

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
EXECUTIVE

held on 18 November 2021
Present:

Cllr A Azad (Chairman)
Cllr S Ashall (Vice-Chair)

Cllr K M Davis Cllr D Harlow
Cllr G W Elson Cllr C S Kemp

Also Present: Councillors W P Forster, K Howard, D E Hughes and I Johnson.

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 7 October 2021 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

3. URGENT BUSINESS

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

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor A Azad 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 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 Legal and Democratic Services, Joanne McIntosh, 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 McIntosh 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 her husband having a small shareholding in Woking Football Club. The interest was such that Mrs Clarke could advise the Executive on those items.

5. QUESTIONS

The Chairman welcomed Mr R Shatwell, who had submitted two questions under Section 3 of the Executive Procedure Rules regarding Elmbridge Recreation ground and the use of flammable materials on buildings. A copy of the questions together with the replies was before the Executive. Mr Shatwell advised that he wished to withdraw his second question as he had been informed by Eastgate residents that work was being carried out. The Chairman confirmed the reply to the first question, a supplementary question was asked and reply given.

6. NOTICE OF MOTION - CLLR W FORSTER - LOCATION OF WOKING'S RAIL AGGREGATES YARD EXE21-151

At its meeting on 14 October 2021, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive.

Councillor W Forster

“The Victoria Arch widening scheme has brought into focus that Woking's rail aggregates yard is in a completely unsuitable location.

The Council agrees to use its best endeavours to encourage Network Rail, Surrey County Council and other partners to move the aggregates yard to a more appropriate and non-residential location.”

Councillor Forster attended the meeting and spoke in support of the Motion. Councillor Forster highlighted the unsuitability of the current town centre location of the aggregates yard and suggested that the Council’s corporate policy should be to try to move the yard to a more suitable alternative location. The Executive agreed that having an aggregates yard in the middle of the town centre was neither sustainable or desirable. The Lead Executive Member, Councillor Kemp, had written to Network Rail to express that consideration be given to finding a suitable alternative. Councillor Kemp undertook to share the response from Network Rail with Councillors when received.

It was noted that Surrey County Council (SCC) had recently launched a consultation on its new Minerals and Waste Plan, and the Council would submit a corporate response to the consultation on the unsuitability of the current site of the yard. Councillor Kemp advised that the consultation would be publicised on the Council’s website and members of the public were encouraged to engage in the consultation.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Azad, would also be writing to the Leader of SCC to advocate moving the goods yard.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the Motion be supported.

7. WOKING BOROUGH COUNCIL DIGITAL STRATEGY 2022-2025 EXE21-033

Councillor Davis, Portfolio Holder for Information Communication Technology, introduced the report which sought approval of the Executive to recommend to Council the adoption of the Digital Strategy 2022-2025. Councillor Davis explained that the three year strategy was presented across three themes; Smart People, Smart Place and Smart Council. The Executive was advised that the strategy set out the Council’s vision on how it would use technology to continue to provide high quality, high priority and highly valued services for its residents, how it would enable businesses to be even more competitive, and how it would ensure that digital technologies enabled Members and staff to work more productively and efficiently.

The Executive congratulated the Portfolio Holder and Officers on the enormous amount of work undertaken on the strategy which would provide an ambitious and visionary future for the Borough.

Following the late submission of questions from the Liberal Democrat Group, the Leader of the Council reminded Opposition Members to submit their questions by the protocol deadline.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the Digital Strategy 2022-2025, as attached to the report, be approved.

Reason: The priorities identified in the Digital Strategy 2022-2025 will positively impact and support Woking's businesses, residents and its wider community.

**8. THAMESWEY BUSINESS PLANS (TO INCLUDE COMPANY CONSOLIDATION PLAN)
EXE21-063**

The Executive received a report which sought approval of the Executive to recommend to Council that the Thameswey Group continue to operate the Business Plans for 2020-2023. Councillor Azad explained that it was proposed that the Thameswey Group continued to work to the 2020 plans in 2022 ahead of a full review for 2023 following the development of the Council's Corporate Strategy. It was noted that it would also enable the updated plans to reflect the Financial Review of the Council's Assets and Liabilities, and advice secured on the Group structure going forward. A Member Briefing on the Thameswey Group of Companies had been held on 17 November 2021.

