

Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive held on Tuesday 9th September 2014 at Pippbrook, Dorking, from 7.00pm to 9.25pm

Present:

Executive Members: Councillors Chris Townsend (Leader/Chairman), James Friend, Simon Ling, Vivienne Michael, Paul Newman and Charles Yarwood.

Non-Executive Members: Councillors Margaret Cooksey, Stephen Cooksey, David Draper, Valerie Homewood and David Preedy.

16. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 1st July 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman/Leader.

17. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor John Northcott.

18. Disclosure of Interests

Councillor Charles Yarwood declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 9, Report of the Planning Peer Review Working Group as Vice-Chairman of a Parish Council.

Councillor James Friend declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 14 - Grounds Maintenance and Arboricultural Services Contracts: Contractor Selection and Contract Award, and was not present during consideration of that item.

19. Councillor Question Time

(1) Councillor David Preedy asked the following question:

'At last week's Scrutiny meeting, we were told that only 9 households from Mole Valley have applied for the Government's Repair & Renew Grant following last Winter's flooding and that the scheme finishes at the end of September. I am very concerned that so few flood-affected families in our area are managing to take advantage of this scheme. The figures we were given for Surrey as a whole are similarly low.

In discussions with some flood-affected families, I have been told that for many this is not uppermost in their minds until they have managed to get back into their homes; I have also been told that many of the organisations listed under the scheme seem reluctant to come out and visit affected properties in the area.

What is the Council doing to ensure that the Repair & Renew scheme is extended (perhaps till the end of December) so that more local families can benefit from this help?'

Councillor Chris Townsend, Leader of the Council, responded as follows:

As part of the flood recovery programme designed and implemented jointly by Mole Valley District Council and Surrey County Council to support our communities through the aftermath of the flooding, we have been promoting and implementing the Repair and Renew Flood Grant. The grant is available to all residents and businesses who were internally flooded during the last winter. The grant provides up to £5,000 per property to fund property-level flood prevention measures to protect homes and businesses against any future flooding.

As the organisation administering the Repair & Renew Flood Grant, Surrey County Council is very keen to support and assist residents in putting forward applications to this fund.

A coordinated communications campaign was commissioned by the County Council to raise awareness of the grant over the last 6 months. As part of this campaign a personalised letter highlighting the grant scheme has been sent directly to all known flood affected householders within the whole of Surrey.

The publicised date for submitting an application for the grant (30th September), was carefully selected to ensure applicants had sufficient time available in order to enable measures to be installed ahead of the January deadline by which the grant funding needs to be claimed.

The ultimate deadline of 31st March for the scheme is set by DEFRA. By this date the County Council is required to have submitted its schedule for the reclaim of all funds in relation to this grant from DEFRA. Individual applicants need to have claimed the grant funding by the January deadline, to ensure they are included within the schedule.

A key consideration for an applicant is that any application made beyond the publicised date of 30th September, might limit the time left available for the measures to be installed ahead of the January deadline by which the grant funds need to be claimed. The County Council will continue to consider whether it is possible to extend the 30th September deadline and will apply flexibility to individual applications wherever possible.

As the publicised deadline for applications draws closer, any residents concerned with meeting these deadlines are encouraged to contact the administration team at Surrey County Council directly in order that the team can explore and discuss what practical steps could be taken in such circumstances. The contact details for the administration team are: Email: rrg@surreycc.gov.uk
Tel: 0300 200 1003.

We will continue to work with Surrey County Council to promote the scheme and enable our residents to access the grant.

Councillor Preedy asked a supplementary question regarding whether more could be done to encourage take up of the grant, particularly amongst those residents who had not yet been able to return to their homes.

The Leader advised that a request to undertake more publicity and to consider an extension of the September deadline would be made to Surrey County Council. In addition, he undertook to ensure that the Mole Valley website contained information on the Repair and Renew grant scheme and the relevant contact details.

20. Report of the Scrutiny Committee

The Scrutiny Committee met on 4th September and considered a number of reports which were included on the Executive agenda for 9th September 2014. 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. In addition, the Chairman updated the Executive on other items considered by the Committee, including its Work Programme for the forthcoming year and the establishment of two new Scrutiny Panels – one to look at Affordable Housing and the other to look into Planning Enforcement. The Chairman advised that updates on the progress of the Committee's work programme would be brought to the Executive as appropriate.

21. The Future of the Pippbrook Site [KEY DECISION]

The Executive considered the recommendations made by the Council at its meeting on 22nd July 2014. With regard to recommendation (2), the Executive Member for Assets advised that in marketing Pippbrook House, would be bidders would need to indicate what of the surrounding space they would need to support the operational functionality of their proposed uses of the building. This recommendation had, therefore, been amended accordingly.

Some non-Executive Members expressed concern that the additional wording in recommendation (2) had not been discussed at Council and could encourage bidders to request additional parts of

the site for enabling development.

Executive Members supported the inclusion of the additional wording, but considered whether the definition of 'surrounding space' could be clarified perhaps limiting it to the space within the vicinity of Pippbrook House. The Executive Member for Assets advised that the definition had been deliberately left open to allow for a full range of expressions of interest from bidders. He confirmed that all bidders would need to demonstrate why they needed any additional land, and stressed that any such land must be to support the operational functionality of their proposed use of Pippbrook House and was not enabling development.

The Executive noted that, although there was an estimated budget for the refurbishment of the Civic Offices, the specific works to be undertaken and associated costs were not detailed in the report. Officers advised that the refurbishment costs were an estimate which would be market tested during the procurement process. Prior to tendering the works, a pre-tender analysis would be prepared based on the 'must do' and 'should do' elements. The Executive was of the view that the detailed specification and cost analysis for the refurbishment project should be made available to Executive Members at the same time as it was submitted to the Pippbrook Working Group, and an amendment to the terms of reference of the Working Group was agreed accordingly.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the existing Civic Offices be refurbished at an estimated cost of £4.5m as detailed in the report submitted; the order of priority should be Health and Safety, statutory compliance issues, sustainability and improvements to the working environment.
- (2) That, in respect of Pippbrook House, Option 2c be pursued – MVDC should market Pippbrook House and the marketing pack to include a plan of the site and bidders to be asked to indicate what area(s) around Pippbrook House would be required for their operational requirements.
- (3) That a decision on enabling development be deferred until a time to be decided.
- (4) That the Pippbrook Working Group, comprising 5 Members - 2 Conservatives, 2 Liberal Democrats and 1 Independent member (Group Leaders to advise the Corporate Head of Services - Democratic Services of their nominees) and chaired by the Executive Member or their nominee, be re-established to receive regular updates and information, including details of the proposed Civic Offices refurbishment which are also to be provided concurrently to Executive Members, to progress the approved options and to advise the Executive accordingly.

22. Month 4 2014/15 Budget and Performance Report

The Executive considered a report detailing progress during the year to date with regard to performance indicators and priorities, and the outcome of the monthly budget monitoring exercise for the end of July. The Executive Member for Finance and Corporate Services reported that 94% of the Performance Indicators were on or above target, and highlighted a number of areas where performance had exceeded the targets set. He also outlined the budgetary changes since the last reported position to the Executive.

The Executive Member for Community and Resident Services drew the Executive's attention to the improved performance in her portfolio area, including the time taken to assess new benefit claims, the number of affordable homes completed and the number of households in bed and breakfast.

The Executive thanked all staff for their efforts in achieving the performance detailed in the report.

RESOLVED: That the Council's financial and performance position for Month 4 2014/15 be noted.

23. Review of Mole Valley District Council's (MVDC's) Response to the Floods of Winter 2013/14

The Executive considered a report on the review of MVDC's response to the floods, both during and after the emergency, and an improvement plan which detailed actions that would strengthen the response to emergencies and the management of floods for the benefit of the District's communities.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee reported that as part of the Committee's consideration of this report, Surrey County Council and Thames Water had been invited to provide an update on their own response to the flooding. A similar presentation from the Environment Agency had been made to an earlier meeting. The Committee had been encouraged by the cooperation amongst partner agencies in assisting residents affected by flooding and the fact that further improvements to strengthen relationships had been identified. The Chairman advised that the Committee had welcomed the action plan and had requested a further report by the end of the year detailing progress against the action plan.

