

## **Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2013 at Pippbrook, Dorking from 7.00pm to 9.22pm**

Present: Councillors Stephen Cooksey (Chairman), Paula Hancock, Raj Haque, Phil Harris, Dave Howarth, Chris Hunt, Roger Hurst and Paul Potter

Also present: Councillors Margaret Cooksey, Simon Ling, Vivienne Michael, David Preedy, Caroline Salmon, Chris Townsend and Charles Yarwood.

### **52. Minutes**

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2013 were approved as a correct record.

### **53. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Lynne Brooks, Clare Curran and Paul Newman

### **54. Service Update: Property**

The Property Manager, Paul Brooks, attended the meeting to provide Members with an update on the work of the Property service. During the course of the presentation the following points were noted:-

- The team were responsible for Pippbrook, managing the Council's asset database, the building management and maintenance of all Council owned properties including the management of capital works and repairs. The team's work also encompassed estate management such as the sale, the purchase and leasing of properties and other property based projects.
- The Council currently owned 271 assets, which generated a rental income of approximately £1.8m per annum. The Council's assets were currently estimated to have a combined value of £120m. Excluding work on the Pippbrook site, there had been £125,000 capitals spend on these assets in the past year. Following a request, it was agreed that a complete list of Council assets would be provided for Members.
- A major issue for the team was what to do with some of the Council's older assets as the increased amount of expenditure needed to maintain these properties and difficulty finding tenants meant that they may no longer be cost effective.
- The key aims for the team were to maintain and increase the current level of income to the Council from its properties, to maintain and improve the fabric of these assets and to identify and progress projects that increase income or reduce cost for the Council.
- It was advised that the solar panels installed at Leatherhead Leisure Centre had performed well this year due to better than expected weather and were on course to achieve there 20 year payback target
- How often rents were reviewed was based on the terms of a tenants lease. If a Council property was empty for a significant amount of time then a realistic approach to the rent offered would be taken.

The purpose of creating another door at the front of Dorking Halls was questioned by a Member as there was concern that customers using this entrance would bypass the reception area and would be less likely to buy tickets for shows. It was advised that when the idea for a second entrance was being developed it was the intention that it would be used by both staff and the public, as it was intended that this door would help to increase use of the café at Dorking Halls.

It was noted that a lot of the work of the Property team cuts across different areas of the Council and it was questioned how this was taken into account. It was advised that during the planning for

any project, the service need and business case were carefully examined and other officers and Members were consulted.

It was questioned how the Council worked with its tenants to ensure that dilapidation repairs were carried out. It was advised that the Council took a robust approach to dilapidation and looked to enforce any requirements within the terms of a tenants lease, but in some of the older leases the requirement for dilapidation repairs had not been included which made it difficult to enforce in these circumstances.

The Chairman thanked Mr Brooks for his presentation and extended an open invitation to return and give another update to the Scrutiny Committee in the future.

## **55. Mole Valley District Council Grant Aid Applications**

The Committee received the Executive report which set out the Grant Aid applications the Council had received for 2014/2015. Members were asked for their comments and/or recommendation which would be submitted to the Executive during its consideration of the item at its meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2013.

The Standing Budget Panel had been given the opportunity to scrutinise the report at its last meeting and made a number of comments which included a request that a more appropriate name be given to the Parish Council Support Grant, which reflected its purpose. The Panel also suggested that more be done by the Council to promote the tri-partite scheme.

The Panel's other comments reflected the concerns of the Committee and related to the proposal to continue the restriction on applications for revenue grants to those groups set out in Appendix E of the report. It was felt that this recommendation needed to be clarified to make it clear that this restriction would affect grants allocated in 2015/2016. However, the main concern of both the Panel and the Committee was the actual proposal itself and it was agreed to recommend to the Executive that all organisations that qualify for grant aid under the criteria agreed by the Council should be permitted to bid for grants and that the list set out in Appendix E should be reviewed on an annual basis accordingly.

The other main area of concern for the Committee related to the proposed grant for the CAB. It was accepted that by provisionally allocating the CAB a three year grant it would provide them with a secure source of funding, but in not granting them the full amount they had requested their were concerns that the CAB's ability to continue operating at its current level would be affected, particularly in light of the Government's Welfare reforms. It was clear from the discussions held when CAB reported to Scrutiny Committee (7<sup>th</sup> November 2013) that welfare reform would place an increasing amount of pressure on the service in forthcoming years and there was concern that this seemed not to have been taken into account when the three year proposal was developed. The Committee agreed to recommend to the Executive that either a Working Group or a Scrutiny Panel be established to review the Council's funding of the CAB going forward and to provide support to the CAB in order to improve its ability to gain additional funding from external sources.

There were also some concerns about the consistency of the approach to different organisations particularly when no explanation was given about why grants to different organisations were given different percentage increases. It was felt that it would be beneficial in future years if additional commentary on the decision making could be added to Grant Aid reports.

**Resolved:** That comments and recommendations of the Committee be reported to the Executive during their consideration of this item.

## **56. Local Development Scheme**

The Committee received the Executive report which set out the proposed Local Development Scheme. Members were asked for their comments and/or recommendation which would be submitted to the Executive during its consideration of the item at its meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2013.

It was advised that it was a requirement for all local authorities to publish a Local Development Scheme (LDS), setting out the timetable and what was proposed to be included in the Local Plan.

The LDS for Mole Valley District Council set out three main areas of work, which were the Housing and Traveller Site Land Allocations Plan, the Council Infrastructure Levy and the Local Plan itself. Once approved the LDS would be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate.

In response to a question about the Community Infrastructure Levy it was advised that ability for local authorities to request S106 payments from developers ended in April 2015. If the Council had not completed its work on the Community Infrastructure Levy by that stage, it would not be able request funds from developers. As a result the team were closely monitoring the development of this plan to ensure that it was produced within the required timescale.

On the whole the Committee were happy with this report and agreed that the Executive should accept the recommendation.

**Recommendation to the Executive:** That the recommendations as set out in the report be accepted.

#### **57. Statement of Community Involvement**

The Committee received the Executive report which set out the Council intends to consult with users of the Planning Service and how it deals with responses. Members were asked for their comments and/or recommendation which would be submitted to the Executive during its consideration of the item at its meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2013.

Apart from a number of minor changes relating to the wording of the document, the Committee agreed that it would be happy for the Executive to approve the recommendations as set out in the report.

**Recommendation to the Executive:** That the recommendations as set out in the report be accepted.

#### **58. Bookham Neighbourhood Planning**

The Committee received the Executive report which set out information relating to the Bookham Neighbourhood Plan. Members were asked for their comments and/or recommendation which would be submitted to the Executive during its consideration of the item at its meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2013

It was advised that the Bookham Neighbourhood Forum had carried out a Green Belt Review and assessed sites for possible inclusion in the Land Allocations Plan. The Council had been asked by the Forum to assess six potential sites being considered as part of the Land Allocation Plan to allay local fears about conflicts of interest. The Planning Policy team had assessed these sites and were now asking the Executive to approve this work, for it to be passed back to the Bookham Neighbourhood Forum.

The Committee agreed that it was happy for the Executive to accept the recommendations as set out in the report.

**Recommendation to the Executive:** That the recommendations as set out in the report be accepted.

#### **59. Scrutiny Work Programme 2013-2014**

It was confirmed that a report setting out information on the Outside Organisation to which the Council appoints representatives would be brought to the next Committee meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

**Resolved:** That the Work Programme be noted.

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Chairman

10<sup>th</sup> December 2013