

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 24th February 2015 at Pippbrook, Dorking from 7.00pm to 9.50pm

Present: Councillors Stephen Cooksey (Chairman), Lucy Botting, Lynne Brooks, Clare Curran, David Draper (Vice-Chairman), Paula Hancock, Raj Haque, Mary Huggins, Howard Jones, Paul Potter and Peter Stanyard.

Also present: Councillors Margaret Cooksey, James Friend, Roger Hurst, Bridget Lewis-Carr, Simon Ling and David Preedy.

Also Present: Rowan Munson (Youth Voice)

84. Minutes

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 27th January 2015 were agreed as a correct record.

85. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from the Executive Member, Councillor John Northcott.

86. Disclosure of Interests

Councillor's Clare Curran and Stephen Cooksey declared a non pecuniary interest in Agenda Items 6 and 7 as they were elected Members of Surrey County Council.

Councillor David Draper declared a non pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 5 as he was a member of the Friends of Dorking Hospital

Councillor Raj Haque declared a non pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 5 as he ran a food establishment in the district.

87. The Landscape Group

The Committee received a presentation from David Brew (Operations Director) and Darren Davison (Assistant Operations Director) of the Landscape Group. The Landscape Group had recently been awarded the contract to deliver the Council's Grounds Maintenance, Arboricultural and Highways Horticultural services and provided the Committee with an overview of their vision for the operation of these contracts. During the course of the presentation the following points were noted:-

- The Landscape Group had been in operation since 1919 and was a well established company with contracts across the country. They had an annual turnover of £45m of which £37m related to long term grounds maintenance contracts.
- The company employed 850 core staff throughout the year and additional seasonal staff during the summer months as required. The Landscape Group was committed to training its staff and provided a range of training opportunities from manual handling and first aid courses through to NVQ Level 3 qualifications.
- As part of the new contract with Mole Valley District Council, the Landscape Group had ordered completely new machinery with which to deliver the service. The Landscape Group would also be holding workshops with local stakeholders to gain an understanding of the key issues for residents. As it was noted that the Landscape Group would be working with the Council to identify relevant stakeholders, it was suggested that it would be useful to speak to Parish Council's as some were responsible for the parks in their local area.
- The new machinery purchased for the contract would provide tracking information to monitor the work being undertaken by the Landscape Group's employees, which would be used to target efficiencies in service delivery. It would also be used to generate monthly performance reports for the Council along with information from the Landscape Group's monitoring and quality scoring system.
- A system called Job Manager was used by staff to receive up to date job information through handheld devices. This system was used to plot efficient job schedules that could be updated with new issues as they arose.

In response to a question about monitoring, it was advised that although the Landscape Group had its own system of monitoring, council officers would still regularly inspect sites. Officers would also continue to respond to calls from residents reporting any issues with the service. These calls were taken on behalf of the Parks team by the Customer Services Unit.

Now that the Highways Horticultural service had been devolved to Mole Valley District Council, a number of Members highlighted the need to improve upon service previously delivered by Surrey County Council (SCC) and questioned how this would be achieved. It was advised that although the Landscape Group had been tasked with delivering the service to the same contract specifications as the previous SCC contract, it would be closely monitored which would lead to improvements. However, as the delivery of the highways horticultural service was new for both the Council and the Landscape Group, the first year of the contract would be used to learn the best ways of delivering the service and it was likely that improvements would follow in subsequent years.

An issue was raised regarding moss growing on pavements and whether Mole Valley District Council would now be responsible for its removal. It was advised that the responsibility for clearing moss could lie with either the District or Surrey County Council depending on where it was located and Members should contact council officers if they were unsure who was responsible. As the Council now operated both the street cleaning and highways horticultural contracts it was hoped that there would be improvements in this area.

The Chairman thanked Mr Brew and Mr Davison for their attendance at the meeting and extended an invitation for them to return before the Committee at a later date to provide an update on their delivery of the contract.

