Full Council in February 2024;**
- (3) **Agree the Council Tax Discount bands for 2024/25, as set-out in section 9 of the report;**
- (4) **Support the future savings options as set out in 5.2 of the report for inclusion in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.**
- (5) **Submit the capital programme for 2024/25 as identified in section 8 of the report to the Full Council for approval in February 2024;**
- (6) **Note the provisional forecast of schemes for the capital programme for 2025/26 to 2028/29.**

41 URGENT DECISIONS

The Committee received a report setting out decisions taken by the Chief Executive and Directors on the grounds of urgency, in compliance with the requirements of the Constitution.

The following matter was considered:

- a) **Household support fund.** In response to a question from a member, the Head of Finance informed the Committee that the £25,000 returned to the Council would be used to provide residents in receipt of council tax discounts or housing benefits with a more meaningful award than would otherwise be the case.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) **Note the urgent decisions taken and the reasons for those decisions, since the last meeting of the Committee.**

The meeting began at 7.30 pm and ended at 8.38 pm

COUNCILLOR NEIL DALLEN (CHAIR)