Following a question regarding the reasons for losses on Thameswey shown in 2019 and 2020 accounts, the Executive was informed that the Thameswey Business Plans were all long term in nature, making losses to start with and moving to a profitable position over time as energy customers were connected and rents increased. It was noted that the Thameswey audits for 2019 and 2020 had now been signed off and the auditors questions had been resolved.

Following a request for more clarity on the arrangement in paragraph 4.2 of the report, it was reported that the relevant land asset was to be sold to Thameswey Energy Limited (TEL), requiring TEL to increase its loan facility to secure the acquisition. Therefore TEL would service the financing costs for the site of the energy centre, not the Council.

Regarding Thameswey Housing Limited (THL), the Executive was advised that THL continued to develop and acquire properties for rent in the Borough, with half of the properties at affordable or social rents.

RECOMMEND to Council

That (i) the Thameswey Group continue to operate the Business Plans for 2020-2023;

(ii) the Poole Road land acquired by the Council in 2017/18, and on which the Energy Station has been constructed, be sold to Thameswey Energy Ltd and an increase to the Poole Road Loan facility of £1.3m on the same terms be agreed to enable this sale;

(iii) loans advanced to the Thameswey Group for less than 10 years, be allowed to be repaid and converted to long term loans of up to 50 years where there is an appropriate existing long term facility available, including consolidating to a single loan for simplification; and

(iv) loans originally advanced to Thameswey Developments Ltd be allowed to transfer to Thameswey Housing Ltd or Thameswey Energy Ltd on the same terms as the original advance.

Reason: To agree the approach to Business Planning for the Thamesway Group for 2022.

9. TOWN CENTRE PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER (PSPO) EXE21-060

Councillor Harlow, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, introduced the report which sought approval of the Executive to recommend to Council the implementation of the Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) for the town centre. The Executive welcomed the report and noted the consultation undertaken regarding the proposed PSPO which had been broadly supportive. The Executive supported the proposed PSPO which would be another tool to make people feel safe.

In answer to a question about why a new order had been created, rather than reviewing the previous order, Officers explained that the previous order had come to an end at a time when the Council did not have an evidence base to expand or continue the order. It was noted that PSPO's can only be made for three years as part of the legislation. At that time, there was an improving picture in the town centre because of Covid and other activities and interventions the Council had put in place.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That (i) the consultation be noted;

(ii) the Director of Neighbourhood Services be authorised to implement the PSPO for the town centre with the amended map to the report in light of the overwhelming support in the consultation for its introduction;

(iii) delegated authority be given to the Director of Neighbourhood Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, to allow minor amendments to the order throughout the duration of the order;

(iv) regular reviews will be carried out via the Joint Action Group (JAG) meetings and quarterly updates will be circulated to the Community Safety Task Group; and

(v) delegated authority be given to the Director of Neighbourhood Services to issue fixed penalty notices at the level set at paragraph 5.6 in the report and to amend in line with any legislation changes.

Reason: To approve the terms of a Public Spaces Protection Order and approve delegations to enforce the Order.

10. REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES 2022-23 EXE21-068

The Executive received a report detailing the proposed discretionary fees and charges for 2022-23. Concern was raised by Non-Executive Members regarding the proposed increase to Meals on Wheels charges. The Executive noted that the Council offered one of the most comprehensive and responsive community meals services in Surrey at one of the lowest costs, however the level of subsidy required was not sustainable.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the discretionary fees and charges, as set out in Appendices 1 – 4 of the report, be approved.

Reason: The regular review of discretionary charges ensures that the Council maintains its income base and generates additional resources for the provision of services.

11. CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2022-23 EXE21-076

The Executive received a report which sought approval to recommend to Council the Calendar of Meetings 2022-23.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the Calendar of Meetings 2022/23 be approved as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

Reason: In accordance with Standing Order 1.2 of the Constitution, which states that “The date of the annual (Council) meeting and those of ordinary meetings shall be fixed by the Council in or about December of the preceding municipal year”.

