

<b>Policy and Resources Committee</b>	
<b>Meeting Date</b>	13 July 2022
<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Handover report: Executive model to committee system</b>
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<b>Lead Officer</b>	Head of Policy, Governance and Customer Services
<b>Classification</b>	<b>Open</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	The committee is asked to <i>note</i> the contents of the report.

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This report is intended to ensure that all Policy and Resources committee members have a shared understanding of the committee's remit, including the services it controls, and of current issues and large pieces of work relevant to that remit. Similar reports have been provided to all of the new service committees.

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 Council agreed unanimously in October 2021 to move to a committee system of governance from the 2022/23 municipal year, and the new constitution was adopted in April 2022. The constitution establishes five politically-balanced service committees to undertake the decision-making on what would previously have been executive matters.
- 2.2 The Policy and Resources committee's functions are slightly different to those of the other service committees, having a role in coordinating the work of the other committees. Policy and Resources sets council policy on all matters not reserved to full council, generally based on recommendations from the other service committees. Policy and Resources also proposes the annual budget, the medium-term financial plan and the policy framework (which includes major policies and strategies such as the local plan and the corporate plan) to full council.
- 2.3 As with the other service committees, Policy and Resources has a number of areas of responsibility on which it is able to make decisions under delegation from council. These are generally corporate, strategic and/or cross-cutting in nature, and are set out in paragraph 2.2.1.3 of the constitution as follows:
- i. corporate strategy and corporate plan;
  - ii. development of annual budget and medium-term financial plan;
  - iii. overall budget management;
  - iv. overall risk management;
  - v. overall performance management;

- vi. organisational health and safety;
- vii. customer services, including oversight of service-related complaint handling;
- viii. communications including website;
- ix. transformation and digitisation;
- x. commissioning and procurement systems and processes;
- xi. revenues and benefits, including council tax collection and CT support;
- xii. corporate services including all Mid-Kent Services functions;
- xiii. cemeteries;
- xiv. members' and officers' learning and development;
- xv. equality and diversity;
- xvi. resilience, including emergency planning and business continuity; and
- xvii. all matters relating to the Council's responsibilities as an employer.

2.4 The 'proposals' section below provides committee members with some essential background information on some of these areas of responsibility.

### 3 Proposals

#### ***Corporate plan objectives***

3.1 The corporate plan 2020-2023, which was adopted by council in October 2020, includes 20 strategic objectives grouped under four overarching priorities. The corporate plan objectives set out in the table below fall largely or exclusively within the remit of the Policy and Resources committee.

Objective	Summary of current position
<p><b><i>Priority 1:</i></b> <i>Building the right homes in the right places and supporting quality jobs for all</i></p>	
<p>1.1 Use the local plan review to ensure that future housing delivery is more closely aligned to the borough's ability and capacity to provide for genuine sustainable housing needs, in terms of location, type and tenure, and that the impact of housing growth is offset through improved physical, environmental, social and health infrastructure.</p>	<p>In the new governance system, the planning and transportation policy working group will lead on the review of the local plan, making recommendations to Policy and Resources (in some cases for onward recommendation to full council) as appropriate. The next step in the timetable is a second Reg 19 consultation, which is expected to take place in the early autumn.</p>
<p>1.3 Encourage the development and innovation of high-quality sustainable housing on brownfield land in urban centres, with an appropriate range of</p>	<p>The consultation on the Sittingbourne town centre supplementary planning document closed at the end of March, and officers are now assessing responses. A final version</p>

Objective	Summary of current position
tenure options, improving the appearance, biodiversity, and economic and environmental sustainability of our towns.	of the SPD is due to come to members early in the new municipal year.
<p><b>Priority 4:</b> <i>Renewing local democracy and making the council fit for the future</i></p>	
4.1 Review the council's constitution to diffuse decision-making power more widely among elected members and improve the transparency, responsiveness and public accountability of that decision-making.	The council made the move to a committee system of governance at annual council in May. Training has been provided to members and officers, but there will be an ongoing need to keep both the governance mechanisms and the need for training under review as the new system beds in.
4.3 Develop a cross-departmental corporate ethos focused on the priorities in the corporate plan, and embed the Swale Manager programme to ensure a consistent understanding of the council's expectations of all managers.	Since the management restructure last year, a newly created 'executive management team' is now the senior managerial leadership team for the council. The Swale Manager programme is now largely complete and embedded, with a standard range of training being mandated or offered to all new and existing managers.
4.4 Continue to reduce dependence on government-controlled funding sources and support staff to find innovative ways to ensure other objectives can be met in the context of diminished resources.	The purpose of this objective is to maximise income from sources other than government grant while also seeking to ensure that core services are delivered as efficiently as possible. The council has a long history of operational business process improvement, and officers are now in the early stages of developing a digitisation roadmap to provide more strategic direction to some of this work.

### ***Key policies and strategies***

- 3.2 One of the ways in which the committee system differs from the executive model is the absence of individual member decision-making and the need, which to some extent flows from that, for members to control and direct the activities of the organisation by means of policies and strategies. While it will be for Policy and Resources to adopt all of the council's policies and strategies the adoption of which is not reserved to full council, the committee will want to take a particular interest in those policies and strategies which relate to matters within its own remit.

- 3.3 The most far-reaching of these is always likely to be the corporate plan, which sets out an overarching statement of the council's strategic priorities, generally for a four-year period beginning and ending with borough council elections. Each priority usually covers a number of more specific and more measurable strategic objectives, articulating both local political aspirations and the council's response to anticipated changes to the policy and fiscal context in which it operates.
- 3.4 The corporate plan's primary purpose is to ensure that the organisation's resources are coherently allocated in support of agreed priorities, although resourcing the provision of statutory services will of course always be fundamental whether or not those services are seen as strategic priorities. It is expected that work will begin on a new corporate plan shortly after the borough election next year.
- 3.5 Other policies and strategies covering matters within the Policy and Resources committee's remit are expected to come up for renewal in the current municipal year. The council needs to adopt a new corporate equality scheme, and a first draft of this is expected to come to the committee later in this calendar year.
- 3.6 The council has a loose programme of interrelated projects and initiatives all broadly aimed at ensuring customers can transact with the council in ways that suit them and which result in cost savings and more effective processes for the council. The rollout of Microsoft 365 (of which Teams is a part) has significant implications for how the organisation works, and is a key component of the programme.
- 3.7 This work on transformation and digitisation would benefit from a 'roadmap' to clarify the strategic objectives and establish the necessary workstreams and their expected milestones. The work to produce a roadmap has only just begun, but something is likely to be available for members to consider during the autumn.

### ***Current issues and large pieces of work***

- 3.8 There are a number of ongoing issues which fall within the remit of the Policy and Resources committee. These are summarised in the paragraphs below.
- 3.9 ***2023/24 budget and medium-term financial plan:*** The budget gap which will need to be closed to achieve a balanced budget proposal by December is likely to be in the order of £2.8m, but could be above £4m, depending on what the government decides on the future of the new homes bonus. This is an unprecedented amount, requiring robustly evidenced savings proposals.
- 3.10 ***Officer engagement/wellbeing and recruitment/retention:*** Swale participates in the Best Companies 'B Heard' staff engagement and wellbeing survey every two years, with the last survey taking place in late 2021. The overall results were a slight improvement on the previous year, but there are significant concerns in relation to the wellbeing aspect of the survey. Survey responses on wellbeing and work-life balance were worrying at most levels of the organisation. A failure to address these issues would cause staff retention problems and exacerbate the

significant recruitment difficulties which are already being experienced in a number of specialisms.

- 3.11 **Mid-Kent Improvement Partnership (MKIP):** MKIP is a partnership between Swale, Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells councils, begun in 2008, aimed at sharing and aligning services in order to save money, share talent and increase the resilience of small teams. Shared services within MKIP are largely corporate or back office functions (HR, ICT, legal, audit, planning support). Given the centrality of the shared services to Swale's ability to achieve its objectives in the context of reduced resources, it is essential that Swale engages fully with the partnership and its governance going forwards.
- 3.12 **Shared revenues and benefits service:** Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells councils have long shared a revenues and benefits service, with Swale participating in this in respect of joint procurement for the revenues and benefits system and some relatively peripheral areas of the service. Work is now being undertaken to consider whether joining this arrangement would enable Swale to improve its processes and create efficiencies with minimal impact on existing claimants. A prerequisite to this would be the adoption of a banded council tax support scheme, and a decision on this is expected to come to the committee for recommendation to council during the summer.
- 3.13 **Energy rebate scheme:** The administration of the government scheme to provide a £150 'rebate' on council tax bills to households in Band A-D properties continues to be a major headache to councils across the country. Despite some significant initial problems, the payments have now been made to the 34,000 (62%) Swale households who pay their council tax by direct debit. An online form has been developed to enable the remaining 21,000 (38%) potentially eligible households to apply, and all these households have been individually written to, inviting applications. However, checking the eligibility of these households and setting up the payments is a very resource-intensive process which is expected to absorb much of the capacity of the revenues and benefits team for several more months.
- 3.14 **Waste contract:** While agreeing a new waste contract is primarily a matter for the environment committee, in the event that negotiations are unable to result in a contract cost within the budget framework agreed by council, a decision will need to go back to council with a recommendation from the Policy and Resources committee. Equally, were any new contract to entail significant changes in what could be regarded as council policy on waste (for example major changes to the collection methodology), this could require a decision by Policy and Resources.

## 4 Alternative Options

- 4.1 As the report is for noting only, there are no alternative options.

## 5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed

5.1 As the report is for noting only, no consultation has been undertaken or is proposed.

## **6 Implications**

6.1 As the report is for noting only, there are no implications arising from the recommendations.

## **7 Appendices**

7.1 There are no appendices.

## **8 Background Papers**

- Swale's [corporate plan 2020-2023](#)