88. Service Update: Environmental Health

The Committee received a presentation on the Council's Environmental Health Service from Richard Haddad, the Environmental Health Manager and Steve Ruddy, the Corporate Head of Service. During the course of the presentation the following points were noted:-

- There were 15 members of staff within the Environmental Health team who were responsible for delivering Commercial Food Hygiene, Licensing and Residential Pollution work strands.
- In the area of Commercial Food Hygiene, the team were responsible for monitoring the 760 food businesses in the district of which 95% had achieved a hygiene rating of 3 out of 5 or higher. The team had investigated 19 outbreaks of food poisoning in the past year, which had caused 163 individual cases of food poisoning. The team were also responsible for accident at work investigations in businesses across the District.
- The Licensing team covered taxi licensing as well as licenses for betting shops, pubs and restaurants serving alcohol.
- The Residential Pollution team's work included investigating complaints of excessive noise, odour and bonfires. In the past year the team has dealt with 496 requests in this area. The team were also responsible for investigating air pollution, contaminated land, housing standards, dog control and the animal warden.
- The Environmental Health team worked in conjunction with other authorities to share information and resources, to improve the service provided and increase staff resilience. Other partner authorities included Surrey Heath Borough Council, Tandridge District Council and Surrey County Council Trading Standards.
- The Council had been awarded a Government grant to work in partnership with the aforementioned local authorities to research new, innovative ways of delivering licensing, which would be fed back to the Government.
- Other initiatives being delivered by the team included the 'Eat Out Eat Well' scheme that encouraged local food businesses to provide healthy options for their customers. An anti-social dog initiative was also being developed.

Following the presentation Members were given the opportunity to ask the officers questions about the Environmental Health service, these included whether there was a particular problem with e-coli

infections in the District. It was advised that the team were rarely required to investigate e-coli outbreaks, with on average only 2 – 3 cases a year being reported.

In response to a question about the average length of time needed to investigate a complaint, it was advised that the team were targeted with responding to a complaint within three days of it being made. However it was difficult to estimate the average time needed to complete an investigation as the action required could vary from advice being given over the phone to a complainant through to a number of visits to a business to resolve an issue. It was also confirmed that very few complaints ended in legal action being taken, as the team liked to take a positive approach through working with businesses to resolve issues.

A number of Members noted that the Dorking Advertiser newspaper had recently included an article about the 'Scores on the Doors' scheme used to rate an establishment's food hygiene and in particular the article had highlighted those businesses with low scores. As a result it had come to light that some of these scores had been out of date and in a number of cases the businesses in question had now achieved higher ratings. Members wanted to find out what the Council was doing to rectify any errors made. It was advised that in a very small number of cases the scores had been out of date and in these instances the Council had contacted the business in question to apologise, had contacted the Dorking Advertiser to ask them to correct the information in their article and had also updated the scores on the Food Standards Agency website where the scores were displayed.

It was confirmed that at present 16 businesses in Mole Valley had signed up to the 'Eat Out, Eat Well' scheme, together with approximately 200 businesses across the whole of Surrey.

In response to a question about the type of bonfires investigated by the team, it was advised that there were no specific rules, but it would usually depend upon factors such as the time of day the bonfire was lit and the amount of smoke being produced. In most circumstances there would not be a problem with individuals having bonfires in their gardens and the team were more likely to investigate businesses burning waste on a regular basis in residential areas.

It was questioned whether the team was involved with monitoring the sale of alcohol and tobacco to people under the age of 18. It was confirmed that Surrey County Council Trading Standards took the lead in this area by providing advice and information to local businesses. However the Licensing team worked with Trading Standards and the Police when a business was of particular concern, and it was required to review its license.

The session concluded with the Chairman thanking Mr Haddad and Mr Ruddy for their attendance at the Committee meeting.

89. The Surrey Waste Partnership's Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy

The Committee received an Executive report setting out the Surrey Waste Partnership's Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategy. Members were asked for their comments which would be submitted to the Executive during its consideration of the item at its meeting on 3rd March 2015.

It was noted with concern that the report seemed to suggest that the performance indicators proposed in the strategy would be set by the Surrey Waste Partnership and would not be based on national indicators. Members felt that by setting the targets ourselves it would devalue their worth; however reassurance was given that most of the performance indicators would be based upon national targets.

