

COUNCIL – 20 JULY 2023

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE

Executive Summary

The Council is invited to consider the recommendations from the meetings of the Executive held on 15 June and 13 July 2023. The extracts from the published minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2023 are set out below, together with the extracts from the draft minutes of the Executive on 13 July 2023.

THE EXECUTIVE – 15 JUNE 2023

8A. NOTICE OF MOTION - CLLR E NICHOLSON - RETROSPECTIVE SURFACE WATER ACTION EXE23-046

At its meeting on 30 March 2023, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive.

Councillor E Nicholson

“Retrospective Surface Water Action

The latest State of the UK Climate report indicates the UK has become wetter over the last few decades, although with significant annual variation. 2011-2020 was 9% wetter than 1961-1990. From the start of the observational record in 1862, six of the ten wettest years across the UK have occurred since 1998.

The recent UK climate projections (UKCP18) provide the most up-to-date assessment of how the UK climate could change over the 21st century. Overall, the UK is expected to experience wetter winters and drier summers.

However, rain that does fall in summer will likely be more intense than what we currently experience. For example, rainfall from an event that typically occurs once every 2 years in summer is expected to increase by around 25%. This will impact on the frequency and severity of surface water flooding, particularly in urban areas.

In towns and cities, flash floods are a growing problem. Concrete can't soak up rainwater, so in heavy downpours it has nowhere to go except into drains, overloading sewers and setting off flash floods. During the recent heavy rainfall, the water caused slippages within the station underpass and led to pooling of water within areas of the town centre.

Therefore this motion proposes that this Council:

1. Engages with South West Trains to seek to secure surface water drainage systems are retrospectively fitted to the two entrances to the station underpass and /or other measures to capture rainwater are installed to reduce the excess water overspill causing slippage within the underpass.
2. That Woking planning applications continue to be assessed with surface water drainage systems in mind and that the County, as the lead flood authority is consulted on planning applications where required.

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3. That Woking Borough Council work proactively with the partners to green Victoria Square, and introduce features such as rainwater gardens in line with the aspirations of the town centre Masterplan.”

Councillor Nicholson spoke in support of the Motion, commenting on the need to work with partners to improve the town’s sustainability and to consider surface water drainage systems to capture and recycle rainwater. The Executive welcomed the Motion noting that it concerned working with partners to deliver, with the Council providing help and support. The Executive noted the rainwater gardens already installed in parts of the Borough and how the Council could encourage residents to use sustainable solutions, such as when installing driveways.

Councillor Nicholson drew attention to an amendment to the Motion to replace the words ‘South West Trains’ with the words ‘Network Rail and South Western Railway’. The amendment was due to South West Trains having been replaced by South Western Railway, and to reflect the parties with responsibilities for the station. The Executive was supportive of both Cllr Nicholson’s Motion and the amendment, and agreed an amended Motion to read as follows:

“Retrospective Surface Water Action

The latest [State of the UK Climate](#) report indicates the UK has become wetter over the last few decades, although with significant annual variation. 2011-2020 was 9% wetter than 1961-1990. From the start of the observational record in 1862, six of the ten wettest years across the UK have occurred since 1998.

The recent [UK climate projections \(UKCP18\)](#) provide the most up-to-date assessment of how the UK climate could change over the 21st century. Overall, the UK is expected to experience wetter winters and drier summers.

However, rain that does fall in summer will likely be more intense than what we currently experience. For example, rainfall from an event that typically occurs once every 2 years in summer is expected to increase by around 25%. This will impact on the frequency and severity of surface water flooding, particularly in urban areas.

In towns and cities, flash floods are a growing problem. Concrete can’t soak up rainwater, so in heavy downpours it has nowhere to go except into drains, overloading sewers and setting off flash floods. During the recent heavy rainfall, the water caused slippages within the station underpass and led to pooling of water within areas of the town centre.

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1. Engages with Network Rail and South Western Railway to seek to secure surface water drainage systems are retrospectively fitted to the two entrances to the station underpass and /or other measures to capture rainwater are installed to reduce the excess water overspill causing slippage within the underpass.
2. That Woking planning applications continue to be assessed with surface water drainage systems in mind and that the County, as the lead flood authority is consulted on planning applications where required.
3. That Woking Borough Council work proactively with the partners to green Victoria Square, and introduce features such as rainwater gardens in line with the aspirations of the town centre Masterplan.”

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the Motion, as amended by the Executive, be supported.

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8B. NOTICE OF MOTION - CLLR K DAVIS - DIGITAL SPINE CONNECTION EXE23-047

At its meeting on 30 March 2023, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive.

Councillor K Davis

“At the March Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting, Enterprise M3, the Local Enterprise Partnership discussed the Guildford to Basingstoke Digital Spine and confirmed that Woking would not have a spur to join the Gigabit link.

