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**POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE****MINUTES**

Of a meeting held in the Penn Chamber, Three Rivers House, Northway, Rickmansworth on 6 December 2021 from 7.30pm to 9pm.

Councillors present:

Sarah Nelmes (Chair of the Committee)  
Matthew Bedford (Infrastructure & Planning Policy)  
Stephen Cox  
Stephen Giles-Medhurst (Transport and Economic Development)  
Paula Hiscocks  
Debbie Morris

Chris Lloyd (Leisure)  
Andrew Scarth (Housing)  
Alex Hayward  
Reena Ranger  
Alison Scarth (for Cllr R Seabourne)  
Steve Drury (for Cllr D Sokalski)

Other Councillors in attendance – Croxley Green Parish Councillor Chris Mitchell

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Officers Present: Joanne Wagstaffe, Chief Executive  
Geof Muggerridge, Director of Community and Environmental Services  
Justin Wingfield, Head of Property Services and Major Projects  
Ray Figg, Head of Community Services  
Alex Laurie, Principal Landscape Officer  
Rebecca Young, Head of Community Partnerships  
Kimberley Grout, Head of Housing Services  
Kimberley Rowley, Head of Regulatory Services  
Hannah Doney, Head of Finance  
Sarah Haythorpe, Principal Committee Manager

**PR45/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Phil Williams, Dominic Sokalski and Roger Seabourne, with Councillors Alison Scarth and Steve Drury substituting.

**PR46/21 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting held on 1 November 2021 were agreed and signed by the Chair subject to the following amendments:

Add Councillor Alex Hayward to the Members present

Minute PR42/21 – Page 3 paragraph 2 which starts “Car parking bays there was an £110k underspend.... To add an extra sentence to read: “Which could have been spent on sorting out the residents who contacted the Councillor pleading for verge hardening (parking bays) and enquired why the money had not been spent”

To add the following post meeting note to the addendum to the minutes:

“A report went to IHED in January 2021 which confirmed the current programme (Barnhurst Path, South Way and School Mead) along with the three highest-scoring schemes set out in Appendix A to the report and which would be included on the proposed work programme. These 3 schemes included Mullion Walk and Falkirk Gardens in South Oxhey. The South Oxhey schemes are due for completion this financial year.

With regard to the re-phasing of monies recently detailed the Programme is a 2 year Working Programme against an annual budget. We have schemes from previous years still to be implemented (South Way and School Mead) but are still awaiting relevant consents. We also have a staffing capacity to consider around scheme implementation under this Programme and other work priorities.”

**PR47/21 NOTICE OF OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chair ruled that the following items and reports which had not been available for five clear days before the meeting but were of sufficient urgency to be considered by the Committee for the reasons indicated

Item 11 – Exemption from Procurement Procedure Rules – Livestreaming/Hybrid meetings

To ensure that the project can be completed and the equipment installed so that meetings can be livestreamed and hybrid meetings held

Item 12 – Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) Funding Proposals

To ensure that the grants can progressed and committed to the projects identified by the deadline of the end of March 2022.

Item 14A – Proposals for Spending of Household Support Fund

To enable the Council to provide support during the winter with food and energy.

**PR48/21 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

None received.

**PR49/21 TO RECEIVE THE FOLLOWING PETITION SIGNED BY OVER 600 PEOPLE**

The Committee received the following petition from Croxley Green Parish Council which was presented by Parish Councillor Chris Mitchell

Three Rivers District Council has designated the Red Cross Centre as a site for future development with 6 dwellings to be built on the land.

This decision will remove a vital, well-used community space, which was built using funds raised directly from Croxley Green residents.

Three Rivers District Council own the land where the Centre is and it is completely their decision to build dwellings there instead. This cannot be allowed to happen.

In 2019 the Parish Council made an offer to take over the Centre to ensure that it remained open and available to Croxley Green residents, community groups and organisations. This has not been accepted.

Croxley Green needs spaces such as this where the community can come together to enable Croxley's great community spirit to thrive and grow.

