

MINUTES
OF A MEETING OF THE
EXECUTIVE

held on 19 November 2020

Present:

Cllr A Azad (Chairman)
Cllr S Ashall (Vice-Chair)

Cllr K M Davis Cllr D Harlow
Cllr G W Elson

Also Present: Councillors A-M Barker and D E Hughes.

Absent: Councillors C S Kemp.

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 8 October 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 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 Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Chief Executive, Ray Morgan, 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 Morgan could advise the Executive on those items.

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.

In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Chief Executive, Ray Morgan, declared a disclosable personal interest (pecuniary) in Item 10 – Management Arrangements arising from it relating to his employment with the Council. The interest was such that Mr Morgan left the meeting whilst the item was determined.

5. QUESTIONS

The Chairman reported that three questions had been submitted by members of the public under Section 3 of the Executive Procedure Rules regarding missed collections of communal recycling bins, the Victoria Square development and Wolsey Place lettings strategy. 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. REVIEW OF FEES AND CHARGES 2021-22 EXE20-027

The Executive received a report detailing the proposed discretionary fees and charges for 2021-22. Councillor Ashall, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Financial Planning and Policy, explained the proposed increases to leisure charges, community meals and Careline. It was noted that community meals charges had been frozen since 2017. Attention was drawn to Table 5.1 on page 16 of the agenda pack which summarised the proposed changes in fees and charges.

Discussion ensued on Government support received in relation to the leisure contract. The Executive was advised that Freedom Leisure had access to the Government's furlough scheme and had received rate relief where appropriate. In addition, the Council had received support from the Government in terms of loss of management fee income. Officers advised that it was unclear at the present time whether further support would be made available by the Government.

Following a question regarding community meals charges, the Executive was informed that no increase in cancellations had been noted due to affordability issues. Regarding Centres for the Community, it was noted that activity was taking place to ensure centres were being more widely used, such as hosting health visitor clinics and youth services.

Officers confirmed that existing registered disabled blue badge holders would be transferred onto the new parking system at no cost. It was noted that the £15 administration charge for renewals or new applications would apply for the full three year term of the disabled persons blue badge.

It was explained that the licensing and taxi service was currently running at a loss as the Council had chosen not to increase licence fees for several years. A modest increase in fees was therefore proposed.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the discretionary fees and charges, as set out in Appendices 1 – 4 of the report, be approved.

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

7. NEXT STEPS ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME EXE20-125

The Executive received a report which sought approval to recommend to Council the acquisition of 121 Chertsey Road for use as move-on accommodation for rough sleepers who had been accommodated during the Covid-19 pandemic and prevent their return to the streets. Councillor Harlow, Portfolio Holder for Housing, explained that the proposal would be funded by Government capital grant funding with the remaining balance raised through Council borrowing.

Discussion ensued regarding rent levels for the 25 studio apartments. The Portfolio Holder explained that as the intention was for clients to move-on to permanent accommodation, and the apartments were of a high specification, it was felt that the rent levels should not be set too low. It was noted that the Government had also provided revenue funding for a Tenancy Sustainment Officer and three Night Support Workers. Members also discussed the benefit cap and financing arrangements between the Council and Thamesway.

The Executive welcomed the proposed purchase of 121 Chertsey Road which would add to the Council's existing portfolio of temporary accommodation premises.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That (i) subject to the Government grant funding being secured, the acquisition of 121 Chertsey Road for use as move-on accommodation be approved at a total cost of up to £6.7 million; and

(ii) the Director of Housing, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, be authorised to take all necessary actions to secure the grant funding and deliver the scheme.

Reason: To enable the Council to provide suitable move-on accommodation for rough sleepers who have been accommodated during the Covid-19 pandemic and prevent their return to the streets.

8. DRAFT INVESTMENT PROGRAMME 2020-21 TO 2024-25 EXE20-031

The Executive received a report which set out the draft Investment Programme 2020-21 to 2024-25. Councillor Ashall, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Financial Planning and Policy, drew attention to the considerable impact of the Covid pandemic on local government finances and advised that the Council faced a high level of uncertainty going forward. The Executive heard that it was unclear whether the Council would receive additional compensation from Government or whether Government support would continue into 2021/22. Councillor Ashall advised that a number of projects had been temporarily removed from the funded Investment Programme to protect the Council's reserves due to the impact of the pandemic.

Members discussed the proposal for the Finance Director to request a reduction in Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) borrowing rate. It was commented that the likelihood of success was unknown until conversations commenced with the Government on the matter.

Following a question regarding We Are Working, which had been placed on the list of temporarily suspended projects due to Covid, Officers advised that the aim of the

campaign had been to promote and drive interest in the town. Although We Are Woking had previously included climate change promotion, it was noted that climate change was now promoted through Planet Woking. Members also discussed the Transit Site project and Victoria Square modelling.

Following a request for a longer summary to be made available at December Council concerning the Thameswey Energy Ltd additional funding requirement, Councillor Barker was invited to advise Councillor Ashall of the information that could be included.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the draft Investment Programme for 2020/21 to 2024/25 be received;
- (ii) Managers, Corporate Management Group and Portfolio Holders be asked to review the Programme for any further cost improvements including reviewing the projects, their costs and timing to achieve savings with the minimum impact on citizen outcomes;
- (iii) the Finance Director requests a reduction in PWLB borrowing rate, through the reduction of the margin applied by the government, to support the Victoria Square, Sheerwater and HIF regeneration schemes;
- (iv) Officers work with Surrey County Council to agree an acceptable use of additional Council Tax generated through the Long Term Empty premium to support climate change initiatives; and

RECOMMENDED to Council

That (v) the loan facility provided to Thameswey Energy Ltd for the expanded Poole Road Energy Centre be increased to £35.6m.

Reason: To agree the draft Investment Programme for consultation before submission for final approval to the Council in February 2021.

9. CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2021-22 EXE20-028

The Executive received a report which sought approval to recommend to Council the Calendar of Meetings 2021-22. The Council meeting on Thursday, 29 July 2021 was raised as it was in the summer holiday period. Officers confirmed that a Council meeting was required on the last Thursday in July on the basis that the current statutory deadline for Council approval for the Statement of Accounts was the end of July. The scheduled Council meeting on 29 July 2021 would maximise the time available for preparation of the accounts. The Executive was advised that in the event that the statutory deadline was changed, Officers would re-visit the Calendar of Meetings in light of requirements.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the Calendar of Meetings 2021/22 be approved as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

Reason: In accordance with Standing Order 1.2 of the Constitution, which states that “The date of the annual (Council) meeting and those of ordinary meetings shall be fixed by the Council in or about December of the preceding municipal year”.

10. MANAGEMENT ARRANGEMENTS EXE20-123

[NOTE: In accordance with the Officer Employment Procedure Rules, the Chief Executive, Ray Morgan, declared a disclosable personal interest (pecuniary) in this item arising from it relating to his employment with the Council. The interest was such that Mr Morgan left the meeting whilst the item was determined.]

The Executive received a report which sought approval to recommend to Council the proposed employment, on a part time basis, of the current holder of the post of Chief Executive as Project Manager in order to continue supporting the Council in the management of the Victoria Square project, following his retirement on 31 March 2021. The Leader of the Council, Councillor Azad, explained that it was proposed that the current Chief Executive would be employed on a rolling three-month mutual notice contract and would report to the new Chief Executive. It was confirmed that the new Chief Executive would have absolute responsibility for the Victoria Square project.

The Executive supported the proposal noting the importance for the Council to retain the invaluable knowledge and expertise of the current Chief Executive in respect of the Victoria Square project.

RECOMMENDED to Council

That the current Chief Executive be appointed as Project Manager from 1 April 2021 on a 22 hours per week contract at £62,145 plus pro rata Flexible Benefits of £4,130, subject to mutual notice of three months.

Reason: To support the Council in the delivery of the Victoria Square project.

11. DRAFT GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2021-22 EXE20-029

Councillor Ashall, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Financial Planning and Policy, introduced the report which outlined the draft General Fund Budget for 2021-22. Councillor Ashall explained that the report represented an interim stage in the business planning process of the Council. Attention was drawn to the table on page 187 of the agenda pack which set out the forecast Covid-19 outturn for 2020-21. The loss of revenues in particular from car parking charges and commercial rents was highlighted. Councillor Ashall stated that although the Council's reserves were strong, it was proposed to request permission from Government to spread the Council's losses over a longer period through use of a Capitalisation Direction.

Following a question, it was confirmed that the Kestrel Way Units had been let. Regarding HG Wells, Officers reported that discussions were taking place with the owners of the building in order to reduce the cost to the Council of owning the building for longer.

The Executive was advised that the draft General Fund Budget did not include provision for staff pay increases in 2021-22.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the draft General Fund Budget for 2021/22 be received;
- (ii) Managers, Corporate Management Group and Portfolio Holders continue detailed budget preparation to secure savings for consideration by the Executive in February 2021; and
- (iii) the Finance Director seeks confirmation from the government of continued funding to cover the impact of the pandemic into 2021/22 and requests permission to spread losses on commercial and unfunded service income experienced in 2020/21-2022/23 over 50 years through use of a Capitalisation Direction.

Reason: Consideration of these proposals will enable the preparation of the Council's budgets for 2021/22 to proceed.

12. DRAFT HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET UPDATE 2021-22 EXE20-030

The Executive received a report which set out the Council's draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budgets for 2021-22. The Portfolio Holder reported that social housing rents were now being increased by CPI + 1% following the end of the rent reduction period in April 2020. The impact of the Covid pandemic on HRA rent collection was highlighted, as well as the impact of the Sheerwater Regeneration Scheme on the HRA.

It was confirmed that New Vision Homes (NVH) engaged with other agencies in order to provide support for residents and tenants in terms of maximising benefits available. Regarding Sheerwater void properties, Officers advised that regular meetings were held to discuss voids, including work required and the length of time before their phase of the project was needed.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the draft Housing Revenue Account budgets for 2021/22, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be agreed; and
- (ii) Managers, Corporate Management Group and Portfolio Holders continue detailed budget preparation for consideration by the Executive in February 2021.

Reason: Consideration of these proposals will enable the preparation of the Council's Housing Revenue Account budgets for 2021/22 to proceed.

13. HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY EXE20-076

The Executive received a report which set out the work undertaken to create a Health and Wellbeing Strategy in collaboration with residents and partners, and which sought approval to the North West Surrey Integrated Care Partnership Alliance Agreement. The Executive noted that the report provided information on the excellent work already being undertaken by the Council and its partners, in particular the work during the pandemic to support resident's mental and physical health. The Strategy would enable the Council to work with partners to better deliver services that supported the health and wellbeing of the Borough's residents.

It was agreed that the Alliance Agreement would be brought to the Health and Wellbeing Task Group once the other members of the Partnership were content with the Agreement.

The Executive welcomed the good news report and looked forward to a Health and Wellbeing Strategy and programme of work being reported back to the Executive in Spring 2021.

RESOLVED

- That (i) the work to create a Health and Wellbeing Strategy in collaboration with residents and partners be noted;
- (ii) the North West Surrey Integrated Care Partnership Alliance Agreement be supported and authority to sign the Alliance Agreement be delegated to the Chief Executive; and
- (iii) a Health and Wellbeing Strategy and programme of work be reported back to Executive in Spring 2021.

Reason: To enable the Council to work with partners to better deliver services that support the Health and Wellbeing of Woking residents.

14. WOKING FOOTBALL CLUB AND ASSOCIATED DEVELOPMENTS EXE20-126

In the interest of openness and transparency, the Executive received a report which provided an update on two specific actions arising from the recommendations agreed at Council, at its meeting on 30 July 2020, in regard to Woking Football Club and Associated Developments.

Firstly it was reported that the Council had appointed an Independent Person, nominated by the Local Government Association (LGA), to investigate and review the processes and actions of the Council in respect of the Woking Football Club and Associated Developments and to make appropriate recommendations to the Council. It was confirmed that the Independent Person, to be known as the "Investigator", had been given an open remit with no constraints. Regarding timescales, the Executive was advised that a 3 to 4 week period had been assumed for completion of the exercise, depending on the Investigator's findings. It was noted that the Investigator's report would be received by the Chief Executive on behalf of the Council. The Investigator's report would be received by Full Council, subject to corrections. Should an Officer report be required to accompany the Investigator's report, an audit trail would be made clear.

Secondly the confidential Part II report considered by the Overview and Scrutiny, at its meeting on 5 June 2020, had been published on the Council's website. Following a suggestion that the Part II report be put together with the Part I report on the website, the Leader undertook to consider if it would be possible.

RESOLVED

That the report be noted.

Reason: To note publicly the action taken.

15. PERFORMANCE AND FINANCIAL MONITORING INFORMATION

The Executive considered the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information (Green Book) September 2020. Regarding empty properties brought back into use, the Portfolio Holder reported that resource had been allocated and work on empty homes had resumed. It was noted that questionnaires had been sent out in October and Officers were currently reviewing responses received. It was highlighted that 33 properties had so far been identified as non-empty.

It was explained that the increase in households in non-secure accommodation in September was due to clients moving into 121 Chertsey Road, as discussed earlier in the agenda. Officers advised that 121 Chertsey Road was classed as non-secure accommodation due to the Council leasing the building from Thamesway.

Regarding the increase in average days void, the Executive was informed that it had mainly been caused by Breyer Group's poor performance. The Portfolio Holder reported that the issue had been discussed at the recent Housing Task Group, an action plan was in place and there had been significant improvement.

RESOLVED

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

Reason: To manage the performance of the Council.

16. MONITORING REPORTS - PROJECTS EXE20-022

The Executive received a quarterly monitoring report on the progress of projects in the interest of financial prudence and to ensure open and transparent corporate governance. The Executive agreed that, going forward, the Executive should receive an exception report setting out what had changed along with a link to all projects.

RESOLVED

That the report be received.

Reason: To monitor the position of active projects on SharePoint.

This document was published on Friday, 20 November 2020 and the decisions within it will be implemented on Monday 30 November 2020, subject to call-in.

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm
and ended at 8.49 pm.

Chairman: _____

Date: _____