

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
EXECUTIVE

held on 15 July 2021

Present:

Cllr S Ashall (Vice Chair, in the Chair)

Cllr K M Davis
Cllr G W Elson

Cllr D Harlow
Cllr C S Kemp

Also Present: Councillors A-M Barker, K Howard and D E Hughes.

Absent: Councillor A Azad.

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 17 June 2021 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Azad.

3. URGENT BUSINESS

There were no items of Urgent Business under Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The interest of Councillor A Azad was referred to in the agenda but it should be noted that Councillor Azad sent apologies to the meeting.

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor K M Davis declared a non-pecuniary interest in any items concerning the companies of which he was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that speaking and voting were permissible.

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor D Harlow declared a non-pecuniary interest in any items concerning the companies of which she was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that speaking and voting were permissible.

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor C S Kemp declared a non-pecuniary interest in any items concerning the companies of which he was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that speaking and voting were permissible.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Chief Executive, Julie Fisher, declared a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning the companies of which she was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that Mrs Fisher could advise the Executive on those items.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Director of Finance, Leigh Clarke, declared a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning the companies of which she was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that Mrs Clarke could advise the Executive on those items.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Director of Planning, Giorgio Framalico, declared a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning the companies of which he was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that Mr Framalico could advise the Executive on those items.

The interest of the Director of Neighbourhood Services, Geoff McManus, was referred to in the agenda but it should be noted that Mr McManus sent apologies to the meeting.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Director of Housing, Louise Strongitharm, declared a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning the companies of which she was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that Mrs Strongitharm could advise the Executive on those items.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Director of Finance, Leigh Clarke, declared a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning Woking Football Club and/or the GolDev Woking Limited development. The interest arose from (i) her husband having a small shareholding in Woking Football Club and (ii) being a Council-appointed director of Kingfield Community Sports Centre Limited. The interest was such that Mrs Clarke could advise the Executive on those items.

5. QUESTIONS

The Chairman reported that a question had been submitted by Dr Anthony Fraser under Section 3 of the Executive Procedure Rules regarding borrowing figures in the Green Book. A copy of the question together with the reply was before the Executive. The Chairman advised that Dr Fraser would be sent a copy of the reply to his question.

6. HOUSING STRATEGY EXE21-051

Councillor Harlow, the Portfolio Holder for Housing, introduced the report which sought approval of the Executive to recommend to Council the adoption of the Housing Strategy 2021-2026. Following the good response to the consultation, the Executive noted that Officers were pulling together a full consultation report with the intention of publishing it on the Council's website and providing a copy at the next Housing Task Group. Following a question, it was noted that some Thameswey properties outside of the Borough were used in the Council's Let's Rent Scheme. Regarding shared ownership schemes, Officers advised that the main barrier was the number of new homes built as such schemes were usually delivered through new development. The low number of homes delivered by Thameswey was highlighted, however the Portfolio Holder commented that there had been a low number of new builds generally.

Downsizing was discussed and it was noted that the aspiration was to consult people currently under occupying and to understand what incentives would encourage them to downsize.

Members welcomed the Housing Strategy and congratulated Officers on their hard work.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That (i) the Housing Strategy 2021-2026, as attached to the report, be approved; and

(ii) the Director of Housing, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, be delegated authority to make minor amendments to the Strategy and to update the action plan as required.

Reason: The Council has a legal duty to have an up-to-date Housing Strategy in place.

7. HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY EXE21-016

The Executive received a report which sought approval of the Executive to recommend to Council the adoption of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2031. Attention was drawn to a supplementary report which set out the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee following the Committee's pre-decision scrutiny of the Strategy at its meeting on 12 July 2021. The Executive noted that the Strategy identified five key priority areas to deliver the Council's vision for the health and wellbeing of the Woking population. Members welcomed that an Action Plan would set out the key actions to deliver the identified priorities. It was suggested that health and wellbeing implications could be considered in all Council policies. It was also suggested that specific reference be made to the health needs of care leavers and refugees.

