

Runnymede Borough CouncilCORPORATE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE19 November 2020 at 7.30 p.m. via MS Teams

Members of the Committee present: Councillors N Prescott (Chairman), J Gracey (Vice-Chairman), A Alderson, I Chaudhri, D Cotty, L Gillham, J Hulley, R King, M Maddox, J Sohi, D Whyte and M Willingale.

Members of the Committee absent: None.

Councillors S Lewis, I Mullens, M Nuti and J Olorenshaw also attended.

315 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings held on 15 October 2020 and 28 October 2020 were confirmed as correct records. As the meeting was being held remotely using MS Teams, the Chairman would sign these two sets of minutes when this was physically possible.

316 NOTIFICATION OF CHANGE TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Group mentioned below had notified the Chief Executive of its wish that the change listed below be made to the membership of the Committee. The change was for a fixed period ending on the day after the meeting and thereafter the Councillor removed would be reappointed.

<u>Group</u>	<u>Remove From Membership</u>	<u>Appoint Instead</u>
Conservative	Councillor M Heath	Councillor J Sohi

The Chief Executive had given effect to this request in accordance with Section 16(2) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

317 BUDGET MONITORING

This item was withdrawn from the agenda.

318 PAPERLESS TRANSMISSION OF AGENDA AND SUPPORTING PAPERS

The Committee considered a report containing recommendations for a policy on increased roll out of paperless transmission of agendas and supporting papers and the working up of a business case for the Mod.Gov Committee management system which offered a paperless meeting app and other governance features. As any decision on paperless agendas would affect all Members, the Committee's recommendations would be submitted to Full Council for a final decision to be made.

Since May 2015 all Councillors had been receiving agendas electronically for all Committee meetings. Hard copy distribution had continued for those Members who requested receipt of hard copies. In September 2019, the Committee had agreed to allow for preparation and consideration of a business case for the introduction of Mod. Gov from January 2021 and a move to the paperless process from that date and for the contract with the current supplier (Blue Mushroom in Chertsey) to be extended until 31 December 2020. This project had been included in the project portfolio for the financial year 2020/21 but in view of the impact of Covid-19 on the Council's financial position, this project had subsequently been deferred by the Committee to the 2021/22 financial year, subject to an extension of the current print contract with Blue Mushroom for another year until December 2021. Blue Mushroom had

indicated in informal discussions that they would be prepared to extend the contract for another year on the existing rates. The Committee expressed their appreciation of the excellent service provided by Blue Mushroom.

Since that decision and separate from the Mod.Gov initiative, the Service and Digital Transformation Member Working Party and the Leader of the Council had recently asked for the Council to progress going paperless for agendas and supporting papers. The report had been prepared to achieve this objective by proactively inviting Members to consider opting in under the law to receipt of papers electronically from 1 January 2021 and to agree to receive all papers electronically from May 2021. This phased approach would allow Group leaders to canvass opinion within their respective Groups and officers to assess take up from Members as this would dictate the residual requirement for hard copy printing and give Members time to adapt to this new way of operation. Moving to a paperless approach would require the agreement of all 41 Councillors. Officers would also have to work in the same system if a paperless approach was adopted, although both Members and officers would have the option of printing out documents under this system if they wished to do so.

In view of the likelihood of Committee meetings continuing on MS Teams until May 2021 and the work that was being undertaken on webcasting meetings, and as implementing Mod.Gov would impact the whole Council organisation, a substantial lend in time up until 31 December 2021 would be required to prepare a business case for the introduction of Mod.Gov on 1 January 2022. In the interim period, Members would be proactively encouraged by other Members who had moved to a paperless way of working to also agree to work in that way. In order to ensure that residual print requirements could be assessed and statutory requirements for agenda despatch were met during the interim period, and as the current Multi-Functional Devices in the Civic Centre would not be suitable for large volume print jobs and it would be detrimental to service delivery for officer time to be spent printing hard copies of agenda, it was proposed that the contract with Blue Mushroom would be extended until 31 December 2021 on the existing rates. The proposed policy's potential impact on anyone with a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010 had been considered and an Equality Screening Assessment had been undertaken which was noted by the Committee.

