

MINUTES  
OF A MEETING OF THE  
**EXECUTIVE**

held on 15 June 2023

Present:

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

Cllr P Graves                      Cllr E Nicholson  
Cllr I Johnson                    Cllr D Roberts  
Cllr L Lyons

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies for absence were received.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor I Johnson declared an interest in minute item 9 – Woking Voluntary Sector Annual Report arising from his wife's employment by Citizens Advice Woking (CAW). The interest was such that Councillor Johnson left the 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 – 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.

The interest of the Head of Transformation and Digital, Adam Walther, was referred to in the agenda but it should be noted that Mr Walther sent apologies to the meeting.

### **3. MINUTES**

#### **RESOLVED**

That the minutes of the meetings of the Executive held on 23 March 2023 and 22 May 2023 be approved and signed as true and correct records.

### **4. URGENT BUSINESS**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor A-M Barker, made a statement regarding the Council's financial situation and explained the Council's current position, what happened next, and what should be expected in the coming months. The Leader drew attention to two key financial events which had affected Woking Borough Council in the last three weeks. Firstly, a report published by the Government Review Team on 25 May 2023 and the announcement by the Local Government Minister of intervention in Woking and the appointment of Commissioners on the same day. The Government Review Team had highlighted the Council's huge level of borrowing and its lack of capacity to manage its finance, investments, land and property. The Council had borrowed £1.9 billion and was projected to increase its borrowing to £2.4 billion. Secondly, on 7 June 2023, the Chief Finance Officer issued a Section 114 Notice stating that the Council was unable to set a balanced budget for 2024/25.

The Leader advised that Officers and Councillors were working with the three Commissioners appointed by Government. The Commissioners had experience in local government and business and would be providing support to the Council on its journey back to a sustainable financial position.

The Leader explained that the next step in tackling the financial situation was a statutory meeting of Full Council at 7pm on Tuesday, 20 June 2023, which was a requirement following the declaration of a Section 114 Notice. At the Council Meeting, the Chief Finance Officer would present the Section 114 Notice with a full explanation of his reasons for making the declaration, and the Chief Executive would present her response to the Notice. All Councillors would have the opportunity to contribute to the debate.

In regards to what should be expected, the Leader advised that it was 'business as usual' for every day Council services such as bin collections, Council-owned housing repairs and planning application decisions. Attention was drawn to the need to bridge a £9 million budget gap in the Council's day to day budgets and to become a Council which lived within its means. Difficult decisions would need to be made about how the Council delivered services to local people, including offering a reduced service, charging more for services, or to work with partners and the voluntary sector to deliver some services.

The Leader recognised that it was a very worrying time for Council staff, local people, suppliers, businesses and charities. The Leader stated that the Council would treat everybody fairly, ask for input of those involved in the Borough, and inform everyone as the Council travelled the challenging road ahead.

The Leader encouraged everyone to watch the Extraordinary Council Meeting on Tuesday, 20 June 2023. The meeting would start at 7pm and members of the public were welcome to attend in person, or watch the meeting online.

## 5. QUESTIONS

No written questions had been submitted under Section 3 of the Executive Procedure Rules. The Leader highlighted that the Executive 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 13 July 2023, so the deadline for written questions was 12 noon, 6 July 2023.

Following adoption of the new Constitution for the 2023-24 Municipal Year, the Leader drew attention to the introduction of questions from members of the public to Full Council meetings. The deadline for written questions from members of the public was 12 noon, seven working days before Full Council. The next ordinary meeting of Council would be held on 20 July 2023, so the deadline for written questions was 12 noon, 11 July 2023.

## 6. NOTICE OF MOTION - CLLR E NICHOLSON - RETROSPECTIVE SURFACE WATER ACTION EXE23-046

At its meeting on 30 March 2023, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive.

Councillor E Nicholson

“Retrospective Surface Water Action

The latest [State of the UK Climate](#) report indicates the UK has become wetter over the last few decades, although with significant annual variation. 2011-2020 was 9% wetter than 1961-1990. From the start of the observational record in 1862, six of the ten wettest years across the UK have occurred since 1998.

The recent [UK climate projections \(UKCP18\)](#) provide the most up-to-date assessment of how the UK climate could change over the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Overall, the UK is expected to experience wetter winters and drier summers.