The Executive welcomed the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, noting the synergy with the current work on the Housing Strategy and Town Centre Masterplan. The Chairman thanked all those involved for their work on the Strategy, noting that the Strategy underpinned the corporate objective to improve the health and wellbeing of all residents.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2031 be approved.

Reason: The priorities identified in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy will positively impact and support the health and wellbeing of the residents of Woking.

8. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS) EXE21-056

Councillor Ashall, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Financial Planning and Policy, introduced the report which provided a forecast of the financial position of the Council for the four years to 2024/25 and outlined the approach to aligning the budgets of the Council with the priority outcomes defined within the Corporate Plan. Councillor Ashall stated that the Council faced significant financial challenges arising from the impact of the Covid

pandemic and that there was significant uncertainty around the speed of recovery of the economy and Government funding. Councillor Ashall reported that the Council had received confirmation this week from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) that it would not support the Council's request for Exceptional Support for 2020/21 and 2021/22. It was noted that the reasons that MHCLG was not supporting the Council's request were that the Council's overall financial position, including current levels of reserves, did not meet the criteria for support, the Council was not facing an immediate unmanageable cost pressure, and there were a range of actions that the Council could take to help manage its financial position in coming years.

Attention was drawn to the proposal to establish a "Fit for the Future" Programme which would drive out and maximise the benefits from the Council's investments into the regeneration of Woking, as well as ensuring that the Council remained a lean, efficient and digitally modern Council. The Fit for the Future Programme would be in support of the Council's commitment to engage with its communities on establishing priorities and their delivery. It was noted that the Finance Task Group and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be involved with formulating the details of the Programme. The Executive heard that the Programme would complement and not duplicate the assurances from the Council's independent auditors and its statutory Section 151 Officer. The Portfolio Holder stated that he would ask the Chief Executive to write to the Council's independent auditors requiring them to commit to a timetable to get their audit of the Council's accounts back on timetable. The Executive was reminded that the independent auditors issued an unmodified audit opinion on the financial statements on 26 November 2020. The Portfolio Holder proposed four additional resolves (ix to xii) which were agreed by the Executive.

Following a question regarding the impact of the reduction in government grants, the Executive was advised that table 7.1 in the report assumed a reduction in general grants and New Homes Bonus of £1.874m by 2024/25. Regarding the Investment Programme, it was noted that the project list would be part of the programme of reviews and that priorities would be set following engagement with residents in developing the Corporate Plan. The Director of Finance explained that should the conditions be met for the loan to GolDev to be progressed, the Council would borrow the money from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) and that the margin on the loan to GolDev would provide additional income to the Council for a short period during the development. It was noted that the forecasts in the report had not been specifically amended to reflect the closure of Victoria Arch.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the evidence base on demographics (Appendix 1) be noted;
- (ii) the priority outcomes, in the Corporate Plan which form the basis of the Council's business and financial planning set out in Section 3, be reviewed through the process highlighted within the report;
- (iii) the target for areas of search to identify further efficiency and savings proposals (Section 7) be noted;
- (iv) the development of a four year Medium Term Financial Strategy drawing from the Corporate Plan priority outcomes be agreed;
- (v) it be agreed to continue to develop activity and financial plans through the Fit for the Future programme to deliver the savings and resource realignment needed in each of the next four years to operate within the resources available;

- (vi) the development of the engagement and consultation plan to embed a culture of this way of working into decision making processes be continued;
- (vii) reports be received on more detailed plans for the next four years in November 2021;
- (viii)a £500k budget for external support for the Fit for the Future programme, to be funded by revenue reserves or the Flexible Use of Capital receipts where the criteria for this flexibility are met, be approved;
- (ix) the confirmation from the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) that they are not supporting our request for Exceptional Support for 2020/21 and 2021/22 be noted;
- (x) the reasons MHCLG are not supporting our request, highlighted below, be noted:
 - the MHCLG assessment of the Council's overall financial position, including current levels of reserves, does not meet the criteria for support.
 - the Council is not facing an immediate unmanageable cost pressure.
 - there are a range of actions that the Council could take to help manage its financial position in coming years.
- (xi) a letter from the Chief Executive to our independent auditors stressing:
 - the critical role that they have in their independent audit of our accounts
 - and the reliance we place on their audit as part of our strategies and our fit for the future transformation programmerequiring them to commit to a timetable to complete the outstanding audit of accounts so that we can place the required assurance and reliance on our established governance arrangements be agreed; and
- (xii) to note that in order to ensure the independent audit of our accounts and the fit for the future programme are aligned and complimentary, a comprehensive assessment of the following will be commissioned from independent advisors and made available to our independent auditors:
 - a. The current net realisable value of each of the assets
 - b. Full details of borrowing including their terms and conditions
 - c. Full details of all preferential creditors and the amounts owed
 - d. Full details of outstanding contractual obligations involving future income to be received and expenditure to be incurred
 - e. Details of any fixed or floating charges on any assets

- f. Full details of any grants, loans or other contracts which contain performance conditions which, if not met today, would incur financial penalties for the Council or any of its companies

Monthly reports of progress on this will be provided to the Lead Councillor for Finance and to the Standards and Audit Committee

The independent advisors and auditors shall have full and unfettered access to all information

The Council shall seek completion of this audit work by 31 December 2021 as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

Reason: To update Members on the issues which need to be taken into account in the priority and budget setting process for 2022/23 – 2024/25 and beyond.

9. TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN EXE21-057

Councillor Elson, Portfolio Holder for Planning Policy, introduced the report which provided an overview of the Woking Town Centre Masterplan and which sought Executive approval of the budget of £100,000 for the preparation of the Masterplan. Discussion ensued regarding timeframes and it was highlighted that the report set out three options for consultation on the Masterplan ranging from 6 months to 36 months. It was noted that community engagement would be central to the preparation of the Masterplan and that timeframes could be clarified as the Masterplan journey progressed. It was noted that the Masterplan would sit within the Council's current planning policy framework and that there was a need to ensure momentum to take forward the Masterplan as soon as possible in order to provide certainty and to show where investments could take place. Following a question regarding the rail station flyover, the Executive was informed that, although the flyover was not part of Network Rail's current capital programme, it remained part of its future planning to increase capacity on its rail network and the reason Network Rail had invested significant funds into the new Victoria Arch bridge.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the overview of the Town Centre Masterplan, as set out in the report, be noted;
- (ii) the budget for the preparation of the Masterplan, which is estimated to be £100,000, be approved; and
- (iii) delegated authority be given to the Director of Planning, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, to oversee the preparation of the Town Centre Masterplan to its adoption.

Reason: To help provide a framework to guide development within the Town Centre.

10. ANIMAL WELFARE POLICY EXE21-036

The Executive received a report which sought approval to undertake public consultation and engagement in order to inform a draft Animal Welfare Policy. The Chairman stated that the Conservative administration wanted the Council to be a leader in championing compassionate policies that advanced the welfare of animals in the Borough. The Executive welcomed the Responsibility Guide which had been produced as a useful document for residents to help signpost to organisations responsible for each aspect of animal welfare. The issue of fireworks, snare traps and the giving of pets as prizes were raised and it was noted that individual animal welfare policies would be addressed during the consultation process. Following a question, it was confirmed that animal welfare was dealt with under the Licensing Committee.

RESOLVED

That public consultation be undertaken as proposed in the report and engagement be carried out to inform a draft Animal Welfare Policy.

Reason: To promote animal welfare, publish a draft guide and development of Council policy.

11. EQUALITIES ANNUAL REPORT - 2021 EXE21-027

The Executive received the Equalities Annual Report – 2021 which set out the progress on the equalities agenda. The Council's support to employees during the Covid pandemic was highlighted, as well as the Council's wider role as service provider and community leader in supporting the most vulnerable in the community. Attention was drawn to the comprehensive programme of equality and wellbeing awareness which had taken place during the year with a focus on the impact of the pandemic and lockdown. Following a request regarding the Council employee figures, Officers agreed to ensure that future annual reports included a percentage breakdown against the employee figures in order for comparisons to be made with the percentage figures for the local population so that any areas of underrepresentation could be identified.

