

# Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2016 at Pippbrook, Dorking from 7.00pm to 10.21pm

Present: Councillors Chris Townsend (Chairman), David Draper (Vice-Chairman), Tim Ashton, Stephen Cooksey, Paula Hancock, Duncan Irvine, Malcolm Ladell, Jatin Patel and Paul Potter

Also present: Councillors Howard Jones, Vivienne Michael and Sarah Seed

## 68. Minutes

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2016 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## 69. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Claire Curran and Mary Huggins.

## 70. CAMHS Surrey

The Committee received a presentation from Joanne Pennell, Consultant Occupational Therapist for Children and Young People's Services at CAMHS Surrey.

The presentation outlined details of a new joint working contract being implemented from 1 April 2016 which brings together a range of Surrey's mental health and learning disability services for children and young people. The new partnership involves both national and local voluntary, statutory and private providers, with the aim of delivering greater support to children and young people and reaching out to those at risk before they become seriously unwell. One of the key changes under the new 'one-stop' model was the creation of a single point of contact for referrals to CAHMS services and booking of appointments. This was to be managed by a partner organisation called Beacon UK, to ensure that those being referred were always in contact with the right service and receive appropriate treatment and support.

Members expressed some concern that historically the financing of mental health initiatives had been overly complex and it appeared in many cases that the funds at the top often failed to filter down efficiently to where they were most needed. The CAMHS representative acknowledged that this has been a problem in the past but reassured Members that commissioning groups were working together to address this problem, and the practitioners involved in the new partnership would be working passionately to ensure the new arrangements were adequately resourced.

There were also some concerns that whilst early intervention can help to identify problems before they escalate, in some cases it could appear that children were being over-diagnosed at a young age and this could have a stigmatising effect that might compromise their future development. The CAHMS representative explained that the focus has moved increasingly towards prevention in recent times, particularly as a result of the growing recognition that one service area cannot necessarily cope with and identify all of the problems being experienced by a child or young person. It was on this basis that the more collaborative approach due to be rolled out was formulated.

Members expressed their gratitude for the hard work and dedication of CAHMS and stated that they looked forward to seeing positive results from the new partnership arrangements.

## 71. The Landscape Group

The Committee received a presentation on the Council's Grounds Maintenance and Highways Horticulture contract from two representatives of the Landscape Group; Martin Packman, Regional Operations Director, and Paul Norton, General Manager for the Surrey/Sussex region.

It was explained that the current contract had now been in operation for twelve months. An overview was provided of what the Landscape Group had done so far in order to address concerns regarding the quality and timeliness of scheduled works, in particular during the initial phase of the takeover from the previous contractor. In response to the areas of concern identified, a range of measures had been introduced which included improved communication, a review of the contract management structure and recruitment of additional skilled employees. It was suggested that these

measures had resulted in significant improvements to service delivery. In addition, the recent purchase of a range of high quality new equipment as well as robust performance monitoring arrangements were presented as evidence to the Committee that the Landscape Group remained committed to delivering a high quality service and building upon its achievements so far.

Members raised a number of questions in relation to the quality of service delivered during the early stages of the contract. Some Members suggested that the Landscape Group initially appeared to be inadequately prepared to take over the contract, particularly in terms of staffing levels and the knowledge and expertise of the staff assigned to particular tasks. The Landscape Group acknowledged that staffing had been unexpectedly challenging during the initial takeover of the contract, given that most of the staff employed by the previous contractor had not been transferred over under TUPE arrangements as anticipated. Whilst new staff had been recruited, this nonetheless resulted in a loss of local knowledge and expertise which had taken some time to be re-established.

Members also asked for clarification on the Group's performance monitoring arrangements and how the scoring for quality of works was determined, in light of the claim that a Quality Pass Rate of 85% had been achieved. It was explained that the specification for achieving the desired quality of work was laid out in the terms of the contract, and this is jointly monitored by Council Officers and the Landscape Group to ensure that consistency of performance is being delivered. Members were given assurances that where the quality of service falls short of the desired standard, Officers have the ability to issue notices to the Landscape Group demanding improvement.

The Committee discussed the issue of involving the community in assessing the Landscape Group's performance. It was suggested that at present there was a lack of awareness amongst local communities that they could contribute to the monitoring of the contract by taking part in joint inspections, and efforts should be increased to communicate this to residents. In addition, it was suggested that elected Members, Parish Councils and Residents Associations would all welcome the opportunity to become more involved with this.

The Committee asked whether there was a schedule of works for the next twelve months that could be shared with Members, as this would help them to keep residents informed as well as alerting Members if works were not completed on schedule. The Strategic Parking and Parks Manager confirmed that a schedule of planned works does exist and that this could be made available to Members via MOSS. It was however cautioned that scheduled works could be subject to revision, given the unpredictability of weather and other factors.