Under the law, no Member could be compelled to consent to receive agenda electronically and a Member could withdraw any consent given. Nor could any person be prohibited from standing as a Councillor because they refused to receive agenda papers electronically. Since Committee and Full Council meetings had been held remotely by MS Teams from April 2020 following the outbreak of Covid, the Member demand for paper copies had increased slightly as some of the 12 Members who had accepted electronic copies hitherto had found it unwieldy to both be present on MS Teams and also to access the agenda papers on the same device at the same time.

The Chairman advised the Committee that eight of the other eleven Surrey district Councils had either moved to Mod.Gov or were moving towards Mod.Gov. He advised that Members would find it easier to access pages electronically under the Mod.Gov system. At present some Members found it difficult to work electronically at Committees when there were a number of different papers to look at rather than all of the paperwork being in one or two complete packages. It was understood that referring to a number of different documents at a Committee would be less problematic under Mod.Gov.

Training would be provided for Members if the paperless approach was adopted which would also assist some Members in making full use of the digital devices which they had received. Members were advised that they should contact Digital Services if they required training on any information technology issue. It was suggested that it would be helpful for Members at some stage to be provided with an illustration of the benefits that would be gained by moving to the Mod.Gov system.

A Member of the Committee had some reservations about the proposals in the report on the basis that only a low number of Members had decided to go paperless so far and some Members would have difficulties with this new way of working. However, a majority of Members of the Committee considered that these difficulties could be overcome with training and supported the recommendations in the report.

RECOMMEND to Full Council on 10 December 2020 that -

- i) Members be encouraged to opt into receipt of electronic agendas and supporting papers from 1 January 2021, and from May 2021 all Members consider agreeing to receipt of all agendas and supporting papers in electronic form only;**
- ii) officers be authorised to prepare a business case on the Mod. Gov Committee management system with a view to its introduction on 1 January 2022; and**
- iii) to ensure residual print requirements can be assessed and statutory requirements for agenda despatch are met during the interim period whilst work is undertaken on i) and ii) above, the contract with Blue Mushroom in Chertsey be extended until 31 December 2021 on the existing rates.**

319 REFERENCE FROM HOUSING COMMITTEE – HOUSING TECHNICAL SERVICES STRUCTURE REVIEW

At its meeting on 11 November 2020, the Housing Committee had considered a report on a Housing Technical Services Structure Review. This report that provided Members with two options for delivering a comprehensive capital works programme over 5 years commencing in 2021, which were either an in-house client team managing a full programme of investment or an outsourced managed service with a smaller in-house client function.

The Housing Technical Services structure had last been reviewed in 2018 but the Council had been unable to recruit to the new technical posts for Planned Maintenance despite several attempts. In addition, there had been no major planned programme for over ten years. The stock condition survey results showed a significant backlog in Decent Homes compliance and the Council needed to procure and deliver an extensive programme over the next five years to resolve this. As part of the Council's commitment and ongoing communication with the Regulator for Social Housing, evidence had to be provided that plans were in place to address these backlogs in a timely manner with all delivery risks mitigated as far as was reasonably practical.

In order to address these issues and following an options appraisal by an external specialist consultant, Members of the Housing Committee had accepted the Officers' recommendation to utilise an outsourced managed service with a smaller in-house client function which was Option B in the report to the Housing Committee on 11 November 2020. This model retained the current Council in-house team which was supplemented by two additional posts and a refinement of existing posts. The Corporate Management Committee noted that it was proposed in the longer term to equip staff with the necessary skills to undertake this work in the future but agreed that the outsourced solution was the right approach at this time.

The Corporate Management Committee agreed the increased staffing resources which were set out in the Team Structure Option B (Table 2) in paragraph 2.21 of the report to the Housing Committee and noted that the costs of the additional posts would be funded from the Housing Revenue Account. It was noted that the Housing Committee had also agreed to request Officers to build the budgetary provision of £675,600 in the Table referred to above

into the Housing Revenue Account estimates for 2021/22 that were currently being prepared for the consideration and approval by the Housing Committee in January 2021.