The Executive commended the report and improvement plan.

RESOLVED: That the outcomes of the review and the improvement plan, attached to the report submitted, be noted.

24. Report of the Planning Peer Review Working Group

The Executive considered the report of the Planning Peer Review Working Group which detailed the response of the Working Group to the Peer Review's recommendations. The Leader presented the report in the absence of the Executive Member for Planning.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee reported that the majority of the responses to the Peer Review's recommendations had been supported unanimously by the Committee. However, there had been significant objections from a number of Members in respect of recommendations (a) and (c) on the size of the Development Control Committee and the revised Scheme of Delegation respectively, although the Chairman noted that a number of members of the Committee had not commented on the recommendations. With regard to the size of the Development Control Committee, those Members objecting to any change in size had questioned the reason for change, citing that the current system worked well. A committee of 19 allowed for a wide range of representation and a greater number of Members participating in decision making. The proposal to change the Scheme of Delegation had also generated considerable debate. The Committee was not in favour of any further delegation to officers, as it was felt that this would lead to less transparent decision making. The Committee had also expressed concern in respect of the proposal to remove from the Scheme of Delegation the right of Parish Councils and Residents' Associations to refer applications to the Development Control Committee for determination.

Executive Members held varying views on the optimum size of the Development Control Committee and in light of this, and the views expressed by non-Executive Members at the meeting, agreed not to make a recommendation to Council with regard to committee size, but instead to refer the recommendation of the Working Group to Council for debate and decision.

A number of Executive Members expressed concern regarding the proposed revised Scheme of Delegation to officers in respect of Development Control functions, in particular the removal of the right of Parish Councils and Residents' Associations to refer applications. The role of the Parish Councils and Residents' Associations was considered to be key, especially in geographically large single Member wards in rural areas. It was suggested that the right of referral could be given to other representative organisations in order to put all communities on a level footing. Concern was also expressed that the proposal in the revised Scheme of Delegation to increase delegation to officers could reduce the number of decisions taken in public. Having debated the proposed changes to the Scheme of Delegation, it was proposed and agreed that recommendation (c) from the Working Group should not be referred to Council. Recommendation (b) proposed the maintenance of the status quo with regard to substitutes on the Development Control Committee and therefore no recommendation to Council was required.

RESOLVED: That the report of the Planning Peer Review Working Group be noted and that, having reported to Executive in accordance with its terms of reference, the Working Group be disbanded.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That the size of the Development Control Committee be either 13-15 or 19 members.

25. Aviation Working Group – Terms of Reference

The Executive considered a report proposing the establishment of an Aviation Working Group to assist in developing Mole Valley District Council's responses to the consultations on aviation matters in the South East.

RESOLVED: That an Aviation Working Group be established with the Terms of Reference set out in the Appendix to the report submitted.

26. Amendments to the Appointments of Members onto Working Group

RESOLVED: That Councillor James Friend replace Councillor Vivienne Michael on the Wellbeing Working Group.

27. Exclusion of Press and Public

RESOLVED: That members of the Press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that it involves 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 outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

28. Grounds Maintenance and Arboricultural Services Contracts: Contractor Selection and Contract Award [KEY DECISION]

Having approved the procurement process and timetable to deliver a contract for the Grounds Maintenance and Arboricultural Services on 29th October 2013, and the service specifications for the contracts on 8th April 2014, the Executive considered a report recommending the award of the contracts.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee reported that the Committee had welcomed the inclusion of a provision within the contract specification requiring contractor engagement with local communities.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Supplier F who submitted the Most Economically Advantageous Tender be awarded the Grounds Maintenance Contract.
- (2) That the Grounds Maintenance Contract be awarded on a seven year basis, with the opportunity to extended by a further four and then three years.
- (3) That Supplier F who submitted the Most Economically Advantageous Tender be awarded the Arboricultural Services Contract.
- (4) That the Arboricultural Services Contract be awarded on a seven year basis, with the opportunity to extended by a further four and then three years.
- (5) That the successful suppliers be invited to attend a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to present their approach to delivering the contracts.