



FARNHAM TOWN COUNCIL



Report
Council

Date: 15 December 2022

Strategy Day. 5th November 2022

1. Summary

The Strategy day considered a wide number of issues including the draft budget for 2023-24 in light of the current economic climate and proposals to change the committee structure effective from May 2023 in light of the expected reduction in the numbers of councillors following the Governance Review. The potential for introducing allowances for members, particularly those who had dependants was also discussed as was the vision for the Council moving forward.

2. Vision Statement Update

It was agreed to recommend an updated Vision “Farnham Town Council strives to be the influential and effective voice for Farnham bringing together the views of all organisations working for the good of the town and enhancing the well-being of all the community.

Farnham Town Council aims to be an efficient and effective organisation providing high-quality, sustainable services and facilities for the residents and businesses of Farnham whilst addressing the climate challenge, with a strong and respected voice representing Farnham’s best interests”.

3. Finances

The Town Clerk outlined a range of pressures facing the Council as it prepared its budget for 2023-24 including the cost of living crisis with inflation running in double digits, the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis with prices tripling, the climate crisis and covid 19 recovery. There were a number of significant pressures on principal authority budgets and particular service pressures on services for young people and older people in particular. There was expected to be a £60bn hole in public sector budgets.

4. Service Update

Members identified the following as priorities for the year ahead (not in any particular order of priority):

- Services for young people given the success of what Godalming Town Council was taking forward
- Supporting the implementation of a Business Improvement District for Farnham
- Further consolidating Farnham as a World Craft Town as a tool for growth and tourism.
- Meeting the needs of the community where there were gaps in provision with reductions in principal authority services.
- Retaining community assets for Farnham people (including the museum and library)

- Encouraging devolution of services by principal authorities,
- Continuing well-being support and the hardship fund with community partners

It was noted that there was now some CIL coming on stream to support Farnham Infrastructure and community facilities, although there would be high demand on the fund. It would be time to review the funding/allocation processes early in 2023.

5. Members allowances

Councillors discussed the pros and cons of members' allowances which were not currently claimed by Farnham Town councillors, apart from an allowance to cover the mayoralty expenses. On the one hand councillors as volunteers enjoyed a huge amount of other volunteer support from the community. However, there were real difficulties in retaining councillors who had dependants to look after (whether young children or elderly or disabled relatives). It was noted that FTC was working with the National Association to correct the anomaly in the legislation whereby parish councillors were no longer able to claim such allowances. It was noted that allowances could encourage diversity and it was important that people were not put off standing for council because they could not afford costs they might incur. On balance, it was felt allowances should not be introduced at this time but lobbying for dependant carers' allowances should be continued.

6. Review of Administration Priorities

Members noted the wide range of achievements during the 2019-23 administration which included:

- Neighbourhood Plan Review
- Asset Transfers
- Craft Town/World Craft City Status
- Council of the Year 2021
- Not for Profit Organisation of the Year 2022
- In Bloom Gold and Category Winners 2019. Gold 2022
- First Green Flag for Gostrey Meadow
- Farnham Infrastructure Programme contribution by FTC staff and councillors to encourage community engagement
- Covid community support/Hardship Fund
- Hale Chapels progress
- West Street Cemetery Gates restoration
- Central Car Park Public Convenience refurbishment
- Young People focus, new Youth Shelter
- Support for Business through covid and beyond
- New Literary Festival launched
- Effective arrangements in line with protocols for Jubilee, death of Monarch and proclamation

This represented positive working together between councillors, officers and the wider community.

Committee Structure

The Group considered proposals for a revised structure (attached at Annex 1). It was agreed, with an expected reduction in councillors from 18 to 16 to reduce the number of main Working Groups from 4 to 3 and the number of councillors on each from 6 to 5. This was agreed by Strategy & Finance for recommendation to Council

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- 1) The vision in section 2 be adopted;**
- 2) The achievements for the administration 2019-2023 be welcomed;**
- 3) The areas of focus for the forthcoming period be progressed;**
- 4) The new structure for Council from 2023 at Annex 1 be implemented.**