

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
EXECUTIVE

held on 19 January 2023

Present:

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

Cllr P J T Graves Cllr E Nicholson
Cllr I Johnson Cllr D Roberts
Cllr L S Lyons

Also Present: Councillors K M Davis, S Dorsett, D M C Jordan, and Independent Co-Opted Person, Claire Storey.

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 8 December 2022 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

The Leader welcomed Councillor Peter Graves to the Executive. Councillor Graves replaced Councillor Rob Leach who had stepped down from the Executive to focus on his work as a Ward Councillor. Councillor Graves was now the Portfolio Holder for Greener Woking.

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 I Johnson declared an interest in Item 11 – Cost of Living Crisis Update in respect of the reference to Citizen's Advice Woking arising from his wife's employment by the charity. The interest was such that Councillor Johnson would leave the Council Chamber during the determination of the item.

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 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

The Chairman welcomed Mr J Wheeler, Mr M Peel and Mr D Lodge who had submitted questions under Section 3 of the Executive Procedure Rules regarding the Brookwood Lye development and Brookwood Crossroads. A copy of the questions together with the replies was before the Executive. The Chairman confirmed the replies, supplementary questions were asked and replies given.

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 2 February 2023, so the deadline for written questions was 12 noon, 26 January 2023.

6. NOTICE OF MOTION - CLLR S DORSETT - RENAMING OF HENRY PLAZA EXE23-018

At its meeting on 1 December 2022, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive.

Councillor S Dorsett

“The passing of Her Majesty Queen is one of the most important events in our lifetime. Many Woking residents, including current and former Councillors, made the journey to Westminster to pay tribute by “Queuing for the Queen”. Our own events over that week, including the Proclamation of the new King, and the moment of National Reflection, were extremely well attended by Woking residents, and Jubilee Square was fill to capacity. Given the strength of feeling Woking residents clearly have for the Royal Family and especially to the memory of Her Majesty the Queen, we are proposing a permanent tribute to Her Majesty. With that in mind it is proposed we rename Henry Plaza, the newest part of the Victoria Place, to Queen Elizabeth II Plaza.

Given that the Plaza opened in March of this year, the same year of her Platinum Jubilee and her untimely passing, it feels right in this year we can commemorate her memory with this tribute. Few residents are aware of the reasoning behind the current name of Henry Plaza. But having it be named Queen Elizabeth II Plaza, along with Jubilee Square and the Victoria Place itself, feels thematically constant. This tribute will reflect the love and admiration for her felt by our Woking community.”

Councillor Dorsett attended the meeting and spoke in support of the Motion. Although supportive of the sentiment of the Motion, the Executive was of the opinion that it would be more appropriate to name somewhere new in honour of Queen Elizabeth II. It was noted that Henry Plaza had been named in honour of Henry Cawsey, a distinguished and influential local figure. The Executive was advised that the Leader had asked Officers to progress a plaque to be displayed in the Plaza on Henry Cawsey. It was suggested that surviving relatives of Henry Cawsey could be invited to its unveiling. Alternative locations which could be named in honour of Queen Elizabeth II were invited by Members for consideration by Officers.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the Motion be not supported.

7. NOTICE OF MOTION - CLLR S DORSETT - MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETINGS EXE23-019

At its meeting on 1 December 2022, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive.

Councillor S Dorsett

“Openness and Transparency are vital to the workings of this Council. Therefore the minutes of Full Council should adequately reflect members supplementary questions to the Leader and the Executive.

At present Councillor Questions to Full Council are recorded with the written answers given as a printed document. However supplementary questions and answers are not minuted.

This means the only way for our residents to understand the supplementary question and subsequent answer is to watch the meeting from the webcast.

We want to make it as easy as possible for our residents to engage with the work we as a council do therefore moving forwards this Council resolves to include in the minutes all Supplementary Questions from members, along with the answers given. This will allow our residents to better understand and follow how the Executive is held to account by members.”

Councillor Dorsett spoke in support of the Motion. The Executive was supportive of the Motion, noting that providing written answers to supplementary questions would further openness and transparency of Council meetings. In order to reduce the burden upon Democratic Services, it was agreed that minutes of the meeting should be drafted as a priority and answers to supplementary questions should be drafted separately. Following discussion, it was felt that the timescale for minuting supplementary questions should be by the next Ordinary Council meeting. Public Questions to the Executive were highlighted,

and it was agreed that the Motion should be amended before Council on 9 February 2023 to also include the minuting of supplementary questions at Executive.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the Motion, to be amended to include Public Questions to the Executive, be supported.

8. NOTICE OF MOTION - CLLR W FORSTER - COMMUNITY DIAGNOSTIC CENTRE IN WOKING EXE23-020

At its meeting on 1 December 2022, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive.

Councillor W Forster

“This Council notes that our residents’ closest diagnostic centres are currently in Ashford, Chertsey and Guildford. At present Woking residents often have to travel outside the Borough for medical tests or a diagnosis.

This Council warmly welcomes and fully supports the decision to open a community diagnostic centre at Woking Community Hospital. The planned expansion of a diagnostic hub in Woking is in line with the NHS Long Term Plan will provide a local, accessible service for our residents. The Council recognises that access to the new services has the potential to improve our residents quality of life and may help to save lives.

This Council believes that the decision to open a strategic community diagnostic hub in Woking is a clear example of this authority’s close working relationship with our key partners, especially Ashford and St Peters NHS Trust, Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care Board and CSH.”

Councillor Forster spoke in support of the Motion. The Executive welcomed the Motion, noting the Council’s important partnership work with key partners to bring forward a planned expansion at Woking Community Hospital to provide a diagnostic hub for the benefit of residents of Woking. The Executive further welcomed that the decision to open a community diagnostic centre at Woking Community Hospital would provide diagnostic facilities to residents locally and would reduce the need for Woking residents to travel to Ashford. Councillor Forster informed the Executive that the proposed development would increase parking pressures at Woking Community Hospital. Therefore, Officers had been asked to consider how the Council could help NHS service delivery by offering parking permits at a public sector rate in its car parks.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the Motion be supported.

9. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (MTFS) EXE23-021

Councillor Roberts, Portfolio Holder for Finance, introduced the report which provided an update on the Medium Term Financial Strategy and approach to financial resilience work required to set the 2023/24 budget. Following updates received by the Executive in November and December 2022, Councillor Roberts reported that work on stabilising reserves and identifying cost savings was progressing. The Executive was informed that the analysis undertaken to date should enable a budget to be set for 2023/24. Councillor Roberts stressed that this would involve a significant spending reduction. In addition, if the Council's assessment of a more prudent provision for its borrowing was necessary then it would likely be unsustainable within the General Fund budget.

The Executive heard that budget workshops with Senior Managers had been taking place and Senior Managers were thanked for their approach to the budget review work. It was noted that the Council would continue to work with independent advisors. It was reported that Corporate Leadership Team would be meeting the Government (DLUHC) Rapid Review team the following week. Further updates on the DLUHC review would be provided to Members as work progressed.

Discussion ensued on Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) and it was noted that the MRP policy was a Council approved policy. Officers advised that guidance on MRP had changed in recent years. It was noted that there was a significant risk that a more prudent assessment of MRP provision should be adopted, as well as a more prudent provision for impairment of capital loans.

Following a question regarding outstanding audits of Council accounts, the Leader advised that the matter had been escalated by the Chief Executive and a meeting was scheduled next week with the auditors.

The Executive noted the immediate actions taken by the Council to mitigate cost pressures going forward which included the introduction of cost controls, Fit for the Future Savings, review of Thamesway Business Plans, and review of forecast assumptions.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the update to the Medium Term Financial Strategy be noted: and
- (ii) the approach to operational savings through cost controls, set out in Section 6 of the report, be noted.

Reason: The decision is sought to develop further proposals to ensure the medium-term financial stability of the Council.

10. REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION EXE22-050

The Executive received a report which outlined the revised timetable and consultation process in order to undertake a review of the Council's Constitution for implementation in the 2023/24 Municipal Year. It was noted that the report also included an update following engagement sessions with Councillors and Council Officers. The aim was to streamline and modernise the Constitution, make it easier to read and to include flow charts to explain complex processes. It was also intended to provide newly Elected Members with an online version of the Constitution instead of a paper copy.

Discussion ensued regarding the procedure for dealing with Notices of Motion, namely the proposals around dealing with Motions on the night. The Executive was advised that it was proposed that Motions would be dealt with on the night unless the Monitoring Officer or s151 Officer advised that there was a legal, policy or financial reason which needed to be addressed before the matter was considered. It was determined that there would be sufficient time between the Motion being published and the Council meeting for the relevant Officer to review and decide if the Motion should revert to the Executive and then Full Council. Following a question regarding tracking Motions, the Executive was advised that Officers were implementing a process for tracking Council actions including Motions.

RESOLVED

That the progress to date be noted and the revised timetable be agreed.

Reason: The Council is required by law (Local Government Act 2000) to prepare and maintain a constitution.

11. COST OF LIVING CRISIS UPDATE EXE23-012

Following the Cost of Living Summit held in September 2022, the Executive received a report which provided an update on the Woking response to the Cost of Living crisis and which reported on progress on the action plan. It was noted that Citizen's Advice Woking had experienced a 30% increase in new clients. The Leader drew attention to a number of local initiatives developing across the voluntary sector. The Executive welcomed the creation and promotion of 19 Warm Hubs across the Borough which had been visited by over 2,200 people to the end of December. Food initiatives were highlighted such as the membership scheme at the Shopwise store in Sheerwater. It was hoped that potential venues could be explored for a similar membership scheme for a 'Community Grocery' store run by the Welcome Church. It was confirmed that the Council had been awarded a third tranche of the Household Support Fund to be distributed to residents by the end of 2022/23.

Following a question, the Executive was informed that the Cost of Living Partnership Group was an Officer Group created by Surrey County Council to bring together stakeholders across the County. The Group included representatives from Public Health, Communications, Local Resilience Forum, Emergency Management and Response, District and Borough Communities, and Surrey Heartlands.

The Executive thanked the various organisations and partners for their work to support and help residents, as well as Officers for bringing local support networks together to strengthen the local offer for residents.

RESOLVED

That the ongoing local response to the Cost-of-Living crisis from the Council, partners, and organisations across the voluntary and faith sector be noted, in line with the action plan.

Reason: To ensure Woking residents access the support they need this Winter with the Cost of Living and to monitor progress against the action plan.

12. RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE EXE22-056

Following pre-decision scrutiny by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 21 November 2022, the Executive received a report on the Council's Risk Management arrangements which included the Strategic Risk Register. It was noted that risk management training had been delivered to Councillors and Senior Managers. It was suggested that, when risk management was next reviewed by the Executive, it would be useful to see the changes between now and then in the Strategic Risk Register.

RESOLVED

That the Strategic Risk Register reflects the key risks currently facing the Council and that measures to mitigate each risk have been recorded and are being actioned by officers.

Reason: To provide an update in relation to Risk Management arrangements and to provide assurance that the Strategic Risk Register reflects the key risks currently facing the Council.

13. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING INFORMATION

The Executive considered the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information (Green Book) October 2022. Attention was drawn to Annual Election Indicator EC-003 on page 5 of the Green Book, which was the percentage of rising 18 year olds on the Electoral Register. The feasibility of the Council working with Woking College to promote and raise awareness of Voter ID in that age group was highlighted.

RESOLVED

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

Reason: To manage the performance of the Council.

14. MONITORING REPORTS - PROJECTS EXE23-005

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 October 2022. Councillor Davis drew attention to the Rainwater Gardens project and asked about the status of the rainwater garden at Brookwood Crossroads. The Executive was informed that the creation of a rain garden at the Brookwood Crossroads was not part of the current Rainwater Gardens project which had been grant funded by Surrey County Council. The Leader undertook to speak to Officers regarding how it could be put into the formal processes of the Council.

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.

This document was published on Friday 20 January 2023 and the decisions within it will be implemented on Monday 30 January 2023, subject to call-in.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 9.03 pm.

Chairman: _____

Date: _____