12. DRAFT MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS) AND GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2022-23 EXE21-077

Councillor Ashall, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Financial Planning and Policy, introduced a report which presented to the Executive the Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2022-23 to 2024/25 and draft General Fund budget for 2022/23. It was noted that a Member Briefing on the MTFS had taken place on 11 November 2021. Councillor Ashall highlighted that some £4.9m of savings had been identified, and thanked the Finance Director and her team for their hard work on the draft MTFS and draft General Fund budget.

Discussion ensued on electric vehicle (EV) charging points and the opportunity to increase revenue by installing more charging points in the Borough. Councillor Davis, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change Strategy, advised that the Council had been quick to respond to providing EV charging points and had installed technology very early on. However, some of the technology was old and took all day to charge an EV. Officers were currently looking at the older EV charging technology. It was noted that proposals were being developed to charge for use of electric charging bays within car parks to include existing charging points and the new charging points which will be provided in the new car parks from Spring 2023.

Regarding the community engagement which was currently taking place around the Borough, Members were advised that a report on the outcomes of the community roadshows would be received by the Executive at its meeting on 20 January 2022.

Following a question regarding the possible impact of a rise in interest rates on Thamesway the Executive was informed that mitigation processes were being put in place by the Finance Director.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the draft General Fund Budget for 2022/23 be received;
- (ii) Managers, Corporate Leadership Team and Portfolio Holders continue detailed budget preparation to secure savings for consideration by the Executive in February 2022; and
- (iii) the savings and efficiency proposals at Appendix 3 to the report be noted.
- Reason: Consideration of these proposals will enable the preparation of the Council's budgets for 2022/23 to proceed.

13. DRAFT HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET UPDATE 2022-23 EXE21-078

The Executive received a report which set out the Council's draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budgets for 2022-23. Discussion ensued on rent collection and it was noted that during lockdown, when there had been no evictions, Officers had looked at arrears in a different way and worked with residents to maximise their income and benefits and help them to pay their rents. It was hoped to build on that approach when New Vision Homes came in house in April 2022.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the draft Housing Revenue Account budgets for 2022/23, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be agreed; and
- (ii) Managers, Corporate Leadership Team and Portfolio Holders continue detailed budget preparation for consideration by the Executive in February 2022.
- Reason: Consideration of these proposals will enable the preparation of the Council's Housing Revenue Account budgets for 2022/23 to proceed.

14. DRAFT INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2021-22 TO 2025-26 EXE21-079

The Executive received a report which set out the draft Investment Programme 2021-22 to 2025-26. Councillor Ashall explained that there remained a great deal of uncertainty as the Council emerged from the pandemic, and that there remained a list of projects which continued to be suspended. It was highlighted that the only additional budget the Executive was being asked to approve was for the Celebrate Woking programme in 2022/23. The Executive welcomed the inclusion of Celebrate Woking in the Investment Programme, which would signal that Woking was open for business and bring more people into the Borough. It was noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 22 November 2021, would receive a presentation on the Celebrate Woking programme.

It was suggested that a priority list could be considered for the suspended projects, as well as considering the suspended projects as part of the Fit for the Future programme process in order to ensure that the projects were still required.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the draft Investment Programme for 2021/22 to 2025/26 be received;
- (ii) a budget of £100,000 be approved for the Celebrate Woking programme in 2022/23; and
- (iii) Managers, Corporate Leadership Team and Portfolio Holders be asked to review the Programme, including temporarily suspended projects, considering project costs and timing.

Reason: To agree the draft Investment Programme for consultation before submission for final approval to the Council in February 2022.

15. COMMUNITY MEMORIAL TREES PROJECT EXE21-149

Following the Mayor's announcement of plans for a community memorial woodland last summer, the Executive received a report which sought approval to establish a Woking Community Memorial Trees project. The Executive was informed that Officers had explored various options and historic Brookwood Cemetery was considered to be the most appropriate location offering a natural and accessible space. The proposed project would also support delivery of tree-lined avenues envisaged within the Brookwood Cemetery Masterplan.

Following a question regarding Havering Farm, which had initially been suggested as a potential site, it was noted that the site was not deemed suitable after review. The Council had made no long-term decisions at this stage about the future use of the Havering Farm site.

RESOLVED

- That (i) agreement is given to establish a Woking Community Memorial Trees project; and
- (ii) delegated authority be given to the Director of Planning, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment & Sustainability, the Portfolio Holder for Asset Management and the Director of Neighbourhood Services, to progress establishment of the memorial trees scheme, its launch and ongoing operational arrangements.

Reason: To facilitate development and delivery of this new scheme to support residents in the Borough.

16. LOAN AGREEMENT PROPOSAL EXE21-152

The Executive received a report which sought approval to provide Greenfield School with a new 3 year loan facility. In 2019, the Council had provided the School with loan finance to move to its new site on Old Woking Road. A further loan facility was agreed for the development of the site, in total a facility of £11m covering the site acquisition plus

development costs. The Executive was informed that the School had requested access to the existing approved Council loan facility, However, as the project costs were currently forecasted to exceed the funding available to the School, drawdown of those funds had not been approved and could not be considered until the Council had confidence that finance facilities existed to deliver a complete scheme.

The Executive was of the opinion that it was in the Council's interests for the School to be able to complete the development which would meet the original objectives of increased school places. The Executive supported the proposal that an additional short term loan facility be made available to enable the essential works to be completed. The Executive also supported the proposal that the Strategic Asset Manager would monitor progress on the project.

It was highlighted that confidential supporting information was provided in Part II of the Agenda.

RESOLVED

- That (i) a new 3 year loan facility to cover construction costs of £2.5m plus accrued interest to completion of the development (assumed to be £600k), be made available to Greenfield School at 3.5% interest;
- (ii) on 22 July 2022, or earlier, the amounts advanced from the existing £11m loan facility be converted into a 50 year annuity at 1% over the PWLB rate; and
- (iii) the Council secure a charge over the remaining investment property asset held by the School and the disposal proceeds from this asset are required to be applied to reduce the outstanding loan.

Reason: To approve additional Loan Finance for Greenfield School.

17. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING INFORMATION

The Executive considered the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information (Green Book) September 2021.

RESOLVED

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

Reason: To manage the performance of the Council.

18. MONITORING REPORTS - PROJECTS EXE21-065

The Executive received a quarterly monitoring report on the progress of projects in the interest of financial prudence and to ensure open and transparent corporate governance. Members welcomed the new format of the report. Following a query as to why the Playground Improvements project was amber when the end date was listed as 2009, the Portfolio Holder, Councillor Kemp, explained that it was a rolling programme of

improvements and that 2009 was a set date entered into the system. In relation to Heather Farm SANG, the Executive was advised that the project would be closed after March 2022 once the additional car parking spaces had been delivered.

It was reported that the Council was in a position to progress the Railway Underpass Refurbishment as Fire Engineer approval had been received and delegated authority from South Western Railways had been obtained.

Following a question regarding the issues with Victoria Square panels, it was highlighted that the project reporting was on the status of projects as at the end of September 2021. The panel issues were very current and under close scrutiny and monitoring. It was noted that the Chief Executive provided frequent updates on the latest status to Councillors.

It was noted that the Hoe Valley Flood Alleviation and Enhancement Appraisal project had received time extensions appropriately approved and assured through the Council's project management process. It was explained that the RAG rating was done against the latest approved project deliverables; time and budget.

RESOLVED

That the report be received.

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

19. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of item 20 in view of the nature of the proceedings that, if members of the press and public were present during this item, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A, to the Local Government Act 1972.

Paragraph 3 – Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information).

20. LOAN AGREEMENT PROPOSAL EXE21-153

RESOLVED

That the confidential supporting information in support of the Loan Agreement Proposal in Part I of the Agenda be noted.

Reason: To approve additional Loan Finance for Greenfield School.

<p>This document was published on Friday 19 November 2021 and the decisions within it will be implemented on Monday 29 November 2021, subject to call-in.</p>
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The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 8.33 pm.

Chairman: _____

Date: _____