Connecting to the Internet via Gigabit links is a key part of the Digital Strategy as it is important for the economic output of the borough as well as the limitless opportunities high speed links provides to residents.

Would the Council please investigate opportunities that exist with a view to ensuring that the borough is connected to the fastest possible digital backbone as soon as possible and certainly within three years if it cannot be achieved within the Digital Strategy period.”

Councillor Davis was not in attendance at the meeting to present the Motion. The Executive discussed the Motion which concerned investigating opportunities to provide gigabit capable broadband to local businesses and residents. Councillor Roberts, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, advised that sufficient provision was most likely to be provided within the next three years by private sector network providers. However, the Portfolio Holder was supportive of investigating other opportunities to accelerate access to gigabit capable broadband should the Council not be achieving the proper balance of access for residents and businesses, and affordability in terms of resources available to the Council.

The Executive was supportive of the broad principle of the Motion. The Leader commented that further information could be provided ahead of Council on 20 July 2023 regarding potential future opportunities.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the Motion be supported.

8C. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS)

Councillor Roberts, Portfolio Holder for Finance, introduced the report which provided an updated Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2024/25 to 2028/29 and which also set out a timetable with clear milestones for a further update of the MTFS in September 2023. An updated Budget Timetable (Annex 4 to the report) was tabled at the meeting. It was noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 10 July 2023, had considered the MTFS report under its remit for pre-decision scrutiny.

The Portfolio Holder explained the background to the report, drawing attention to the Section 114 Notice which had been issued by the Section 151 Officer on 7 June 2023 and the Chief Executive's Response. The Executive was informed that the MTFS set out the strategic financial approach that the Council would adopt in supporting delivery of the Improvement and Recovery Plan. The Plan would be reported to an Extraordinary Council Meeting on 22 August 2023. It was noted that the MTFS and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) would be reported quarterly to the Executive. Regarding the budget shortfall of £11m, the Executive was invited to support the recommendation to undertake consultation and engagement to allow the Council to take decisions on the Budget in September 2023 and February 2024. Engagement with residents had commenced in early July regarding discretionary services, and formal consultation with staff and Unison would commence on 24 July 2023. It was noted that a reduction in staff headcount of approximately 60 FTE in the Council overall was expected given the scale of the savings proposals. The Executive expressed regret at the proposed staff redundancies and gave a commitment for the process to be done in a responsible and compassionate way and to conduct the proper consultations. Regarding the Deficit of £1.2bn, it was noted that engagement with the Government Department (DLUHC) would commence shortly led by Commissioners with the Council's statutory officers.

The Executive acknowledged that it was a difficult and challenging time for residents, business and Council staff. The positive relationship between the Council and the Commissioners appointed by Government was highlighted, noting that the aims of both were fully aligned. Regarding the assumed 20% rise in car park charges in 2024/25, it was highlighted that planning assumptions would be revised following the Parking Strategy due in Autumn 2023 which would consider best value. The Portfolio Holder undertook to review the 14 Guiding Principles with the Interim Director of Finance to ensure that the Council was not undermining its approach to the Greener Woking agenda. It was added that there was a need to review the Woking For All Strategy and that Net Zero would form part of that review. Following a question regarding Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), it was noted that the Interim Director of Finance was preparing a briefing note on CIL for Members.

The Executive commended Officers for their resilience and commitment during this challenging time. The Leader of the Council advised that the survey on discretionary services would be available for local people to complete until 10 August 2023 and the Leader encouraged residents to complete the survey before the deadline. It was highlighted that paper copies of the survey were available, such as at the Council's community centres.

RECOMMENDED to Council

- That (i) the Budget Timetable, as updated, be noted;**
- (ii) the Guiding Principles be approved;**
- (iii) the Capital Planning Principles be approved;**

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- (iv) it be noted that the Capital Planning Methodology will be re-designed before Budget Council on 8 February 2024;
- (v) it be noted that the Investment Programme has been suspended indefinitely on grounds of affordability;
- (vi) the savings for consultation (FFP 3(A)) including those relating to possible reductions in the Council's staffing establishment be approved;
- (vii) it be noted that the Treasury Management Strategy, Financing Strategy, and related documents will be re-set for Budget Council in February 2024;
- (viii) the MTFS and embedded MTFP as an estimate of the Council's current financial position be approved; noting that the figures will change as further updating takes place; and
- (ix) the preparation of an Assets Rationalisation Plan be noted.

Reason: The decision is sought to ensure open and transparent governance in the financial affairs of the Council in balancing the 2024/25 Budget.

