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## POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

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**MINUTES** of the Meeting held in The Sapling Room, The Appleyard, Avenue of Remembrance, Sittingbourne, Kent, ME10 4DE on Wednesday, 14 December 2022 from 7.00 pm - 8.16 pm.

**PRESENT:** Councillors Mike Baldock (Chair), Monique Bonney (Vice-Chair), Derek Carnell, Mike Dendor, Tim Gibson, James Hunt, Ken Ingleton, Julian Saunders, Roger Truelove, Tim Valentine, Mike Whiting and Corrie Woodford.

**PRESENT (Virtually):** Councillor David Simmons.

**OFFICERS PRESENT:** Billy Attaway, David Clifford, Lisa Fillery, Larissa Reed and Claire Stanbury.

**OFFICERS PRESENT (Virtually):** Martyn Cassell, Flo Churchill, Philippa Davies, Charlotte Hudson, Zoe Kent and Emma Wiggins.

**ALSO IN ATTENDANCE (Virtually):** Councillors Cameron Beart, Elliott Jayes, Ken Rowles and Tony Winckless.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Mike Henderson, Alan Horton and Bill Tatton.

### 523 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

### 524 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

### 525 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 30 November 2022 (Minute Nos. 458 – 465) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

### **Part A Minutes for recommendation to Council**

### 526 **Council Tax Support Scheme**

The Revenue and Benefits manager introduced the report which sought to implement the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme with effect from 1 April 2023.

The Chair proposed the recommendation as set out in the report, and this was seconded by the Vice-Chair.

**Recommended:**

- (1) That Council approves the introduction of a new income banded/ grid scheme for working age applicants with effect from 1 April 2023 to simplify the scheme for claimants, reduce the administrative burden placed on the Council by the introduction of Universal Credit and, to improve the targeting of support for the lowest income families.**

**Part B Reports for Decision by the Policy and Resources Committee****527 34-hour working week**

The Director of Resources introduced the report which set out proposal to conduct a formal staff consultation on the introduction of a 34-hour working week from 1 April 2023 if the 2023/24 budget proposal was agreed at Full Council in February 2023.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, which included:

- What was Unison's opinion of the staff consultation and a 34-hour working week?;
- thought that a 1.30 pm finish on Fridays was not appropriate as that was when a lot of residents might contact officers and Members about missed bin collections etc;
- officers had a more flexible approach to working now and this needed to be considered in the consultation;
- residents of the borough wanted to contact officers at different times now;
- thought that it was a good solution to save money, but needed to consider the impact it would have on residents;
- would a 4-day working week be considered if this proposal was to fall through?;
- was there enough resources for officers to complete their work with reduced hours?; and
- what would happen to the shared services, would they need to pick up extra work to cover the hours?

In response to the flexible working approach for staff, the Director of Resources said that a flexible working pattern was an incentive for staff, but that it also needed to meet the business needs. She added that the consultation was to understand what officers felt would work best for their service and would have little impact on residents.

In response to Unison and a 4-day working week, the Chief Executive explained that the Council were taking the correct approach with Unison, and she had discussed the proposals with Unison. The Chief Executive added that a 4-day working week was being trialled at other authorities, but there would need to be considerations on how services would be delivered. She clarified with Members that this consultation was for officers to consider the impact a 34-hour working week would have on residents and for them to consider how they could deliver their service in a different way to ensure that residents' experience did not change.

In response to the shared services, the Chief Executive said that Mid Kent Legal services was a service which was shared between three councils, but the staff were employed by Swale Borough Council. The Chief Executive would have discussions with her counterparts in Mid Kent Services on the approach they would take if Swale officer hours were reduced.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That a formal staff consultation on the introduction of a 34-hour working week be commenced from 1 April 2023 if the 2023/24 budget proposal is agreed at Full Council in February 2023.**

528 **Q2 Budget Monitoring Report**

The Head of Finance and Procurement introduced the report setting out the Quarter 2 Revenue and Capital budget monitoring forecast for 2022/23 and explained that the report was based on service activity for April – September 2022.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, which included:

- The projected overspend was nearly £1million and that was mainly due to the growth of Housing expenditure, was there a reason for this?;
- understood that housing vulnerable people was important but needed to find ways to reduce the cost without putting people at risk; and
- did this report consider the steps officers were already taking to reduce the budget overspend?

In response, the Head of Housing and Community said that a lot of the expenditure was due to the increase in rent for Swale Borough Council's (SBC) temporary accommodation and landlords putting the prices up due to the increase in energy and gas bills. She told members that officers would consider the possibility of purchasing some SBC owned units for temporary accommodation to help combat this cost.

The Vice-Chair proposed the recommendations in the report, and seconded by Councillor Tim Gibson.

**Resolved:**

- (1) That the projected revenue overspend of £920k be noted.**

- (2) That the capital expenditure of £3.766m against the Revised Budget as detailed in Table 2 and Appendix I be noted.**

529 **Performance Monitoring - 2022/23 Half-year**

The Director of Resources introduced the report which presented the quarterly performance for the second quarter of 2022/2023 (July – September 2022) and the latest progress update to Priority Projects.

The Chair invited Members to make comments, which included:

- Questioned why on page 59 the percentage of beach huts occupied was only 99% when there was a long waiting list for beach huts;
- concerned that on page 60 of the report, long-term sickness of staff, the percentage was increasing each quarter;
- did the Council have a sickness policy to address the percentage of staff on long-term sickness?; and

- what was the progress percentage based on?

The Head of Environment and Leisure clarified that all beach huts were now occupied.

In response, the Head of Policy, Governance and Customer Services said that long-term staff sickness was actively managed, but unlike short-term absence was not performance managed because the Council had less control over it. He confirmed that the Council did have a sickness absence policy.

In response to the priority project list, the Chief Executive explained that the percentage progress was based on how close officers were to achieving the project outcome and how many milestones had been completed. She added that sometimes the project might have extra steps that were not originally planned and that this would affect the completed percentage.

Members raised concerns that several planned projects were not being scrutinised by the relevant service committees and felt that the performance report of certain projects should lie with the service committee. The Chief Executive reminded Members that it was the Policy and Resources Committee's responsibility to have a strategic oversight of all Council services, including performance and risk. She advised that if Members felt that a particular project was appropriate for scrutiny from a service committee, then Members could make a request to the Chair of the service committee and it would be the Chair's decision to include the project on the service committees Forward Plan.

Members made further comments which included:

- The performance report needed to provide more qualitative information as well as quantitative information;
- would be good to have a short, written description of the current situation of projects; and
- noted that the committee system was still new, and it would take some time to get used to the process on how projects were reported.

The Chair asked Members to raise any questions that they had on particular projects to officers before the next performance report came to Policy and Resources Committee so that officers could provide Members with a sufficient update.

The Chair proposed the recommendation in the report, and this was seconded by the Vice-Chair.

**Resolved:**

***(1) That the Corporate Performance Management Report at Appendix I and the progress of Priority Projects at Appendix II be noted.***

## 530 **Coronation of King Charles III**

The Chief Executive introduced the report and informed members that SBC knew little about the details of the Coronation, but they did know that a bank holiday would fall on Monday 8 May 2023.

The Chair proposed the recommendation as set out in the report and this was seconded by the Vice-Chair.

**Resolved:**

**(1) That a cross party working group with one Member representing each political party, chaired by the Mayor to receive reports and discuss the detail of the Coronation be formed.**

**(2) That the Communities Committee receive a further report when more information was known about the Coronation.**

531 **Recommendations from the Swale Joint Transportation Board meeting held on 5 December 2022**

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the recommendations in Minute Nos. 478, 479 and 480 be agreed.**

532 **Forward Decisions Plan**

**Resolved:**

**(1) That the report be noted.**

Chair

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All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel