
POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**MINUTES****THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL**

At a meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Rickmansworth, on Monday, 11 September 2023 from 7.30 - 9.08 pm

Present: Councillors

Sarah Nelmes (Chair)
Steve Drury (Community Partnerships)
Raj Khiroya (in place of Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst)
Chris Lloyd (Leisure)
Keith Martin (Resources)
Paul Rainbow (Public Services)
Andrew Scarth (Housing, Public Health and Wellbeing)
Jon Tankard (Climate and Sustainability)
Stephen Cox
Oliver Cooper
Philip Hearn
Abbas Merali
Chris Mitchell

Also in Attendance:

Ciaran Reed and Rue Grewal

Officers in Attendance:

Alison Scott, Stephen Rix, Marko Kalik, Justin Wingfield, Sarah Haythorpe

External in Attendance:

Laura Wood, the Project Lead for the Southwest Herts Joint Strategic Plan.

PR24/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst with the substitute being Councillor Raj Khiroya.

PR25/23 MINUTES

The minutes of the 17 July 2023 Policy and Resources Committee were confirmed as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

PR26/23 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS

The Chair advised that some further dates had been circulated to Councillors with regard to sub-committee meetings being include in the calendar of meetings. They had agreed to take these dates as urgent so that they could be included as part of the debate on item 6 and if agreed by the Committee recommend to Council for adoption at the meeting on 17 October.

The Chair advised that the Part ii item on Local Authority Housing Fund – Acquisition of Property in Sarratt had not been published 5 clear working days before the meeting but was of sufficient urgency to be taken at the meeting so that the acquisition could be undertaken.

PR27/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest

PR28/23 WREATH LAYING PROTOCOL

Members requested that the Wreath Laying Protocol be reviewed following some questions asked at Council about the protocol following its circulation ahead of Remembrance Sunday in November 2022.

Members asked that the protocol come forward to the Committee, so all Members are able to review the protocol and put forward suggestions for amendments for the Committee to consider ahead of the services in November 2023.

As part of the review the protocol was circulated to all Members twice ahead of the report publication so that the comments received could be provided for the Committee to consider. The new protocol was attached at Appendix 1.

Members put forward the following suggestions on the protocol:

- In some Wards there was not a memorial or place where a wreath was laid and asked if the words “or nearest memorial” could be added.
- Some Members were invited to services which did not fall on either Remembrance Sunday or Remembrance Day and asked that there be some flexibility on this.

The Chair proposed, duly seconded, that subject to the suggestions proposed the protocol be agreed and that the protocol be circulated to the Group Leaders to agree the wording of the amendments before circulation to Councillors.

On being put to the Committee the motion was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being by general assent.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the suggestions proposed the protocol be agreed and that the protocol be circulated to the Group Leaders to agree the wording of the amendments before circulation to Councillors.

PR29/23 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2025/26 AND AMENDMENTS TO THE CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2023/24 AND 2024/25

The calendar of meetings for 2025/2026 is being considered by the Committee for recommendation to Council on 17 October 2023 (Appendix 1).

Comments had been received from Members on the current year's calendar of meetings (2023/24) with regard to the Budget Setting Council meeting on 20 February 2024 as the date falls within half term, recognising that the budget setting date is part of a wider timetable. In addition, Members have asked if the July Planning Committee meeting date (on the 2024/25 calendar of meetings) could be moved to a week later (17 July 2024) instead of 11 July and that this continues for future years (i.e. the planning meeting being held in the third week of July).

In addition, it is proposed that the Audit Committee at the beginning of July now be rescheduled for 2024 to the end of May and that this continues for future years. The background to this is the deadline for the publication of draft accounts is 31 May which allows for a 30-day period of public inspection to commence no later than 1 June 2023.

The Committee are asked to consider the draft calendar of meetings for 2025/26 and the proposed amendments outlined above (and detailed in Appendices 2 and 3) and make their recommendation to Council.

The Committee also considered suggested meeting dates for the three sub-committee meetings over the next three years to be added to the calendar of meetings. The Committee agreed to add these dates for consideration at Council in October, subject to consultation with all Councillors.