8D. SHEERWATER REGENERATION

Councillor Forster, Portfolio Holder for Key Projects, introduced the report which provided an interim position on the Sheerwater regeneration reflecting the very serious financial position of the Council. The Portfolio Holder expressed regret that, given the Council's significant financial challenges, the Council could not afford the future borrowing required to complete the regeneration. The Executive was informed that the report proposed that the current Development Agreement between the Council and ThamesWey for the delivery of the Sheerwater regeneration project be brought to an end. It was noted that it was proposed for ThamesWey to complete the three phases – Copper, Red and Yellow – which were currently mid-construction. The Council would work with housing associations or private developers to complete the Sheerwater regeneration scheme, and/or consider refurbishing and reletting existing homes. The Executive noted that the report also proposed to rebalance the affordable housing ratio in order to achieve the balanced community ambition of the planning consent. The Portfolio Holder highlighted that the Council wrote to residents ahead of the Executive meeting in order to explain the situation. The detrimental effect of the regeneration scheme on Housing Revenue Account (HRA) rental income was raised.

The Executive was sorry that the Council was not in a position to complete the regeneration itself and recognised the ongoing disruption, concern and uncertainty faced by Sheerwater residents. It was confirmed that the Council remained committed to delivering a regenerated Sheerwater and would be seeking the views of the local community on alternative options. A report on the future delivery of the wider Regeneration Scheme would be received by the Executive and Council in the Autumn.

RECOMMENDED to Council

- That (i) the existing Development Agreement between the Council and ThamesWey for the delivery of the Sheerwater regeneration project be brought to an end;
- (ii) ThamesWey do not commence any new phases following those currently under construction;
- (iii) ThamesWey be authorised to take such actions, including seeking technical and planning approvals as necessary, to bring its involvement in the project to a cost-effective end in consultation with the Council;
- (iv) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to give an Executive Undertaking if the Planning Committee approves the changes to the affordable housing as outlined in the report;
- (v) negotiations between the Council and ThamesWey commence on an unwinding of the previously agreed barter arrangement; and
- (vi) the Special Lettings Policy adopted in 2017 be temporarily suspended until such as time as the wider scheme and Sheerwater Community Charter have been reviewed.

Reason: To enable further work to progress that will deliver a sustainable delivery option for the Sheerwater Regeneration project whilst reducing financial risks and exposure to the Council.

8E. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) RECOVERY PLAN

The Executive received a report which provided an update on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget, including forecasts for the coming 5 years, along with actions that were being pursued to deliver a sustainable long-term HRA. Councillor Johnson, Portfolio Holder for Housing, advised that the HRA was in a difficult situation and forecast a deficit up to and including 2026-27. The Executive was advised that the HRA had been adversely impacted by a combination of factors, including lost rental income due to the Sheerwater Regeneration scheme, nationally imposed rents cuts between 2016 and 2020, energy inflation, and internal cross charging practice. The report set out a path to recovery and included the main areas of search for savings. The need to work with Surrey County Council and partners to meet the capital budget shortfall was highlighted. It was noted that the Annual Maintenance Plan (AMP) for 2023/24 had been reviewed and reduced with a focus on essential works only, for example, fire safety remedial works. Due to the suspension of some works relating to the Decent Homes programme, the Council would be required to self-refer to the Social Housing Regulator.

RECOMMENDED to Council

- That (i) the update on the Housing Revenue Account budgets be noted;
- (ii) the Housing Annual Maintenance Plan (AMP) budget for 2023-24, included in the Housing Investment Programme, be increased to £5,330,000 to allow essential and statutory remedial works to be completed, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report;
- (iii) the Strategic Director – Communities, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, be authorised to agree the disposal of vacant housing assets as required; and
- (iv) any capital receipts from disposals of vacant housing assets be held in the Major Repairs Reserve for investment in the maintenance of the Council's homes.

Reason: To ensure the Council is able set a sustainable Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget and deliver on its statutory and regulatory housing duties.

8F. PUBLIC REALM USAGE POLICY

The Executive received a report which recommended to Council the adoption of the updated Public Realm Usage Policy in order to better manage the town centre spaces open to the public, and the events permitted within the town centre denoted boundary, for the benefit of all users. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered the report at its meeting on 10 July 2023 under its remit for pre-decision scrutiny. A copy of the recommendations of the Committee were before the Executive and set out that the Committee welcomed the Policy, that every effort be made to ensure that such a policy be delivered on a cost neutral basis, and that due consideration be given such that charities not be financially burdened by the policy. The Executive noted the recommendations from the Committee and agreed that Officers should consider how the Policy could be delivered on a cost neutral basis but not financially burden charities.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted;
- (ii) Officers consider how the Public Realm Usage Policy could be delivered on a cost neutral basis but not financially burden charities; and

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the updated Public Realm Usage Policy, attached as Appendix 1 to the report, be adopted.

Reason: To ensure fair and consistent usage of the town centre to promote footfall and economic prosperity.

Supplementary Report – Recommendations of the Executive

The Council has the authority to determine the recommendations set out above.

Background Papers: None.

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Date Published: 19 July 2023

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