

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, 17 July 2023 from 7.30 - 8.34 pm

Present: Councillors

Sarah Nelmes (Chair)
Stephen Giles-Medhurst (Vice Chair, Planning Policy and Economic Development)
Paul Rainbow (Public Services)
Chris Lloyd (Leisure)
Andrew Scarth (Housing, Public Health and Wellbeing)
Steve Drury (Community Safety Partnerships)
Keith Martin (Resources)
Philip Hearn
Abbas Merali
Stephen King (In place of Stephen Cox)
Chris Mitchell

Also in Attendance:

Anita Hibbs

Officers in Attendance:

Alison Scott, Director of Finance
Stephen Rix, Associate Director of Legal & Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer)
Kimberley Grout, Associate Director of Strategy, Partnerships and Housing
Kimberley Rowley, Head of Regulatory Services

PR15/23 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Stephen Cox with the substitute being Councillor Stephen King. Apologies for absence were also received from Councillor Oliver Cooper and Councillor Jon Tankard.

PR16/23 MINUTES

The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on Monday, 12 June 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair of the meeting.

PR17/23 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS

There were no items of other business.

PR18/23 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

PR19/23 COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT FUND 2023

The Director of Finance presented the report on the Council Tax Support Fund 2023 scheme.

£96,000 funding had been granted to Three Rivers by the government to provide additional support to those already on Council Tax support through the individual scheme. The plan was to pay a further £25, in addition to the mandated £25, to eligible households in receipt of local Council Tax. There are approximately 2,600 households in total, about 1,300 of those will receive the further payment.

Members raised the following questions and points:

Q. Is £50 the total amount of Council Tax support for one year for individual families?

A. This amount is an additional discount on top of the existing Council Tax support scheme. The amount of benefits depends on whether the individual families are in receipt of other benefits.

Q. Is the Council one of the few local authorities that provide full Council Tax discount to families?

A. There are less and less local authorities that provide full Council Tax discount, but the Council is one of that does.

Q. How is the money allocated by the government?

A. It is calculated on a national formula, based on how many people are in receipt of the support in any one local authority.

Q. Are those families that pay no Council Tax eligible to receive any discount?

A. Families that pay no Council Tax are not eligible to receive any discount.

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

RESOLVED:

That the main and discretionary schemes, as outlined in the report, be accepted.

PR20/23 CIL SPENDING APPLICATION - KING GEORGE V PLAY AREA, SARRATT

The Committee received a CIL funding request from Sarratt Parish Council to replace and update the children's play area at King George V playing fields in Sarratt as detailed in the summary of Table 1 in the report.

Under Council Procedure Rule 35(a) the Chair of Sarratt Parish Council spoke in support of the CIL application.

Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst moved the recommendation as outlined in the report, duly seconded by Councillor Chris Lloyd, with an amendment that the request for funding be put through under the Council's urgency procedure, to allow for the immediate release of the funds, so that Sarratt Parish Council can proceed with the plan to update the King George V play area without further delay.

Sarratt Parish Council confirmed that signage would be erected that detailed the Council had contributed towards the cost of the new play facilities.

The Head of Regulatory Services advised that officers had good experience in supporting organisations on play equipment refurbishments from other play areas, and they will be able to offer support to Sarratt Parish Council.

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

RESOLVED:

Approved CIL funding for the following scheme detailed in Table 1 of this report and summarised in the table below for 2023/2024:

Applicant & Project Name Infrastructure CIL Amount Sarratt Parish Council King Georges Field, Sarratt Replacement of children's play area with a multiactivity site £170,000.

As per item 8.2 of the report any request for additional monies for this specific project is delegated to the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Lead Member, to determine having regard to the economic context and timescales for implementation and would consider an increase of up to 10% of the total CIL monies agreed.

That the funding be agreed under the urgent decision process to allow for the immediate release of the funding.

PR21/23 MAY 2023 ELECTIONS REPORT

The Associate Director for Strategy, Partnerships and Housing advised that the purpose of the report was to provide feedback following the introduction of Voter Identification and the use of Modern Polling at the May 2023 elections.