On being put to the Committee the recommendations were declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being by general assent.

RECOMMEND:

1. That the attached draft Calendar of Meetings for 2025/26 be agreed with Members able to comment on the dates before ratification by Council on 17 October 2023.
2. That the proposed changes in the scheduling of the meetings as detailed in Paragraphs 1.2 and 1.3 be considered for the report to be agreed for to Council on 17 October 2023.
3. That Council agree to include the sub-committee meeting dates in the calendar of meetings for 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26.

PR30/23

SW HERTS JOINT STRATEGIC PLAN VISION DOCUMENT

The Chair welcomed Laura Wood, the Project Lead for the Southwest Herts Joint Strategic Plan to the meeting.

Consultation on the first formal Regulation 18 stage of the South-West Hertfordshire Joint Strategic Plan (JSP) was undertaken in autumn 2022. This consultation sought feedback on a number of themes, a draft vision and objectives for the Plan, and a series of potential growth types that could be considered for the future. Officers have now considered all of the responses received and prepared a draft consultation report. This report provides a high-level summary of the number and nature of these responses and seeks the endorsement of a series of changes to the draft vision and objectives to take account of feedback received. It also seeks agreement to a number of changes to the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report which was consulted on in parallel.

The Committee received a presentation on the South-West Herts Joint Strategic Plan. At this time the Committee were only being asked to endorse the revised Vision and Objectives for the Plan incorporating changes recommended as a result of the consultation responses and not adopt at this stage. There was no legal obligation in endorsing the revised Vision and Objectives.

Councillor Philip Hearn moved an amendment that the following point “encourage a radical shift away from car travel by providing accessible, efficient, safe and affordable alternatives” in the Vision and Objectives document be amended to read to “facilitate a choice of public transport, cycling, walking and motor vehicle.”

Councillor Oliver Cooper seconded the amendment and added, agreed by the proposer, “to increase choice of different forms of transport” so it was not being forced but encouraged.

Members noted that if any amendments to the Vision and Objectives document were agreed by the Committee the other Council’s in South-West Herts which had already endorsed the approach being presented to the Committee tonight would need to consider the revisions along with the Councils which would be considering them at their forthcoming meetings and would then need to come back to the Committee at a future meeting.

On being put to the Committee the amendment was declared LOST by the Chair the voting being 3 For, 9 Against and 1 Abstention.

On being put to the Committee the recommendations as set out in the report were declared CARRIED the voting being 10 For, 0 Against and 3 Abstentions.

RESOLVED:

- (1) Noted the feedback received on the SW Herts Joint Strategic Plan Regulation 18 consultation (as summarised in Appendices 1 and 2); (2)
- (2) Endorsed the revised Vision and Objectives for the Plan, incorporating changes recommended as a result of the consultation responses (see Appendix 3); (3)
- (3) Agreed the recommended changes to the Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (see Appendix 4); and
- (4) Delegated authority to the Head of Planning Policy and Conservation in consultation with the Lead Member for Planning Policy to finalise and publish:
(a) a document setting out the revised Vision and Objectives; and (b) an updated Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report.

PR31/23

BUDGET MONITORING REPORT TO 31 JULY 2023

Councillor Keith Martin moved the recommendations in the report. The Committee were being asked to increase the budget which had been agreed at the February Council meeting in order to be able to keep providing our services. Key points highlighted to the Committee were the impact of the high inflation, how difficult it was to forecast recycling, pay award and salaries. It was also pointed out to the Committee the situation with business rates with a 56% increase in Three Rivers which is the highest in the country. Businesses would be able to appeal against the increase and if successful we would need to pay them. The Local Authority funding model is broken and had asked the Government to change the model. Some Councils had issued Section 114 notices, but we are in a much better position with healthy reserves. It was emphasised that the risk register which was part of the report, was reviewed by the Audit Committee at each meeting.

The Director of Finance advised that if no action was taken, we would have sufficient reserves to cover the shortfall and still have a minimum reserve level of £2 million. The Council were not near a Section 114 level and officers were already starting to work on budget strategy for next year and identify savings for the current year.