Three Rivers District Council have not been open and transparent with Croxley Green residents over their plans for the Centre and the decision to mark this site

for development is an affront and an insult to our community and must be stopped. Please sign this petition to help support Croxley Green Parish Council in their efforts to take over the Centre to ensure that it remains open for our community.

In response to the receiving of the petition of the Chair of the Committee read out the following statement on behalf of the Vice Chair of the Committee

The British Red Cross site in Croxley Green is a community asset that Three Rivers District Council have been working to protect for over three years.

Since taking over the Property Portfolio at Three Rivers I have sought to involve Croxley Green Parish Council over the future of the site. I have met with Parish Councillors and listened carefully to their ideas, shared ours, and I have been keeping them up to date on the situation.

In addition to speaking with the Parish, I have also met with concerned residents individually to listen and answer their questions.

I am grateful to have been provided the opportunity at Council to respond to claims about Three Rivers' intentions over the site with the facts.

It is simply not true to suggest that Three Rivers want to "remove" a community space. The Council continues its efforts to provide a brand new, and crucially more widely used, community space on the site.

I used the hall as a child, but since then the British Red Cross have restricted use of the current hall for many years. The building itself also now needs significant investment and is in a dilapidated state.

Three Rivers would like the new hall to be unrestricted so that people of all ages in the community can enjoy it.

As far as I am aware, there has been no 'offer' from the Parish that would meet the objective of Three Rivers to have a more widely used community hall. It is in fact unclear how the Parish proposal would allow for any community use.

As I understand it, the Parish requested the British Red Cross assign them the lease for free to allow the Parish to move their entire offices and store their ranger equipment in the current building.

While I understand the Parish's desire for new offices, it is highly uncertain that the building could be used as office premises (almost certainly requiring planning permission for change-of-use) and not get in the way of enabling a more widely-used community hall – a key objective of Three Rivers.

Ultimately, the British Red Cross have the lease to the site and control what happens next.

Three Rivers have been engaged in negotiations for some time to agree the formal surrender of the lease and at this stage both parties are working towards an agreement in principle. It has proven difficult to agree to the terms which meet the British Red Cross's expectations.

Once agreement is reached, as the site is brownfield, affordable housing would be included on top of the new community hall as a critical step in relieving pressure on Green Belt. Lib Dem-run Three Rivers are fighting to protect as much of our Green Belt as possible from the unrealistic Government housing targets. The Government requires us to, quite rightly, to use brownfield for

housing. We also want to see the site brought back into use to provide the maximum benefit to the community – a new hall, affordable housing and other community uses.

For me, the proposal of Three Rivers is a win-win. It will provide a brand new and more widely used community hall and crucially help to protect our Green Belt. From my meetings with the Parish, I asked whether the Parish would be interested in putting themselves forward to run the new hall for the benefit of the whole community.

While other community groups have expressed interest, I've not yet had a response from the Parish. I am keen to further discuss this with them.

Three Rivers and the Parish have been working well together. In particular, our co-ordinated responses to Killingdown Farm planning appeal.

I have been supporting the Parish and Residents Association in their appeal submissions, including recommending they have a joint representative to strengthen their appeal evidence. I really hope this positive and constructive relationship can be built upon to the benefit of the community.

**RESOLVED:**

That the petition be received and noted and as required under Rule 18 a letter be sent to the Lead Petitioner advising of the response provided at the meeting.

## **POLICY**

**PR50/21**

### **THREE RIVERS DISTRICT COUNCIL - TREE STRATEGY 2022 -2027**

The purpose of this report was to summarise the content and implications of the Final Tree Strategy for the District, and recommend that the final version of the Strategy is adopted by Three Rivers District Council (Appendix B – Final Tree Strategy).

The Principal Landscape Officer reported that this was a new document for the Council which sets out the Authorities approach to a range tree issues in the District. A period of public consultation was held during August and September this year and a brief summary of the areas of feedback received was included in Appendix A to the report and included officer responses to the feedback. Some minor grammatical and technical amendments had been made to the strategy for approval tonight. The Strategy would be reviewed and updated again in 5 years' time.

