

COUNCIL – 30 NOVEMBER 2023

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT – RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE AND COMMITTEES

Executive Summary

This supplementary paper to the report on the recommendations from the Executive and the Standards and Audit Committee sets out the extracts from the minutes of the Standards and Audit Committee which met on 23 November 2023. For ease, the extracts from the minutes of the Executive have been reproduced in this report.

THE EXECUTIVE – 16 NOVEMBER 2023

9A. Review of Fees and Charges 2024-25 EXE23-057

The Executive received a report detailing the proposed discretionary fees and charges for 2024-25. Councillor Roberts, Portfolio Holder for Finance, highlighted that the review of fees and charges needed to be considered in the context of, and was constrained by, the Council's current financial position following the issue of a Section 114 Notice in June 2023. The Executive noted that the Council faced a deficit of £1.2bn and was experiencing a budget shortfall of £12m due to an over reliance on commercial income. The Portfolio Holder advised that the Council had identified £8.5m savings to address the budget shortfall. Separately, the Council was working to resolve the historic debt which would prevent a legal budget being set for 2024-25 without Government support.

Attention was drawn to the Council's Improvement and Recovery Plan (IRP) which would address the capacity of the finance team, and the required improvements in the financial and commercial information which supported decision making on fees and charges. A Commercial Strategy was being developed as part of the IRP which would be used as a framework for setting fees and charges going forward. The Portfolio Holder therefore proposed an additional recommendation (iv) to read "next year's process will use the Commercial Strategy and Protocol being developed as part of the Improvement and Recovery as the framework for setting fees and charges, to ensure that fairness, equity and social impacts are balanced with a sound commercial approach". The Executive welcomed the amendment to the recommendations.

Regarding car park charges, it was noted that a Parking Study was currently taking place and proposals would be put forward for Member consideration in February 2024.

The Portfolio Holder was grateful that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be considering the Review of Fees of Charge 2024-25 report under Urgent Business at its meeting on 20 November 2023.

Members also discussed charges regarding commercial open spaces, season tickets related to CO2 rating, garden waste and replacement waste bins, and consultation in respect of proposed January 2024 increases. Regarding community meals, the Executive acknowledged the rising costs of food items and recognised that increases were necessary to ensure services could continue and were cost neutral. As many of the services provided by the Council were non-statutory, it was necessary to increase fees and charges in order to continue provision and ensure services were cost neutral whilst being mindful of affordability.

Councillor Davis raised a question regarding the level of detail in the report and the difficulty in scrutinising fees and charges as a result. The Portfolio Holder acknowledged that the financial

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and commercial information used for setting fees and charges needed to further improve as part of the wider Improvement and Recovery journey. It was noted that Officers had used the best information available to put forward cost neutral discretionary services, balancing fairness to service users with affordability to taxpayers.

RECOMMENDED to Council

- That (i) **the discretionary fees and charges for 2024/25, as set out in Appendices 1 – 4 of the report, be approved;**
- (ii) **the proposed increases in discretionary fees and charges from 1st January 2024, as set out in Appendices 5 – 7 of the report, be approved;**
- (iii) **to move the waste service to a cost neutral position as soon as possible, any of the proposed 2024/25 increases for Bulky Waste and Waste Receptacles set out in Appendix 2 to the report that can be implemented quickly should be introduced at the earliest practical date following approval by Council; and**
- (iv) **next year’s process will use the Commercial Strategy and Protocol being developed as part of the Improvement and Recovery as the framework for setting fees and charges, to ensure that fairness, equity and social impacts are balanced with a sound commercial approach.**

Reason: The regular review of discretionary charges ensures that the Council maintains its income base and generates additional resources for the provision of services.

9B Climate Change Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) EXE23-067

The Executive received a report which recommended to Council the adoption of the revised Climate Change Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which would provide updated guidance on the application of policies within the Core Strategy relating to climate change. Councillor Lyons, Portfolio Holder for Planning Policy, advised that the consultation on the Climate Change SPD had been widely advertised and had received 17 responses, including Thames Water, Natural England, WeACT and local Neighbourhood Forums. Following a question, it was confirmed that the number of responses received was typical for such a consultation. The Portfolio Holder thanked Officers for their hard work on the revision of the SPD.

RECOMMENDED to Council

- That (i) **the various representations to the Climate Change Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) consultation together with Officer’s responses and recommendations as set out in Appendix 1 to the report be noted;**
- (ii) **the revised Climate Change SPD included in Appendix 2 to the report be adopted as Supplementary Planning**

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Document for the purposes of managing development across the Borough and other planning decisions; and

(iii) the requirements of the SPD should apply from the date of adoption, in this case 30th November 2023.

Reason: To ensure that there is up to date guidance on the implementation of policies within the Core Strategy relating to climate change and ensuring development can contribute towards the vision of a sustainable Woking.