There was a significant amount of discussion amongst Members about the clarity of the strategy and while it was recognised that more specific information would be included in the action plan, to be produced at a later date, there was concern raised about the level of detail set out in the strategy. Alternatively the strategy was welcomed by other Members as an aspirational document and a statement of intent for the future delivery of the Council's Waste Collection service. It was agreed across the Chamber that it would be important for the Committee to see the detailed Action Plan when it was produced.

Resolved: That the comments of the Scrutiny Committee will be reported to the Executive during their consideration of this item.

90. Surrey Joint Waste Collection Services Contract – Draft Specification

The Committee received an Executive report setting out the Draft Specification for the Surrey Joint Waste Collection Services Contract. Members were asked for their comments which would be submitted to the Executive during its consideration of the item at its meeting on 3rd March 2015.

During the discussion of this report it was questioned whether new Members would be able to join the partnership and whether any benefits arising from having additional members would be passed on to the existing Members. It was noted that new Members would be able to join the partnership, but only if it was advantageous to the existing Members.

It was also noted that it would be the Council's decision whether to extend the contract or not and it was confirmed that a break clause would be included within the contract in the event of poor performance from the appointed contractor.

Although Members accepted that the appointed contractor would be responsible for monitoring their own performance to a certain extent, it was welcomed that council officers would also continue to monitor the contractor's performance as well. It was suggested that this could be made clearer within the report, but accepted that it might not be appropriate for it to be included in the specification.

There was strong concern voiced about the possibility of allowing bin collections from 6am to 8pm Monday to Saturday. It was noted that these times had been included within the contract specification to allow contractors flexibility in their proposals and it was not likely that a contractor would be collecting throughout that time.

It was also requested that, if possible, the cleaning of road signs, central refuges and roundabouts should be included within the specification, but it was accepted that whether these could be cleaned or not would depend upon whether they were part of the adopted highway.

Resolved: That the comments of the Scrutiny Committee will be reported to the Executive during their consideration of this item.

91. Corporate Strategy 2015- 2019

The Committee received an Executive report setting out the proposed Corporate Strategy for 2015 to 2019. 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 3rd March 2015.

From the discussion of the Corporate Strategy a number of comments and suggestions were noted. Firstly, the format of the Corporate Strategy was welcomed by Members who expressed their support for the strategy being set out in a one page document.

Secondly, as it was a significant issue for the rural areas of the district, it was agreed that fly tipping should be added to the final bullet point under the Environment priority.

Thirdly, it was questioned whether the aim to 'Maximise the provision of affordable housing' should be included under the Environment priority and as an alternative it was suggested that it should be located under the Prosperity priority instead.

Fourthly, it was noted that the survey results didn't necessarily indicate support for some of the items under the Community Wellbeing priority. However the Committee recognised that those residents who might benefit from the work under this priority were less likely to have completed the survey.

Finally an issue was raised with the final bullet point under the Community Wellbeing priority which was to 'Welcome considerate cyclists, promoting a healthy lifestyle and sustainable transport.' There was concern that this proposed priority did not reflect the impact to local residents from the large number of cyclists visiting Mole Valley and it was suggested that it should be reworded to take this into account. The Leader of the Opposition suggested a form of words and the Deputy Leader indicated that he would develop an alternative proposal to be submitted during the Executive's consideration of the report.

Resolved: That the comments of the Scrutiny Committee will be reported to the Executive during their consideration of this item.

92. Open Spaces Events and Lettings Policy

The Committee received the Executive report which set out the proposed Open Spaces and Letting Policy. 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 3rd March 2015

Although it was indicated that Members accepted in principle the proposal to allow community groups the opportunity to run local parks and open spaces in their area, there was concern noted that this policy extended to all groups and not just democratically elected ones, such as Parish Councils. It was advised that any group wishing to take up this offer had to agree to manage their local open spaces in line with the Council's policy set out in the report and if this was not the case the agreement could be reviewed.

Resolved: That the views of the Scrutiny Committee will be reported to the Executive during their consideration of this item.

93. Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2014 - 2015

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

Resolved: That the Scrutiny Committee work programme and the Executive forward plan are noted.