

**Minutes of the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee
22 January 2024**

Present:

Councillor J.R. Sexton (Chair)
Councillor C. Bateson (Vice-Chair)

Councillors:

M.M. Attewell	S.M. Doran	O. Rybinski
M. Beecher	M. Gibson	K.E. Rutherford
J.R. Boughtflower	K.M. Grant	H.R.D. Williams
J. Button	K. Howkins	
J.T.F. Doran	L. E. Nichols	

Apologies: Councillors M.J. Lee

1/24 Apologies and Substitutes

Apologies were received from Councillor Lee.

2/24 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 November 2023 were agreed as a correct record.

3/24 Disclosures of Interest

Councillors Attewell and Sexton declared that they were also Surrey County Councillors.

4/24 Questions from members of the Public

There were none.

5/24 Corporate Risk Register

The Committee considered a report from the Internal Audit Manager that sought to advise the Committee of the significant strategic risks and issues and how they were identified, managed, monitored, and reported. The Internal Audit Manager highlighted that five new proposed actions were included in the Risk Action Plan. The Committee's attention was also drawn to one risk which

had moved from amber to red as part of the review which related to Climate Change and Sustainability. This was due to increased extreme weather events and their impact.

The Committee raised technical queries related to mitigations the Council was putting in place to address the impact of groundwater flooding, and how the re-registration in housing affected the decrease in numbers. The Committee also noted risk description related to delays on the Council's development schemes and requested modelling that demonstrated the developments would have delivered the yields identified if they were not delayed. Officers confirmed that answers would be provided after the meeting.

The Committee **resolved** to consider the significant strategic risks and issues highlighted in the report, ensuring continued wider reporting of the Corporate Risk Register and Risk Action Plan across other Committees.

6/24 Bureau Services and Energy Supply

The Committee considered a report from the Property Account Manager on the procurement of bureau services and gas and electric supply through Kent County Council (KCC) LASER. The current contract with the provider required renewal, and KCC LASER provided the best value as energy was purchased in large volumes at lower prices, and bulk purchasing avoided market volatility. A bureau service was also offered which helped address queries, provided monthly portfolio reviews, and allowed for usage data to be collated to help identify trends.

The Committee queried the status of the contract should Kent County Council encounter any difficulties in future. The Property Account Manager assured the Committee that there should be no impact on energy as it was purchased in bulk, but this would be raised with them and an answer provided after the meeting.

The Committee **resolved** to

- 1) Approve the Council entering into a contract for the provision of a Bureau Service and Supply of Energy (Gas and Electricity) with Kent County Council (KCC) LASER for a period from October 2024 to September 2028,
- 2) Authorise the Group Head of Assets to agree terms in respect of any necessary contract arrangements with KCC LASER; and
- 3) Authorise the Group Head of Corporate Governance to enter into a contract with the KCC LASER.

7/24 Proposed Fees and Charges for 2024-25 (as part of the budget process)

The Committee considered the Fees and Charges under the Corporate Policy and Resources Committee's remit as part of the annual Budget process. Following previous guidance from the Committee, all statutory fees were

recommended to increase by the maximum permissible by the regulator, and all discretionary fees were recommended to increase by at least 5%.

The Committee noted that the process of increasing discretionary fees by a percentage resulted in odd pences. It was proposed by Councillor Beecher and seconded by Councillor Gibson that these figures be rounded up to the nearest £5 or £10 figure. The Chair acknowledged concern from some of the Committee with the proposal and suggested that the figures instead be rounded up to the nearest pound. A vote was taken, and a majority of the Committee agreed with the amended proposal.

Some members of the Committee expressed discomfort with the proposal as on smaller charges it may result in a disproportionate increase. After some discussion, the Committee suggested that this should be applied only to discretionary fees and charges over £25, with other proposed fees and charges left unrounded.

A recorded vote was requested and the results were as follows:

For (10):	C Bateson, M Beecher, J Button, J Doran, S Doran, M Gibson, K Grant, L Nichols, J Sexton, H Williams
Against (5):	M Attewell, J Boughtflower, K Howkins, K Rutherford, O Rybinski
Abstain (0):	

The Committee **resolved** to:

1. Approve the proposed Fees and Charges for 2024-25 for this Committee with the exception of any discretionary fees and charges over £25 which will be rounded up to the nearest pound.

8/24 Revenue Growth Bids, Revenue Savings Plans, Capital Growth Bids 2024-25

The Committee considered the Revenue Growth Bids, Revenue Savings Plans, and Capital Growth Bids under the Committee's remit for 2024-25. The Chief Accountant advised the Committee that at present the budget anticipated to be presented to Council was balanced. Growth bids presented in the budget papers, if approved, would still be subject to due process by the Committee. The Chief Accountant highlighted to the Committee that a change was required to Appendix E and that "Sea Cadets" required removal.

The Committee noted anomalies in the figures against Thameside House and requested this be clarified after the meeting when a related item was to be discussed. The Committee also requested that clarification on what was included in individual budget items be provided after the meeting.

The Committee **resolved** to:

1. Approve the proposed Revenue Growth Bids, Savings Plan, and Capital Growth Bids for 2024-25 for this Committee.

9/24 Forward Plan

The Committee noted the forward plan for future committee business.

10/24 Urgent Actions

There were no urgent actions to report.

11/24 Exclusion of Public & Press (Exempt Business)

It was proposed by Councillor Bateson, seconded by Councillor Button and **resolved** that the public and press be excluded for the following agenda items, in accordance with paragraph 3 of part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) because it was likely to disclose information to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintain the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information because, disclosure to the public would prejudice the financial position of the authority in being able to undertake even-handed negotiations and finalizing acceptable contract terms.

12/24 Annual Commercial Property Report 2022/23

The Committee considered the Annual Commercial Property Report 2022/23 from the Asset Manager. The report had previously been considered by the Development Sub-Committee at their meeting on 8 January 2024 and was recommended for approval by this Committee. The Asset Manager drew the Committee's attention to the vacancy rates, portfolio value, and rent collected for the year.

The Committee noted that operating costs were lower than budgeted. The Asset Manager explained that this was due a delay in some refurbishments, though the costs of some refurbishment costs were substantially lower than anticipated.

The Committee **resolved** to:

1. Note the Annual Commercial Property Report for the year ending 31 March 2023,
2. Approve option B as outlined in the report; and
3. Approve the publication of the report to make it publicly available.

13/24 Thameside House

The Committee considered a report from the Development Advisor on the proposed demolition of Thameside House. The property had been vacant for

over ten years and was deteriorating, and additionally was incurring £295,000 per annum to the Council in business rates and security costs. Demolition of the site would provide savings. Cost of internal refurbishment and re-use of the site would far exceed anticipated costs of demolition.

The Committee provided suggestions for options for the site and the Group Head – Assets confirmed that if the procurement exercise was successful, a report would be presented to the Committee which included options for the site. A consultation would be undertaken. A full survey of the site had been undertaken which would form part of the tender. The Committee provided suggestions for requests that should also be included in the tender.

The Committee noted that the final decision for the outcome of the site would be made by members.

The Committee requested that the minutes for this item be public.

A recorded vote was requested and the results were as follows:

For (9):	C Bateson, M Beecher, J Button, J Doran, S Doran, K Grant, L Nichols, K Rutherford, J Sexton
Against (0):	
Abstain (6):	M Attewell, J Boughtflower, M Gibson, K Howkins, O Rybinski, H Williams

The Committee **resolved** to authorise officers to undertake a tender process to procure a demolition contractor to demolish Thameside House.

14/24 Corporate Policy & Resources Chair's Updates

There were no updates for this meeting.

The meeting ended at 20:45.

15/24 Actions Arising From Meeting

The following actions rose from the meeting:

- Further information would be provided on what mitigations the Council was putting in place with regards to the impact of groundwater flooding
- Further information would be provided on how the re-registration process brought the numbers on the housing register down.
- Members would be provided with modelling that demonstrated the Council's developments would have delivered the yields promised if they were developed when intended.
- Further information would be provided on the outcome of the energy contract if Kent County Council entered financial difficulties.

- Justification for the reduction in some car park fees would be provided.
- Clarification on the numbers listed against Thameside House listed in Appendix C of the Revenue Growth Bids, Revenue Savings Plans, Capital Growth Bids 2024-25
- Clarification would be provided on what was covered under the Chief Executive's Training budget listed in Appendix F of the Revenue Growth Bids, Revenue Savings Plans, Capital Growth Bids 2024-25
- Further information would be provided on when we anticipate business rates liability to end on Thameside House.