Members raised the following points:

Q. Wished to understand why the Committee were being asked to agree a 12% increase in such a short period since the budget was agreed in February with inflation

now coming down. Should we have not budgeted for the pay increase when setting the budget.

A. Inflation had been forecast to come down quicker by the Bank of England than it had and economic commentators agreed with this. Local Government don't usually get as good a pay deal as some other public sector workers and we had forecast around 3% at that time and if we had gone higher the danger is you make savings and staffing reductions you don't need and is why we have reserves. Kerbside recycling had been impacted by the wider economic environment and is worse than had been predicted in February. The figures in the report on this and the pay award are forecast and were not being built into the changed budget. The changed budget is things we know about around applying new grants and the brought forward figures from last year. In terms of savings, we will look at grants we can apply against core services to reduce the costs to the Council and look at any efficiencies we can make. Hopefully in the next monitoring report we should be showing an improved position, but we are at the will of the external economic environment. Looking at vacancies our rate is quite high and if that continues it is likely to result in underspends.

Q. Will we be improving on forecasting in the future? Had we not forecast the insurance premiums increasing.

A. The 12% increase was for the whole year. The insurance premiums do tend to increase in the final year, but we are due to retender (undertaken every 4 years) and it is likely the premiums will go down although there is only 3 insurance companies in the sector now.

On being put to the Committee the motion was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being 10 For, 0 Against and 3 Abstentions.

RECOMMEND:

1. That the revenue budget virements as set out in appendices 1 to 3 be approved and incorporated into the three-year medium-term financial plan.
2. That the revenue budget supplementary estimates as set out in appendices 1 to 3 be approved and incorporated into the three-year medium-term financial plan.
3. That the revenue variances to be managed as set out in appendices 1 to 3 be noted.
4. That the capital variances as set out in appendices 1 to 3 be approved and incorporated into the three-year medium-term financial plan.

PR32/23

PROCUREMENT EXEMPTION - MICROSOFT LICENCES

The Director of Finance introduced the report, which was to advise the Committee, as required under the Council Constitution, of a procurement exemption with regard to procuring Microsoft Licences.

Members raised concern why the procurement process had not started earlier when the licences are due to run out at the end of September.

The Director of Finance advised that the ICT service is provided by Watford BC on behalf of the Council and there was no intention to change the licenses from Microsoft.

Councillor Chris Lloyd moved, duly seconded, that the action taken be noted.

On being put to the Committee the motion was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being by general assent.

RESOLVED:

Noted the action taken.

PR33/23 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received their work programme.

Officers were asked to recheck the date for the budget monitoring report.

RESOLVED:

That subject to the comment above the work programme be noted.

PR34/23 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Chair moved, duly seconded, the following motion:

“that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined under paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A to the Act. It has been decided by the Council that in all the circumstances, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.”

On being put to the Committee the motion was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being by general assent.

RESOLVED:

To move into Part ii business.

PR35/23 LOCAL AUTHORITY HOUSING FUND - ACQUISITION OF PROPERTY IN SARRATT

The report sought approval from the Committee to acquire a residential property in Sarratt.

It is proposed that the property be acquired using part-funding from the Local Authority Housing Fund 2 (LAHF2) provided to the Council by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

Members were aware that the LAHF has been previously discussed at Full Council on 21 February 2023 and subsequently at the Policy & Resources Committee on 13 March 2023, where delegations were granted for the development aspects of the scheme and approval of the business case for LAHF.

Councillor Andrew Scarth moved, duly seconded, that the Council acquire the residential property in Sarratt.

The Head of Property and Major Projects advised the Committee on the financial details of purchasing the property and how the property could be used if it was agreed to acquire it. The Committee noted that the property could be used immediately once purchased for temporary accommodation.

Under Council Procedure Rule 35(a) a Local Ward Councillor spoke on the acquisition.

On being put to the Committee the motion was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being by general assent.

RESOLVED:

Approved the acquisition of a residential property in Sarratt for the sum stated in the report

That public access to the report and full details of the decision be denied until the issue is resolved, either following completion of the acquisition of the property or in the event the purchase is no longer pursued.

CHAIR