

CORPORATE SUPPORT COMMITTEE

31 January 2024 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillors Oppler (Chair), Tandy (Vice-Chair), Bower, Brooks, Jones, Lloyd, O'Neill, Pendleton (Substituting for Councillor English), Turner and Warr.

Councillor Stanley was also in attendance at the meeting.

[Note – The following Councillors were absent from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business: Councillor Pendleton – Minute 583 to Minute 588 (Part); and Councillor Lloyd - Minutes 583 to Minute 590 (Part)].

583. APOLOGY FOR ABSENCE

An Apology for Absence had been received from Councillor English.

584. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest made.

585. MINUTES

The minutes of the previous Corporate Support Committee meeting held on 12 October 2023 were approved by the Committee as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair upon the conclusion of the meeting.

586. ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA THAT THE CHAIR OF THE MEETING IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AS A MATTER OF URGENCY BY REASON OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The Chair confirmed that there were no urgent items for this meeting.

587. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Chair confirmed that no public questions had been submitted for this meeting.

588. MICROSOFT LICENCE RENEWAL

The Head of Technology and Digital presented his report which he explained was seeking the Committee's authority to renew the Microsoft contract for a period three years.

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It was explained that the Microsoft licences included the Council's operating systems; end user software; telephony; data bases; cyber security; admin tools; and the cloud environment and so covered just about everything that the Council did. The Microsoft licences were purchased through a subscription model that provided the Council with the right to use them and from this it received support; updates; and security patches. The current licence was due to expire in in June 2024.

Having had the recommendation proposed by Councillor O'Neill and seconded by Councillor Jones, the Committee

RESOLVED

That the Council purchases a three-year Microsoft licence agreement through a Government Procurement Agreement (GPA) compliant framework.

589. CORPORATE SUPPORT PERFORMANCE REPORT QUARTER 2 & QUARTER 3

The Group Head of Organisational Excellence presented to the Committee two key performance indicator reports for 2022- 2026. The first covered the Quarter 2 period from 1 April to 30 September 2023 with the second covering the Quarter 3 period from 1 April to 31 December 2023.

The Committee was invited to either discuss the two reports separately or it could note the first report and focus its attention onto the most up to date performance figures and commentaries provided in the Quarter 3 report.

The Committee noted the Quarter 2 report and then turned its attention to the Quarter 3 report.

Various questions were asked which have been summarised below:

- CP1 – [% of Stage 2 responses responded to in time] – in terms of complaints in Housing Services, it was felt that a lack of inspections might be fuelling complaints and so a request was made for inspections to be put into place to assess work undertaken following the completion of housing repairs and maintenance work. This would help to reduce the number of complaints received.
- CP4 and CP5 [Sickness Absence] and [Staff Turnover] – as stress was a large contributor to long-term absence, could this also be fuelling staff turnover as well? It was confirmed that when dealing with stress it was sometimes very difficult to distinguish between work and home related stress as both could be factors. Absence was not currently analysed in that way and although stress could be a contributing factor to turnover, the point was well understood. Continuing with the debate, it was disappointing to see that leavers were reluctant to complete a survey

when they left the authority as this would provide information that could assist the Council in understanding why people were leaving. It was explained that the system had been changed from staff being asked to attend an in person exit interview to completing a digital survey to encourage and increase survey responses, however, this change may have had the opposite effect with leavers not wishing to vocalise their reasons for leaving. This was making identifying trends for why staff were choosing to leave the authority very difficult capture.

Another Committee member also contributed to this item stating that it would be useful to receive a breakdown of how sickness absence information was accumulated. This was because there were some reasons for absence that everyone understood but there were other reasons that were more difficult to control. It was felt that there needed to be more understanding as to why some people might be too stressed to come into work. A suggestion made was that the Policy & Finance Committee be asked to change the measure for indicator CP4 to record how much sickness absence was because of stress. This would be useful to track as part of organisational culture work.

The Committee then noted the Quarter 3 performance report.

#### 590. COMMITTEE REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS - 2024/25

The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer presented his report which was asking the Committee to consider and recommend its revenue budget for inclusion in the Council's overall 2024/25 revenue budget. The recommendations would firstly be submitted to the Policy & Finance Committee on 8 February 2024 which would consider the overall revenue and capital budgets for 2024/25 so that recommendations could be made to a Special Meeting of the Council on 21 February 2024 regarding the budgets to be set and level of Council Tax for the district for 2024/25.

The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer stated that forecasting remained problematic particularly due to ongoing inflationary pressures and the volatility around other external factors affecting the economy and therefore budgets had been compiled using the best information available. It was confirmed that the current levels of service provision would remain unchanged and that there was no growth in the revenue budget for 2024/25. The net changes in the revenue budget between 2023/24 and 2024/25 were outlined in Paragraph 4.4 of the report, the main highlights being salary inflation; IT costs; an increase in the external audit fee; and a reduction in election services costs.

The savings totalling £249k identified in the Financial Strategy had been listed in Paragraph 4.5 of the report with the largest saving being a reduction in the number of digital based projects. There would be no new planned capital programme for the committee for 2024/25.

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The Chair invited questions. A wide range of questions were asked. Firstly, these focused on the table of savings where an explanation was sought regarding some of the items listed. There was concern expressed over reducing the GIS contract and the deletion of the part-time web administrator post. Clarification was also sought with regard to the last saving of £6k in the table.

The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer explained that the last entry in the table at Paragraph 4.5 should read "~~Reduce Legal Services subscriptions costs through West Sussex wide group purchasing. Recharge Payroll service costs to third parties~~". Members of the Committee had been notified by email of this change and had been provided with an updated report on 26 January 2024. In terms of reducing GIS [Geographic Information System] the Head of Technology and Digital explained that some of the functionality had now been written in-house meaning that the Council was not losing this functionality, it was just not having to pay for it. On the deletion of the web administrator post, the work that had needed to be undertaken to make the Council's web site accessibility compliant had now been undertaken, so that post was no longer needed.

An explanation was sought as to what the Croner [professional] subscription was and what its deletion would mean for the HR service. The Human Resources Manager explained that this was a digital information service that the section used to procure advice on areas such as employment law and tribunals. Losing this subscription service meant that the HR team would have to undertake its own research using the internet at zero cost. Members were reassured that HR Officers were highly skilled professionals making up a very qualified and experienced team and attended regular training. There were also other information sources that could be used. It was confirmed that this saving would not have been proposed by the Human Resources team if it had not been confident that it could not sufficiently function without it.

Other concerns raised over the savings proposed were around the impact of reducing the frequency of the annual residents' survey and what the reduction was; and similarly; the reduction in the publication of the Arun Times. The Group Head of Organisational Excellence reminded Members that the decision to reduce the frequency of producing the annual residents' survey annually to bi-annual had been approved and made by the Policy & Finance Committee in October 2023. The impact of this would be that this would mean that the Council would not receive resident feedback on the delivery of its services as frequently as it did now. Turning to the proposed changes for the Arun Times, Officers were still assessing the implications from moving from two hard copy publications in 2025 to one hard copy and one digital copy. A request was made that in rolling out this change that the hard copy of Arun Times be issued first so that it could provide adequate warning and very clearly publicise the change confirming that the next edition would be provided electronically.

Turning to Appendix A of the report, under Corporate Support Committee, Management and Support Services, a request was made for more detail regarding the decrease in the customer services budget. The substantial increase in print and post services budget was also queried. A question was asked around the salary adjustment of £101k and what this meant. The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer responded explaining that with the customer services budget line, there were a couple of vacant posts that would not be filled from 1 April 2024 and so the budget had been reduced to reflect that. The postal services budget had been incorrectly set at a too low figure for 23/24 and so this reflected that necessary correction for the 2024/25 budget. With the salary adjustment, Members were reminded that when the initial Medium Term Financial Strategy [MTFS] had been presented to the Policy & Finance Committee in October 2023, that strategy had made an assumption of a pay increase at around 6 to 6.5% to reflect the economic landscape at that time which was different then to what it was now. He felt that the likely percentage pay increase for 2024-25 which was likely to be in the region of 4%. The £101k reflected that downward adjustment.

Returning its attention to the table setting out the proposed saving measures equating to £249k, concern was expressed over the possible consequences and risks to the Council and whether any risk would impede the delivery of the savings. It was hoped that there would be no additional cost associated to rectifying any consequences that may need addressing as a result of adopting the savings. This point was acknowledged.

Having received some further questions relating to Arun Times and questions regarding cyber security and its increasing risk and cost to the Council, Councillor Tandy then proposed the recommendations which were then seconded by Councillor O'Neill,

The Committee

RESOLVED – That

- (1) It agrees the 2024/25 Revenue Budget as illustrated in Appendix A of the report; and
- (2) It agrees the 2024/25 Capital Programme as illustrated in Appendix B of the report.

The Committee

RECOMMENDS TO THE POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

That the Revenue Budget for the Corporate Support Committee be included in the overall General Fund Budget we the Policy & Finance Committee considers the overall budgets at its meeting.

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591. BUDGET MONITORING REPORT TO 31 DECEMBER 2023 [QUARTER 3]

The Group Head of Finance and Section 151 Officer presented the Committee's Budget Monitoring Report setting out its forecast outturn against the 2023/24 budget, approved by Full Council in March 2023 covering the period up to 31 December 2023.

The report anticipated an overspend of £221k and showed no movement overall against what had been reported at Quarter 2 to the Committee in October 2023.

The Committee noted this report.

592. PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2024-2025

The Group Head of Organisational Excellence presented her report and confirmed that it was a statutory requirement for Councils to prepare and publish their Pay Policy Statement by 1 April each year.

The Pay Policy Statement outlined current pay policies covering a range of issues concerning the pay of the Council's work force.

Following brief discussion and having had the recommendations proposed by Councillor Tandy and seconded by Councillor O'Neil,

The Committee

RESOLVED

That the contents of the Pay Policy Statement 2024/25 as set out in the report at Appendix 1 be noted.

The Committee also

RECOMMENDS TO FULL COUNCIL – That

(1) It approves the Pay Policy Statement 2024/2025 for publication on the Arun website by 1 April 2024; and

(2) Delegated authority be given to the Group Head for Organisational Excellence to make changes to the Pay Policy Statement should the need arise because of new legislation being introduced or changes to the pay structure resulting from national pay negotiations during the forthcoming year.

### 593. ELECTORAL REVIEW

Before inviting the Group Head of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer to present his report, the Chair confirmed to the Committee that the purpose of the report, at this embryonic stage of the review, was to discuss and debate the two recommendations in the report addressing the draft timetable for the review and the need to seek approval for Officers to carry out an assessment of the costs of conducting an electoral review so that a report could be prepared to submit to the Policy & Finance Committee on 7 March 2024 and before the next meeting of this Committee on 30 April 2024, which was in accordance with the Paragraph 1 of the 9 November 2022 Full Council motion. The Chair made it clear that he did not wish to enter discussion or debate on the review itself nor would it be appropriate for the Committee to discuss not moving forward with the agreed actions, that would be a matter for Full Council to consider.

The Chair asked Members to note that it was highly likely that the Local Government Boundary Commission for England [LGBCE] would soon be identifying the Council for a periodic electoral review in any event and he reminded Members that the aim of this report was to commence a process that would put the Council into a position of beginning that conversation with the LGBCE at an early stage in the 2023-2027 cycle.

The Group Head of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer then presented his report. He confirmed that the last electoral review had been undertaken in 2014 and in setting the context to this he reminded the Committee of the Motion that had been approved by Full Council in November 2022, which had been detailed at Paragraph 4.2 of the report and set out the steps that the Council wanted Officers to take in terms of starting the review process. The report focused on the pre-work that was necessary in undertaking the review which fell under the remit of the Corporate Support Committee.

The report, as well as setting out the process for Members, outlined and set out an indicative timetable for discussion and approval. The Motion approved by Full Council asked Officers to undertake an assessment of the costs of undertaking a review and it was explained that this would be the next step in the review process with a report being compiled for consideration by the Policy & Finance Committee at its meeting to be held on 7 March 2024.

Various sources of information had been provided to the Committee at Appendices 2 and 3 and thanks was extended to the Electoral Services Manager for her work in pulling this information together for Members. The Committee's attention was then drawn towards the draft timetable and Members were invited to make comment on it so that a final timetable could be brought to the Committee's next meeting on 30 April 2024. The key elements of the timetable were then explained to the Committee by the Group Head of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer. A final point for Members to note was that Electoral Reviews were conducted by the LGBCE and that any changes to the district would be made by Parliamentary Order to take

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effect at the next District Council elections in May 2027. The Council had a duty to support the Commission's work and to provide input to that work.

The Chair invited questions from Members. Although they confirmed their general support to what was proposed and set out within the timetable various questions were asked. An explanation was sought as to why there was such a gap between May and December 2024, when work on the review could be progressed. It was explained that during this time the elections team would have managed the Crime and Police and Commissioner Election on 2 May 2024, and would then be preparing for a General Election, which although not confirmed, was anticipated for November 2024 and so the timetable to be set had to consider the capacity and work pressures of that team around the elections planned. During that time, the annual canvass of electors in the district would also be undertaken.

A similar question was asked around timetable gaps between January and April 2025. The Group Head of Law & Governance and Mentoring Officer explained that this timeline would accommodate meetings of a working party that would be established by this Committee. As the calendar of meetings for 2024/25 was not due to be approved until the 13 March 2024 Full Council Meeting, it had not been possible to confirm possible meeting dates for the Working Party. This information would be forthcoming following the approval of the calendar for the new Municipal Year. It was explained that the timetable could be adjusted by the Committee if needed once it had been approved.

In supporting Recommendation (ii) it was highlighted how important it would be for Members to receive and understand all the costs involved and in light of the information that the Committee had received earlier in considering its budget for 2024/25. Another point raised was that since Full Council had approved that an electoral review be undertaken in November 2022, a national census had been undertaken confirming a 10% increase in Arun's population resulting in a larger electorate. This could impact the cost of undertaking the review. Also, as the results of the review could confirm a reduction in Councillors, it could confirm a need to increase the number of Councillors to bridge the increasing population in the district. It was felt that this was of importance and needed to be considered and as the Council resolution from November 2022 precluded that option.

The Group Head of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer responded and acknowledged that there was the possibility that LGBCE could determine that there was a need for more representation and the Committee needed to acknowledge that, however, the resolution of Full Council was aimed at bringing down the number of Councillors and the resultant benefits of that.

The Committee then confirmed its approval for a non-Committee Member to address the meeting. The statement made focused on the costings that would be submitted to Policy & Finance Committee in March 2024. A request was made for that report to include projections on the levels of savings that could be made if the outcome of the review determined that there should be 5, 10, 15 or 20 fewer Councillors as this would be useful information for that Committee.



In response, mixed views were received from the Committee. The Chair felt that this would be eminently sensible so that members and Full Council could look at the holistic picture. In response the Group Head of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer confirmed that for the costings report being submitted to Policy & Finance, this would outline the cost of undertaking the review process but that it could also provide projections around 5, 10 and 15 less Councillors, although this did not form the actual cost of the process in undertaking the review, however, he could see that this would be of benefit to Members. The figures that would be provided would focus on what this might mean in terms of the level of Councillor allowances. Any other changes as a result of the review process, such as a change in committee structure, could not be foreseen and would be considered by the Constitution Working Party. It was also confirmed that although indicative figures on allowances could be provided, only the Independent Remuneration Panel could make recommendations to change Councillor allowances.

Following some further discussion and having had the recommendations proposed by Councillor Jones and seconded by Councillor Warr,

The Committee

RESOLVED – That

(1) Having considered the draft timetable for the electoral review and taking into account the comments provided, Officers bring a final timetable to the Committee at its meeting on 30 April 2024, for reporting to Full Council; and

(2) The Committee requests that Officers carry out an assessment of the costs of conducting an electoral review and submits a report to a meeting of the Policy & Finance Committee ahead of the Corporate Support Committee's next meeting on 30 April 2024, in accordance with Paragraph 1 of the 9 November 2022 Full Council resolution.

#### 594. OUTSIDE BODIES - FEEDBACK FROM MEETINGS

The Chair confirmed that there were feedback reports to be reported to this meeting.

#### 595. WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee received and noted its Work Programme for the remaining Municipal Year.

(The meeting concluded at 7.11 pm)