

Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive held on Tuesday 20th October 2015 at Pippbrook, Dorking, from 7.00pm to 7.49pm

Present:

Executive Members: Councillors James Friend (Leader/Chairman), Lucy Botting, Howard Jones, Vivienne Michael, Paul Newman, Sarah Seed and Charles Yarwood.

Non-Executive Members: Councillors Margaret Cooksey, Stephen Cooksey, Simon Ling, Chris Townsend and Michelle Watson.

33. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 29th September 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader/Chairman.

34. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lynne Brooks and Corinna Osborne-Patterson.

35. Disclosure of Interests

None.

36. Councillor Question Time

None.

37. Report of the Scrutiny Committee

The Scrutiny Committee met on 6th October and considered a number of items which were included on the Executive agenda for 20th October 2015. The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, with the approval of the Leader, undertook to submit feedback to the Executive during their consideration of each report.

The Committee had also taken an early look at the Housing Allocations Policy report that would be considered by the Council in November prior to approval by the Executive in January. The Chairman reported that the Committee supported the proposal to amend the rural local connection criteria from properties within villages and settlements to parish areas, as this would prevent any difficulties that may arise for applicants when available properties fell just outside village boundaries. However the Committee also felt that consideration should be given to extending this to ward boundaries, as there were often close links between the rural villages that formed wards.

The Committee had received the final report from the Affordable Housing Panel, which had been set up to look at what the Council could do to encourage the development of more affordable housing within Mole Valley. As part of its work the Panel had met with local housing associations and also reviewed models used by other local authorities to deliver affordable housing. The Chairman advised that an unknown element to the work of the Panel was the Government's forthcoming Housing Bill which was expected to have an impact on the development of new affordable housing, but using the information that was currently available the Panel had proposed four recommendations for consideration by the Executive.

The Executive Member for Community Engagement and Resident Services welcomed the work and recommendations of the Affordable Housing Panel. She highlighted recommendation (3) as being particularly timely in a rapidly changing external environment. In response to a question regarding work undertaken thus far to assess the viability of the Council building, managing and maintaining affordable housing, the Chairman reported that informal discussions had taken place as the Council benchmarked models used by other authorities. He advised that a range of different models would be considered when progressing this recommendation.

The Executive supported the four recommendations of the Affordable Housing Panel and an additional recommendation regarding developer contributions was proposed and agreed.

- (1) That Ward Members continue to be informed of new major planning applications in their area once submitted via the weekly list of planning applications.
- (2) That the Planning Policy Working Group looks proactively at increasing the proportion of affordable housing provided within a development and also the number of bedrooms in the properties provided.
- (3) That further work be undertaken to assess the viability of the Council building, managing and maintaining affordable housing, particularly in light of the Transform Leatherhead regeneration project, which may provide development opportunities.
- (4) That sites within the built up area continue to be carefully reviewed as part of the Local Plan making process and sites that come forward for consideration from developers in the meantime are assessed in terms of opportunities for affordable housing be pursued where appropriate.
- (5) That consideration be given to whether developer contributions for affordable housing can be directed to local community housing trusts and associations rather than the wider range of organisations as at present.

38. Asset Management Plan

The Executive considered the Asset Management Plan for 2015-19 which outlined the current state of the Mole Valley District Council estate and the Council's asset management strategy for the next five years. The Executive Member for Property and Parking thanked officers, particularly those in the Property team, for their work on the Asset Management Plan, and reported that the Plan before the Executive took account of the comments made by the Scrutiny Committee. He advised that a response from the Strategic Parking and Parks Manager to the query in respect of the Open Spaces Policy would be posted on the Members' Extranet.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee reported that overall the Committee had been happy with the report, but had suggested a number of possible amendments or additions to the Asset Management Plan. He was pleased to note that these suggestions had been incorporated in the final Plan.

RESOLVED: That the Asset Management Plan attached at Appendix 1 to the report submitted be approved.

39. Dorking Halls Business Plan 2015-18

A three year business plan for Dorking Halls was considered by the Executive. The Executive Member for Property and Parking drew attention to the main areas of work in the Action List and highlighted the reduced subsidy required by the Halls. Members were advised that, following concerns being raised at the Scrutiny Committee, an invitation had been extended to community groups to meet to discuss issues regarding hire charges, but to date only one group had taken up the invitation.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee referred to the feedback reported from groups receiving concessionary rates for hiring the Halls that they were struggling to afford the fees following a 5% increase for 2015/2016, and was pleased to note that an invitation to community groups to discuss the matter had been made. He also reported that, during its discussion, the Committee had agreed that managing the catering provision at the Halls should lead to service improvements. In particular, Members had felt that the upstairs bar was underutilised at present and that there was potential for this space to be used during events. The Committee had been pleased to hear that the launch of the new website in the New Year would allow people who were part of the Friends of Dorking Halls scheme to purchase discounted tickets. . Overall the Committee was very pleased

with the progress that had been made at Dorking Halls over the past few years and the range of programmes now on offer.

In response to a question regarding the Halls' ability to provide banqueting facilities, the General Manager advised that it was possible to cater for 350-400 in the main hall. The main kitchen was adequately equipped for such functions and staffing could be provided either in-house or by external caterers.

Members noted that the Action List focused on actions to be completed within the next year with the latter years of the Business Plan being on continuous improvement.

The Executive asked that their thanks to the Dorking Halls General Manager and his team for their excellent work be formally recorded.

RESOLVED: That the Dorking Halls Business Plan attached at Appendix 1 to the report submitted be approved.

40. Mole Valley Draft Wellbeing Strategy

The Executive considered the Mole Valley Draft Wellbeing Strategy which, along with its priorities and action plan, had been developed with the cross-party Wellbeing Working Group. The Executive Member for Wellbeing advised that, as community wellbeing was one of Mole Valley District Council's corporate priorities, the Strategy was a critical piece of work, and thanked the Working Group for its role in developing the Strategy. With regard to next steps, she reported that engagement with key partners would continue and that a 'plan on a page' would be developed and shared with Council as part of an Executive briefing on Wellbeing.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee reported that the Committee had been pleased to note the additional maps which had been included following its feedback on the initial draft, which enhanced an already well written report. He sought confirmation that the Walk for Health Co-ordinator was being tied into other walking schemes in the District, such as those organised at Polesden Lacey.

Members discussed the Social Isolation Index and priority hotspots and noted that both Executive Members and Ward Members needed to be aware of areas with higher levels of social isolation and to particularly target campaigns to address social isolation to these areas. The Chairman stressed that localisation of actions was key in addressing all the wellbeing priorities and noted that the maps identifying priority hotspots would enable the Council to focus its actions and resources on communities where it could make the most difference.

RESOLVED: That the Mole Valley Wellbeing Strategy 2015-2020, including its priorities and action plan for Year 1, be approved.

41. Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020, Six Month Review

The Executive considered an update on the progress made during the first six months of the five year Homelessness Strategy approved in February 2015. The Executive Member for Community Engagement and Resident Services outlined the key achievements over the period and reported that the numbers in bed and breakfast had fallen from twelve on 31st August to ten at today's date. The Executive noted that the main reason for homelessness continued to be the end of assured shorthold tenancies in the private rented sector and welcomed the work undertaken by the Housing team to support and enable residents to remain in such tenancies.

RESOLVED: That the progress made to achieve the actions in the Homelessness Strategy 2015-2020 be noted.

42. Syrian Refugee Vulnerable Persons Relocation Programme

The Executive considered an urgent report regarding Mole Valley District Council's participation in the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Programme for Syrian Refugees. The decision was urgent to enable the Council to provide the support as quickly as possible.

The Executive Member for Community Engagement and Resident Services advised that further information on how residents could help in the current refugee crisis could be found on the Mole valley District Council website.

RESOLVED: That Mole Valley District Council confirms to the Home Office that it will participate in the Vulnerable Persons Relocation Programme for Syrian Refugees for five years and that a maximum of five households will be assisted per year.