Members made the following comments:

- There had been 45 responses to the consultation and asked if any amendments to the strategy were made in the light of those responses other than the grammatical and technical changes.
- Paragraph 95 of the strategy refers to the watering of mature trees as being critical to their establishment so wondered why hydration bags had not been included.
- Would it be useful to reference the detailed specification in the strategy which could assist residents?
- At point 108 it stated that a member of the public can request a TPO but had to advise the nature of any threat. Shouldn't the value of the tree be sufficient rather than sight a specific threat? The wording in the policy made it appear that the member of the public had to state the nature of

any threat – could that be amended so that there is no requirement to provide that.

- Thanked officers for the work they had done and the people who responded to the consultation. The District had a lot of woodland which everyone appreciated and wanted to see more trees planted.
- In the Aquadrome the trees were inspected but there were still dangerous trees that had been left or missed. Was there scope in this strategy for someone to oversee the trees to check the work?
- All of our policies assume that what is included in the policy is done correctly and if it was not done correctly that would be a separate issue. This is strategy rather than a list of jobs.
- Paragraph 115 of the strategy highlighted a vague commitment that “TRDC would carry out periodic reviews of TPOs.....” could the review time period be defined and the endeavour be more of a tighter commitment and timeframe.
- Paragraph 127 was that a legislative decision and not the Council making that decision.
- In terms of Paragraph 115 the action was to undertake a desk top review of existing TPOs and identify those that require updating so to some extent this is covered by the action being proposed.
- Wish to record the work TRDC do on trees and referred to Paragraph 121 where a weekly tree bulletin is provided to Members and interested parties. Very few authorities provided this.
- Welcomed the weekly tree bulletin and planning bulletin but would like to see a weekly licensing bulletin as well.

Councillor Chris Lloyd moved, duly seconded, that the Tree Strategy be adopted subject to any comments by the LEC Committee in January.

The Principal Landscape officer responded as follows:

- There had been no changes made to the policy due to the responses received to the consultation.
- There is a detailed specification for standard trees which includes technical information (including hydration bags) and chose not to include that level of detail in the strategy but a copy of the technical information can be sent to Members to view. Reference could be included in the strategy to that information.
- You do not need to sight a specific threat to a tree to request a TPO but the Council have to consider the legislation and whether it is expedient to serve a TPO. If officers understand that there is a clear and specific threat to a tree that might change our reasoning on whether it might be expedient to serve a TPO at that time. The wording of the policy could be amended to reflect that you do not need to identify a specific threat to the tree.
- The finer details on the policy can be discussed at the LEC meeting in January.
- On Paragraph 127 – if it was a Conservation Area notification the Council were not able to condition it to have a replacement tree without putting a TPO on it.

On being put to the Committee the motion was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being unanimous.

RESOLVED:

Approved the Final Tree Strategy subject to any comments made by the Leisure, Environment & Community Committee on 12 January 2022 and to be then formally adopted by Three Rivers District Council

**PR51/21**

## **RENT ARREARS FINANCIAL SUPPORT SCHEME FOR 2021-22**

This report provided the Committee with the proposed Rent Arrears Financial Support Scheme for 2021/22. This details how the Council will assist renters using the funding granted to the Council from the Government. The full policy can be found in Appendix One to the report.

The Head of Housing Services reported that the nearly £60k funding received from the Government was for the Council to use to assist households that were at risk of homelessness as a result of rent arrears caused by the pandemic. The paper provided details on how the Council would use that funding. It was a one off pot of money and there was no indication we would receive this money in the future and it had to be spent in this financial year.

A Member asked whether some of the paperwork customers have to provide/complete was too onerous and that there was no right to review the decision.