However, rain that does fall in summer will likely be more intense than what we currently experience. For example, rainfall from an event that typically occurs once every 2 years in summer is expected to increase by around 25%. This will impact on the frequency and severity of surface water flooding, particularly in urban areas.

In towns and cities, flash floods are a growing problem. Concrete can't soak up rainwater, so in heavy downpours it has nowhere to go except into drains, overloading sewers and setting off flash floods. During the recent heavy rainfall, the water caused slippages within the station underpass and led to pooling of water within areas of the town centre.

Therefore this motion proposes that this Council:

1. Engages with South West Trains to seek to secure surface water drainage systems are retrospectively fitted to the two entrances to the station underpass and /or other measures to capture rainwater are installed to reduce the excess water overspill causing slippage within the underpass.

2. That Woking planning applications continue to be assessed with surface water drainage systems in mind and that the County, as the lead flood authority is consulted on planning applications where required.
3. That Woking Borough Council work proactively with the partners to green Victoria Square, and introduce features such as rainwater gardens in line with the aspirations of the town centre Masterplan.”

Councillor Nicholson spoke in support of the Motion, commenting on the need to work with partners to improve the town’s sustainability and to consider surface water drainage systems to capture and recycle rainwater. The Executive welcomed the Motion noting that it concerned working with partners to deliver, with the Council providing help and support. The Executive noted the rainwater gardens already installed in parts of the Borough and how the Council could encourage residents to use sustainable solutions, such as when installing driveways.

Councillor Nicholson drew attention to an amendment to the Motion to replace the words ‘South West Trains’ with the words ‘Network Rail and South Western Railway’. The amendment was due to South West Trains having been replaced by South Western Railway, and to reflect the parties with responsibilities for the station. The Executive was supportive of both Cllr Nicholson’s Motion and the amendment, and agreed an amended Motion to read as follows:

“Retrospective Surface Water Action

The latest [State of the UK Climate](#) report indicates the UK has become wetter over the last few decades, although with significant annual variation. 2011-2020 was 9% wetter than 1961-1990. From the start of the observational record in 1862, six of the ten wettest years across the UK have occurred since 1998.

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3. That Woking Borough Council work proactively with the partners to green Victoria Square, and introduce features such as rainwater gardens in line with the aspirations of the town centre Masterplan.”

**RECOMMENDED to Council**

**That the Motion, as amended by the Executive, be supported.**

**7. NOTICE OF MOTION - CLLR K DAVIS - DIGITAL SPINE CONNECTION EXE23-047**

At its meeting on 30 March 2023, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive.

Councillor K Davis

“At the March Overview & Scrutiny Committee meeting, Enterprise M3, the Local Enterprise Partnership discussed the Guildford to Basingstoke Digital Spine and confirmed that Woking would not have a spur to join the Gigabit link.

Connecting to the Internet via Gigabit links is a key part of the Digital Strategy as it is important for the economic output of the borough as well as the limitless opportunities high speed links provides to residents.

Would the Council please investigate opportunities that exist with a view to ensuring that the borough is connected to the fastest possible digital backbone as soon as possible and certainly within three years if it cannot be achieved within the Digital Strategy period.”

Councillor Davis was not in attendance at the meeting to present the Motion. The Executive discussed the Motion which concerned investigating opportunities to provide gigabit capable broadband to local businesses and residents. Councillor Roberts, Portfolio Holder for Economic Development, advised that sufficient provision was most likely to be provided within the next three years by private sector network providers. However, the Portfolio Holder was supportive of investigating other opportunities to accelerate access to gigabit capable broadband should the Council not be achieving the proper balance of access for residents and businesses, and affordability in terms of resources available to the Council.

The Executive was supportive of the broad principle of the Motion. The Leader commented that further information could be provided ahead of Council on 20 July 2023 regarding potential future opportunities.

**RECOMMENDED to Council**

**That the Motion be supported.**

**8. 2022-23 WOKING FOR ALL OUTTURN REPORT ON PERFORMANCE EXE23-038**

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 made during 2022-23 on delivering the Strategy. Several areas of work were highlighted by the Leader and Portfolio Holders, including implementation of the Council's Empty Homes Plan, progress on play area refurbishments, consultations on the Council's Climate Change Strategy and Town Centre Masterplan, and improved company governance arrangements. Attention was drawn to the successful Microsoft 365 rollout which provided Members and Officers with a hybrid working platform.

Regarding the action to work with Surrey County Council (SCC) to maintain highways, paths and pavements, the Executive was advised that SCC had acknowledged it was behind on grass verge cutting in the Borough. Councillor Graves, Portfolio Holder for Greener Woking, commented that the Borough Council was aware of the situation and that SCC was endeavouring to catch-up on the new contract.

In relation to the Victoria Arch widening scheme which was currently paused and on review, the Deputy Leader, Councillor Forster, advised that negotiations were ongoing with Government and it was hoped to bring a paper to the Executive in the autumn.

The Executive thanked Officers across the Council for their hard work and for the progress made against the objectives of the Strategy.

**RESOLVED**

That progress against the actions resulting from the Woking For All Strategy and the Supplementary and Amended Priorities document be noted.

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

**9. WOKING VOLUNTARY SECTOR ANNUAL REPORT EXE23-037**

Councillor Forster, Portfolio Holder for Voluntary Sector, introduced the first Woking Voluntary Sector Annual Report which provided an overview of how the Council supported volunteers, local charities and community groups. The report also set out the outcomes of the community grants for 2023-24 which had been administered through a new partnership with the Community Foundation for Surrey (CFS). The Portfolio Holder explained that the new approach for administering community grants had been very successful and community groups had welcomed the opportunity to access multiple funds through one expression of interest.

The Executive noted that Service Level Agreements had been created for organisations which were deemed particularly important in supporting the Woking community in partnership with Council teams, such as Citizens Advice Woking and York Road Project.

The Executive acknowledged the key part the voluntary sector played in the Borough and expressed its gratitude for the work undertaken across the voluntary sector. Given the Council's challenging financial circumstances, the importance of empowering and working with the voluntary sector going forward to help to deliver services was raised.

RESOLVED

That the wide range of support for the voluntary sector in Woking be noted, including the benefits of the partnership with the Community Foundation for Surrey in administering community grants.

Reason: To report on the outcomes of the awards from the Woking Council Community Fund, and the wider discretionary support provided to the voluntary sector from the Council.

**10. RISK MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS CONTINUITY ANNUAL REPORT EXE23-035**

The Executive received the annual report on Risk Management and Business Continuity. The Executive was advised that good progress had been made and the report set out the key highlights. It was noted that risk management training had been delivered to senior managers and Councillors during the past year. In addition, Corporate Strategic Risks were reviewed and updated quarterly by CLT. Attention was drawn to the changes to the Strategic Risk Register set out in Section 3 of the report.

RESOLVED

That (i) the report be noted; and

- (ii) Risk Management and Business Continuity arrangements will continue to be reviewed and updated in-line with agreed monitoring arrangements.

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

**11. WRITE OFF OF IRRECOVERABLE DEBT EXE23-007**

Members were advised, that under Financial Regulation 12.14, the write off of any debt over £10,000 had to be authorised by the Executive. A small number of business rate and housing benefit debts had been identified as irrecoverable and were now before the Executive. Going forward, it was noted that the process would be conducted quarterly rather than annually in order to allow greater opportunity to recover and manage debts more closely. Following a question regarding the lengths undertaken by the Council to recover debts, Officers advised that formal processes were followed based on the nature of the debt. Officers undertook to provide information to Members outside of the meeting regarding the formal processes followed, and whether notes were placed on credit records.

RESOLVED

That the debts listed in Appendix 1 to the report be written off.

Reason: To write off debts over £10,000.

**12. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING INFORMATION**

The Executive considered the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information (Green Book) March 2023.

RESOLVED

That the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information, March 2023, be received.

Reason: To manage the performance of the Council.

**13. MONITORING REPORTS - PROJECTS EXE23-025**

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 April 2023. Regarding Redeployable CCTV, the Executive was informed that the project was complete as the CCTV cameras had been bought and had been deployed first in Maybury and then would move to Goldsworth Park and other fly tipping hotspots around the Borough.

The Executive welcomed that start dates had been agreed for improvements and refurbishments of Horsell Moor and Oakfield play areas with work commencing within the next month. It was confirmed that both projects had been committed prior to the issue of the Section 114 Notice and would be able to go ahead as planned.

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><b>This document was published on Friday 16 June 2023 and the decisions within it will be implemented on Monday 26 June 2023, subject to call-in.</b></p>
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The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm  
and ended at 8.03 pm.

Chairman: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_