Members raised the following points:

- Voters had to wait for a long time to collect their ballot paper due to the QR codes did not scan at some of the polling stations.
- There were 141 delayed postal votes this year; this seemed unusually high.
- A further clarification is required for a breakdown on number of delayed postal votes between the District and Parish Council, and the individual wards, and the issues with Royal Mail.
- Concerns were raised by the public on postal votes being sent out in different envelopes to the same address on consecutive dates.
- The postal votes being sent out in separate envelopes caused delays.
- Tables during the count were over-crowded, preventing the observers to view the counts.
- Tellers should not have been reminding voters about personal ID.
- Members should not have handled postal votes; it is against the code of conduct policy.

The following clarification was provided by the Associate Director for Strategy, Partnerships and Housing:

- The number of delayed postal votes was higher this year compared to last year, with last year being 52. It was not known how many of the delayed postal votes were the result of Royal Mail and how many of them were posted late by voters.
- Officers received two types of online training prior to the Election; one was how to use the Modern Polling device, and the other was the Elections process training.
- Connectivity of the devices was monitored in the office throughout the day and connectivity was not restricted to Wi-Fi; the iPads had access to the relevant mobile networks, and if there was Wi-Fi access at the premises, it was used as a backup.

- The council received new burden's funding to cover the extra cost of the new duties placed upon the officers.
- Royal Mail had advised that some of the postal votes could not be delivered to residential roads in South Oxhey due to staff sickness.
- Further clarification can be provided on the breakdown of the 141 late postal votes, with ward data included. However, this number may not have amounted to an actual vote as officers don't open late postal votes. The district and parish council postal votes were sent out in separate envelopes due to time constraints.
- The parish council election count usually takes place on a Saturday, but due to the Coronation this year, which was followed by the bank holiday Monday, the count was scheduled for Tuesday, 9 May 2023.
- This was the first year that all district wards were counted at the same time, which meant that the only way to physically do the 13 counts at one time, is by having smaller count teams, which allowed less space for observers.
- One of the questions on the Government return the council has to provide was whether there were any greeters at the polling stations during the election, we did not provide any such greeters.

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

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

PR22/23 MEMBER TRAINING

The purpose of the report is to provide an annual update on Member Training.

The recommendations for the Committee to consider were as follows:

To continue with the 4 mandatory online training modules (Equality and Diversity, Safeguarding Children, Safeguarding Adults and Prevent) and they be completed on a three yearly basis.

To add two additional online training modules Climate Change and General Data Protection Regulation.

Officers strongly encourage Members to continue with the online mandatory training modules as a way for Members to keep up to date with best practice on these key areas in their role as a Councillor.

Members raised the following questions:

Q. Are the two additional online training modules Climate Change and General Data Protection Regulation mandatory to complete, and can a clarification be provided regarding what mandatory training means?

A. The two additional online training modules are not mandatory, but it is recommended that Members complete them, particularly the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) module and the Safeguarding modules to protect Members as well as protecting the Council. The mandatory training refers to the training where officers rely on the Group Leaders to encourage and enforce the training within their groups.

Q. What is the process to monitor the training budget to ensure there is no overspend?

A. The budget is regularly monitored and if there are more training requests received than the budget allows, officers work with the Group Leaders to prioritise training proposals accordingly. Further budget points should be discussed with the Group Leaders. There is no cost to the additional online training as they are already accessible to officers at the Council.

Concerns had been raised regarding the mandatory Planning training; the status and level of the Planning training needed to be reviewed.

Concerns had been raised about accessing the online training modules. Further support can be provided by the Committee team.

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

RESOLVED:

- the Chief Executive have delegated authority to authorise attendance at LGA Leadership and other LGA courses in consultation with the relevant Group Leader,
- authorise attendance at other external training courses which are not free in consultation with the relevant Group Leader where there are exceptional circumstances,
- to continue with the 4 mandatory online training modules (Equality and Diversity, Safeguarding Children, Safeguarding Adults and Prevent) and they be completed on a three yearly basis,
- to add two additional online training modules Climate Change and General Data Protection Regulation,
- to consider the points raised in Point 2.3 with regard to the delivery of the mandatory training.

PR23/23 WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

CHAIRMAN

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