Based upon their plans for the next twelve months, the Landscape Group expressed confidence that Members will continue to see improvements in the service. Members were largely reassured by the presentation and expressed optimism that the improvements outlined would help to restore the confidence of both Members and Mole Valley residents going forward.

## **72. Tourist Information in Mole Valley**

The Committee received a report which invited it to consider the provision of tourist information in Mole Valley and express a view on what measures would be most appropriate to improve communication about tourist attractions to visitors to the District.

Introducing the report, the Executive Member for Community Engagement and Resident Services advised the Committee that any proposals involving increased expenditure on tourist information services in the District would need to be supported by a robust business case.

Some Members of the Committee expressed the view that there remained an unmet demand in the District for tourist information services which was resulting in visitors having to seek advice and information at alternative locations such as Dorking Museum, which only had limited opening hours. Whilst there were websites currently in existence which contained tourist information for the District, these were not well maintained and often displayed outdated information.

Other Members expressed the view that tourist information facilities that had previously been provided within the District, such as the information point situated inside Dorking Halls, had required significant running costs to maintain but only received a moderate number of daily enquiries. It was

also suggested that increasingly visitors were planning their visits in advance using online tourist information, potentially reducing the need for a staffed facility.

It was suggested that running costs for any proposed tourist information facilities in the District could be mitigated through the recruitment of volunteers, and that the volunteering centre in Dorking had already expressed a willingness to provide volunteers for such a facility. It was however cautioned that the use of volunteers would still require some form of financial support from the Council in order for training and management to be effective and any supporting websites to be adequately maintained.

In order to give further consideration to the issues raised and with the aim of moving towards a consensus, a Member of the Committee proposed the formation of a Tourist Information Scrutiny Panel. The Committee supported this proposal, and it was subsequently recommended that a Panel of five Members be established, to include Members from both the North and South of the District to ensure fair representation.

**Resolved:** That a Tourist Information Scrutiny Panel be established, with terms of reference and membership to be tabled at the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2016.

### **73. Affordable Housing Position Statement – February 2016**

The Committee received an Executive report setting out the Council's current plans to deliver new affordable homes. Members were asked for their observations or recommendations which would be reported to the Executive during its consideration of the item on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016.

The Committee noted that a Government consultation on changes to the definition of affordable housing contained in National Planning Policy Framework had recently concluded, and Members were very keen to see how accurate a revised definition of the term might prove to be. Members remained concerned at the apparent incompatibility between the current definition of affordable housing and the reality of the financial situation in Mole Valley, where both property prices and rental prices continue to exceed national and Surrey averages. There were concerns that affordable housing would in fact remain unaffordable for a sizeable number of residents, and those that could afford such properties might view them purely as an investment opportunity, denying an opportunity to those with the greatest housing need. It was suggested that it would be extremely challenging to build community support for sites identified for affordable housing unless it could be demonstrated that they would be genuinely affordable and in particular would encourage younger people to stay in the area rather than exploring cheaper options elsewhere.

The Committee discussed the Action Point contained within the report to "evaluate the corporate implications of an Article 4 direction to remove permitted development rights to convert office floor space to residential use". A Member of the Committee questioned why it had taken the Council since the introduction of the Article 4 option in 2013 to consider its introduction, given that many office conversions had already taken place within the District. Officers explained that the introduction of an Article 4 direction has to be developed, consulted upon and agreed before it can be enforced, an exercise which requires significant time and resources. Also, at the time of introduction, the permitted development scheme was intended to be a temporary measure designed to provide a boost to the housing market. The Government had now given indication however that this was likely to become permanent policy. It was noted that Epsom & Ewell Borough Council had adopted an Article 4 direction, and Officers were looking at this example to inform Mole Valley's strategy going forward.

**Resolved:** That the comments of the Scrutiny Committee be relayed to the Executive during its consideration of the report.

### **74. Transform Leatherhead**

The Committee received an Executive report setting out the results of the latest round of consultation on the Transform Leatherhead project. Members were asked for their observations or recommendations which would be reported to the Executive during its consideration of the item on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016.

Members welcomed the positive public response to the consultation exercises carried out to date. The increase in responses during each of the consultation exercises was taken as a sign that as the vision for the town was becoming clearer, more and more people were keen to support and contribute ideas to its successful delivery.

A concern was raised at the number of respondents to the longer questionnaire that stated they strongly disagreed with the design and development principles for the Bull Hill site, and asked if there was any indication as to why such strong feeling existed. Officers explained that the questionnaire did not provide sufficient detail as to the reasons for this strong feeling; it was however acknowledged that due to the changes proposed in this area some sections of the community may have concerns yet, overall, a significant amount of support existed for transforming this site.

In response to a question concerning why tourism was not mentioned within the report, Officers explained that tourism had not been identified as a key theme during the consultation.