The Head of Housing Services replied that most of the paperwork required was paperwork that is provided as part of a normal housing application and we need that to confirm that the customer is in rent arrears and how they have accrued that. There is a limited pot of money so we have to make sure we are fair to all our customers and giving the money out appropriately. On the right to review there is legally no right to do this. All the decisions made in the housing team are subject to legislation. Customers are entitled to make a complaint if they feel any errors have been made.

Councillor Chris Lloyd moved the recommendation to adopt the policy, seconded by Councillor Andrew Scarth. The Councillor thanked officers for their report. The key thing was the Council were working with partners to provide help to our customers and to try and stop the situation occurring again. We do refer people to the CAB which is key to get them help with their debts.

A Member said the customers would be pleased a grant had been provided but if the money had to be used the end of March what was the current need and would the money be spent by then. Would the funding all go to rent arrears?

The Head of Housing Services advised the intention was not to retain any of the funding that it all be used on our customers for rent arrears. The team had spoken with colleagues in Housing Benefit to see if anybody was in rent arrears. The amount provided to the Council was set by the Government. Some social media campaigns will also be undertaken to ask anyone who is struggling to contact us. Once the policy is agreed we can then start giving out funding and did have some customers who would be eligible for funding.

An amendment was put forward to the recommendation that any amendments within the policy be delegated to the Director of Community and Environmental Services in consultation with the Lead Member for Housing. This was agreed by the proposer and seconder of the motion.

On being put to the Committee the motion was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being unanimous.

**RESOLVED:**

Agreed the policy and delegated any amendments within the policy to the Director of Community and Environmental Services in consultation with the Lead Member for Housing.

## **PR52/21 REVIEW OF STRATEGIC RISKS**

The purpose of this report was to agree the current risk ratings, mitigations and action plans for each strategic risk.

The Emergency Planning and Risk Manager advised this was a regular report coming to the Committee to review our strategic risks. One of the recommendations was to remove one of our risks around the Hertfordshire Growth Board. The Council did not have any sites identified in the District so we were proposing to remove this risk. It was proposed to include two new strategic risks around recruitment and retention of key staff and potential cyber attacks.

Members raised the following points:

- The Local Plan would not be ready for 2021 but would be adopted in 2023 – could a tighter timescales be included on that with a specific month.
- The removal of the Herts Growth Board risk - had the Council put forward any sites which were not possible to deliver?
- Failure to retain and keep our staff – it was very important to have the right staff to provide the services for our residents.
- The action plans did not really clarify the strategic way we were going to deliver this.
- Thought we reviewed this annually but it stated in the report it was last reviewed in 2018.
- Should a risk on Covid 19 be included around attending meetings?

In response to the Member questions it was advised that:

- A timetable would need to be published for the Local Plan probably in the New Year once officers have been able to clarify the timings under the Local Plan process.
- The Hertfordshire Growth Board did not agree any sites in Three Rivers which were put forward.
- This report was looking at the strategy and risk register not the detailed action plans.
- On staff retention the staff morale point was the risk and the Council do not have low morale. As part of the staff PDRs we monitor two things around staff morale and motivation and they usually come out really well. The mitigation was around looking at those in the staff appraisals and the action plan was included in the table.
- There was not much of an action plan yet on the two new risks but if the Committee did agree to add them then the actions plans would be developed before coming back next time. The Council were not experiencing problems in retention it was around recruiting which had been difficult over the last 18 months as there was so much competition particularly around HGV drivers.
- The report was not listing out problems we have we were scanning the horizon to have strategic risks in place on things which could go wrong in the future if we don't do something now and putting in mitigation measures.

- The risk management strategy was last reviewed in 2018. Strategic risks are reviewed twice a year by this Committee and operational risks reviewed by the Audit Committee. The strategy is reviewed internally.
- On Covid 19 it was more of an operational risk and each of the operational risks registers which get attached to the service plans would take that into account.

On being put to the Committee the recommendation was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being unanimous.

RESOLVED:

Noted the updated Strategic Risk Register and agreed to the closing of risk ST05 and the inclusion of two new strategic risks.

