

MINUTES  
OF A MEETING OF THE  
**BOROUGH COUNCIL OF WOKING**

held on 27 February 2025

Present:

Cllr L Morales (Mayor)  
Cllr A Boote (Deputy Mayor)

Cllr H Akberali	Cllr C Martin
Cllr A Aslam	Cllr J Morley
Cllr A-M Barker	Cllr S Mukherjee
Cllr T Bonsundy-O'Bryan	Cllr F Mumtaz
Cllr G Cosnahan	Cllr E Nicholson
Cllr W Forster	Cllr S Oades
Cllr P Graves	Cllr P Pandher
Cllr S Greentree	Cllr J Pearce
Cllr S Howes	Cllr M I Raja
Cllr A Javaid	Cllr L Rice
Cllr I Johnson	Cllr D Roberts
Cllr M Kuipers	Cllr T Spenser
Cllr R Leach	Cllr M Sullivan
Cllr L Lyons	

Also Present: Sir Tony Redmond (Lead Commissioner) and Carol Culley (Commissioner).

Absent: Councillor D Jordan

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.**

Apologies for absence had been received from the Chief Executive, Richard Carr, and Councillor Daryl Jordan. Councillor Will Forster had indicated that he would be late in joining the meeting.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.**

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 companies were listed in an attached schedule. The interests were such that Mr Foster could advise on those items.

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor Ian Johnson declared an interest in item 12A– General Fund Budget 2025-26 arising from his wife's employment by Citizens Advice Woking as Provincial House, where Citizens Advice Woking was based, was referred to in the savings proposals in Appendix 1 of the report. Councillor Johnson would leave the Chamber if Provincial House was discussed during the debate. The interest was such that Councillor Johnson left the Chamber during the determination of the recommendations.

**3. MINUTES.**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 12 December 2024 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

**4. MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS.**

The Mayor reported on the many events she had attended following the previous meeting of Council on 12 December 2024. These had included a number of Christmas events such as a service at Guildford Cathedral in aid of Help the Aged, Christmas concerts by the Elmbridge Choir and a Ukrainian Christmas Choir at the Lighthouse.

More recently, the Mayor had attended a Winston Churchill School production of Legally Blonde the Musical, a third anniversary Ukrainian war event in Jubilee Square and the opening of the Hoe Valley sixth form.

**5. URGENT BUSINESS.**

No items of Urgent Business were considered.

**6. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF PUBLIC WBC24-004.**

The following questions had been received from a member of public.

Lance Spencer

"The new Hilton Hotel in Victoria Place, Woking, opened on 31 October 2024, which is good news. It is a very high-quality hotel development that will hopefully be massively successful.

Question: How much of the £760m spent on the Victoria Place development did Woking Borough Council or associated companies spend on the Hilton Hotel development, including fixtures, fittings, and any other expenditure per opening?

Question: How much income does Woking Borough Council or associated companies expect to receive in FY24/25 and each financial year for the next five years from the Hilton Hotel?"

Reply from Councillor Ann-Marie Barker

"Thank you for your question.

I do understand the public interest in relation to the Hilton Hotel, especially considering the issues concerning the cladding failures.

In relation to the Victoria Place Development, Woking Borough Council provided the lending to Victoria Square Woking Limited for the construction of the development.

The Council is restricted in what information it can provide related to the commercial transactions of Victoria Square Woking Limited which is classified as a public authority in its own right.

Because it is wholly council owned, Victoria Square Woking Limited are subject to Freedom of Information requests.

I have forwarded your request to the Board of Victoria Square Woking to respond to as a Freedom of Information request.

In respect to your question and its relevance to the Council:

- The Council does not receive income from the Hilton Hotel. Such income is received by Victoria Square Woking. Hilton are paid a management fee to operate the hotel and profits come back to Victoria Square Woking. Prior to the recent cladding failure, performance of the Hilton was in line with the business plan forecasts."

Supplementary Question

"Thank you Councillor Barker for your response. As the sole shareholder, Woking Borough Council that is, can she encourage the Victoria Square Woking Limited Company to respond to the Freedom of Information in a meaningful way, and will I get a copy of the response when you receive it?"

Reply from Councillor Ann-Marie Barker

"Thank you for your supplementary question, Mr Spencer.

Yes, the Freedom of Information request will be shared with you. That's at the point of giving it to them so they can respond to you, and we'll encourage them to do that as quickly as possible.