Additional concerns were raised regarding the height of some of the buildings shown as part of the draft masterplan. It was acknowledged that in order to accommodate adequate parking, residential and retail facilities there would be a necessity to build higher units in the town than was presently the case, but it was felt that this would need to be achieved sensitively to prevent individual buildings being an eyesore.

Members expressed their appreciation for the hard work of both Officers and Members in helping to make the consultations carried out to date so well received and worthwhile. However, caution was urged that the Council should not over-consult on the proposals, as it was suggested that people may become less responsive at later stages of the process if they felt that they were being repeatedly asked the same questions. The Executive Member for Community Engagement and Resident Services reassured the Committee that a number of new, innovative ideas were being developed for the next stage of consultation in order to maintain the public's enthusiasm for participating.

**Resolved:** That the comments of the Scrutiny Committee be relayed to the Executive during its consideration of the report.

#### **75. Considering Community Views on Sites Suggested by Developers and Landowners for Inclusion in the Mole Valley Local Plan**

The Committee received an Executive report containing a recommendation that the Council should reconfirm its commitment to listen to the views of local communities and give them significant weight when considering sites suggested for development during the process of preparing the Mole Valley Local Plan. Members were asked for their observations or recommendations which would be reported to the Executive during its consideration of the item on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016.

Some Members of the Committee raised concerns that a commitment to give 'significant weight' to community views was a limited commitment, amounting to the Council saying it would listen to the views of communities, but not necessarily act in accordance with these views. It was suggested by one Member of the Committee that an improved commitment would be to promise communities that sites suggested for development would only be given approval if it could be proven that such a development had community support and did not impact upon existing Green Belt criteria. However, in response to this suggestion Officers cautioned that a blanket commitment to refuse to consider sites for development in the Local Plan unless they had community support before preparation of the Local Plan had begun could be seen as prejudging or predetermining the outcome of the process of preparing the Local Plan. Indeed, a number of other Local Authorities had not succeeded in getting their respective Local Plans through because of a failure to adequately assess all available options. In order for Mole Valley's Local Plan to gain government approval, it therefore needed to be shown that in all cases proper consideration of all relevant factors had been applied before ruling suggested sites out. Therefore, a commitment to listen to community views at each stage of the process of developing the Local Plan and to give significant weight to these views was proposed as a way of trying to build consensus whilst ensuring an appropriate balance exists between considering community views alongside other relevant planning considerations.

Other Members of the Committee spoke in favour of the recommendation and suggested that a commitment to give 'significant weight' struck the right balance between welcoming the views of communities whilst at the same time allowing for other considerations to also be given appropriate weight.

**Resolved:** That the comments of the Scrutiny Committee be relayed to the Executive during its consideration of the report.

#### **76. Local Development Scheme 2016-2019**

The Committee received an Executive report setting out the proposed Local Development Scheme for 2016-2019. Members were asked for their observations or recommendations which would be reported to the Executive during its consideration of the item on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016.

The Committee were satisfied that the report provided Members with adequate detail regarding the Local Development Scheme and welcomed the informative timetable appended to the report which set out the key milestones in completing the Local Plan, the Community Infrastructure Levy and the Community Infrastructure Levy Review.

The Committee supported the recommendation in the report to approve the Local Development Scheme 2016-2019.

**Resolved:** That the view of the Scrutiny Committee be relayed to the Executive during its consideration of the report.

#### **77. Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2015/16**

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

Members raised a request for representatives from Dorking and Leatherhead Leisure Centres to be invited to a Scrutiny Committee meeting in the near future to update Members on the leisure contracts. The request was noted and Officers undertook to make arrangements for this.

Members also asked when the Planning Enforcement Scrutiny Panel was next due to meet. It was advised that there were currently no items of business for the Panel to consider but that once discussions with Tandridge District Council over the shared planning enforcement arrangements had been concluded a meeting would be convened at the earliest opportunity.

**Resolved:** That the Scrutiny Committee work programme and the Executive Forward Plan are noted.

#### **78. Urgent Items**

The Chairman agreed to allow an additional item to be considered at the meeting as a matter of urgency, in order to allow the Scrutiny Committee the opportunity to scrutinise a report prior to its consideration by the Executive at its meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016.

#### **79. Environmental Enhancements in Church Street, Leatherhead**

The Committee received an Executive report containing a recommendation that the Executive agrees to allocate £300,000 from Section 106 Agreements and Planning Infrastructure Contributions as MVDC's financial contribution to a scheme to enhance the public realm in Church Street, Leatherhead. Members were asked for their observations or recommendations which would be reported to the Executive during its consideration of the item on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2016.

The Committee agreed that this proposal would be an appropriate use of funds set aside for town centre improvements, and it was hoped that successful delivery of these enhancements would suitably complement the wider ambitions of the Transform Leatherhead agenda.

**Resolved:** That the view of the Scrutiny Committee be relayed to the Executive during its consideration of the report.

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Chairman

Date: