

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
EXECUTIVE

held on 14 July 2022

Present:

Cllr A-M Barker (Chairman)
Cllr W P Forster (Vice-Chair)

Cllr I Johnson Cllr L S Lyons
Cllr R N Leach Cllr D Roberts

Also Present: Councillors A Azad, K M Davis and C S Kemp.

Absent: Councillor E Nicholson.

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 16 June 2022 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Nicholson.

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 minute item 7 – Company Governance concerning the companies of which she was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that speaking was permissible.

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor K M Davis declared a non-pecuniary interest in minute item 7 – Company Governance concerning the companies of which he was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that speaking was permissible.

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor C S Kemp declared a non-pecuniary interest in minute item 7 – Company Governance concerning the companies of which he was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that speaking was 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 Strategic Director – Place, 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.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Strategic Director – Communities, 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.

5. QUESTIONS

No written questions had been submitted under Section 3 of the Executive Procedure Rules. The Leader highlighted that the new administration welcomed questions from members of the public and explained the submission process. The deadline for written questions from members of the public was 12 noon, seven days before the Executive. The next Executive would be held on 8 September 2022, so the deadline for written questions was 12 noon, 1 September 2022.

6. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS) EXE22-043

Councillor Roberts, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Financial Planning and Policy, introduced a report which provided an update to the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2022-23 to 2025-26. The report also outlined the approach to aligning Council budgets with the priority outcomes defined within the Woking for All strategy, as well as the supplementary and amended priorities from the new administration agreed at the last meeting of the Executive. The Portfolio Holder explained that the financial forecasts within the report set out the level of challenge faced by the Council due to increased inflationary pressures and risk to the level of the Council's forecast income. As part of the Council's Financial Resilience Strategy, the Executive noted that it was important that plans were in place to respond to the financial risks outlined in the MTFS and work would progress on savings options with an update provided at the October Executive. The proposed savings options of circa £11m was highlighted.

In order to meet the needs of residents whilst supporting the Town Centre, the Executive discussed the proposed parking pilot for Victoria Place, which included Red, Green, Yellow and Blue car parks. It was proposed that a new tariff be piloted on Saturdays during

September to encourage car park users to extend their stay in the Town Centre beyond two hours. Councillor Davis, Shadow Portfolio Holder for Corporate Financial Planning and Policy, raised a number of questions on the proposed pilot including measurement of success, exit strategy and impact on CO2 emissions in the Town. The Leader responded to the points raised and highlighted that the information from the pilot would support the development of a car parking strategy later in the year. It was highlighted that it would be necessary to bear in mind other factors which could increase parking occupancy during the pilot, such as the opening of Italia Conti in Victoria Place.

The Executive acknowledged the challenging financial situation and the updated financial forecasting set out in the report. It was noted that the MTFS would continue to be reviewed and updated over the summer to bring forward areas of search for efficiencies and savings, with further MTFS updates brought to the Executive throughout the year.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the evidence base on demographics (Appendix 1 to the report) be noted;
- (ii) the target for areas of search to identify further efficiency and savings proposals (Section 6) be noted;
- (iii) agree for the Strategic Director – Place, in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder, to submit the UK Shared Prosperity Fund Investment programme (referenced in Section 2 of the report) to the DLUHC by 1st August 2022;
- (iv) agree to the continuance of Opportunity purchases within the Investment Programme with delegation to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and relevant Portfolio Holder;
- (v) agree the car park pilot in the Victoria Place Car Park for the Saturdays within the pilot period;
- (vi) the priority outcomes, in the Corporate Plan which form the basis of the Council's business and financial planning set out in Section 4, be reviewed through the process highlighted within the report;
- (vii) the development of a four-year Medium Term Financial Strategy drawing from the Corporate Plan priority outcomes be agreed;
- (viii) agree to continue to develop activity and financial plans through the Fit for the Future programme using the guiding principles of affordable, responsible, and sustainable to develop options for operating within the resources available;
- (ix) reports be received on more detailed plans for the next four years in November 2022;
- (x) as detailed in paragraphs 6.19-6.20 of the report, parent company guarantees be provided to the new gas and electricity providers, as required by Thamesway Energy Ltd and Thamesway Central Milton Keynes Ltd, with the detail to be agreed by the Director of

Legal and Democratic Services in consultation with the Leader;
and

RECOMMENDED to Council

That (xi) the Medium-Term Financial Strategy as updated be approved.