## **RESOURCES**

### **PR53/21 STRATEGIC, SERVICE AND FINANCIAL PLANNING 2022-2025**

This report enabled the Committee to comment on its draft service plans.

A Member wondered why the date for the Local Plan was due to be completed in the next 15 days. Did the brownfield register get updated yearly and who does that.

In response to the question the Lead Member advised that the current timetable for the Local Plan would need updating and a new timetable would be issued in the new year.

The Director of Community and Environmental Services advised that the Head of Planning Policy and Projects updates the brownfield register and it was done in conjunction with the Local Plan.

The Head of Community Partnerships advised that the templates used did have the objectives from the previous year but the corporate objective around the Local Plan had been changed to 2023 which was agreed in March and at Full Council in May.

On being put to the Committee the recommendation was declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being unanimous.

RESOLVED:

That the draft service plans attached at Appendix 1 be noted and the comments made and the Committee receive the final service plans in March 2022 for recommendation to Council.

### **PR54/21 BUSINESS RATES POOLING**

This report sought approval to enter into a business rates pool with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and a number of other Districts within the County for 2022/23

The Head of Finance advised it was an annual pooling process which the Council had been invited to join. The Government had not confirmed that pooling would be an option but this would be confirmed as part of the finance settlement and the Council would have 28 days after that to sign up or not to.

On being put to the Committee the recommendations were declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being unanimous.

**RECOMMEND:**

That Council agrees that, subject to a final review following the Local Government Settlement for 2022/23, Three Rivers District Council enters into the Hertfordshire Business Rates Pool.

That Council delegate authority to the Chief Executive and the Director of Finance, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee to sign up to the Hertfordshire Business Rates Pool, within 28 days of the Local Government Finance Settlement.

**PR55/21 EXEMPTION FROM PROCUREMENT PROCEDURE RULES – LIVESTREAMING/HYBRID MEETINGS**

To advise Members that an exemption to the Procurement process was approved by the Shared Director of Finance under the Exceptional Circumstances exemption as permitted by the Council's Constitution.

An urgent decision had been agreed by the Group Leaders that the project could be progressed and completed. The reason for the decision to go with the supplier was that the existing equipment had been provided by them and this would help with the implementation of the new equipment and the training and support to livestream the meetings and hold hybrid meetings.

Grant funding was obtained by the Council for the purchase of the equipment. It was hoped to have the project completed by the end of March.

On the livestreaming of our public meetings that was a decision for full Council to make and the retention of those recordings/livestreams. Currently it was not legally possible for Members to attend meetings virtually, who are making the decisions, but it was for officers.

It was understood only one fixed camera would be provided.

**RESOLVED:**

Noted the action taken.

**PR56/21 ADDITIONAL RESTRICTIONS GRANT (ARG) FUNDING PROPOSALS**

The Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) is Central Government funding provided to local authorities to enable them to support businesses through and as they recover from the pandemic.

An initial award of funding (£1.8 million) was received by TRDC in October 2020. These monies had to be spent (or committed) by July 2021 in order for an additional amount of funding to be received.

This report identified a number of projects to support businesses and the economy in TRDC and seeks agreement for the ARG funding to be committed to these projects. This would enable the projects to commence and businesses to be supported.

The Head of Regulatory Services advised that an extra £829,000 had been received which had to be spent by the end of March. We received that because we had committed/spent the previous funding. The report identified those projects that officers had been working through to look at securing that spend. It

was evident we would need additional support to help with these projects up to the end of March to monitor the existing projects and any new projects which get approved.

Members raised the following points:

- Wanted to check the Council were not taking any administrative charge out of the grant monies.
- There seemed to be quite a few posts of staff listed are these people in post or are they new posts we are looking to recruit to.

