

# 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, 13 November 2023 from 7.30 - 9.01 pm.**

**Present:** Councillors

1. Sarah Nelmes (Chair)
2. Stephen Giles-Medhurst (Vice-Chair)
3. Jon Tankard
4. Paul Rainbow
5. Chris Lloyd
6. Andrew Scarth
7. Oliver Cooper
8. Steve Drury
9. Keith Martin
10. Philip Hearn
11. Stephen Cox
12. Chris Mitchell

**Officers in Attendance:**

Joanne Wagstaffe	Chief Executive
Alison Scott	Director of Finance
Emma Sheridan	Associate Director for Customer and Community
Rebecca Young	Head of Strategy and Partnerships
Stephen Rix	Associate Director, Legal & Democratic Services
Joanna Hewitson	Climate Change & Sustainability Strategy Officer
Shivani Dave	Partnerships Manager
Jason Hagland	Strategic Housing Manager
Cameron MacLean	Legal & Democratic Services Officer

#### **1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Merali.

#### **2. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee of 11 September 2023 were confirmed, and the Chair authorised to sign them as a correct record.

#### **3. NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS**

There were no Items of Other Business.

#### 4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

#### 5. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2023

The Committee considered a report by the Director of Finance setting out the expected financial position over the Three-Year Medium-Term based on the Council's actual financial performance at the end of Quarter 2 (30 September 2023) set against the latest budget.

Councillor Keith Martin introduced the report and Alison Scott, Head of Finance, made a few observations on the report.

In the subsequent discussion, the following points were made.

- a) Regarding the Revenue Reserve Position and proposals to maintain a minimum General Fund balance of £2 million, it was noted that the £2 million referred to in Paragraph 3.2.2 of the report comprised the General Reserve Fund and the Economic Impact Reserve (Paragraph 3.2.3) and were available for general use.

Work on budget preparation had started, including proposals to bridge any gaps in the budget.

- b) In response to a number of questions, the Director of Finance noted that –
- Regarding VAT, partial exemption allowed local authorities, within prescribed limits, to claim back VAT;
  - The key risk in relation to Business Rates concerned revaluation, notably the significant increase in valuation of Warner Brothers. Government had reset the Business Rate system based on a 3% Appeals allowance across the board. Therefore, if Warner Brothers appealed, that would exceed the appeals allowance. Therefore, officers were in discussion with government on how to allow for this at the end of the year.
  - The Council's external auditors would bring a final report to the December meeting of the Audit Committee on the 2019/20 accounts, followed, shortly thereafter, by a report on the 2020/21 accounts.

- c) Referring to the Table: 2023/24 Revenue Account – General Fund Summary, at Paragraph 1.3.3 of the report, and the supplementary estimates and variances saving of £327,000, and the £489,000 variation to latest budget overspend, it was noted that most of the £489,000 came from recyclable income referred to in Paragraph 3.5.1.

- d) Regarding Appendix 3, Annex A: P&R Committee Medium-Term Revenue Budget Service, and the officer comment –

*“Variance to be managed in year of £60,000 due to backdated rent and interest from Telefonica.”*

the Director of Finance stated that she would need to get further information before she could respond to questions about this item.

- e) Based on previous years, it was anticipated there would be an increase in recyclable income towards the end of the year, but this was dependent upon price fluctuations in the global commodities market.

As there were no more questions, the Chair proposed that the Committee consider the recommendations as set out in the report.

Councillor Martin, seconded by the Chair, moved that the Committee approve the recommendations, as set out in the report. In the subsequent show of hands, the votes cast were, as follows –

For the Motion: 10  
Against: 0  
Abstentions: 2

**RESOLVED:** That that the Committee recommend to Council:

That –

1. 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.

## **6. EXCLUSIVE RIGHTS OF BURIAL EXTENSION POLICY**

The Committee considered a report of the Environmental Strategy Manager, regarding the introduction of a new policy to allow for the extension of the Exclusive Right of Burial (ERoB) for a further 50 years, once the original 100-year ERoB had lapsed.

Emma Sheridan, Associate Director for Customer and Community, presented the report.

In the subsequent discussion, the following points were raised.

- a) As the proposed lease term was for 50 years i.e. half the time of the original 100-year lease, it was proposed that it would be appropriate to charge half the fee charged for the original lease.

Extending the EroB would provide a potential cost saving to the Council in that, when a lease lapsed, it became the Council's responsibility to look after untended graves.

- b) Regarding the possible termination of a lease before the expiry of the 50-year extension, it was noted that the Council had a duty of care to ensure that memorials on designated plots were being maintained, failing which the lease would revert to the Council.

As there were no more questions, the Chair, seconded by Councillor Martin, proposed that the Committee approve the recommendations as set out in the report.