Reason: The decision is sought to agree the framework for Officers to develop further proposals for consideration, in due course, by the Council to ensure the medium-term financial stability of the Council.

7. COMPANY GOVERNANCE EXE22-048

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Barker, introduced a report which recommended to Council proposals to modernise the Council's governance arrangements with respect to its oversight of its wholly or part owned companies. It was explained that Officers had undertaken a review of the governance of the Council's subsidiary companies as part of the medium term financial resilience assessment produced by the professional services firm EY. The Leader advised that the proposed arrangements sought to improve openness and transparency, address conflict issues by removing Councillors from company boards, and formalise provision of Council services to group companies. The Executive noted that the proposals included the appointment of the Leader as the Council's Shareholder Representative, and the creation of a Shareholder Advisory Group (SAG) to which the Leader of the Council and members of the Executive would be appointed.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee had pre-scrutinised the report at its meeting on 11 July 2022 and had expressed concern over the proposed membership of the SAG. The Leader advised that the proposals followed best practice and mirrored the Council's governance arrangements of a Strong Leader and Executive model. It was noted that the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be invited to attend SAG meetings. The new structure would also allow the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to call matters to be considered by the Committee. Reserved matter decisions, such as adoption of business plans, would continue to be determined by Full Council.

Following a question regarding the financial implications of the proposals, the Executive was informed that the additional posts would cost around £100k - £150k and would be funded in the short term through the Fit for the Future programme budget.

The Executive welcomed the report, noting that the proposals were in line with CIPFA best practice. A review of the new arrangements was considered to be useful to see how it was operating, subject to Council agreeing the proposals on 21 July 2022.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That (i) the Leader of the Council be appointed as the Council's Shareholder Representative;

(ii) the creation of a Shareholder Advisory Group be approved, as detailed in the report, to ensure that its companies act in the interests of the Council as shareholder and contribute to the Council's objectives;

- (iii) **the Terms of Reference of the Shareholder Advisory Group, as set out at Appendix 2 to the report, be approved;**
- (iv) **Directors to the Group Companies, as outlined in Appendix 3 to the report, be appointed;**
- (v) **the Shareholder Liaison Service be established to lead on managing contractual arrangements with the companies and in holding of the companies to account;**
- (vi) **the establishment of Head of Shareholder Liaison Service at Grade W8 and Project Officer on Grade W5 be approved;**
- (vii) **delegated authority be given to the Director of Legal and Democratic Services to approve final terms and enter any Service Level Agreements where corporate functions provide support services to group companies;**
- (viii) **delegated authority be given to the Director of Legal and Democratic Services to approve final terms and enter any Data Protection or Information Sharing Agreement; and**
- (ix) **the Constitution be updated accordingly.**

Reason: The recommendations proposed will improve the governance arrangements in line with current best practice and allow the Council to closely monitor its interests within each of its companies with further clarity, transparency, and reporting. It will ensure that the Council and its subsidiaries are meeting their legal and statutory responsibilities and are practising good governance.

8. DRAFT TOWN CENTRE MASTERPLAN EXE22-044

Following the meeting of the Executive on 15 July 2021, the Portfolio Holder for Planning Policy, Councillor Lyons, introduced a report setting out the Draft Town Centre Masterplan which Officers had been requested to prepare with the purpose of providing an overarching framework to help guide development and investment decisions in the Town Centre. The Executive was asked to approve the Masterplan for public consultation and engagement between 25 July 2022 and 16 October 2022. It was noted that the Masterplan covered many topics including townscape strategy, leisure and culture, green infrastructure, housing and transport.

Following a question about potential locations for lower rise family housing, it was suggested that the sites identified in Oriental Road and Quadrant Court could be suitable.

The Portfolio Holder thanked Officers and Councillor Morales, Chair of the LDF Working Group, for their valuable work and input into the Masterplan.

The Executive welcomed the public consultation, noting the many opportunities for residents to take part and have their say during the twelve-week consultation period. Residents would have opportunities to feedback in person at a Town Centre hub, around the Borough and online.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the contents of the Draft Woking Town Centre Masterplan and the accompanying Site Analysis and Consultation Plan be noted and approved for public consultation and engagement between 25 July 2022 and 16 October 2022; and
- (ii) delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director – Place, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, to approve any minor amendments to the Masterplan and the accompanying documents before it is published for community consultation and engagement.

Reason: To give the public an opportunity to comment on the Draft Town Centre Masterplan and for their comments to be considered before the Masterplan is adopted.

