

MINUTES  
OF A MEETING OF THE  
**EXECUTIVE**

held on 1 February 2024

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	

Also Present: Councillor L Rice.

**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 6 – General Fund Budget 2024-25 and Proposed Savings in respect of the reference to Citizens 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 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, Digital and Customer, Adam Walther, was referred to in the agenda but it should be noted that Mr Walther was not present at the meeting.

**3. MINUTES**

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 18 January 2024 be approved and signed as a true and correct record.

**4. URGENT BUSINESS**

There were no items of Urgent Business under Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

**5. QUESTIONS**

The Leader welcomed Ramona Thevenet who had submitted a question under Section 3 of the Executive Procedure Rules regarding Council Tax. A copy of the question together with the reply was before the Executive. The question, together with the reply from the Leader of the Council, was presented as follows:

Question from Ramona Thevenet

“Would Woking Council reconsider their intention of raising Woking Council Tax from 10% to 7%? I believe this to be fair as it is more in line with the average wage increase last year of 6.8%. I have obtained 116 signatures on a petition on the change.org website where Woking residents are also unhappy with an intended 10% increase. Link below.

[Petition · Demand Fair Increase in Council Tax by Woking Council · Change.org](#)”

Reply from Councillor Ann-Marie Barker

“Local Government Minister, Simon Hoare, has said he feels a 10% increase would be 'appropriate and proportionate' for Woking Council. Woking needs to make this increase as part of putting its own house in order. This is part of a package, which includes Government support to get us to a balanced budget.

We did put forward a lower, benchmarked figure, which took Woking to a comparable level with the highest charging boroughs in Surrey. It was clear that this would not be acceptable.

Most of the Council Tax paid by Woking residents goes to Surrey County Council (74%). Woking gets just 12%. The Police and Crime Commissioner gets 14%. A 10% increase in Woking's share of Council Tax is a 1% increase on the total Council Tax bill. The extra amount payable to Woking Council will be 50p a week from the baseline Band D property.

We recognise that any increase will add to cost of living struggles so will use some of the increase for a hardship fund for those who find it difficult to pay.”

Ramona Thevenet was thanked for her question and invited to ask a supplementary question.

Supplementary Question from Ramona Thevenet

“Thank you. I don't believe that to be fair, I believe that to be lazy, sloppy, disproportionate. I would like the Council to reconsider raising the tax proportionate to the banding of the housing. So for example, Band A and B 6% increase, C and D 8% increase, E and F 10% increase, G plus 15% increase and whatever your accountant would have to play with the figures to make that the balanced budget.”

Reply from Councillor Ann-Marie Barker

“Thank you, I don't actually believe that's possible within the guidelines that govern how Council Tax is applied. Of course, if someone's in a Band A property then the increase becomes around 20 pence a week, a Band B property is around 30 pence a week. So it's obviously proportionate, the increase in terms of the valuation of your property as set in the early 1990's I believe. It's not something that we want to do to put Council Tax up by that amount, but it is important people realise that they will actually pay a lot more when Surrey County Council make an increase in their Council Tax, which I understand is likely to be a 4.99% increase because they take 74% of the Council Tax. You can imagine that's going to be substantially more of an increase that people will need to pay. It is important we try and help people, and that's why we've set up the hardship fund to make sure there is support on our part of the Council Tax, and I would hope that Surrey County Council might do something similar for their part of the Council Tax which has a bigger impact on our residents. Thank you very much for your question, much appreciate you taking the time to set up the petition and then when there wasn't time to submit that to come here and put a question. It is really appreciated.”

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 21 March 2024, so the deadline for written questions was 12 noon, 14 March 2024.

**6. GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2024-25 AND PROPOSED SAVINGS EXE24-001**

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Ann-Marie Barker, provided a short update regarding the Council's budget savings. In order to achieve a balanced budget, the Council faced the difficult decision to remove all grant funding for charities and voluntary bodies. The Leader advised that the Council was working with Citizens Advice Woking and Woking Community Transport, two charities which provided an invaluable service in the Borough and had been the most significant recipients of funds in the past, to try and find a way ahead in which they could continue to deliver a reduced service for local people. The Leader urged both groups to collaborate with the Council rather than campaign against the Council, stressing that there was no money in Council budgets for grants. The Council would continue to provide office accommodation where it could and seek to find funds that could be used to deliver new business models that enabled a revised service from these charities. The Council would be speaking to both Citizens Advice Woking and Woking Community Transport again next week and the Leader hoped a way ahead could be found.

Councillor Roberts, Portfolio Holder for Finance, introduced the report which recommended to Council service savings of £8.4m and provided updates on the processes for Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) and public consultation which had been part of the decision-making process. It was noted that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee had considered the report at its meeting on 29 January 2024. The Portfolio Holder explained that an Extraordinary meeting of Council on 4 March 2024 would receive a report finalising the treatment of the Council's debt in 2024-25 and the level of Council Tax.