The Head of Regulatory Services advised the Council were not taking any administrative charge and that everything on the spreadsheet was what officers were working on, although this included a Project Support resource. There were projects which do involve TRDC and this was detailed in the spreadsheet. . The business communication officer was already in post working in the Communications Team and already doing a lot of work engaging with our businesses and the funding would enable that work to continue. The Projects Support Assistant would be a new post and which we could only support for 3 months.

In terms of the additional staffing for three months, the Lead Member advised that Members needed to bear in mind that the Council were a lean authority in terms of staffing numbers. To be able to process the grants additional resources would be required.

Councillor Stephen Giles-Medhurst moved the recommendations as set out in the report, seconded by Councillor Stephen Cox, to go ahead with the schemes. Officers intended to spend the full grant funding and that there are a potential 3 - 4 other schemes be also looked at in detail. The Councillor proposed an amendment, seconded by Councillor Stephen Cox, to amend the delegation to delegate any further decisions for the spending of ARG funding to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Group Leaders, to ensure monies are committed/spent by 31 March 2022.

The Lead Member advised that there were specific rules on how the grant funding could be used.

On being put to the Committee the recommendations were declared CARRIED by the Chair the voting being unanimous.

RESOLVED:

i) Option 1: for Officers to progress the identified projects and funding, including the Project Support Officer, subject to any appropriate processes such as procurement requirements. This will enable the projects to be secured, commenced and further businesses in TRDC supported with ARG funding.

AND

ii) To delegate any further decisions for the spending of ARG funding to the Director of Finance in consultation with the Group Leaders, to ensure monies are committed/spent by 31 March 2022.

## **PR57/21 WORK PROGRAMME**

A Member advised there was a lot of items for January but not much business for March. There would be the budget monitoring report for the March meeting which can be added to the work programme.

RESOLVED:

Noted the work programme.

**PR58/21**

**PROPOSALS FOR SPENDING OF THE HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND**

As part of efforts to recover following the pandemic, Hertfordshire County Council had been provided with £6.172m funding from the Government's Household Support Fund (HSF). This funding will be used to help people in need this winter with things like the cost of food and energy.

Hertfordshire County Council are working with a range of partners across the county to make sure we can get the right help to those who need it, at the right time. This targeted approach will mean that residents can be supported and get professional assistance from the county council, borough and district councils and organisations such as HertsHelp, our Money Advice Service and local Citizens Advice services.

Three Rivers District Council will receive a total of £33,000 for food support and £44,000 for fuel support and was to be spent by 31 March 2022.

The Head of Community Partnerships advised in terms of the energy side of the fund this could be used for utility costs, warm clothes, cooking equipment and white goods. The organisations the Council was proposing to provide the fund to had been included in the report. Our housing team would be linking to the vulnerable registers scheme. If someone came forward looking for help with their rent arrears we could also offer them a food voucher or utility voucher. We would also be using the Revenue and Benefits team to reach out to our most vulnerable residents. The Council had previously supported a number of other charitable donations for food and utility support through our local Covid support fund which was small amounts of money received from the Government since September for food and subsequently for utilities. Organisations such as Homestart and the CAB had received funding. They were not listed as they were still administering that funding. The focus of this funding was on our Housing Associations, South Oxhey foodbank and Herts Mind network to reach the most vulnerable. Rickmansworth food bank had been offered funding but did not want to receive any and was the same with the local Covid support fund.

A Member advised that the Council were taking an administrative cost why was that and were other organisations also taking admin costs.

The Head of Community Partnerships advised that the admin costs had been given to the Council by Herts County Council.

The Lead Member advised again how lean the Council were on staffing and why schemes had not been delivered as quickly as Members would like. There was £6.1m to the County but only £33k and £44k to the Council if that was the case for all Councils in Herts the county would retain around £5.8m of funding. Heating costs were getting higher and higher and how many people could £44k help.

The Head of Community Partnerships said there had not been an opportunity to query the amounts allocated.

RESOLVED:

Agreed the plan for spend of the Household fund so that funds can accessed by vulnerable people during the winter to the end of March 2022 in Three Rivers through a range of partners as identified in the report.

**CHAIR**