

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 13 November 2018 at Pippbrook, Dorking from 7.00pm to 8.48pm

Present: Councillors David Draper (Chairman), Joe Crome (Vice-Chairman), Tim Ashton, Lynne Brooks, Rosemary Dickson, Mary Huggins, Duncan Irvine, Malcolm Ladell, Stephen Cooksey, Garry Stansfield and Michelle Watson.

Also present: Councillors Simon Edge, David Harper and Chris Hunt.

32. Minutes

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 16 October 2018 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

33. Apologies for Absence

None.

34. Disclosure of Interests

None.

35. New Taxi Tariff for 2019

The new taxi tariff charges for 2019 were introduced by the Executive Head of Service for Place and Environment who brought attention to paragraph 2.5 of the report which detailed the current and proposed charges. It was noted that should objections be received, then the proposals would go to Cabinet in February.

Members noted that earnings for drivers were down in the face of increased costs to the trade such as vehicle insurance and fuel costs as well as increased competition from private hire operators. In general, Hackney Carriage drivers based in the Leatherhead area were in favour of a near RPI level increase, indicating that anything less would be financially difficult for drivers, whilst those based in Dorking preferred the tariff to remain unchanged, believing that an increase in the tariff could have more detrimental impact on business by increasing competition from private hire operators.

The Scrutiny Committee went on to note after considering a range of options, the Hackney Carriage Consultative Group agreed to propose an increase of 10% to the tariff table; slightly below the percentage in the RPI since the last Hackney Carriage fare increase.

Members questioned the frequency of taxi fare increases. It was asked if it would be more beneficial to have regular smaller increases rather than larger increases every 3 years. In response, the Senior Licensing Officer advised that going forwards there would be annual taxi fare reviews.

The Committee then went on to note that the fare tariff set by MVDC represented the maximum that could be charged and that the driver was entitled to both demand and accept less than the fare shown on the meter.

Members queried why the views of drivers from Leatherhead and Dorking differed and the Senior Licensing Officer advised that the proximity of Leatherhead to Epsom & Ewell and London Boroughs might be a contributory factor.

In conclusion to the discussion, the Senior Licensing Officer added that consideration would be given to the provision of a simplified chart to be displayed in cabs showing the fee structure.

36. Homelessness Strategy Action Plan Update

The Cabinet Member for Planning Services and Houses introduced the annual update of the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan.

It was asked if the Housing Options Team had sufficient staffing levels to cope with the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The Housing Options Manager told the Committee that several local authorities within Surrey had been on a major recruitment drive; however Mole Valley had opted to wait for a while. In response an additional Housing Options Officer has been recruited. This increased capacity meant that staff were readily available for appointments and they had the additional time to dedicate to customers.

Members queried the acquisition of property for emergency accommodation and asked if MVDC needed to purchase additional property/units to cope with the increase. The Strategic Housing Manager advised that the Council currently had the right level of properties, however this was being monitored and if additional units were needed the appropriate Executive Head would be alerted.

A number of new affordable housing schemes had been completed during the year to help with managing homelessness and these have been at the Therfield School site, Leatherhead and Middlemead, Bookham.

It was confirmed that Universal Credit was now live in Mole Valley and the Strategic Housing and Housing Benefit Teams were working closely together on this. Both teams had undertaken training with the DWP to ensure that the impact of Universal Credit was understood.

An event was planned for on 29th November 2018 that would provide private landlords and letting agents with information on the implementation of Universal Credit.

Members asked if there had been an increase in the Citizens Advice Bureau's (CAB) workload. The Housing Options Manager advised that she would obtain this information for Members. She confirmed that the Housing team worked closely with the CAB and this was imperative in relation to Universal Credit.

It was asked what the process would be for a person in temporary accommodation refusing an offer of permanent accommodation. The Housing Options Manager explained how households would receive one offer of accommodation, so long as the offer was suitable. If someone was to refuse, then they would need to request a review setting out the reasons why it was not suitable.

Members asked how long it would be before the flatmate scheme would come into effect. The Housing Options Manager advised that there was still work to be undertaken on checking liabilities for this type arrangement.

With reference to the Homelessness Strategy Action Plan attached at appendix 1 to the previously circulated report, and specifically the action relating to the review and update of the customer feedback process, the Strategic Housing Manager advised that the Housing Team were hoping commission a further piece of work on this which would entail in depth interviews with customers to find out how the service could be improved.

Councillors commended the Strategic Housing Team for their report and their customer focussed approach.

37. Syrian Refugee Vulnerable Person Resettlement Scheme - Update

The Strategic Housing Manager introduced this item.

In 2015, the Council committed to resettle refugees through the Home Offices Syrian Refugee Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Programme. Since June 2016, 11 families had been greeted and commenced the resettlement process. Households were progressing well and their needs were being met. The East Surrey Family Support Service provided Arabic speaking Refugee Support Workers. The Committee were informed that the Council had the second highest rate of resettlement within the County.

It was anticipated that out of Mole Valley's commitment of 25 households over five years, 15 households would be single or couples over 55 years old. The Home Office had only been able to refer a few households in this category meaning that the 25 total could not easily be achieved and to achieve the total by providing more family accommodation would place pressure on private rented sector accommodation needed for the Council to fulfil its duties to house homeless households.

In view of this and because the Housing Team needed to concentrate on the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, it was not proposed to accept further households under the scheme, however, there remained the opportunity to resettle households through the Community Sponsorship Scheme.

The Committee heard how community sponsorship would allow the community to play a part in resettling Syrian Refugees. There was a multi-faith group in Mole Valley who would like to become a community sponsor. They were aware of what is involved and would submit an application to the Home Office as well as consent from MVDC. Approval from the Home Office would only be given if they met the criteria and participated in training.

Members understood why the resettlement scheme was not being extended.

The Committee asked how proactive MVDC would be in promoting the community sponsorship scheme and were informed that the Council would work with the Guildford Diocese and refugee support groups to promote the scheme as well as working with an organisation called Reset.

It was asked where the local sponsorship groups would find the accommodation to house refugees. The Strategic Housing Manager informed the Committee that community sponsors would find properties from a number of sources that may include the private rented sector, and benefactors or grouping together to buy a property.

Members asked what actions would be taken regarding school places. The Strategic Housing Manager advised that the community sponsor needed show that they had consulted Surrey County Council on school places as part of their application process to the Home Office.

38. Future Mole Valley Local Plan – local housing need and principles of site selection; and updating the Local Development Scheme

The item was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Planning Services and Housing, who gave a presentation (annex 1 of these minutes).

Following the presentation, Members had the opportunity to ask questions;

Members questioned the purpose of the Cabinet agreeing the draft plan before it went to consultation. The Committee were advised that the draft plan would require approval by Cabinet and Council before being published for consultation; and that Members would have the opportunity to further amend the plan before a final version was agreed. The 'preferred options' draft plan would be published in June 2019.

Councillors were invited and encouraged to attend the Planning Policy Working Groups to ask questions on behalf of the public.

Members asked if the proposed draft options plan consultation in Q2 2019-20 would include specific sites. It was advised that it would. Members were advised that there would be a 6 week consultation starting in June 2019 on the draft plan, which could be amended in the light of representations received, before members were asked to agree on the submission version. This would then be submitted to the Government who would carry out the examination/inspection process. Once approved, the plan would then be implemented. The expected timescales for this process was set out in the Local Development Scheme.

It was asked why villages had the opportunity to have their say but urban areas did not. Members were concerned these areas would have to wait until June to have their say. The Planning Policy Manager explained the views of parish councils were being sought specifically on the preferred option of modest additions for rural villages ahead of the draft plan consultation because they now had a greater role to play in plan-making; and their views would help members decide what to include in the draft plan on that particular option. The Committee asked if there was a deadline for parish councils to submit their views and would parish councils be given the option of a second opinion on behalf of residents regarding any sites put forward, particularly brownfield sites.

The Planning Policy Manager confirmed that everyone would be able to comment on the draft plan and were seeking views from parish councils who had the option to change their views. All views should be taken into consideration.

Members asked if it was now too late for communities who have not yet put forward their views regarding brownfield sites.

In response to this query, the Committee were informed that the Call for Sites exercise was carried out in October 2016 and in January 2018 land owners had the opportunity to put forward their views. It would depend on the site; however time was running out and could not guarantee that MVDC would be able to consider them for inclusion in the draft plan

39. 2019/2020 Council Meeting Schedule

The draft Council Meeting Schedule for 2019/20 was introduced by the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager. There were some minor adjustments to the schedule as follows;

Scrutiny Committee – Tuesday 15th October 2019 had now been moved to Wednesday 9th October 2019.

Thomas Flack Working Group – Wednesday 13th November 2019 had now been moved to Wednesday 27th November 2019.

Extra ordinary meetings had been arranged as follows;

Cabinet – 4th June 2019

Full Council – 18th June 2019

The Committee noted that the final schedule would be considered by Cabinet at it's meeting on 27 November 2018.

40. Urgent Items

None

41. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED that members of the Press and public be excluded from the meeting for the proceeding item of business under Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act; namely information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

42. Approval to seek a delivery partner for Claire House and James House

The Scrutiny Committee considered the previously circulated report which set out details for the site known as Claire House and James House to be marketed to potential development partners.

Approval of this proposal would then enable any future development partner to progress any further (detailed) planning application and then commence the delivery of the proposals in a timely way.

Chairman: Date:

Local Plan

David Harper

Planning Policy Cabinet Member

Mole Valley District Council



NPPF July 2018

- Stronger emphasis on meeting ‘Objectively Assessed Need’ (OAN)
- Central Government calculator results in a OAN of 6600 over 15 years
- Continued support for Green Belt (GB) and the phrase ‘Exceptional Circumstances’ means it should only be used after
 - Brown field sites
 - Higher densities in town centres
 - Checking with neighbouring authorities about whether they could accommodate some of the identified need.

Housing Delivery Brown Field

- Brown Field provides 4100 comprising of
 - Existing permissions and allocations
 - Town Centre redevelopment
 - Limited reallocation of Commercial and Retail Land
 - Mixed use redevelopment
 - Targeted increases in suburban densities



Housing Delivery Green Field

- Green Field sites provides 2500 comprising of
 - Urban extensions of existing built up areas (*northern area and Dorking*).
 - Expansion of one or more rural village.
- Why?
- Because; shops, pubs, schools, roads, trains, drains, water pipes, Virgin Fibre, etc etc etc are cheaper to deliver when adjacent to existing communities and will help
- A) Deliver Affordable Homes policy
- B) Sustain new areas and offers shortest travel journeys (school/work)



Housing Delivery Green Field

- Green Field is all undeveloped land consisting of
 - Green Belt
 - Land beyond the Green Belt
- There are no Green Field sites that that are not in the Green Belt that are a strategic fit.
- Exceptional Circumstances test has been met.
- Land released will be less than 1% of all Green Field

Housing Delivery Green Field

- Unmet need after exploring all other options is 2500.
- Non-strategic sites (<100 dwellings/site) consist of:-
 - Modest expansion of rural villages
 - Non-strategic urban extensions
- Strategic sites (>100 dwellings/site)
 - Urban extensions
 - Expansions to rural villages



Method of selecting Green Field sites

- Same method for all Greenfield options.
- 1) Strategic fit; development must be adjacent/next to existing areas- not isolated or separate from an existing settlement.
- 2) Constraints; areas ruled out for national planning restrictions
 - AONB
 - AGLV
 - Conservation
 - SSSI
 - Historic Parks and Gardens
 - Flooding
 - Common Land
 - National Trust
 - Aircraft noise

Method of selection Green Field sites

- 3) Green Belt Review; assess the extent to which it fulfills the five (5) purposes of the GB as defined in NPPF
- 4) Sustainability Appraisal; sites assessed against sustainability objectives
- Check for land offered compatible with the 4 criteria.
- Take these lands forward to next step



Process regarding strategic Green Field sites

- Draft 'preferred options' Plan will be put to a Public consultation of 6 weeks in Q2 2019
- Review the consultation in Q4 2019
- Submit to inspector Q1 2020 concurrent with further consultation.
- If found sound, approved Q4 2020.

Meanwhile... what's happening?

- Government requires 5 year land supply, measured against OAN (441).
- Our current policies (that can only be changed in a new Local Plan), are delivering around 188 dwellings/year.
- Do not have a 5 year land supply (currently 2.5 years).



..... So what?.....

- When there is not a 5 year land supply and there is not an up to date Local Plan, then
- ‘Tilted Balance’ in favour of development applies to boost the build rate.
- ‘Permission should be granted unless there are national policies of protection that provide a clear reason for refusal, (*Green Belt for instance-DH*) or (*where local policies would otherwise restrict supply-DH*) there would be an adverse impact that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of providing additional housing.

Last year

- Major Example is Leatherhead Food Research offices.
- Our local policy protects useable office space on economic land.
- Tilted balance forced us to consider the fact that it had been marketed and vacant for a long time.
- Emphasises need for new Local Plan



Thank you for listening

- Any Questions?