

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 13 February 2019 at Pippbrook, Dorking from 7.00pm to 09.12pm

Present: Councillors David Draper (Chairman), Joe Crome (Vice-Chairman), Tim Ashton, Lynne Brooks, Simon Budd, Stephen Cooksey, Elizabeth Daly, Mary Huggins, Duncan Irvine, Alan Reilly and Garry Stansfield.

Also present: Councillors Margaret Cooksey, David Hawksworth, Paul Kennedy and Patricia Wiltshire,

62. Minutes

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 22 January 2019 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

63. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tim Ashton, Joe Crome and Duncan Irvine.

64. Disclosure of Interests

Councillor Margaret Cooksey declared:

- A non-pecuniary interest in item 5 as she was a MVDC's representative on the Police and Crime Panel.

65. Presentation from Surrey Countryside Partnership Board

Helen Cocker attended the meeting to give Members an update on the work of the Surrey Countryside Partnership Board. During the course of the presentation the following points were noted:-

- Surrey Countryside Partnership Board were hosted by Surrey County Council and funded by the district and boroughs in which they worked in.
- There were three countryside management services that formed the Surrey Countryside Partnership, namely the Lower Mole, Downlands and Surrey Heathland. The areas covered by the three organisations spanned across Surrey and into four neighbouring London boroughs. The Lower Mole Partnership covered the north of Surrey, including Dorking and Leatherhead. The partnership mainly worked with volunteers to provide maintenance work in both woodland and common land with a view to improving public access.
- A key aim for SCPB was to protect the local habitat and promote biodiversity, which was increasingly under threat with a 56% decrease in woodland butterflies and 34% decrease in woodland flora since 1990. 80% of the chalk grassland on the North Downs had been lost since WWII. 80% of the heathland in Surrey had been lost over the last 200 years.
- There had been 5,857 volunteer hours in the Lower Mole area so far this year which included 729 hours from other groups including corporate volunteers.
- The Partnership Board had representation from each of the funding partners and an independent Chair, meeting twice per year. There was also an Officer Group that also met twice per year and a Liaison Group which met as needed. MVDC's representative was the Cabinet Member for People and Rural Affairs.

- The funding provided to the Partnership covered the cost of 1 FTE Senior Project Officer, 1.2 FTE Project Officers, 0.4 FTE Operations Manager and 0.3 fte Partnership Development Manager. The total core funding for the Lower Mole Partnership was £117,486, with MVDC contributing £17,138.

It was asked what approach the SCPB were taking with regard to tackling Ash Die Back disease. Ms Cocker acknowledged the threats which trees were exposed to and told the Committee that it only carried duties that the land owner asked of them. Members then asked if the SCPB charged private land owners for any work carried out on their land. Ms Cocker confirmed that they did.

Ecology was discussed and it was asked why some species of insect were under threat. Members were advised that this was due to a number of factors including climate change, use of pesticide and different farming practices as well as a lack in management of habitats.

The issue of fly tipping was raised and it was asked if an increase in fly tipping had been observed. Ms Cocker told the Committee that was not something that SCPB experienced often, she however acknowledged that littering was an issue.

Members raised concern with the tree felling method used by SWT. It was felt that it should use a more sensitive approach which would minimise the impact on wildlife. Furthermore, Members made it aware that DEFRA's had released an online 'toolkit' on managing Ash dieback disease and highlighted how it didn't make reference to any of the Surrey Wildlife Trust's techniques. Mrs Cocker acknowledged this.

The Chairman thanked Ms Cocker for her presentation and for answering the Committee's questions.

66. Presentation from the Surrey Police and Crime Commissioner

David Munroe, the Police and Crime Commissioner attended the meeting to give Members an update on the work of the PCC. During the course of the presentation the following points were noted:-

- Government had doubled the cap from £12 a year to £24 a year in which the precept could be set. The PCC pledged one hundred extra officers and operational staff to be in place by April 2019. Residents were consulted on this and overall, residents agreed with the proposals which meant that the budget could be raised by over £20m to £235m. The focus of the budget would to increase front line and local policing. A series of community events were planned, including an event in Mole Valley, to ask residents on ask how the extra number of police officers could be deployed.
- The Chief Constable position was currently vacant and the selection process for a replacement was taking place with a view start by mid-March.
- The Number of officers based in Mole Valley were outlined. All officers were based at Pippbrook offices and included the Borough Commander, Safer Neighbourhood Team, Neighbourhood Patrol Team and PCSOs.
- The PCC outlined what he regarded as the top eight crimes, Surrey-wide. These included anti-social behaviour, burglary, child sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, drug/alcohol offences, fraud, modern slavery and unauthorised encampments. The PCC emphasised the importance of reporting crimes such as domestic abuse and child sexual exploitation.

Members were pleased to see that crime was being stabilised but asked if violent crime in particular was on the rise. The PCC told the Committee that knife crime in London was usually drug related and that statistics showed that knife crime in Surrey was low. Furthermore, County Lines was continuing to make arrests and Government recently announced a new inquiry into which people were taking drugs and how supply to those people could be interrupted.

The Committee questioned the consultation response rate and it was asked how many people responded. The PCC confirmed that just under 5,000 residents responded in favour of his proposals to increase the precept, which equated to 75%.

Members welcomed the additional one hundred police officers and asked how much this would compensate for the officers that had left the force over recent years. The PCC advised that although Surrey Police had not lost many officers compared to other forces, the addition of one hundred officers would not compensate fully. Furthermore, many officers were switching roles within the force rather than leaving altogether.

It was asked what the additional one hundred officers would include. The PCC explained that this would include a combination of warranted police officers, PCSOs and front line police staff. The upcoming community events would allow residents to provide input on the exact split.

Members thanked the PCC for his support in setting up the Joint Enforcement Team (JET) and asked if it would have any impact on the amount of additional officers it would see in the district. The PCC advised the introduction of the JET would not have any negative impact on this. The PCC told the Committee that he hoped further officers would be recruited in the future, but this would be dependent on the budget. There were a number of efficiency plans in place which included the relocation of the Surrey Police headquarters. Other savings were being made on printing and photocopying costs.

Concern was raised with regards to a spate of bicycle thefts from railway stations and Members queried the coordination between Surrey Police and British Transport Police. The PCC agreed to look into the matter and gave examples of how both forces currently work together.

Members gave reference to MVDC's decision to waive council tax for care leavers up to the age of 25 and asked if Surrey Police would look to do the same for their element. The PCC told the Committee that he would look into this.

Members raised concern at how it felt police were dealing with enquiries from residents. The PCC advised that Police take crime seriously and emphasised the importance of evidence. Police would investigate evidence and would act where they had evidence of a crime having been committed.

Unauthorised encampments were discussed in depth and the PCC acknowledged that more transit sites were needed as this would increase the number of pitches and give Police the power to move people on using a different section of the act.

The PCC was asked why Pippbrook and other offices did not have an officer on the front counter. Members noted that this was due to efficiency savings across the force and how the way for contacting Police had changed.

Members also discussed usage of some nail bars and car washes in relation to modern slavery. The PCC acknowledged that some were not run as legitimate organisations which had come to the attention of the Police. The PCC was working with the Home Office to set up a register of these organisations.

Speeding was then discussed and it was asked how much of a priority this was. The PCC explained how Police treated speeding and how it worked with the Highways authority to enforce this.

The Committee thanked the Police and Crime Commissioner for the presentation and for answering Members' questions.

67. Environmental Health and Licensing Shared Service and its Governance

The Strategic Partnership Manager was in attendance and provided Members with a presentation, during which he outlined the roles and responsibilities of MVDC and Tandridge District Council within the Environmental Health and Licensing shared service. During the course of the presentation, the following points were noted:-

- The shared service was established as a result of a project between MVDC and Tandridge District Council to enable an integrated team to be created to share expertise provide improve resilience.
- The Inter authority agreement was signed and commenced on 13 February 2017. Both Council's retained its licensing and regulatory committees and sub-committees.
- MVDC were the host authority for the delivery of the shared service. All members of the team were employed by MVDC. Teams included within the shared service included the Commercial Team, Residential and Environment and the Compliance Team.
- Going forward, the shared service would look to integrate its budget, IT systems and policies and processes. Savings could be made once these were put in place.
- Tandridge District Council had asked MVDC for additional services to be included within the shared service including Private Sector Housing Standards for Landlords, Taxi Licensing and the function of the Animal Warden.

Members discussed licensing applications and it was highlighted how although Members get notified of applications, they no longer receive the same in depth information as before due to GDPR regulations. It was felt that this information was important as it helped Members make a decision. The Strategic Partnership Manager advised that he would look into this matter to see if any supporting information could be provided.

The Committee noted how there were only two statutory bodies that could object to temporary event notices; Environmental Health and the Police. The Strategic Partnership Manager acknowledged the importance of Members knowing what is happening in their ward, although they would not be able to make an official objection. Furthermore, there was a limit of temporary event notices that could take place at particular premises over the course of a year. This applied to the premises and not applicant.

Staffing levels and resources were discussed and it was asked if the shared service experienced any difficulties whilst working under two different sets of policies. The Strategic Partnership Officer explained how Officers in both MVDC and Tandridge carried out similar duties and that the process for responding and investigating was largely the same. Members heard how staffing levels were sufficient to cope with statutory duties, however, anything else on top of this was unfeasible.

Members queried the out of date environmental health policy and asked when this would be updated. The Strategic Partnership Manager advised that the updated policy would be coming to Scrutiny Committee in June 2019, followed by Cabinet.

Trends were then discussed and it was asked if any trends had been highlighted. Members were told how the service saw an increase in noise related reports in the summer months due to outside space being used more and in the winter months there were increases in the reports of damp and heating issues within private sector accommodation.

The Committee thanked the officers for their presentation and for answering Members' questions.

68. Urgent Items

None

Chairman: Date: