

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 15th September 2015 at Pippbrook, Dorking from 7.00pm to 9.11pm

Present: Councillors Chris Townsend (Chairman), David Draper (Vice-Chairman), Tim Ashton, Stephen Cooksey, Mary Huggins, Duncan Irvine, Malcolm Ladell, Jatin Patel, Paul Potter and Michelle Watson (substitute for Claire Curran).

Also present: Councillors Lucy Botting, Lynne Brooks, Margaret Cooksey, Paul Newman, John Northcott and Sarah Seed.

22. Minutes

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 7th July 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

23. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Claire Curran and Paula Hancock. An apology was also received from Councillor Vivienne Michael, Executive Member for Community Engagement and Residents Services.

24. Urgent Item: Surrey County Council Consultation – Shaping Surrey’s Community Recycling Centres.

In addition to the scheduled items on the agenda, the Scrutiny Committee had received a request to consider a Surrey County Council consultation on the future of its Community Recycling Centres. This item had been requested to allow Members the opportunity to make comments on the consultation which would be fed into the Council’s response. As the consultation was scheduled to close on 30th September 2015 and there would not be an opportunity for it to be considered by Members at another meeting before this date, it was agreed that it would be taken as an urgent item.

In attendance at the meeting was Mr Justin Foster, the Waste Contract Manager for Surrey County Council (SCC), who provided background information on the consultation and also answered questions arising from the discussion. During the introduction from Mr Foster, it was noted that the Waste Service at SCC had been tasked with identifying significant savings and were already in the process of implementing many identified savings. Nonetheless in order to reach the saving target, efficiencies needed to be found within the budget for SCC’s Community Recycling Centres (CRCs). In order to inform this decision, SCC was undertaking a public consultation on a number of possible options for the future operation of its CRCs.

The options included in the consultation were:-

1. Introducing charges for non-household waste (such as DIY waste) or not accepting it at all.
2. Reducing opening hours on weekdays.
3. Closing CRCs on the least busy weekdays.
4. Full closure of some CRCs.
5. Only accepting waste at CRCs in clear plastic bags.
6. Selling good quality second hand items at CRCs.

From the responses received to date a primary concern was the impact any changes would have upon the level of fly tipping in the county. In order to address these concerns SCC were having ongoing discussions with district/borough council’s and the police to establish the potential impact of any changes and to establish what SCC could do to help prevented increased incidents of fly tipping. It was confirmed that SCC were prepared to provide additional resources and support as part of a solution and to address concerns about increased levels of fly tipping.

During the Committee’s discussion of the consultation a number of question were raised and these

are summarised below, along with the answers given.

Q. Why was an option of retaining the status quo not included in the consultation?

A. Unfortunately due to the level of savings required, retaining the service in its current format was not an option and as such the consultation only set out the different options that would help to achieve the savings needed.

Q. Had any sites been identified for closure?

A. At this stage SCC were using the consultation to establish whether residents would accept the possible closure of any sites. If this proved to be acceptable then further work would be need to be undertaken to identify possible sites for closure.

Q. What would be the reduced hours?

A. Should hours be reduced, it would be likely that there would be different hours at different sites. SCC had auto traffic counters installed at its CRCs which could produce usage data to inform any possible changes to opening hours.

From the discussion of this item it was clear that Members held differing views on the consultation. Some Members took the view that a change to the operation of the CRCs was inevitable given the level of savings needed. In light of these circumstances it would be beneficial to highlight the Committee's views on the options presented and to indicate which of these would be the least worst option. However following a counted vote (four Councillors in favour and three against) it was agreed that the view of the Scrutiny Committee to be fed into the Council's response to SCC would reflect the opinion that none of the options were acceptable for the reasons set out below.

Resolved: The Scrutiny Committee recommends that Mole Valley Council:

1. Responds to the consultation and indicates to the County Council that none of the options set out in the consultation are acceptable since the adoption of any one of them would lead to a reduction in service, increased fly-tipping and a decrease in recycling rates;
2. Uses its influence as a Surrey District Council and a member of the Surrey Waste Partnership to persuade the County not to introduce any of the suggested options.

25. Review of Complaints 2014/2015

The Committee received a report setting out details of the complaints received by the Council during 2014-2015. A report summarising all complaints received by the Council is presented to the Scrutiny Committee on an annual basis to be noted and to give Members the opportunity to identify any concerns going forward.

The Committee welcomed the content of the report which showed that the number of complaints received by the Council had decreased over the past year. The Committee were also pleased to note that for the period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015 the Ombudsman made decisions on 16 complaints (1 was carried forward from the previous year) and that the Ombudsman did not find against MVDC in any of these cases. This was seen by Members as a good reflection upon the Council's complaints handling process.

Resolved: That the content of the report be noted.

26. Mole Valley Draft Wellbeing Strategy

The Committee received an Executive report setting out a draft version of Mole Valley District Council's Wellbeing Strategy. Members were asked for their comments which would be taken away by the officers and incorporated in a revised version of the report that would be considered by the Executive on 20th October 2015

During the discussion of the Wellbeing Strategy it was suggested that the addition of another column within the action plan providing an update on the current status of actions already underway would be useful. It was also highlighted that the map included within the report provided useful information for Members on their local communities and it was requested that further maps displaying other information be circulated as they became available.

Overall the Committee welcomed the report and noted that the final version would be presented at their next meeting on 6th October.

Resolved: That the comments of the Committee be noted and used to produce a revised version of the documents, which will be brought back to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 6th October 2015.

27. Migrating the ICT Systems to the Surrey County Council Shared Data Centre

The Committee received an Executive report setting out a proposal to move the Council's ICT systems to Surrey County Council's Shared Data Centre. Members were asked for their observations or recommendations which would be reported to the Executive during its consideration of the item on 29th September 2015.

In light of the proposals it was questioned whether there would be any staffing implications arising from these changes. The Committee were advised that there would be no immediate impact to staff, but as many local authorities used the same software packages there may be opportunities to achieve efficiencies further down the line through sharing technical support staff and jointly tendering software contracts on service specific programmes. However the Council would still retain a helpdesk facility providing general ICT support for staff and Members.

There was some concern voiced about the Council being the first local authority joining the data centre, before any teething problems had been worked out. In response, it was advised that although Mole Valley District Council would be the first district or borough to migrate its ICT Services, other organisations were already using the facility and as such many of the potential issues were understood. However, as with any project there was always the possibility of unforeseen issues arising, but officers were confident that any such issues would be resolvable.

Overall it was recognised by the Committee that the proposal set out in the report would provide the Council with additional resilience and that the blended model recommended in the report offered the best value for money.

Resolved: That the comments of the Scrutiny Committee be relayed to the Executive during its consideration of the report on 29th September 2015.

28. West Street, Dorking – Public Art Project

The Committee received an Executive report setting out a proposed project for a piece of public art in West Street, Dorking. Members were asked for their observations or recommendations which would be reported to the Executive during its consideration of the item on 29th September 2015.

The main discussion point covered funding, with some Members concerned about the Council meeting the full cost of the project (£32,000) from planning contributions for environmental enhancements alone. As an alternative it was suggested that the option to seek private investment should be explored as well, with a couple of suggestions put forward for potential funding sources. It was also felt that this option would help to encourage public ownership of the project.

Conversely, as the money allocated towards the project had been raised from developer contributions for environmental enhancements, other Members felt that it would be appropriate for it to be used to fund a piece of public art which would help to improve West Street. It was also felt that without funding being guaranteed there was a possibility that the project would not be able to proceed, given the difficulty in raising funds for other similar projects that had relied on public funding. Previous public art project supported in part by public subscription has been the initiative of previous chairmen of the Council and, as such, they were the exception rather than the rule. Most public art project were funded entirely from developer contributions.

It was also pointed out that developer contributions were often time limited and needed to be spent by a certain date. As a result it was questioned whether there was any risk of the funding for this project expiring. It was agreed that confirmation of any time limits on funds for environmental enhancements raised through developer contributions would be provided at the Executive meeting.

Despite differing views over funding, overall the proposed project was welcomed by the Committee who felt that it would provide a boost to the West Street shopping area and demonstrate the

Council's support for local traders.

Resolved: That the comments of the Scrutiny Committee be relayed to the Executive during its consideration of the report on 29th September 2015.

29. Draft Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) 2015

The Committee received an Executive report setting out the draft Statement of Community Involvement. Members were asked for their observations or recommendations which would be reported to the Executive during its consideration of the item on 29th September 2015.

Members noted that the My Alerts system could be used by residents to be notified of planning applications in their local area, but it could only be used to notify residents based on distance from a postcode area. It was questioned whether the system could be adapted to include notifications by Ward area as well as by distance, as there was concern that by using distance residents may miss notifications in rural areas where properties were further apart. It was confirmed that at present the system did not allow individuals to receive notifications by Ward, but it was something that officers could look at for the future.

It was noted that the provision of site notices would be extended to include all householder applications. As these equated to 70% of all applications it was questioned whether this was necessary as neighbours were already notified and , it could save officer time to be used in other areas if they were to be responsible for putting up site notices.. It was also questioned, what would happen if the applicant had not put up the notice?

Resolved: That the comments of the Scrutiny Committee be relayed to the Executive during its consideration of the report on 29th September 2015.

30. Application by Capel Parish Council to Designate a Neighbourhood Area

The Committee received an Executive report setting out the results of a consultation on the application by Capel Parish Council to be designated as a Neighbourhood Area.

The Committee were happy with the content of the report and had no comments it wished to bring to the attention of the Executive.

Resolved: that the content of the report are noted.

31. Business Planning and Budget 2016/17 – Scene Setting

The Committee received an Executive report setting the scene for the Business Planning and Budget for 2016/17. Members were asked for their observations or recommendations which would be reported to the Executive during its consideration of the item on 29th September 2015.

It was questioned what criteria would be used to decide whether the Council would become a borrowing authority? In response it was confirmed that any Council decision to borrow money to fund a capital project would use criteria such as the rate of return on an investment and the value for money for council tax payers. Although it was understood that it might be necessary to borrow funds to meet the Council objectives, Members felt that any decision would need careful thought given that Mole Valley had been debt free for many years.

It was also highlighted that the report seemed to suggest that the Council would be reducing the funds available for community grants. It was confirmed that the values shown in the report could be misinterpreted as the 2015/16 figure for community grants included an amount carried over from the previous year. In any case no decision had been made on grants for 2016/17, with a report scheduled to come to the Scrutiny Committee for comments in November.

Resolved: That the comments of the Scrutiny Committee be relayed to the Executive during its consideration of the report on 29th September 2015.

32. Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2015/2016

The Committee received a copy of its work programme and the Executive Forward Plan for it information.

Resolved: That the Scrutiny Committee work programme and the Executive forward plan are noted.

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Chairman
6th October 2015