

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
EXECUTIVE

held on 6 October 2022

Present:

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

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

Also Present: Councillor A Azad.

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 14 July 2022 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 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 Strategic Director – Corporate Resources, Kevin Foster, 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 Foster could advise the Executive on those items.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Strategic Director – Place, Giorgio Framalitto, 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 Framalitto 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 17 November 2022, so the deadline for written questions was 12 noon, 10 November 2022.

6. NOTICE OF MOTION - CLLR W FORSTER - PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION EXE22-057

At its meeting on 21 July 2022, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive.

Councillor W P Forster

“The Council notes that Belarus and the United Kingdom are the only European countries that use First Past the Post for their national elections.

This Council believes that Proportional Representation ensures all votes count, have equal value, and those seats won match votes cast. Under Proportional Representation, Parliaments better reflect the age, gender and protected characteristics of local communities and the nation. Members of Parliament better reflecting their communities leads to improved decision-making, wider participation and increased levels of ownership of decisions taken.

Proportional Representation would also end minority rule. In 2019, 43.6% of the vote produced a Government with 56.2% of the seats and 100% of the power. Proportional Representation also prevents ‘wrong winner’ elections such as occurred in 1951 and February 1974.

Proportional Representation is already used to elect the parliaments and assemblies of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, but not for Westminster elections.

This Council therefore resolves to write to the Prime Minister and Woking’s Member of Parliament calling for a change in our outdated electoral laws to enable Proportional Representation to be used for future General Elections.”

Councillor Forster spoke in support of the Motion. The Executive was in agreement with the Motion which called for the Council to support Proportional Representation in elections, and to express its preference for Proportional Representation to the Government. It was noted that Proportional Representation had been raised as a doorstep issue by residents.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the Motion be supported.

7. ANIMAL WELFARE POLICY EXE22-023

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Barker, introduced the report which recommended to Council the revised Animal Welfare Responsibilities Guidance document following public consultation. The Executive heard that the document provided guidance on animal welfare to residents and signposted to the organisations responsible for each aspect of animal welfare and licensing. Subject to Council agreeing the document, the Leader confirmed that the Guidance document would be published on the Council's website for easy accessibility.

Concerns raised by residents regarding giving pets as prizes and the distress caused to animals due to firework displays was discussed. The Executive was advised that it was illegal to give pets as prizes to children aged 16 and under. Regarding fireworks, the Executive noted that Councillor Barker had raised the issue previously and that information on firework displays taking place in the Borough would be published on the Council's website. A letter had previously been sent to Government concerning the banning of loud fireworks and it was suggested that this could be reiterated.

The Executive thanked both the previous administration for initiating the public consultation, and Officers for compiling such comprehensive Guidance for residents.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the Council's revised Animal Welfare Responsibilities Guidance document be agreed.

Reason: To promote Animal Welfare in the Borough.

8. VERBAL UPDATE ON COST OF LIVING SUMMIT

Councillor Barker provided a verbal update on the well-attended Cost of Living Summit held on 27 September 2022 at Eastwood Leisure Centre. Following the Council declaring a Cost of Living Emergency in July 2022, a number of measures had been taken which included holding a Cost of Living Summit. Some 70 people had taken part in the Summit from local charities and voluntary groups, Woking and Surrey councils, the Department of Work and Pensions and health service representatives. Councillor Barker explained that the Summit had provided a useful opportunity for various organisations to come together to understand the scale of the crisis and to work together to strengthen collective efforts. New opportunities to work together had already been recognised as a result of the Summit. The Summit had included presentations from Citizens Advice Woking and Woking Foodbank, both of which had experienced substantial increases in requests for help and foodbank referrals.

The Executive was informed that Officers were currently pulling together the information gathered from the Summit in order to incorporate it into an Action Plan. The Executive would receive a report at its meeting on 17 November 2022, and it was intended that the Executive would track progress on the Action Plan at subsequent meetings.

Information on where residents could access help was available on the Council's website and information would also be included in the next Woking Magazine which would be delivered to every household in the Borough later in October.

The Cost of Living Summit was part of a pledge to support residents through the current Cost of Living crisis and the Executive thanked all those involved in facilitating the event.

9. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING REVIEW EXE22-055

Following pre-decision scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 26 September 2022, the Executive received a report on the proposed changes to the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information (currently known as the Green Book) along with a recommendation from the Committee. Councillor Barker explained that it was proposed to align the current Green Book data with the Woking For All Strategy priorities and Council Directorates in order to provide greater context and accessibility. It was also proposed to show variations on planned and actual spend across Directorate budgets to increase transparency.

The Executive was informed that the replacement for the Green Book would be referred to as the 'Woking for All Performance Report', or 'Performance Report' for short, and would be published on a quarterly basis. It was intended that two iterative reports would be produced alongside the existing Green Book in January and April 2023, before full adoption for the 2023/24 Municipal Year.

The Executive discussed the recommendation of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to include the Treasury Management Information, currently included in the monthly Green Book, as an appendix to the Performance Report. The Executive was supportive of the Officer Comment in the report and agreed that the Treasury Management Information should be saved to a central location which would be referenced from the Performance Report, with quarterly changes noted in the Performance Report. It was acknowledged that the Treasury Management Information did not change frequently through the year and therefore should not be reproduced as an appendix.

RESOLVED

That the revised structure and content of the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information, as set out in the report, be agreed, with Treasury Management Information to be held in a central location and referenced to the report with quarterly changes noted in the report.

Reason: To align the current performance and financial monitoring (Green Book) data with the Woking For All priorities, key project updates from the Corporate Programme Board, and key risks and budgets aligned around Directorates.

10. SELECTIVE LICENSING REVIEW EXE22-060

Councillor Johnson, Portfolio Holder for Housing, introduced the report on the review of the Selective Licensing Scheme which was coming to an end on 31 March 2023. It was noted that the Housing Task Group had been consulted on the proposals set out in the report. The Executive heard that, although the Scheme had been useful in identifying private rented properties and landlords in Canalside Ward, it was proposed not to implement a further Selective Licensing Scheme due to the administrative burden and avoidance of further financial losses. It was clarified that the Scheme did not include social housing in the Canalside Ward.

Councillor Johnson explained that the intention was to adopt an up-to-date set of Amenity Standards which would provide consistency across the whole Borough on what the Council required of private rented properties. The Executive was supportive of the proposals, noting the importance of enforcement of the Amenity Standards.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the Selective Licence Scheme in the Canalside Ward is ended at the expiry date of 31 March 2023;
- (ii) no further Selective Licensing Scheme be implemented at this time; and
- (iii) the new Private Sector Housing Amenity Standards, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be adopted and form the basis of requirements and enforcement, with the Strategic Director – Communities, in consultation with the Housing Portfolio Holder, being delegated authority to make minor amendments when required.

Reason: To agree the Council's future approach to addressing issues of housing standards and improvements in private rental properties across the Borough.

11. RECOMMENDATION FROM LICENSING COMMITTEE - REVIEW OF TAXI FARES EXE22-067

The Executive received a recommendation from the Licensing Committee held on 4 October 2022 in relation to the setting of Hackney Carriage Fares. A supplementary report was tabled at the meeting setting out a minute extract and recommendations from the Licensing Committee. Councillor Lyons, Portfolio Holder for Licensing, explained the proposals to introduce a more robust method of calculating fares for Hackney Carriages on the same basis used by Guildford Borough Council, noting that it had been judicially reviewed with success and implemented following extensive consultation. It was highlighted that an annual review of the calculation would be reported to the Licensing Committee.

The Executive welcomed the recommendations which would provide an easier, clearer and fairer method of setting maximum fares for Hackney Carriages.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the proposed method of working out the Hackney Carriage Fares be formally adopted;
- (ii) delegated authority be given to the Head of Legal Services, in consultation with the Licensing Portfolio Holder, to act on behalf of the Council in agreeing to any future changes to Hackney Carriage Fares;
- (iii) it be agreed that the fares are to be reassessed as a matter of priority by the Licensing Authority to ensure that the maximum fares the Hackney Carriage trade can charge are not being restricted at a time of record inflation and rising fuel costs, by way of a required statutory consultation with the outcomes considered by the Head of Legal Services in consultation with the Licensing Portfolio Holder; and
- (iv) an annual review of the calculation be reported to the Licensing Committee.

Reason: To ensure that the setting of Hackney Carriage taxi fares remains robust, fair and clear for the trade and the travelling public.

12. CONFIDENTIALITY PROTOCOL ANNUAL REPORT EXE22-035

Following the adoption of the Confidentiality Protocol at Council on 15 October 2020, the Executive received an annual report on the Protocol in support of the Council's commitment to being an open and transparent organisation.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

Reason: To provide an annual report to the Executive.

13. FULL ASYLUM DISPERSAL – SOUTH EAST REGIONAL DELIVERY PLAN EXE22-071

The Portfolio Holder for Refugee Support, Councillor Nicholson, introduced the report which sought approval of the Executive to endorse the proposed draft regional delivery model and options developed by the South East Strategic Partnership for Migration (SESPM). The Executive noted the Council's strong track record of welcoming refugees into the Borough. It was highlighted that the full dispersal model would allow accommodation providers, working on behalf of the Home Office, to identify private rented sector properties that could be procured for asylum dispersal accommodation in the Borough. Councillor Nicholson drew attention to further pressure the full dispersal model would put on local services and communities, namely accommodation scarcity and access to services.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the Government's policy for asylum accommodation dispersal be noted, along with the associated implementation challenges both nationally and locally;
- (ii) the regional delivery model to full dispersal proposed by the South East Migration Partnership be endorsed; and
- (iii) the Strategic Director – Communities, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Living Well, shall be delegated authority to decide whether Woking Borough Council can offer any further accommodation under its refugee resettlement commitments once the local implications of full dispersal are fully understood.

Reason: To inform the Government's plans to disperse accommodation for asylum seekers fairly and equitably across the country.

14. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING INFORMATION

The Executive considered the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information (Green Book) July 2022. The number of empty homes brought back into use was discussed. The Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Johnson, explained that it could be a long process to bring empty homes back into use, and could also involve legal reasons such as probate. Councillor Johnson advised that twelve homes had been brought back into use during August and September, and the Housing Team was hopeful to get close to the target of 40 homes by the end of the Municipal Year. The Executive was advised that an updated Empty Homes Plan was currently being consulted upon and would be brought to a future Executive.

RESOLVED

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

Reason: To manage the performance of the Council.

15. MONITORING REPORTS - WOKING FOR ALL STRATEGY EXE22-068

The Executive received a report which provided an update on how the Council was performing against the actions resulting from the Woking For All Strategy (WFAS) and the Supplementary and Amended Priorities document. The Executive welcomed the progress being made on delivering the Strategy. Several areas of work were highlighted by the Leader, including the work to encourage diverse groups of users to leisure facilities, particularly at the Eastwood Leisure Centre, provision of mobile CCTV to tackle fly tipping and ASB, work to deliver a play area improvement plan, and the comprehensive Masterplan consultation.

RESOLVED

- That (i) progress against the actions resulting from the Woking For All Strategy and the Supplementary and Amended Priorities document are noted; and
- (ii) the performance monitoring regime as detailed in the report, and the content of Appendix 1 to the report, be agreed and implemented moving forward.

Reason: To ensure that robust performance monitoring is in place to support the delivery of the Council's Woking For All Strategy.

16. MONITORING REPORTS - PROJECTS EXE22-027

The Executive received a report which provided an update on progress in relation to the Council's project management arrangements, assurance and processes. The report included the status of projects as at the end of June 2022.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the report be received; and
- (ii) the detailed project monitoring recorded in Appendix 1 to the report be approved.

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

<p>This document was published on Friday 7 October 2022 and the decisions within it will be implemented on Monday 17 October 2022, subject to call-in.</p>

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 8.04 pm.

Chairman: _____

Date: _____