

**Minutes of the Meeting of the STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE held on
27 January 2022**

PRESENT -

Councillor Colin Keane (Chair); Councillor Hannah Dalton (Vice-Chair); Councillors Kate Chinn, Bernice Froud, David Gulland, Graham Jones, Eber Kington, Clive Smitheram and Clive Woodbridge

Absent: Councillor Lucie McIntyre

Officers present: Kathryn Beldon (Chief Executive), Jackie King (Director of Corporate Services), Clare Lawrence (Director of Environment, Housing & Regeneration), Judith Doney (Head of Digital and Service Transformation), Brendan Bradley (Head of Finance), Gillian McTaggart (Head of Corporate Assurance), Mark Shephard (Head of Property and Regeneration), Sue Emmons (Chief Accountant), Patrick Lyons (Principal Lawyer) and Stephanie Gray (Democratic Services Officer)

38 QUESTION TIME

The Committee received one written question from a member of the public and noted that the Chair of the Strategy and Resources Committee had responded directly to the questioner. This response had also been published on the Council's website.

One supplementary verbal question was asked during the meeting and a response was given.

39 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declaration was made by a Councillor in respect of an item on the agenda.

Local Council Tax Discount for Care Leavers

In the interests of openness and transparency, Councillor Hannah Dalton declared that her husband is the CEO of a charity organisation which works with cared-for and ex cared-for young people but that she came to the meeting with an open mind and without predisposition or predetermination.

40 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the previous meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee held on 16 November 2021 and were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

41 EXTERNAL AUDIT UPDATE

The Committee received a report presenting Grant Thornton's 2020/21 Annual Report to members.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **New requirement:** under the 2020 Code of Audit Practise, a new requirement is for external auditors to issue an Auditor's Annual Report, to include commentary on the Council's arrangements to secure value for money, within three months of auditing the Statement of Accounts.
- b) **Positive report:** although five improvement recommendations were presented by the external auditors, the Annual Report was viewed as positive overall.
- c) **Statutory deadline:** the deadline for completing the Housing Benefit certification work is 31 January 2022, however Management has requested an extension of this deadline. DWP has confirmed that this extension will be in order and will not result in any penalties being levied.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved unanimously to:

- (1) Receive the Auditor's Annual Report;
- (2) Note the management responses to the auditor's recommendations at Appendix 1 to the report;
- (3) Confirm that the Auditor's Annual Report be presented to Full Council.

42 APPOINTMENT OF EXTERNAL AUDITOR FROM 2023/24

The Committee received a report setting out proposals for appointing the external auditor to the Council for the accounts for the five-year period from 2023/24.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved unanimously to:

- (1) Agree with Audit, Crime & Disorder and Scrutiny Committee's decision, to recommend to Full Council that EEBC should accept Public Sector Audit Appointments' invitation to opt into the sector-led option for the appointment of external auditors to principal local government bodies for five financial years from 1 April 2023.

43 2022/23 REVENUE BUDGET AND FEES & CHARGES

The Committee received a report setting out estimates for income and expenditure on services in 2022/23.

The following matters were considered by the Committee:

- a) **Council Tax Discount Scheme 2022/23:** it was noted that the scheme has proven simpler to administer, and that to uprate the Council Tax Discount for the new year will be a simpler exercise.

- b) **New initiatives:** the Committee considered the new initiatives set out in paragraph 5 of the report. Both of the proposed initiatives were supported, it having been confirmed that the budget amount in paragraph 5.1.2 was an estimate for a consultant to review the Council's ICT strategy. The normal procurement processes will be followed.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved unanimously to:

- (1) Recommend the 2022/23 service estimates for approval at the budget meeting of Full Council in February 2022;
- (2) Recommend the 2022/23 fees and charges, as set out in Appendix 1, for approval at the budget meeting of Full Council in February 2022;
- (3) Confirm that the two new initiatives in section 5 of the report are supported;
- (4) Note that any supported initiatives from section 5 will only be progressed if a funding option can be identified during the year, in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations and budget virement policy.
- (5) Agree the Council Tax Discount bands for 2022/23, as set out in section 8 of the report.

44 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX DISCOUNT FOR CARE LEAVERS

The Committee received a report providing information to enable Committee to make a decision on whether it wishes to introduce a local care leavers discount from 01 April 2022.

The following matters were considered by the Committee:

- a) **Duration of the Discount:** it was confirmed that the Local Council Tax Discount would apply until the Care Leavers reached the age of 25.
- b) **Reimbursement by Surrey County Council:** it was confirmed that Surrey County Council have agreed to reimburse the Council under separate arrangements for what would have been its share of the council tax reduction until March 2024.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved:

- (1) To agree to introduce the Local Care Leavers Discount on Council Tax detailed in paragraph 3.1 of the report.

45 FUNDING FOR PLANNING APPEALS

The Committee received a report seeking a financial provision in respect of securing a planning consultant to prepare and submit the cases for two appeals in respect of two major applications.