Thank you for coming along this evening."

**7. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL.**

No written questions had been received from Members of the Council.

**8. NOTICES OF MOTION.**

No motions had been received from Members of the Council.

**9. ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, COMMITTEE CHAIRS AND THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE.**

The Budget

The Leader of the Council spoke of the budget process and the progress the Council had achieved since the previous budget had been set in March 2024, when the Council had faced the struggle of trying to identify funds for vital services for residents such as Citizens' Advice.

A budget for the coming year had been drawn up, although the support of the Government in relation to the Authority's debt was necessary.

The Hilton Hotel

A further panel had become loose from the Hilton Hotel in January and Sir Robert McAlpine were now working to make the cladding safe.

The building was owned by Victoria Square Woking Ltd. and they were working with Sir Robert McAlpine to get a fix in place and the hotel made safe so that the road could be opened. Victoria Square Woking Ltd. were using all contract and legal steps to ensure that Sir Robert McAlpine resolved the issue as quickly as possible.

Road Closures

It was noted that the past week had seen a number of road closures.

As well as the closure of Victoria Way for safety reasons, there had been a leak of water along Goldsworth Road and electricity failure to properties around Triggs Lane. Goldsworth Road had been closed from the Morrison's roundabout to Victoria Way and traffic light controls at Triggs Lane and Goldsworth Road roundabout.

The Leader expressed her sympathy for all those who had been affected, including those who had lost who lost power or gas. A letter had been sent to Matt Furness, the County Council lead for highways, to set out the concerns over the recent traffic issues.

Local Government Reorganisation.

The Leader reported that Surrey County Council had put Woking Borough Council and all the other authorities in Surrey on the fast track to reorganise local government. For Surrey, this was expected to involve the creation of two or three unitary authorities that would combine the functions of both County and Borough Authorities.

The Government had set an ambitious timetable to respond to its request for a proposal for a new structure in the County, with the initial proposals to be submitted by 21 March 2025, followed by detailed proposals by 9 May 2025. The proposals would need to address the debt faced by the County as a whole, which was in the region of £6bn.

Deputy Mayor

Finally, on a positive note, the Leader announced that the Liberal Democrat Group would be nominating Councillor Rob Leach for the position of Deputy Mayor for the forthcoming Municipal Year.

**10. FINAL ACCOUNTS REPORT 2023/24 WBC25-009.**

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Councillor Dale Roberts, introduced a report on the accounts for 2023/24, noting that the Audit and Governance Committee has received the accounts at its meeting on 20 February 2025. The Government had adopted a 'backstop' position and had announced that the outstanding accounts for 2023/24 had to be published by 28 February 2025.

The draft accounts for 2023/24 had been published on 16 January 2025 for a public inspection period before being presented to Council for approval. It was noted that, as agreed with Commissioners and External Auditors, the issues outlined in the S114 notice and the mitigations set out in the Extraordinary Financial Support had been dealt with in the 2023/24 accounts rather than restating previous years. The 2023/24 Accounts had been prepared on this basis and included the significant reassessment of the Council's Revenue Account and Balance Sheet since the issuing of the S114 Notice and the start of Intervention.

Previous accounts for 2019-2020, 2020-2021, 2021-2022 and 2022-23 had been approved by Council in December 2024 subject to caveats. The accounts for 2023/24 had been recommended for approval by the Audit and Governance Committee subject to those same caveats. It was noted that the accounts had been based on the statement by the Director of Finance who had made clear that the accounts were based on the best information available.

**RESOLVED**

That the 2023/24 Final Accounts be approved and submitted to the External Auditors, Grant Thornton.

**11. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC.**

The Mayor moved and Councillor Boote seconded that the press and public should be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the agenda item 12K in the event any Member wished to discuss the confidential details of the supporting document, Strategic Options Appraisal.

**RESOLVED**

That in the event any Member wished to discuss the confidential Strategic Options Appraisal for the Joint Waste Collection Services Contract Retender under agenda item 12K, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of that item in view of the nature of the proceedings that, if members of the press and public were present, 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).

**12. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE AND COMMITTEES WBC25-002.**

The Council had before it a report on the recommendations from the Executive, the Employment Committee and the Audit and Governance Committee, setting out the extracts from the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 13 February 2025, the Employment Committee held on 19 February 2025 and the Audit and Governance Committee held on 20 February 2025.

In accordance with the Constitution, the recommendations were deemed to have been moved and seconded.

**12A General Fund Budget 2025-26 EXE25-001**

The recommendations of the Executive in respect of the General Fund Budget were introduced by the Portfolio Holder for Finance, Councillor Dale Roberts. The report outlined the provisional budget proposals for the coming year together with proposals for the three years up to 2027/28.

The Council's discretionary services would be maintained under the budget proposals, and the areas of housing and homelessness had been identified as priority service areas. It was noted that, despite the financial position faced by the Authority, the Council's proposals would limit the year's Council Tax increase to 2.99%, an increase adopted by most of the Surrey Authorities.

In presenting the proposals, the Portfolio Holder thanked all the Officers who had helped in the development of the budget, including all those who had sought to identify all possible savings while ensuring services were maintained for those most in need.

Councillor Ian Johnson, the Portfolio Holder for Housing Services, highlighted the work undertaken to support the Council's housing services and the support for homeless individuals. Working with Thamesway Housing, the Council was able to bring properties currently classed as void back into use, to be let to those needing homes.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Ann-Marie Barker, highlighted a number key points, reiterating the challenge faced in ensuring the Council Tax increase was kept at 2.99%, outlining the work being undertaken to fully record the true costs of services and the focus on essential services such as housing.

Councillor Roberts thanked the Councillors for their comments before referring them to the recommendations set out in the report before them.

#### RESOLVED

- That (i) the £2.5m of savings in 2025/26, rising to £4.7m by 2027/28 as set-out in Appendix 1 to the report be agreed, subject to any comments received from Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee;
- (ii) the £2.4m of growth pressures in 2025/26, rising to £3.2m by 2027/28 as set-out in Appendix 2 to the report be agreed, subject to any comments received from Resource and Finance Scrutiny Committee;
- (iii) the Equality Impact Assessment on the savings proposals that are summarised in Appendix 6 to the report, with detailed reports on each resident facing saving proposal, be noted as part of the decision-making process;
- (iv) the position of the Business Rates and Council Tax Collection Fund, including the brought forward surplus/deficit position and the Council Tax and Business Rates bases for 2025/26 as set out in Section 14 of the report be noted and agreed;
- (v) the Management of Change and Flexible Use of Capital Receipts budgets proposed at Appendices 3 and 4 to the report be supported; and
- (vi) it be noted that Full Council on 3 March 2025 will receive a final report from the Strategic Director of Finance to seek final, formal approval of the Council's budget, the Exceptional Financial Support and Council Tax for 2025/26.

Reason: The contents of the report is to ensure open and transparent governance in the financial affairs of the Council in balancing the 2025/26 Budget, and the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

**12B Fees and Charges 2025-26 EXE24-060**

Councillor Dale Roberts, Portfolio Holder for Finance, presented the recommendations of the Executive in respect of the proposed fees and charges for the coming financial year. The Council was advised that the proposals would ensure that discretionary services were sustainable going forward. Benchmarking had been undertaken and adjustments had been made for inflation, to ensure that service costs were appropriately allocated. Appendices 1 to 3 of the report considered by the Executive had set out all the proposed fees and charges for 2025/26.

The proposals were opened up to debate and concern was expressed that, for some charges, Woking Borough Council was the most expensive or close to the most expensive authority in Surrey, with the costs of the Careline service and the meals service highlighted as examples where this was the case.

It was noted that the Council was not in a position to subsidise such services, unlike other Authorities, and that the level of services was not necessarily comparable across Councils. In respect of the Careline service, for example, Officers visited the residents to ensure their needs were being met and supported them in accessing other services such as pension credits.

Not all costs were increasing. As an example, the three hour parking charge was being reduced from £5 to £3.50 to encourage visitors to stay longer in the town. The new charge would make Woking competitive with neighbouring towns.

Councillor Roberts responded to the comments made during the debate, emphasising that the Council was committed to reducing costs through efficiencies.

In accordance with Standing Orders, the names of Members voting for and against the recommendations were recorded as follows:

In favour: Councillors H Akberali, A Aslam, A-M Barker, T Bonsundy-O'Bryan, A Boote, G Cosnahan, W Forster, P Graves, S Greentree, I Johnson, M Kuipers, R Leach, L Lyons, C Martin, J Morley, S Mukherjee, F Mumtaz, E Nicholson, P Pandher, J Pearce, L Rice, D Roberts, T Spenser and M Sullivan.

Total in favour: 24

Against: Councillors S Howes and S Oades.

Total against: 2

Present not voting: The Mayor and Councillors A Javaid and M I Raja.

Total present not voting: 3

The recommendations were therefore carried by 24 votes in favour and 2 votes against.

**RESOLVED**

That (i) the proposed guiding principles in relation to setting fees and charges, set out in section 4 of the report, be approved; and

(ii) the discretionary fees and charges for 2025/26, as set out in Appendices 1-3 of the report, be approved.

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

**12C Housing Revenue Account Budgets 2025-26 EXE25-002**

The Council had before it the recommendations of the Executive which proposed the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budgets for 2025/26. The budgets would set the framework for the management of the Council's housing stock and would ensure that the rental income was used effectively to maintain and improve the properties.

The proposals were introduced by Councillor Dale Roberts, Portfolio Holder for Finance, and Councillor Ian Johnson, Housing Portfolio Holder, who highlighted the intention to spend £16m on fire risk and decent homes over the coming year, leading to a big impact for tenants. The proposals included an element of borrowing, though it was emphasised that this had been budgeted for.

**RESOLVED**

That (i) the Final Housing Revenue Account budgets for 2025-26, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be agreed; and

(ii) with effect from 7 April 2025, rents be increased by 2.7%.

Reason: To enable a decision to be made by Council on the Housing Revenue budget for 2025 and approval of the increase in rents from 7 April 2025.

**12D Capital Programme 2024-25 to 2028-29 EXE25-003**

Councillor Dale Roberts, Portfolio Holder for Finance, presented the recommendations of the Executive in respect of the Capital Programme which outlined the investments over the period 2024/25 to 2028/29 to deliver the Council's strategies and objectives. The proposals focussed on essential investments in

infrastructure and housing. Of the proposed spending of £30.5m, a total of £23.5m would be spent on housing services. General fund projects included the maintenance of green spaces, works to recreation grounds and plans to upgrade information technology for transformation.

**RESOLVED**

- That (i) the Capital Programme 2024/25 to 2028/29, as summarised in Appendices 1 to 4 to the report, be approved subject to reports on projects where appropriate; and
- (ii) the proposed financing arrangements at Appendix 2 to the report be approved.

Reason: To recommend to Council that it approves the capital programme and the proposed financing arrangements for 2024/25 onwards considered necessary to support the Council's service plans and objectives.

**12E Housing Resident Engagement Strategy EXE25-021**

Councillor Ian Johnson, Portfolio Holder for Housing, outlined the ambitions of the engagement strategy and the approach adopted in its development, central to which was the involvement of many tenants; the Portfolio Holder noted that the foreword of the strategy had been drawn up by local residents.

The Members of the Council echoed the words of appreciation for the support of local residents and the hard work of Housing Officers, and endorsed the recommendations of the Executive.

**RESOLVED**

That the Housing Resident Engagement Strategy be approved.

Reason: The decision will ensure that there is a focus on Housing Resident Engagement, its importance, key areas of focus and the baseline of engagement opportunities that Woking Borough Council Housing Service commit to providing between 2025 and 2028.

**12F Pay Policy Statement 2025/26**

The Mayor referred the Council to the recommendations from the Employment Committee. The Chair of the Employment Committee, Councillor Ann-Marie Barker, was invited to introduce the recommendation to approve the 2025/26 Pay Policy Statement. The Statement, required by the Localism Act 2011, sought to provide transparency in respect of the Council's approach to setting the pay of employees. The statement outlined the pay details for chief officers and the lowest paid employees, providing a measurable ratio between the two.

The past year had seen the creation of a Pay Panel which would consider proposals submitted by managers in support of individual pay increases. The Panel had met once, with a further meeting to be held in due course. Councillor Barker noted that, amongst the positives in regard to staff pay, the Council would be paying the living wage for the lowest paid staff.

RESOLVED

That the Pay Policy Statement for 2025/26, as set out in the report, be approved.

### **12G Pay Award 2025/26**

The Employment Committee had considered the Council's position on pay and progression for employees for the coming year. Included within the recommendations was the addition of the Real Living Wage for the lowest paid staff. It was further proposed that the inflationary element of the pay award should be deferred until the National Joint Council for local government had published a proposed uplift.