9C Calendar of Meetings 2024-25 EXE23-058

The Executive received a report which sought approval to recommend to Council the Calendar of Meetings 2024-25. It was noted that the report proposed that meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were held in the same week as the Executive to allow for pre-decision scrutiny. In addition, it was proposed to reduce the number of Planning Committees held during June and July. The Leader reminded Members that additional meetings could be arranged during the Municipal Year if required.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the Calendar of Meetings 2024/25 be approved as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

Reason: In accordance with Standing Order 1.2 of the Constitution, which states that “The date of the annual (Council) meeting and those of ordinary meetings shall be fixed by the Council in or about December of the preceding municipal year”.

THE STANDARDS AND AUDIT COMMITTEE – 23 NOVEMBER 2023

9D Amendments to Constitution - Public Participation at Planning Committee STA23-024

The Committee received the first of a series of recommendations from the Corporate Governance Working Group regarding amendments to the Council’s Constitution, relating to Public Speaking at Planning Committee, which also incorporated changes proposed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Planning Committee at their respective meetings.

Tom James, Development Manager, introduced the paper and advised that the main changes proposed were to reduce the threshold for public speaking from ten to five objections and to also include supporters of applications. Following a discussion with Councillor Andy Caulfield a further change had been proposed with the aim of ensuring local residents held an equal voice at meetings of the Planning Committee. The amendment was to alter the wording of paragraph 4.10 from:

‘Councillors will have the opportunity of asking further questions of the Officers and, if necessary, ask Officers to make a brief summary of the planning issues, at the end of the debate.’

to:

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‘Councillors will have the opportunity of asking further questions of the Officers and with the permission of the Chair, this can include the Ward Councillors. If necessary, the Chair can ask Officers to make a brief summary of the planning issues, at the end of the debate.’

The Committee supported the amendment.

Following a question, Tom clarified that the reason for a petition being counted as a single objection was that Planning Services encouraged residents to submit a written letter setting out their views on a planning application rather than signing a petition handed to them.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- That (i) the amended Public Speaking at Planning Committee section of the Constitution (Appendix 2 to the report) be adopted, as amended by the Standards and Audit Committee in relation to paragraph 4.10;**
- (ii) the authority delegated to the Monitoring Officer to make minor amendments to the Constitution be noted, including amendments to references within the document and section numbering; and**
- (iii) the Monitoring Officer be instructed to make the agreed changes to the Constitution.**

9E Amendments to Constitution - Media Protocol STA23-025

The Committee received the second proposal from the Corporate Governance Working Group which proposed the adoption of a Corporate Press and Media Protocol. Andy Denner, Marketing Communications Manager, introduced the report and advised that the Protocol set out the roles and responsibilities for managing media relations and the reputation of the Council. It would apply to members of the Executive and Council Officers who may be contacted by representatives of the media.

Following a question, it was noted that each Press Release included a quotation from a Member otherwise the document would be referred to as a Press Notice.

The Committee broadly welcomed the Protocol.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- That (i) the Corporate Press and Media Protocol (Appendix 1 to the report) be adopted;**
- (ii) the authority delegated to the Monitoring Officer to make minor amendments to the Constitution be noted, including amendments to references within the document and section numbering; and**
- (iii) the Monitoring Officer be instructed to make the agreed changes to the Constitution.**

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9F Amendments to Constitution - Provisions for Urgent Business STA23-026

The Committee received the third recommendation from the Corporate Governance Working Group which proposed the adoption of a new section in the Constitution to deal with items of Urgent Business. Members supported the proposal.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- That (i) the section on Urgent Business (Appendix 1 to the report) be added to the Council's Constitution under Section 1 of Part 4;
- (ii) the authority delegated to the Monitoring Officer to make minor amendments to the Constitution be noted, including amendments to references within the document and section numbering; and
- (iii) the Monitoring Officer be instructed to make the agreed changes to the Constitution.

9G Amendments to Constitution - Questions from Members of Public STA23-027

The Committee received the fourth and final recommendation from the Corporate Governance Working Group which suggested amendments to the arrangements for receiving questions from members of the public at Council meetings, which had been introduced earlier in the year. The report included the proposal to enable each questioner to ask one supplementary question at the meeting. Members broadly welcomed the proposal.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

- That (i) the existing section on Questions from Members of the Public (Appendix 1 to the report) in the Council's Constitution be updated under Section 1 of Part 4;
- (ii) the addition of any references within the new section to other sections within the Constitution be delegated to the Monitoring Officer as minor amendments; and
- (iii) the Monitoring Officer be instructed to make the agreed changes to the Constitution.

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| The Council has the authority to determine the recommendations set out above. |
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Background Papers: None.

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