The Executive discussed the regrettable but necessary proposed savings for 2024-25 which included a staff reduction programme of up to 20% across most Council services resulting in the loss of some 60 employees, the removal of community grant funding, the closure of public toilets, transferring sports pavilions and community centres to community ownership, reductions to street cleaning and grounds maintenance services, and increasing fees and charges for non-statutory services. The savings had been subject to public and staff consultation, benchmarking with statistically similar councils, and had been reviewed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Finance Working Group and at Member Briefings. The Portfolio Holder thanked all Members for their input. The Executive was informed that, despite these savings, the Council still faced a deficit on its business-as-usual services of £12.4m and required Government support to set a legally balanced budget. Without Government support, the Council's budget deficit next year could be up to £785m given the scale of its debt problem. The Extraordinary Council on 4 March 2024 would receive a report on the Government's support mechanisms; a Capitalisation Directive and Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP) exceptional support.

The Executive welcomed the work undertaken by the Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Officers and residents to find a viable option to keep the Pool in the Park open in 2024-25 by increasing fees and charges. The Community Asset Transfer Policy discussed at the last Executive was highlighted as an alternative way to run facilities such as sports pavilions and community centres. It was noted that the Council had recently facilitated local charities to meet The National Lottery to discuss options for funding.

The Executive thanked Officers for their hard work on the 2024-25 budget and agreed to recommend the proposals to Council on 8 February 2024, noting that a further report on the treatment of debt and level of Council Tax would be received at an Extraordinary Council meeting on 4 March 2024.

#### **RECOMMENDED to Council**

- That (i) the £8.4m of savings set out in Appendix 3b to the report be agreed;**
- (ii) the Equality Impact Assessment and public consultation processes on the savings proposals that are summarised in Appendix 5 to the report, with detailed reports on each resident facing saving proposal, be noted as part of the decision-making process; and**
- (iii) it be noted a further report to Full Council on 4 March 2024 will receive a final report from the Director of Finance to finalise the treatment of the Council's debt and Council Tax in 2024/25.**

Reason: The contents of the report is to ensure open and transparent governance in the financial affairs of the Council in balancing the 2024/25 Budget.

**7. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGETS 2024-25 EXE24-002**

The Executive received the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Budgets 2024-25 for recommendation to Council. It was noted that a review of recharge allocations had been undertaken during 2023-24 to ensure recharges were fair and reasonable to the HRA, and the 2024-25 budget assumptions included those adjusted recharges. The Executive was informed that the HRA was forecast to make an estimated surplus of some £960k in 2024-25. It was reported that the 2024-25 HRA Budget included an increase in interest costs that would be incurred from borrowing an additional £2.5m to support the capital programme for housing. Due to the poor condition of the Council's housing stock, capital investment was required to fund high risk safety remedial works and Decent Homes improvements. The Executive welcomed the 30-year HRA Business Plan and the Housing Asset Management Plan which was part of the Capital Programme report later on the agenda. Consideration of reaching Net Zero by 2030 and improving energy efficiency was highlighted when investing in and refurbishing the Council's housing estate.

Regarding service charges, the Portfolio Holder for Housing highlighted the need for support to be made available to vulnerable tenants to ensure that those tenants claimed benefits to which they were entitled and which would cover service charges.

Following national issues around damp and disrepair, it was highlighted that there was a new Government requirement for all local authorities and social landlords to consult Council tenants. This positive step to consult tenants would take place in Woking in the coming months.

The Executive welcomed the Council's focus on homes for local people and the investment planned in the Council's social housing to tackle fire safety and to undertake Decent Homes improvements.

**RECOMMENDED to Council**

**That (i) the Final Housing Revenue Account budgets for 2024-25, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, be agreed; and**

**(ii) with effect from 1 April 2024, rents be increased by 7.7%.**

Reason: To approve the resources necessary to implement the Council's objectives for Housing and to enable the Council to determine charges to tenants for 2024/25.

**8. CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2023-24 TO 2027-28 EXE24-003**

The Executive received the Capital Programme 2023-24 to 2027-28 which set out the investments required to deliver the Council's key strategies and objectives. Following the Section 114 Notice, it was noted that the Capital Programme (formerly known as the Investment Programme) had been largely suspended with provisions only for items such as urgent health and safety and regulatory works, Housing Asset Management Programmes funded by the HRA, and payments related to business cases agreed with the Commissioners and DLUHC. Attention was drawn to the Capital Planning Principles adopted by the Council in July 2023 for the General Fund Capital Programme year 2024-25 and the period of the MTFS.

As discussed under the Housing Revenue Account Budgets 2024-25 item, the Executive welcomed the Council's new focus on homes for local people and the significant upscaling of the Housing Capital Programme. Investment was planned in the Council's social housing to tackle fire safety and to undertake Decent Homes improvements, and work was taking place on a 30-year HRA Business Plan.

The Executive also welcomed the inclusion in the Capital Programme of Pool in the Park capital maintenance, play area and parks and green spaces works, and West Byfleet Recreation Ground tennis courts.

Regarding Byfleet flood relief works, it was noted that although the Council was no longer able to make a £5m contribution as originally intended it was still able to give land to the scheme. Officers were looking at whether the Environment Agency and Surrey County Council could increase their contributions to the scheme.

**RECOMMENDED to Council**

**That (i) the Capital Programme 2023/24 to 2027/28 be approved subject to reports on projects where appropriate; and**

**(ii) the proposed financing arrangements be approved.**

Reason: To recommend to Council that it approves the capital resources for 2023/24 onwards considered necessary to support the Council's service plans and objectives.

**9. FUTURE OF BROCKHILL EXE24-017**

Following consultation on the proposed closure of Brockhill Extra Care Housing agreed by the Executive at its meeting on 14 December 2023, the Executive received a report which provided an update on the results of the consultation and which recommended to Council the closure of Brockhill. Councillor Nicholson, Portfolio Holder for Extra Care, expressed regret at the proposed closure of Brockhill Extra Care Housing scheme, a much valued and loved facility. Due to the significant capital expenditure required on fire safety remedial works, a full heating system replacement and limited investment over the years, the building was unfortunately considered unviable due to the level of capital investment needed; some £5.8m over the next 10 years. In addition, the design and layout of the building did not meet the current expectations for extra care housing as set out in Surrey County Council's Accommodation with Care and Support Strategy and national best practice. The Council was working with SCC Adult Social Care to support residents with identifying and moving to alternative accommodation based on their individual assessed needs.

The Executive was informed that no discussions had taken place on the long-term future of the Brockhill site as the focus was on supporting residents through this difficult period.

Following a query regarding the medium-term plans to return some of the lost capacity as a result of the closure of Brockhill, the Portfolio Holder for Extra Care advised that she had submitted a question to SCC Cabinet regarding capacity concerns. SCC had advised that it did have an Accommodation with Care and Support Strategy dated July 2019 which looked at the County Council's overall strategy across Surrey. In the future, SCC was planning to deliver about 200 units in North West Surrey.

**RECOMMENDED to Council**

- That (i) the closure of Brockhill Extra Care Housing be agreed;
- (ii) the residents of Brockhill be offered suitable alternative accommodation which best meets their needs and preferences and be paid Statutory Home Loss and Disturbance payments, where eligible; and
- (iii) authority be delegated to the Strategic Director - Communities, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, to make any further decisions required in respect of the closure.

Reason: To set out the future plans for Brockhill Extra Care Housing scheme and the support that will be available to impacted residents.

**10. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT**

The Executive considered the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information contained in the Performance Management Report – Quarter 3, 2023/24. The report, covering October to December 2023, summarised the financial picture, provided progress against the IRP and KPIs, and was structured around the three Directorates with the Council. The Executive recognised the intense activity being undertaken by the Council.

Regarding the Communities Directorate, the Portfolio Holder for Housing drew attention to the KPIs relating to homelessness and allocations on pages 18 to 19. The need to bring more Sheerwater properties back into use was highlighted.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Meals highlighted a campaign which was currently being publicised by the Council offering a free two day trial for potential new clients to experience and sample the food on offer. Councillor Nicholson encouraged Members to raise awareness of the offer which was hoped would increase take-up of the community meals service.

**RESOLVED**

That the Performance and Financial Monitoring Information contained in the Performance Management Report – Quarter 3, 2023-24, be received.

Reason: To manage the performance of the Council.

**11. FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT - BUDGET MONITORING AND FORECAST 2023-24 - QUARTER 3 EXE24-010**

The Executive received a Financial Monitoring Report which set out the material financial issues identified since the 2023/24 budget was set, based on the income and expenditure as at end of December 2023 (Quarter 3). The Executive was advised that the December (Q3) outturn projected an overspend of £3.277m for the year, compared with a £7.5m projected overspend reported for September (Q2). It was noted that many changes between forecasting periods had been due to better forecasting and monitoring.

It was suggested that Officers consider the presentation of future reports in order to help Members better understand the numbers.

RESOLVED

That (i) the Council's forecast General Fund outturn position for 2023/24 be noted; and

(ii) it be noted that the Corporate Leadership Team will continue to identify mitigations to enable the net expenditure for 2023/24 to be contained within budget approved by Council on 23 February 2023.

Reason: Controlling the outturn within budget is essential to maintain financial control.

**This document was published on Friday 2 February 2024 and the decisions within it will be implemented on Monday 12 February 2024, subject to call-in.**

The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm  
and ended at 8.52 pm.

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

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