**RESOLVED:** That –

1. A 50-year extension to the ERoB be approved;
2. That a deed be issued, accordingly; and
3. That the fee for the 50-year extension be set annually through the fees and charges budget setting process at 50% of the full ERoB resident fee at the time it is required.

## **7. CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN UPDATE, CLIMATE CHANGE, LEISURE AND COMMUNITY COMMITTEE**

The Committee considered a report in which it was noted that a Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy had been adopted by Full Council in May 2021. The present report sought the Committee's approval to adopting the "Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy 2023-2027".

Joanna Hewitson, Climate Change & Sustainability Strategy Officer, presented the report.

In subsequent discussion, the following points arose.

- a) Watford Community Housing was addressing environmental concerns by implementing a programme providing external cladding on its properties at a cost of approximately £20,000 per property.

It was noted that the Council had previously worked with Watford Community Housing and was now working with Thrive Homes who had an ambitious programme of retrofitting properties, the cost of which was between £30,000 and £35,000 for external wall insulation (EWI) or a standard 3-bedroom semidetached property, with government grants being in the region of £10,000.

- b) It was noted that, under the Government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Funds: Wave 2.1 and 2.2, the Council was excluded from applying for funding from 2.2 as it was already seeking funds under 2.1. In addition, the Council was constrained in the amount of government funding for which it could apply based on the application by Thrive Homes for funding and match funding requirements.

As there were no more questions, the Chair, seconded by Councillor Tankard, proposed that the Committee approve the recommendations as set out in the report.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee –

1. Approve the revised Climate Emergency and Sustainability Strategy 2023-2027 (“the Strategy”);
2. Recommend the Strategy to Council for adoption; and
3. Note the updates arising from the Climate Change and Sustainability Action Plan.

## **8. ADAPTATION AND RESILIENCE RISK REGISTER**

The Committee considered a report, the purpose of which was to demonstrate that Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) acknowledged that climate adaptation was a crucial part of the climate and ecological emergency, and that TRDC was acting accordingly to ensure that the Council was resilient and adaptable to the risks associated with the impacts of climate change.

Joanna Hewitson, Climate Change & Sustainability Strategy Officer, presented the report.

In the subsequent discussion, the following points arose.

- a) In Appendix A, it was proposed that the Fire Brigade should be included in Column 17: D – Drought, at Paragraph D1.
- b) That there was a need to address pluvial (surface water) flooding and to inform residents of what measures they could take to mitigate this risk.

The Chair stated that information would be provided on the Council’s website.

- c) Regarding the use of Article 4 Directions (removal of permitted development rights) as a means of restricting property owners from paving over driveways and other such activities which were to the detriment of the environment, it was noted that the Council’s Planning officers had been consulted when the Risk Register was compiled.

As a critical aspect of flood prevention, officers had carried out communication exercises intended to inform the public about paving over driveways and had liaised with Planning officers on stressing environmental protection measures when considering planning applications.

- d) Referring to statistics provided by Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) it was noted that there was a significant problem with blocked gullies not being cleared and that HCC had yet to approve its Drainage strategy.

To address problems of flooding, the Council, when considering Planning applications for new developments, had required the inclusion of attenuation ponds as part of the development which had the benefit of resolving flooding issues beyond the area of the development.

- e) Regarding the use of Article 4 Directions, it was proposed that officers could look at their application in relation to, say, conservation areas, and not just single planning applications.

Councillor Lloyd, seconded by Councillor Tankard, moved that the Committee approve the recommendations as set out in the report.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee –

1. Approve the Adaptation and Resilience Risk Register (“the Register”);
2. Recommend to Full Council at its meeting on 12 December 2023 that it adopt the Register;
3. Note that the actions arising from the Register would form part of the Service Plans; and
4. The Finance and Budgetary Risk Register should add a direct reference to the Adaptation and Resilience Risk Register.

## **9. EQUALITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION POLICY 2023-26**

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Strategy and Partnerships recommending that the Committee approve and recommend to Full Council adoption of the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy (“the Policy”), set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

It was noted that the Policy has been finalised after taking into consideration feedback from the Equalities Sub-Committee and public consultation, the results of the public consultation being summarised in the report.

Shivani Dave, Partnerships Manager, presented the report.

During the subsequent discussion, the following points arose.

- a) Regarding the demographic information set out in Paragraph 4.1 of the background paper: Results of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy Consultation, it was reported that there had been some issues with the requirement to register with the “Have Your Say” platform before the survey could be completed.

The Community Engagement Officers within the Partnerships Team were working with local community groups and partners to ensure that their voices were being heard even if they had not completed the “Have Your Say” survey.

It was noted that, not everyone who has registered for, and returned, the survey had completed the demographic information requested as this was optional.

- b) Regarding the impolite comments that had been submitted in the comments section in the survey, it was reported that two people who were critical of the survey had submitted the comments.
- c) It was acknowledged that receiving only 45 responses from the 153 people who had visited the survey was below officer’s expectations and that changes had been made to improve both resident and Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) Elected Member and staff engagement as there were elements of the policy that were of relevance to the Council and its employees.

The Chair moved that the Committee approve the recommendations, as set out in the report.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee –

1. Approve the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy (“the Policy”); and
2. Recommend the Policy to Full Council for adoption.

## **10. SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND ADULTS POLICY 2023**

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Strategy and Partnerships recommending changes to the Council’s Safeguarding Children, Young People and Adults at Risk Policy (“the Policy”) to bring it up to date and in line with the requirements of the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership, and the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board.

Rebecca Young, Head of Strategy and Partnerships, presented the report.

In the subsequent conversation, the following points were raised.

- a) It was confirmed that the changes that had been made to the Policy would bring it in line with the policy of Hertfordshire County Council (HCC).
- b) The compulsory training for Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) staff and Elected Members would reflect the changes that were being recommended and which would be updated by HCC.

It was proposed that the Safeguarding training should be made available to everyone.

The Chair moved that the Committee approve the recommendations, as set out in the report.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee –

1. Adopt the new Safeguarding Children, Young People and Adults at Risk Policy 2023-2026 (“the Policy”);
2. Recommend to Full Council at its meeting on 12 December 2023 that it adopt the Policy;
3. That public access to –
  - a) The report; and
  - b) To the decisions of the Committee and Full Council, be immediate.

## **11. SERVICE PLANNING 2024-27**

Rebecca Young, Head of Strategy and Partnerships, on behalf of the various Associate Directors and Heads of Service, introduced the Service Delivery Plans (“the Plans”) 2023-27 that were before the Committee, noting that these particular Plans were specifically for the Committee’s consideration.

Ms Young noted that the Plans included Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), Service Volumes, and Key Risks to Service Plan Delivery.

The Chair observed that the Service Plans were part of the integrated budget setting process.

In the subsequent discussion, the following points were raised.

- a) It was proposed that, with reference to the Service Delivery Plan 2024-27: Property Services & Major Projects, that the last item under the subheading “Major Projects” viz. “Adoption of Shepherds Lane within Local Plan” be removed.

The Chair proposed that, as this was the first draft of the Service Delivery Plans, it would be premature to remove this item and that it could be reviewed prior to the Service Plan being finalised.

In response to a proposal that officers clarify what was meant by the word “adoption” in the reference to Shepherds Lane, the Chair proposed that officers review and clarify the proposal in light of the Committee’s comments.

- b) Regarding the Legal, Election and Committee Services Service Delivery Plan 2023-26, under the heading “Service Purpose and Core Functions: electoral services” where it stated –

*“Compile and maintain a register of electors including undertaking of an annual canvass (Statutory Function)”*

the Chair proposed that officers provide relevant percentage “stretch” target information in relation to the annual canvass and what is achieved.

**NOTED.**

## **12. THREE RIVERS COMMUNITY STRATEGY 2023-28**

The Committee considered a report of the Head of Strategy and Partnerships recommending adoption of the Three Rivers Community Strategy 2023- 28, noting that the Council was the lead partner of the Three Rivers Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) responsible for drafting the strategy.

Shivani Dave, Partnerships Manager, presented the report.

In the subsequent discussion, the following points were made.

- a) The practical differences that the residents of Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) would see as a result of the implementation of the Community Strategy included, for example, in response to the “cost of living” crisis –
- The setting up of individual community group meetings involving community partners within neighbourhoods in the District; and



- Through these meetings, the provision of “Warm Hubs” (also known as “Welcoming Hubs”) as part of a coordinated programme of “warm” spaces provided by community partners.

The Chair noted that the LSP involved several statutory bodies including the Police, the Fire Brigade, the Probation Service, the Job Centre, the Citizens Advice Bureau, Housing Associations, Mind (Mental Health charity), local charities such as Ascend, and working with organisations addressing issues such as domestic abuse, in an effort to make sure that nobody “fell through the cracks”.

- b) The Community Strategy had the greatest impact on those residents and persons within TRDC who were most in need of support. Therefore, by implication, the Community Strategy contributed to the well-being of all residents within TRDC.
- c) With reference to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2023-2026 [see item headed: Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy 2023-26] regarding the statistics of the number of persons who embarked upon Council surveys which they then failed to complete, it was proposed that the major block to people completing and submitting the survey was the requirement to register at the outset of the survey process. Consequently, the requirement to register for the survey has been removed.

It was noted that the various organisations within the LSP structure consulted with their respective service users and the draft Three Rivers Community Strategy had been the subject of discussion at three LSP meetings. The final version of the Strategy, which was before the Committee this evening, had been subjected to significant scrutiny by the LSP and its various substructures and service users.

