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**POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE****MINUTES**

of a meeting held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Northway, Rickmansworth on Monday 23 January 2023 from 7.30pm to 9.00pm.

Councillors present:

Sarah Nelmes (Chair)	Stephen Giles-Medhurst (Infrastructure and Planning Policy) (Vice Chair)
Stephen Cox	Paul Rainbow (Economic Development and Transport)
Philip Hearn	Ciaran Reed
Steve Drury (for Cllr Phil Williams)	Andrew Scarth (Housing)
Keith Martin (Resources and Shared Services)	Roger Seabourne (Community Safety and Partnerships)
Chris Lloyd (Leisure)	
Abbas Merali	

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Officers Present: Joanne Wagstaffe, Chief Executive  
Geof Muggeridge, Director of Community and Environmental Services  
Alison Scott, Director of Finance  
Josh Sills, Head of Customer Experience  
Emma Sheridan, Interim Head of Community Partnerships  
Jason Hagland, Strategic Housing Manager  
Sally Riley, Finance Business Partner  
Marko Kalik, Head of Planning Policy and Conservation  
Sarah Haythorpe, Principal Committee Manager

Other Councillors present: Councillor Chris Mitchell

**PR83/22 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Philip Williams and Reena Ranger OBE with the substitute for Councillor Williams being Councillor Steve Drury.

**PR84/22 MINUTES**

The minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 5 December 2022 were confirmed as a correct record and were signed by the Chair.

**PR85/22 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS**

None received.

**PR86/22 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

None received.

## **POLICY**

### **PR87/22 CLIMATE AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT TOOL DECISION MAKING**

The Interim Head of Community Partnerships advised that the report requested the Committee's approval for use of the Sustainability Impact Assessment Tool as mandatory in policy and project development, decision-making and committee reports.

Councillor Chris Lloyd moved, seconded by Councillor Sarah Nelmes, the recommendation as set out in the report but with an amendment that the tool be reviewed in a years' time to see how effective and successful it is and that the item be added to the work programme.

In response to a Member question on the cost of the mitigations that may be identified as part of the tools use the Chair advised that details on any costs/financial mitigations would continue to be provided as part of any report coming forward to the Committee for any project or policy being considered for implementation, under the financial implications sections of the report.

Under Council Procedure Rule 35(a) a Member outside the Committee spoke at the Chair's discretion.

On being put to the Committee the motion with the amendment was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being unanimous.

RESOLVED:

1. Agreed that the Climate and Sustainability Impact Assessment Tool be used in the decision making process for all relevant policies, projects and procurements so that the climate and sustainability impacts of any action or proposal are fully considered early in the decision-making process and that the tool be a mandatory aspect of the preparation of all committee reports with the exception of planning reports.
2. That the tool be reviewed in a years' time to see how successful and effective it is and that the item be added to the work programme.

### **PR88/22 FIT AND PROPER PERSON ASSESSMENT POLICY**

The Strategic Housing Manager presented the report to the Committee which proposed that a new Fit and Proper Person Assessment Policy be implemented to ensure the Council's compliance in its duties to the residents of Mobile Homes Sites in the District. The new policy was being presented following changes to the regulations which require owners or managers of mobile home sites in the District to apply to the Council to be assessed as a fit and proper person to run the site. The policy set out what the Council would require as part of the application and what would be taken into consideration as part of the decision. Details were also provided on when someone wishes to appeal a decision the Council makes.

A Member referred to policy section 4.2 and the considerations the Council will observe for an application and wondered if an applicant had any enforcement action pending on a property they own would this be captured in the policy? Also would the policy capture if someone may not yet be in contravention of the law but may have an injunction against a piece of land they own for putting caravans on.

The Strategic Housing Manager advised that any case would be looked at on a case by case basis and was covered by the policy. If someone was in these particular positions it would be taken into consideration but they were not able to say whether it would be a positive or negative decision.

In response to a Member question on how many mobile home sites were in the District it was advised 15.