The following matters were considered by the Committee:

- a) **Increase in number and complexity of Planning Applications:** it was noted that the amount of Planning Applications has increased, along with an increase in the complexity of the applications.
- b) It was confirmed that 2 of the Appeals were recommended for approval by officers but were refused by the Planning Committee and that the third appeal was recommended for refusal by officers and was refused by the Planning Committee.
- c) **Annual Budget Provision:** the annual budgetary provision for Planning appeals is £6500. To increase this funding in the annual revenue budget, funding from additional income or savings would need to be identified, or funds would have to be diverted from other services.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved unanimously:

- (1) To allocate up to £150,000 to engage consultancy and barrister support to defend the two appeals which are currently with the Planning Inspectorate and a third anticipated appeal relating to 22-24 West Street, Epsom
- (2) That the budget of up to £150,000 be funded from the Corporate Projects Reserve.

46 EPSOM & EWELL BOROUGH COUNCIL PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2022/23

The Committee received a report introducing the draft Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Pay Policy Statement for 2022/23 and seeking approval of the Statement prior to its approval of the Statement prior to its presentation to Full Council and subsequent publication on the Council website.

The report was introduced by the Director of Operational Services.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **Section 38 of the Localism Act 2011:** this Section requires the Council to be transparent regarding its approach to setting the pay of its employees.
- b) **Pay Multiples (ratio):** it was noted that the figure in paragraph 4.2.1 of the report will be corrected to read "1:6.3%".

Following consideration, the Committee resolved unanimously to:

- (1) Approve the draft Pay Statement for 2022/23
- (2) Agree that the draft Pay Policy Statement for 2022/23 be referred to Full Council for approval.

47 ANNUAL PLAN 2022-2023

The Committee received a report setting out the Annual Plan for 2022/2023 outlining the key objectives to support the delivery of the Council's Four Year Plan 2020-2024.

The Committee received an introduction from the Head of Corporate Assurance.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **Town Hall Asset Review:** caution should be exercised to not make decisions before all the facts have been ascertained.
- b) **Climate Change Action Plan:** the Annual Plan includes the Climate Change Action Plan as a deliverable. It was confirmed that the Environment and Safe Communities Committee have received an update on the Climate Change Action Plan.
- c) **Item 27 of the Annual Plan** (Supporting residents to feel safe and secure): The wording of this item will be reviewed in order to consider the inclusion of aspects such as violence against women and girls.
- d) The reviewed wording of certain items on the Annual Plan will be circulated to Committee Members prior to Full Council's consideration of the report and Plan.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved unanimously to:

- (1) Approve the draft key objectives and deliverables identified within the Annual Plan for 2022 -2023 and recommend approval by Council subject to approval of the 2022/23 budget proposal.

48 FINANCIAL REGULATIONS REVIEW

Following the Local Government Association (LGA) Finance Peer Review, The Committee received a report presenting a review of the Council's financial decision-making procedures, and recommending changes to the Financial Regulations, following the Local Government Association (LGA) Finance Peer Review. The report also provided an update on the LGA Peer Review Action Plan.

The Committee received an introduction from the Head of Finance.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved unanimously to:

- (1) Consider the proposed changes to Financial Policy Panel's and other Committee responsibilities, as set-out in sections 3 & 4 of the report;
- (2) Consider the proposed changes to Financial Regulations at Appendix 3 to the report;

- (3) Recommend that Full Council approve the proposed changes to the Financial Policy Panel's responsibilities and to the Financial Regulations, with effect from 1 April 2022.
- (4) Approve the proposed finance training for members, as set-out in section 6 of the report.

49 COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE REVIEW

The Committee received a report presenting the amended Terms of Reference for consideration by Members.

The Committee considered the following matters:

- a) **An amendment to the proposed wording of recommendation (2) of the report:** an amendment to the recommendation was proposed by Councillor Eber Kington and was seconded by Councillor Hannah Dalton. The reason for the amendment was to ensure that all work being done around the review of the Constitution would not become fragmented across different committees/working groups.

Following consideration the Committee resolved unanimously to:

- (1) Agree the amended Committee Terms of Reference and recommend approval by Council.
- (2) Agree the setting up of a cross-party working group to take forward the next phases of the Constitution review work, which will include but not be limited to: the number of members on committees, sub committees, the Constitution, standing orders and remaining Terms of Reference.

50 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the Committee passed a resolution to exclude the public from the meeting for Part Two of the Agenda on the grounds that the business involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended) and that pursuant to paragraph 10 of Part 2 of the said Schedule 12A the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

51 COMMERCIAL TENANT UPDATE

The decision for this item is recorded in a separate (not for publication) restricted Minute.

The meeting began at 7.30 pm and ended at 9.58 pm

COUNCILLOR COLIN KEANE (CHAIR)