9. HOUSING INFRASTRUCTURE FUND (HIF) - UPDATE EXE22-052

The Executive received a report which provided an update on the Housing Infrastructure Fund (HIF) project and identified a number of key issues and actions in relation to the delivery of the project. Councillor Forster, Deputy Leader, stated that the new administration was concerned about the scale of the budget deficit, risks to the Council and potential significant road closure involved in the proposed Victoria Arch widening scheme. Councillor Forster highlighted the detrimental effect that a significant road closure of 2½ years would have on residents and the Town Centre economy, noting the challenges set out in the MTFS discussed earlier in the meeting.

The Executive heard that Officers would work up a more viable scheme as part of the proposed review, with particular consideration to pedestrian and cycle access.

Councillor Kemp, Shadow Portfolio Holder for Key Projects, drew attention to the HIF grant, the objective of which was the replacement of the arch to unlock housing sites in the Town Centre, and the potential funding consequences if infrastructure was reduced. The Executive was advised that the Council was in regular discussion with Homes England and had fully briefed Homes England on the Council's position to secure a Masterplan.

The Executive was supportive of the submission of planning applications which sought to secure temporary access to the aggregates yard from York Road, and the use of the current access to the yard from Guildford Road as a permanent access.

The Executive welcomed the report and agreed to undertake a fundamental review and pause on certain workstreams until there was a viable project that could be delivered without additional expense to the Council. An update on the review of the project would be received by the Executive by the end of the calendar year.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the commitment made by the Council and its partners to deliver a replacement bridge project and the risks accepted by the Council in its agreement with Homes England and that significant work has been progressed to date on the project, be noted;

- (ii) the additional costs associated with the current designed project based on land acquisitions, utility costs, bridge and highway costs and inflation meaning that further and substantial Government funding is needed before further significant expenditure can be undertaken which would be at the Council's risk, be noted;
- (iii) the need for the continuation of high level meetings with Homes England and through them with key partners at the Department for Transport and Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in order to secure additional funding for the project be supported;
- (iv) given the likely exposure and scale of risk in committing to further expenditure at this stage, a fundamental review of the project be undertaken in order to:
 - a. Conclude discussions on the availability of additional funding to meet the current project design;
 - b. Review with partners other design options to reduce the overall costs of the project including any proposals which remove the need to lower the road and / or reduce the road from a dual carriageway to a single carriageway;
 - c. Ensure that any redesigned options meet with value for money requirements and achieve sufficient environmental and community benefits envisaged from the project;
 - d. To support a project review to be undertaken by Surrey County Council on our behalf. The scope is to consider the appropriateness of current budget, risks inherent with works cost estimate and delivery strategy given current project uncertainties and identified funding shortfall. The review is envisaged as an activity that will add value to the project's delivery strategy. Where cost and budget pressures are identified possible mitigations will be suggested where practical.
- (v) in order to fully understand more about the project costs, the results from the investigatory works following the closure of the bridge in June be reviewed in detail alongside outcomes from the closure, including impact on traffic movements;
- (vi) the planning applications be submitted which seeks to secure a temporary access to the aggregates yard from York Road and the use of the current access to the yard from Guildford Road as a permanent access; and
- (vii) an update on the review of the project be presented to the Executive by the end of the calendar year.

Reason: In order to undertake a review of the project to assess financial risks and opportunities to the Council in progressing with delivering the Housing Infrastructure Fund project, considering whether there are any alternatives and seek risk sharing with project partners.

10. EQUALITIES ANNUAL REPORT - 2022 EXE22-034

The Executive received the Equalities Annual Report – 2022 which set out the progress on the equalities agenda. Discussion ensued on the Gender Pay Gap and it was noted that an Action Plan had been put in place to address the Gender Pay Gap. The Action Plan covered pay and performance, recruitment and promotion, training and development, and flexible and part-time working.

RESOLVED

That the report be received.

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

11. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING INFORMATION

The Executive considered the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information (Green Book) March 2022. The Portfolio Holder for Affordable Housing, Councillor Johnson, drew attention to page 15 of the Green Book which set out a cumulative number of affordable homes provided of 616 against a target of 1,224. Councillor Johnson encouraged all Members to inform him of areas available in the Borough to provide affordable housing.

RESOLVED

That the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information, March 2022, be received.

Reason: To manage the performance of the Council.

<p>This document was published on Friday 15 July 2022 and the decisions within it will be implemented on Monday 25 July 2022, subject to call-in.</p>
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The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 8.52 pm.

Chairman: _____

Date: _____