A Member asked if there was a change in the person applying, for example if they moved away or died, and a new person takes over would they need to apply again. Also if someone has not applied what happens to the site? The Strategic Housing Manager advised that if a positive decision is provided in most cases they would be granted access onto the register kept by the Council for 5 years. If the person did pass away, sold the site or appointed someone else due to ill health that person would have to apply again. The legislation puts the onerous on the site owner or the manager to make an application but officers will be looking at creating some procedure notes about monitoring this going forward after the first decisions are made.

A Member asked if there were complaints received about a person and their management of the site what would the process be for reviewing whether they are a fit and proper person. The Strategic Housing Manager advised that any complaint about a mobile home site would be dealt with by the Environmental Health team. If the complaint did reach the point where there was enforcement, although they would double check the legislation to see how we do that on a formal basis, it would be built into the process and we would review the license. The officer would clarify that to Members.

Councillor Chris Lloyd moved, seconded by Councillor Andrew Scarth the recommendation as detailed in the report and noted that the policy would come back in 3 years' time to review subject to no changes in legislation.

On being put to the Committee the motion was declared CARRIED the voting being unanimous.

RESOLVED:

That the Policy is adopted.

## **PR89/22 FIT AND PROPER PERSON FEE POLICY**

The Strategic Housing Manager presented the report to the Committee which proposed that a new Fit and Proper Person Fee Policy be agreed. The report set out the fees that the Council will charge for any application as a Fit and Proper Person to manage a relevant protected site within the District as per the Mobile Homes (Requirement for Manager of Site to be Fit and Proper Person) (England) Regulations 2020. Details on how the fee had been set were provided within the report although the legislation required that the fees be cost neutral. The full policy was contained in Appendix A and would be reviewed every 3 years but the fees to be charged would be reviewed every 12 months in line with the Council's other fees and charges.

Councillor Chris Lloyd moved the recommendation, seconded by Councillor Andrew Scarth.

On being put to the Committee the recommendation was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being unanimous.

RESOLVED:

That the policy is adopted.

## **PR90/22 FINANCIAL PLANNING – REVENUE SERVICES**

The purpose of the report was to enable the Policy and Resources Committee to recommend to the Council the updated revenue budget for 2022/23, proposed revenue budget for 2023/24 and indicative revenue budget for 2024/25 and 2025/26. These budgets form the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP).

Councillor Keith Martin, the Lead Member for Resources and Shared Services, advised that items 8 and 9 fed into item 10 and would take them as one item. In section 1 of item 10 it referred to the fact that the budget had been prepared at a time of uncertainty. We do know inflation is the highest of any of our competitors (USA, Germany, France and Spain) but we do not know where that is heading. We also know that Local Government funding reforms have been postponed. Section 2.2 of item 8 referred to 2022/23 and the net revenue budget which had now increased from when the budget was set in February last year. Details were provided at Paragraph 2.6 on the main items that contribute to the net favourable services variance. One year of Government funding had been determined but we don't know what would happen after that so we are having to prepare a plan but with only one year's details on Government funding and emphasised how difficult this was for officers.

Under Council Procedure Rule 35(b) a member of the public spoke on the report.

In response to some points made the Chair advised that the Council were working on the information they have now and would need to next year look at the information provided at that time. It was noted it was a forecast not a commitment.

The Shared Director of Finance advised that a report presented to the Committee in December on Business Rates Pooling would not be taken forward. This was due to a revaluation which had changed the risk and reward balance and Herts had decided not to pool this year as the downside risk was too high and the upside gain was much lower than expected.

A Member said the Council are required not to just put a budget forward for one year but future years as indeed are other local authorities. The proposed increase in Council Tax of 2.9% was quite reasonable when compared to other authorities considering that inflation was 10.5%. 77% of what is paid by Council Tax payers in Three Rivers goes to the County Council and we receive a smaller percentage than the police. They thought the Council were £128,000 worse off due to the grant provided by the County Council in relation to the arrangements on the waste collection being removed.

The Shared Director of Finance said the Council had originally forecast a pooling gain of £800,000. We have not lost all of that as we have more small business growth than expected so the actual impact is about £200,000 on overall resources.

A Member said where there were revenue increases agreed by the Council for 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 they had the same amount and wondered what the rationale was rather than taking into consideration the anticipation of further rises. The Shared Director of Finance said when we are doing the forecast we take into consideration known rises so if something is going up automatically by inflation we build that in but where no decision has been made we don't build in that increase.

Fall in reserves this year and reductions in future years would see the reserves reduced. DOF advised that reserves were being used this year, members' recall a report was brought them on SLM which was a large part of that reserve impact in terms of the fall out of Covid and have finalised a plan with SLM going forward. There are contingencies built in around the pay award and are expecting inflation to come down from where it is and believe it is a sound budget with reserves at a sound level. We would always take action during the year if we thought the situation was changing.

A Member asked about the details on page 18 of the revenue services report relating to the Director of Community and Environmental Services (DCES). The current post holder was leaving but the budget remains. The Shared Director of Finance advised that the budget is for posts not people.

RESOLVED:

That the report is noted.

**PR91/22 FINANCIAL PLANNING – CAPITAL STRATEGY AND THE TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICY**

The Lead Member had no comments to make on item 9. .

The purpose of this report is to enable the Policy and Resources Committee to recommend to the Council its capital strategy and treasury management policy over the medium term (2023/24 to 2025/26). This report is the second of three that is covered under the recommendations report at Item 10 on this agenda.

On being put to the Committee the recommendation was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being unanimous.

RESOLVED:

That the report is noted.

**PR92/22 FINANCIAL PLANNING - RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Lead Member for Resources and Shared services referred to point 6.1 of the report and the key financial implications for the Council. Officers recommended at minimum prudent revenue balance of £2 million. Details were provided on what the General fund balance was estimated to be at the 31 March 2026. A 2.9% increase in Council Tax charges from 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 had produced the figures provided with details also provided on what the capital balance was estimated to be in 2025/26. The Council have to legally set a budget by 11 March. The Lead Member felt that Members would prefer to have the detail of the budget before its publication with the Council summons on 13 February so moved the recommendations listed under 9.1 but wished to add a further recommendation as item 1 "that the budget requirements and Council Tax requirements be amended as required in light of the final Local Government financial settlement" so if there is any changes this is covered.

On being put to the Committee the recommendation was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being 8 For, 0 Against and 4 Abstentions.

RECOMMEND:

To Council:-

- (a) That the 2022/23 revised estimates for the revenue account be agreed giving a balance on the general fund at 31 March 2023 of **£3,986,864**.

- (Agenda Item 8 Appendix 1 refers)*
- (b) That the draft revenue estimates in respect of the revenue account for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2026, subject to the changes agreed, be approved *(Agenda Item 8 refers)*
  - (c) That it be noted that **£2,000,000** be considered as a prudent minimum balance for the general fund.
  - (d) That the financial and budgetary risks be agreed and their management monitored by the Audit Committee. *(Agenda Item 8 refers)*
  - (e) That the existing Council Tax Reduction Scheme is continued for 2023/24. *(Agenda Item 8 refers)*
  - (f) That the total capital strategy and investment programme for 2023/24 be agreed at **£3,096,420**. *(Agenda Item 9 Appendix 1 refers)*
  - (g) That the arrangements for funding the 2023/26 capital strategy and investment programme resulting in an estimated balance of capital resources at 31 March 2026 of **£2,759,047** be agreed. *(Agenda Item 9 Appendix 4 refers)*
  - (h) That the Council notes the capital funding available and approves the Policy and Resources Committee's allocation of funds for the period from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2026 *(Agenda Item 9 refers)*
  - (i) That the Treasury Management Strategy Statement 2023/24 be approved. *(Agenda Item 9 Appendix 5 refers)*
  - (j) That the Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement 2023/24 be approved. *(Agenda Item 9 Appendix 6 refers)* and
  - (k) That the Council notes the Director of Finance's advice on the robustness of the estimates and the adequacy of the financial reserves.
  - (l) That the budget requirements and Council tax requirements be amended as required in light of any final local government financial settlement

**PR93/22 COUNCIL MOTION REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE UNDER RULE 11(6)**

The Chair proposed, duly seconded that both motions be discussed together as they both related to the same subject.

At the Council meeting on 13 December 2022 it was noted that the motions at 11 and 12 had been referred to the Policy and Resources Committee meeting on 23 January 2023 under Rule 11(6) of the Council Constitution

*Councillor Chris Mitchell, was invited to speak on their motion although not a member of the Committee the motion had been seconded by Councillor Ciaran Reed moved under Notice duly the motion as given as follows:*

We thank Josh Sills for the Sept and Oct stats for the wait time on answering phone calls to TRDC. Cllr Chris Mitchell is still getting complaints from residents who have waited for over 30 minutes and even 40 minutes for an answer. One, a 75-year-old, who has said she will not ring Three Rivers again because she cannot cope with the long waits. If we believe in good customer service then this is totally unacceptable. Our understanding is that if we were trying to sell goods 50% of callers abandon the call after 45 seconds, and if we were providing technical support 50% of caller abandon the call after 95 seconds. We are providing customer service, so people will hang on longer, but get very frustrated and it gives Three Rivers a bad name.

The Council therefore resolves to:

1. Set a target of 80% of calls been answered within 90 seconds to be achieved in a reasonable time period, say by April 2023, to allow sufficient training of staff.
2. This can be achieved by using extra staff at peak periods for short periods of time to back up the customer services team.

Councillor Chris Mitchell suggested an amended motion to the Committee as follows and asked for a member of the Committee to move it:

The Council will

1. Continue to advertise by all available means how residents can get the information they need using online access
2. Include information about the less busy times in the automatic recorded phone message
3. Aim to provide additional resources at anticipated busy times
4. Report full telephone response statistics for each month to all councillors and
5. Councillors will encourage residents to use online access through their personal contacts, newsletters, etc. including the message that using online enquiries will help free up the telephone for those who don't have internet access, or who have complex enquiries that are not answered online.

Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst moved an amendment to point 3 to read "Continue to provide existing resources at anticipated busy times" this was accepted by the proposer and seconder.

The Head of Customer Experience advised that when we are expecting an increase in call volumes the number of staff rostered on the phones is increased. There is both a proactive and reactive element to managing the call centre. Calls are monitored live throughout the day and the number of people answering calls is adjusted to accommodate peak demand, however this is limited by the total number of staff available. There are also differing numbers of staff rostered to answer phones at different times of the day and days of the week depending on traditionally busy call times.

Councillor Abbas Merali moved an amendment as follows: "The aim to ensure that call waiting times do not regularly exceed 5 minutes with a percentage figure of 80-85%."

Councillor Chris Lloyd proposed that rather than agree a KPI tonight officers to look at this and come back to Members.

The Chair advised there is a KPI which is published in the Members' Information Bulletin.

It was agreed to send out some specimens of some practical and achievable targets which the Committee could then consider.

Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst moved the amended motion seconded by Councillor Ciaran Reed.

It was also agreed that discussion take place with the Head of Customer Experience and the Group Leaders on having an appropriate KPI.

On being put to the Committee the amended motion 12 was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being unanimous.

*Councillor Abbas Merali, seconded by Councillor Ciaran Reed moved under Notice duly the motion as given as follows:*

This Council believes its Customer Services Centre (CSC) should be easily accessible to all trying to call it.

This Council acknowledges that over many months, call answering times have been unacceptably slow throughout the working week. Call queue position numbers are frequently in double digits resulting in waiting times of 15 minutes or more.

This Council resolves immediately to address the slow speed of call answering by the CSC and aim to ensure that call waiting times do not regularly exceed five minutes.

Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst asked if the proposer and seconder wished to reword the motion on the call waiting times and agree to “look to address the issue and call waiting times continue to be monitored so that they do not regularly exceed five minutes.” This was not accepted by the proposer and seconder.

Councillor Ciaran Reed moved an amendment to the final line of the motion to read “This Council resolves to ensure that call waiting times do not regularly exceed five minutes.”

Councillor Abbas Merali moved a further amendment as follows: “This Council believes its Customer Service Centre should be easily accessible to all trying to call it. Call queue position numbers are frequently in double digits resulting in waiting times of 15 minutes or more. This Council resolves to immediately improve call waiting times” seconded by Councillor Ciaran Reed.

On being put to the Committee the final amended motion 11 was declared LOST by the Chair the voting being 3 For, 8 Against and 1 Abstention.

RESOLVED:

Motion 1

The Council will

1. Continue to advertise by all available means how residents can get the information they need using online access
2. Include information about the less busy times in the automatic recorded phone message
3. Continue to provide existing resources at anticipated busy times
4. Report full telephone response statistics for each month to all councillors and
5. Councillors will encourage residents to use online access through their personal contacts, newsletters, etc. including the message that using online enquiries will help free up the telephone for those who don't have internet access, or who have complex enquiries that are not answered online.

That discussion take place with the Head of Customer Experience and the Group Leaders on having an appropriate KPI and that the Committee be advised of the outcome.

Motion 2 was LOST

#### **PR94/22 MEMBERSHIP OF THE LOCAL PLAN SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Chair advised that Councillor Raj Khiroya would replace Councillor Jon Tankard on the Local Plan sub-committee.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor Raj Khiroya replaces Councillor Jon Tankard as a member on the Local Plan sub-committee.

#### **PR95/22 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Committee's received their work programme. It was noted that as the reports coming forward on Biodiversity and the Tree Strategy would be within policy and budget they would not need to be presented to the Policy and Resources



Committee and would only need to go to the Leisure, Environment and Community Committee. Items on Fit and Proper Person and Sustainability Impact Assessment would be added to the work programme.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be agreed.

**PR96/22 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

The Chair moved, duly seconded, that if the Committee wished to consider the remaining items in private, it will be appropriate for a resolution to be passed in the following terms:-

“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 unanimous.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee move into Part II confidential business.

**PR97/22 TO RECEIVE THE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE LOCAL PLAN SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Committee received the recommendations from the Local Plan sub-committee from its meeting on 7 December 2022.

Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst moved, seconded by Councillor Chris Lloyd the recommendations as set out in the report which was:

- The sites recommended for removal as a result of representations to the Regulation 18 Sites for Potential Allocation consultation in 2021;
- The sites to be amended as a result of representations to the Regulation 18 Sites for Potential Allocation consultation in 2021.

The Head of Planning Policy and Conservation advised that with regard to the garages at the rear of the Dick Whittington public house in South Oxhey officers had considered this and don't feel it is sensible to include the site and it should be removed.

Councillor Giles-Medhurst then moved the amendment, seconded by Councillor Chris Lloyd, with regard to the garages at the rear of the Dick Whittington public house in South Oxhey and that the site be removed from the Regulation 18 draft plan. They also moved a further amendment that once all amendments/details were finalised that the details within the P&R report on sites for removal **only** be published on the website.

RECOMMEND:

1. Note the contents of the report

2. Agreed the sites to be removed from the Regulation 18 Sites for Potential Allocation with the addition of the garages at the rear of the Dick Whittington public house in South Oxhey.
3. Agreed the revised dwelling capacities of the Regulation 18 Sites for Potential Allocation
4. That only the sites proposed for removal be made public following this meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee.
5. The remainder of the report not be made public until publication of the draft Local Plan.

CHAIR