RESOLVED

That the report be received.

Reason: To meet the requirement to report on annual progress on the equality agenda.

12. TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21 EXE21-025

The Executive received a report on Treasury Management performance for 2020-21 in accordance with the Council's policy on Treasury Management. Following a question regarding plans for repayment of loans, the Executive was informed that all the annuity loans were repaid over the life of the loan with payments being part interest and part principal repayment. It was explained that the revenue budget incorporated the interest costs and the principal repayments as part of the MRP (minimum revenue provision) and therefore the budget made provision for repayment. It was noted that the payback term on loans to subsidiaries were different depending on the loan facility agreed by the Council.

The Executive was advised that the Victoria Square model would be updated again with the latest assumptions over the summer due to higher interest rates.

RESOLVED

That the annual report on Treasury Management performance for 2020/21 be received, and the compliance with the Council's approved arrangements be noted.

Reason: To receive the annual report on Treasury Management performance for 2020/21 in accordance with the Council's policy on Treasury Management.

13. RISK MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY ANNUAL REPORT EXE21-026

The Executive received the annual report on Risk Management and Business Continuity. It was reported that work to update the Risk Management Strategy was underway and a report would be submitted to the Executive in September for review and adoption.

The Executive thanked everyone involved with ensuring the continuing delivery of Council services during lockdown. Discussion ensued on lessons learnt following the Council's response to Covid. The Executive was advised that communication had been identified as an area for improvement, particularly in regards to the Council's Control Room. It was noted that the capability to work virtually over Zoom had been enacted fairly quickly at the start of lockdown. It was considered a good time to review arrangements in light of hybrid working and the rollout of Microsoft Office 365, which would improve communications between staff. The issues of cyber security and late running audits were also raised.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted and that Risk Management arrangements will be reviewed and updated in the coming months to ensure that the strategy and associated guidance is sufficient to match the needs of the Council.

Reason: The continuous development of Risk Management and Business Continuity is essential to ensure effective management and planning within the Council.

14. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING INFORMATION

The Executive considered the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information (Green Book) April and May 2021. The Chief Executive apologised for the lateness of the publication of the Green Book and explained that Finance colleagues were under much pressure in terms of the accounts and supporting businesses with grants. Officers would endeavour to ensure that the next Green Book was published on time.

Following a question regarding the low targets for the percentage of applications determined on time, the Executive was informed that the planning targets in the Green Book were national targets and provided good benchmarks.

Discussion ensued on recycling figures in the Green Book. Councillor Davis, Portfolio Holder for Waste and Recycling, explained the benefit of recycling less and highlighted

efforts being made to encourage people to recycle less, such as the re-use shops in Woking. It was noted that contamination figures had improved last year, however there remained a national problem with contaminated waste in communal areas. The Portfolio Holder highlighted that there would be service disruption tomorrow due to HGV driver issues. It was noted that Joint Waste Solutions (JWS) would email Ward Councillors in the relevant areas in order to keep them informed. The Portfolio Holder reassured the Executive that he would be meeting with Amey regularly to check on service disruption.

RESOLVED

That the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information, April and May 2021, be received.

Reason: To manage the performance of the Council.

15. MONITORING REPORTS - PROJECTS EXE21-019

The Executive received a report which provided an update on progress on developments to the Council's project management methodology, assurance, processes and reporting. It was noted that a report detailing the status of projects as at the end of June 2021 would be presented to the meeting of the Executive on 9 September 2021.

RESOLVED

That the report be received.

Reason: To monitor progress on development to the Council's project management approach.

<p>This document was published on Friday 16 July 2021 and the decisions within it will be implemented on Monday 26 July 2021, subject to call-in.</p>
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The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 8.23 pm.

Chairman: _____

Date: _____