- d) It was noted that it was the norm for people who engaged in public consultations not to comment, when asked, on the consultation process. Those people who did comment, tended to comment adversely on the consultation process. Therefore, for a consultation which had a broad consensus, the expectation was that there would be a relatively low consultation response rate.

Anecdotally, it was suggested that, if the response rate was relatively low, that was an indication of general support for the subject of the consultation.

- e) It was proposed, regarding those persons who had registered to complete the Council’s Equality, Diversity and Inclusion survey but has not then proceeded to complete the survey, that it may be possible for the Council to follow up, in accordance with GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) regulations, as to why those persons had not completed the survey.
- f) If the Council was consulting with existing service users through existing service providers, there was a possibility that persons who were not existing service users were being overlooked in any consultation process.

It was noted that this was one of the reasons the Council was developing a new consultation platform and requesting people to register with the platform which would allow comparisons to be made with those who had registered, service users and the wider community. Groups that were not included in the list of registered users or service users could then be identified and the Council could

seek to engage with these groups through Community Engagement Officers and the Council's community partners and agencies. It may be that online engagement was not appropriate for some groups and the platform was just one of several tools of engagement available to the Council.

It was further noted that it was for this reason that the LSP included so many different partners and agencies. The only major agency that was not a member of the LSP was the NHS and an offer had been made to the NHS to join the next meeting of the LSP by way of a remote connection.

As there were no more questions, Councillor Drury, second by the Chair, moved that the Committee approve the recommendations as set out in the report.

**RESOLVED:** That the Committee –

1. Adopt the Three Rivers Community Strategy 2023-28 (“the Strategy”);
2. Recommend to Full Council that it adopt the Policy;
3. That public access to –
  - a) The report; and
  - b) To the decisions of the Committee and Full Council, be immediate.

### **13. HOUSING, HOMELESSNESS AND ROUGH SLEEPING STRATEGY 2023-28 – PUBLIC CONSULTATION**

The Committee considered a report of the Strategic Housing Manager reviewing the Council's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2017-2022.

The report included a pre-consultation draft of the Council's proposed Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028, as set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

Jason Hagland, Strategic Housing Manager, presented the report.

In the subsequent discussion, the following points arose.

- a) Regarding the number of Afghan refugees in Three Rivers District Council, it was noted that there were two households in Three Rivers District Council (TRDC) area. One of the families was in Croxley Green and has been accommodated with funding from the Home Office under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy (ARAP).

A second Afghan family had, of their own volition, vacated the hotel accommodation that has been provided and has subsequently been housed by the Council with retrospective Home Office funding.

- b) It was noted that in the section “Local Population within the Country” on Page 5 of the Housing, Homelessness & Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028, the figure of 36,857 in two of the three pie charts on that page were incorrect and would be corrected before the document was sent out for consultation.

- c) Regarding the consultation on the Council's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028, officers would endeavour not to carry out the consultation over the Christmas period.
- d) Apart from one reference in the Index to the graph: Reasons for Homelessness – Accepted Duty, on page 10 of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028, there was no other reference to ongoing housing and homelessness issues that might affect veterans and their families. It was proposed that these issues be referred to in the document within the context of the Council's Housing Allocation scheme and the relevant provision i.e. lack of need for local connection.

The Chair noted that the Council was a signed-up Member of the Armed Forces Covenant<sup>1</sup> ("the Covenant") and the Council ensured that its policies aligned with the Covenant.

Mr Hagland confirmed that the Council's Housing Allocations Policy was in line with the guidance from the Armed Forces Covenant regarding the Council's duty to ex-Armed Forces Members and their families. That said, should anyone wish to raise any issues or concerns in relation to the Council's housing policy and how it affected former members of the Armed Forces and their families, he would encourage them to do so by way of the planned consultation on the Council's Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028.

- e) Regarding the technical nature of some of the terminology used in the consultation document, including references to LSOAs (Lower Super Output Areas), it was proposed that it would be best to avoid technical terms in a consultation document.

The Chair noted that it was the aim of the Council to produce documents that were in plain English. Mr Hagland stated that he would review the terminology used in the consultation document and would liaise with the Council's Communications Team to ensure that the document met the requirements of plain English.

As there were no more questions, the Chair proposed that the Committee approve the recommendations as set out in the report.

**RESOLVED:** To –

1. Approve, subject to ensuring that the document complied with the requirements of plain English, the proposed Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-2028; and
2. That officers proceed with publishing the document for the purposes of public consultation.

#### **14. OTHER BUSINESS (if approved under Item 3 above)**

There was no other business.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.armedforcescovenant.gov.uk/>

By way of conclusion, Councillor Scarth thanked the Chair for having chaired the meeting, and officers for their reports.

**The meeting ended at 9:01 PM**

**CHAIR**