

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
EXECUTIVE

held on 10 September 2020
Present:

Cllr D J Bittleston (Chairman)
Cllr A Azad (Vice-Chair)

Cllr S Ashall Cllr K M Davis
Cllr G S Cundy Cllr D Harlow

Also Present: Councillors M Ali, T Aziz, A-M Barker, J E Bond, K Howard, D E Hughes, S Hussain, I Johnson and M A Whitehand.

Absent: Councillor C S Kemp.

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 16 July 2020 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Kemp.

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 D J Bittleston declared a non-pecuniary interest in any items concerning the companies of which he was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that speaking and voting were permissible.

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor A Azad declared a non-pecuniary interest in any items concerning the companies of which she was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that speaking and voting were permissible.

The interest of Councillor C S Kemp was referred to in the agenda but it should be noted that Councillor Kemp sent apologies to the meeting.

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor D Harlow declared a non-pecuniary interest in any items concerning the companies of which she was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that speaking and voting were permissible.

In accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct, Councillor G S Cundy declared a non-pecuniary interest in any items concerning the companies of which he was a Council-appointed director. The interests were such that speaking and voting were permissible.

The interest of Ray Morgan was referred to in the agenda but it should be noted that Mr Morgan sent apologies to the meeting.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Deputy Chief Executive, Douglas Spinks, 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 Spinks could advise the Executive on those items.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Director of Legal and Democratic Services, Peter Bryant, 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 Bryant could advise the Executive on those items.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Director of Finance, Leigh Clarke, 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 Clarke could advise the Executive on those items.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Director of Housing, 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.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Director of Community Services, 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 Finance, Leigh Clarke, declared a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning Woking Football Club and/or the GolDev Woking Limited development. The interest arose from (i) her husband having a small shareholding in Woking Football Club and (ii) being a Council-appointed director of Kingfield Community Sports Centre Limited. The interest was such that Mrs Clarke could advise the Executive on those items.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Director of Legal and Democratic Services, Peter Bryant, declared a disclosable personal interest (non-pecuniary) in any items concerning Woking Football Club and/or the GolDev Woking Limited development. The interest arose from (i) him being a member of the Cards Trust (the supporters' club for Woking Football Club), (ii) providing occasional unpaid assistance to Woking Football Club, e.g. acting as returning officer at the election of directors and (iii) being a Council-appointed director of Kingfield Community Sports Centre Limited. The interest was such that Mr Bryant could advise the Executive on those items.

Regarding Item 8 – Management Arrangements, the Director of Legal and Democratic Services, Peter Bryant, confirmed that the Chief Executive, Ray Morgan and the Deputy Chief Executive, Douglas Spinks, had no interest to declare under the Code of Conduct for Employees as the report did not affect either Mr Morgan or Mr Spinks in a personal capacity.

5. QUESTIONS

The Chairman reported that 15 questions had been submitted by members of the public under Section 3 of the Executive Procedure Rules regarding environmental issues, the Council's level of debt, accessibility of documents, the Victoria Square development, Thameswey companies, expense claims, support for local business, and open spaces. A copy of the questions together with the replies was before the Executive. The Chairman advised that the questioners would be sent a copy of the replies to their questions.

6. NOTICE OF MOTION - CLLR M ALI - EXPENSES PAID BY WOKING COUNCIL OWNED BODIES EXE20-051

At its meeting on 30 July 2020, the Council referred the following Notice of Motion to the Executive.

Councillor M Ali

Expenses paid by Woking Council owned bodies

“This council requires that expenses of all kinds (e.g. benefits, gifts and trips) are published for Council Officers and Councillors appointed by Woking Council to be Directors of companies owned by Woking Council and its residents.

These expenses will be publicly available at monthly intervals henceforth and also retrospectively back to the formation of the bodies or appointment.”

Councillor Ali attended the meeting and spoke in support of the Motion. The Executive noted that expenses information was currently published by the Council. Officers advised that details of gifts and hospitality received by Officers were published in an open Register and that going forward, these could be published on the Council's website. It was highlighted that Councillors and Officers appointed as Directors to subsidiary companies did not receive payment. The Executive confirmed its support for openness and transparency, however it was not supportive of the Motion as the Executive did not support backdating information to the formation of the companies due to the administrative burden. The Chairman undertook to ask the Director of Legal and Democratic Services to investigate, before Council on 15 October 2020, backdating one or two years of expenses in order to ascertain the work involved for Officers. The Chairman stated that the Executive would be happy in principle to recommend at Council that expenses paid by Woking Council owned bodies be published, as set out in the Motion, in the future.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the Motion be not supported.

7. REORGANISATION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT EXE20-056

The Leader of the Council introduced the report which sought approval of the Executive to enable the Council to respond to the forthcoming proposals in respect of the Government White Paper on Devolution and Local Government. It was reported that Simon Clarke MP, the Minister for Regional Growth and Local Government, had resigned on 8 September 2020 and had been replaced by Luke Hall MP. The Leader of the Council set out the background to the paper and advised that Surrey County Council was pursuing a proposal to establish a single unitary authority. It was noted that the Surrey Borough and District Councils were jointly investigating appropriate unitary arrangements. The Executive was informed that each District and Borough Council had agreed to provide £30,000 towards joint work to investigate alternative proposals, and for communication and consultation with residents.

Following a question regarding the possible cancellation of elections next year, the Executive heard that the Secretary of State had the power to suspend elections up until mid-March without requiring an Act of Parliament. The position regarding Covid would also be a factor in whether elections next year could be held successfully.

The possible effect of Local Government reorganisation on unfinished projects, such as the Victoria Square development, was raised. The Director of Legal and Democratic Services reported that under every Local Government reorganisation which had taken place, all the rights, liabilities and obligations of any Local Government entity which had been abolished were transferred by Act of Parliament and statutory instrument to the successor authority. Therefore the Council's obligation to fund the Victoria Square development would pass to whatever unitary authority took over, if that was the result of the reorganisation.

The Executive noted that Officers would report on preparations for a Governance Review at Council on 15 October 2020. The Governance Review would be to establish a Town Council and/or Parish Councils, as Woking did not have any Parish or Town Councils. The Leader commented that Parish and/or Town Councils could form the platform of more local representation under any unitary arrangement in Surrey. The role of Neighbourhood Forums would also be considered in the Review.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the current work in respect of unitary authority arrangements be noted;
- (ii) the use of £30,000 of contingency approved under delegated authority be noted; and
- (iii) preparations be made for a Governance Review and reported to Council for approval at its meeting on 15 October 2020.

Reason: To enable the Council to respond to the proposals for unitary authorities.

8. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS EXE20-055

The Executive received a report which sought approval of the Executive to the proposed recruitment arrangements for the roles of Chief Executive and Director of Planning from April 2021. Members would be involved in the recruitment process. It was noted that the existing Chief Executive's contract of employment terminated on 31 March 2021, and the Deputy Chief Executive was due to retire on the same date. It was explained that the role of Deputy Chief Executive was personal to the current incumbent.

The current uncertainty due to Covid and local government reorganisation was raised. The Portfolio Holder, Cllr Azad, commented that it was in the Borough's interests to continue business as usual with regards to the recruitment arrangements set out in the report. Discussion ensued on whether alternative proposals had been considered, such as an interim role or sharing a Chief Executive with another local authority. The Leader agreed to discuss possible alternative proposals at the next Leaders Meeting.

It was noted that the Director of Legal and Democratic Services, who was also due to retire next year, had not yet decided upon a retirement date.

The Executive was advised that the new Chief Executive would have the ability to designate a Corporate Management Group (CMG) member as his or her Deputy.

RESOLVED

That the recruitment arrangements set out in the report be approved.

Reason: To make the necessary arrangements for the recruitment of two members of the Corporate Management Team.

9. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING INFORMATION

The Executive considered the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information (Green Book) July 2020. Discussion ensued on the Council's financial position in light of the coronavirus pandemic. The Director of Finance, Leigh Clarke, explained the difficulties in providing reliable and accurate forecasts at the current time and advised that Officers were working towards reporting on the financial position at the November Executive. It was noted that the Government had recently released a loss of income claim form which would allow councils to claim for loss of income as a result of the pandemic.

Regarding car parking income, the Executive was informed that the numbers of cars in the car parks continued to be below normal expected levels.

Members discussed recycling rates and noted that during the Covid period there had been a general upwards trend in recycling, although that had been offset by an increase in waste generally. The Portfolio Holder for Waste and Recycling, Councillor Davis, stressed the need to concentrate on reducing waste and recycling figures.

Following a question regarding savings achieved through the removal of staffing posts, the Executive was informed that the posts removed had been historic posts which had not been used for some time and could be stripped out without having an adverse impact on the operation. The Executive was advised that staffing levels were constantly reviewed by CMG and the level of resourcing was appropriate.

Members also discussed the energy efficiency of Council owned homes, noting that Officers would continue to look at improving Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) scores.

RESOLVED

That the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information, July 2020, be received.

Reason: To manage the performance of the Council.

This document was published on Friday, 11 September 2020 and the decisions within it will be implemented on Monday 21 September 2020, subject to call-in.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 8.09 pm.

Chairman: _____

Date: _____