RESOLVED that -

- i) **the increased staffing resources within the Council's establishment as detailed in the Team Structure Option B (Table 2) in paragraph 2.21 of the report to the Housing Committee on 11 November 2020 on the Housing Technical Services Structure Review, be approved; and**
- ii) **It be noted that the costs of the additional posts referred to in resolution i) above will be funded from the Housing Revenue Account.**

(Councillor R King required that it be recorded separately in the minutes that he voted against these decisions as he was opposed to outsourcing Housing Technical Services and he considered that the Council should instead pursue the option of an in-house client team managing a full programme of investment).

320 FEES AND CHARGES

The Committee considered the proposed fees and charges under its remit for the next financial year, which included garage rents, local land charges and Council Tax and business rates court costs.

RESOLVED that -

the fees and charges as set out in Appendix 'E' to the agenda be approved to be effective from the dates within the Appendix or as soon as practical thereafter.

321 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID YEAR REPORT 2020/21

The Committee noted a report on the Council's treasury activity for the first six months of the 2020/21 financial year.

The Council held £70m of investments as at 30 September 2020 and the investment activity during the first six months of 2020/21 was noted. Although there was a fall in investment income as one of the consequences of the Covid pandemic, the Council's balance sheet and earmarked reserves remained strong and the Council's auditors had found that the Council's governance procedures and compliance with Government financial Codes and guidance was good.

In view of the current investment climate resulting from coronavirus and the very low returns on investments that were available, the Committee agreed that the Runnymede average investment rate generated during this period of 0.61% was excellent and the Assistant Chief Executive agreed to pass on the Committee's thanks to treasury management staff.

The Council invested in low risk counterparties or instruments that provided adequate liquidity initially before considering investment return. The Council's commercial income was used for a variety of purposes including making General Fund interest payments and providing the resources for regeneration schemes and discretionary services. It was noted that the Council was outperforming other Surrey local authorities in collection of rental income at a time when businesses were affected severely by coronavirus restrictions.

322 PROPOSED LETTING OF COMMERCIAL UNIT – ADDLESTONE ONE DEVELOPMENT

By resolution of the Committee, the press and public were excluded from the meeting during the consideration of this matter under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act

1972 on the grounds that the discussion would be likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

The Committee noted that officers had been negotiating for several months with a business with a view to them becoming a tenant of one of the commercial units in the Addlestone One development. The business was seeking to occupy a particular unit which suited the configuration that they required and the proposed layout and fit out of the unit were noted. Agreement had been reached on proposed Heads of Terms which were set out for the Committee's approval. Provided there were no unexpected delays, the business should be able to open during the summer of 2021.

The financial due diligence which had been undertaken by officers and details of the proposed tenant's current business operation were noted. The Committee recognised that deterioration of market conditions caused by Covid meant that there were greater risks associated with business tenants than before the pandemic and the work done by officers to seek to mitigate those risks was noted. Fit out works would be retained by the Council in the event of vacation.

The Committee approved the Heads of Terms and congratulated officers for bringing forward this letting which would enhance the pedestrian flow and vitality of the Addlestone One development.

RESOLVED that –

the Heads of Terms for the letting of the commercial unit in the Addlestone One development to the business as reported, be approved.

323 COMMUNICATIONS – PROPOSED STAFF REORGANISATION

By resolution of the Committee, the press and public were excluded from the meeting during the consideration of this matter under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the discussion would be likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

This item was withdrawn from the agenda.

324 COMMERCIAL SERVICES – PROPOSED STAFF RESTRUCTURING

By resolution of the Committee, the press and public were excluded from the meeting during the consideration of this matter under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the discussion would be likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information of the description specified in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A to Part 1 of the Act.

This item was withdrawn from the agenda.

(The meeting ended at 8.34.p.m.)

Chairman