Councillor Roberts took the opportunity to recognise the impact the decision not to make a pay award in 2024/25 had had on staff, expressing his gratitude that they had stayed with the Council.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the Real Living Wage is implemented from 1 April 2025;
- (ii) pay progression for employees who meet the set criteria is implemented from 1 April 2025; and
- (iii) the pay award for 2025/26 is deferred until National Joint Council (NJC) for local government proposed offer is made.

### **12H Review of the Audit and Governance Committee Terms of Reference STA25-007**

Councillor Stephen Oades, Chair of the Audit and Governance Committee, introduced the recommendation from the Committee to approved amended terms of reference covering the responsibilities of the Committee. The terms of reference had been carefully drafted to ensure that they were consistent with CIPFA guidelines.

The proposals were welcomed by the Council.

RESOLVED

That the amended Terms of Reference for the Audit and Governance Committee be adopted, as amended by the Committee.

**12I Annual Review of the Audit and Governance Committee STA25-008**

The report on the annual review of the activities of the Audit and Governance Committee had been considered by the Committee at its meeting on 20 February 2025. The report set out the Committee's work during the 2024/25 Municipal Year and included details of membership and attendance, training and development and a work programme for the coming year.

The Committee had welcomed the report and had further recommended that reports to the Committee should include a summary section to assist the Members of the Committee.

The Chair of the Committee endorsed the recommendations now before the Council.

**RESOLVED**

That (i) the Annual Review of the Audit and Governance Committee for 2024/25 be received; and

(ii) Audit and Governance committee reports over four pages long should include an Executive Summary at the start.

**12J Joint Waste Collection Services Contract Re-tender EXE25-016**

The Mayor referred the Council to the recommendations of the Executive in relation to the reprocurement of the joint contract for waste collection. The recommendations were introduced by the Portfolio Holder for Waste and Recycling, Councillor Ellen Nicholson, who explained that a specialist advisor had been appointed in 2024 to review the commissioning options for the service. The work had concluded that reprocurring the existing contract for a period of seven years was the best option; the contract would include options to extend the contract for two further terms of seven years.

It was noted that a very positive debate on the merits of the proposals had taken place at the recent meeting of the Environment and Place Committee. The Committee had been advised that the proposal now before the Council posed the least financial and commercial risk to the four Councils in the partnership arrangement.

The Portfolio Holder responded to the comments made during the debate and highlighted the benefits of reprocurring the current contract for the Borough.

**RESOLVED**

That (i) the procurement and contract strategy for waste collection services be approved:

a. To reprocure a joint contract with Mole Valley District Council, Elmbridge Borough Council and Surrey Heath

Borough Council based on the current baseline service specification (outlined in 6.1 of the report) for waste collection with an initial term of seven years commencing on expiry of the current contract in 2027 and expiring in 2034, with two further options to extend up to a maximum of fourteen years.

- b. The contract management function will continue to be delegated by the four authorities to one client team.
- (ii) authority be delegated to the Head of Environmental Services in consultation with the Strategic Director - Place, Director of Legal and Democratic Services, Section 151 Officer and the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Waste as a member of the Joint Waste Collection Services to take all actions necessary to give effect to the decision in (i) including but not limited to;
- a. The final specification.
  - b. The price/quality split and the detailed evaluation criteria and weightings.

Reason: The Council has a statutory duty to arrange for the collection of household waste (Environmental Protection Act 1990). A strategic review of the options for succeeding the existing contract, concludes that reprocurement offers the best value at least risk.

## **12K Joint Waste Collection Services Contract Re-tender EXE25-022**

At the request of Councillor Oades and in accordance with the decision taken earlier in the meeting under Item 11, the Mayor announced that the meeting would move into Part II – Press and Public Excluded – to enable questions to be raised in respect of the confidential supporting paper (the Strategic Options Appraisal) for the Joint Waste Collection Services Contract.

Following a short discussion in Part II, the meeting returned to considerations in public and the Mayor referred the Councillors to the recommendation before them, namely to note the Strategic Options Appraisal.

**RESOLVED**

That the Strategic Options Appraisal, attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be noted.

Reason: The Council has a statutory duty to arrange for the collection of household waste (Environmental Protection Act 1990). A strategic review of the options for succeeding the

existing contract, concludes that reprocurement offers the best value at least risk.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm  
and ended at 8.51 pm

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

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