

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 24th March 2015 at Pippbrook, Dorking from 7.00pm to 8.57pm

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, Rosemary Dickson, Valerie Homewood, Bridget Lewis-Carr, John Northcott, David Preedy, Chris Townsend and Charles Yarwood.

94. Minutes

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

95. Disclosure of Interests

Councillor David Draper declared a non pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 4 as he was Chairman of the Friends of Dorking Hospital

Councillor Peter Stanyard declared a non pecuniary interest in Agenda Item 6 as he had previously been employed by contracting companies who may be interested in bidding for the Meadowbank contract.

96. CSH Surrey

The Committee received an update from Jo Pritchard (Chief Executive) and Matt Jarratt (Business Director) of CSH Surrey. The update covered in detail the reasons why CSH Surrey had decided to close its in-patient beds at Leatherhead Hospital in late 2014, which was of significant concern for Members.

Members were advised that in November 2014 it was identified that there were staffing issues at Leatherhead Hospital relating to the ratio of agency nursing staff in comparison to permanent nursing staff, which had risen to a level that was considered to present a significant risk to patient safety. As a result it was decided, with the support of the Surrey Downs Clinical Commissioning Group, to close these beds and to relocate the patients to other community hospitals in the local area.

Although the recruitment of nursing staff was an issue across the country, since the closure of the beds in November 2014, CSH Surrey had appointed a new HR Director with a view to improving its recruitment strategy. Staff had now been recruited to the vacant nursing posts, but it was recognised that recruitment would continue to be an issue for hospital's across Surrey, due to its close proximity to London where staff salaries were higher due to London weighting.

When questioned about the time scale for reopening of the inpatient beds at Leatherhead Hospital it was advised that it was on hold pending the outcome from a review of community care provision by the Surrey Downs Clinical Commissioning Group which was expected in July 2015. In the meantime the other services offered at Leatherhead Hospital, such as physiotherapy and outpatient facilities would continue unaffected.

In response to a suggestion that the patients affected by the closure had not been kept informed, it was advised that although the decision to close beds had been taken quickly both patients and their families had been fully consulted. This was also the case with any staff members who were affected by the decision.

The Chairman thanked the representatives from CSH Surrey for coming to the meeting and providing an update on an important issue for many residents. CSH Surrey were also invited to return to provide a further update once Surrey Downs Clinical Commissioning Group had announced the results of its review.

97. Service Update: Dorking Halls

The Committee received a presentation on Dorking Halls from Keith Garrow, the General Manager at the Halls. During the course of the presentation the following points were noted:-

- In response to a competitive booking environment, Dorking Halls had offered a diverse range of shows and events over the past year including a beer festival, a production of the Mousetrap and also live bands.
- Year on Year income had risen across the board at Dorking Halls, with Live Event income up 30% and Hire Event income up 19% from the previous year. In fact, the income derived from Hire Events was actually at its highest level since 2008.
- Improvements at Dorking Halls in the past year included the redecoration of the café area, together with the provision of new café furniture. A popcorn machine had also been purchased which meant that customers could now be offered fresh popcorn. As the popcorn machine delivered a greater profit margin than pre-packaged popcorn, it also helped to increase the income stream at the Halls.
- There had also been staff changes at Dorking Halls with more part time and one full time Member of staff being employed to increase resilience and reduce the need for casual staff.
- £37,000 savings had been identified in the 2015/2016 budget, including £17,000 from a 50p increase in the ticket booking fee, £10,000 from increased hire charges and £10,000 from increased conference bookings.
- The key risks for the continued operation of Dorking Halls included the direct competition with other similar sized venues in the local area, maintaining the building and also keeping up with customer expectations.
- Looking to the future, a new business plan would be produced in the summer, the website would be redesigned and lighting in customer areas would be improved. Looking further forward, as it had been 17 years since the last major refurbishment at the Halls, another major refurbishment would be required to deliver larger income generating projects such as increasing the capacity of the Grand Hall.

Following the presentation, a number of Members raised concern that they had received feedback from community groups who were no longer able to hire Dorking Halls for events because they were unable to afford the booking fee. Mr Garrow advised that he had not received any feedback about the hire charge from his discussions with local groups and although the fee for community hire had increased by 5%, it was negotiable.

There were also a number of concerns raised about the catering provision offered by the contractors at Dorking Halls, with a feeling that there was room for improvement. Mr Garrow advised that he was aware there had been some issues with the catering provision and he was holding on-going discussions with the contractor to improve the situation.

Apart from the aforementioned concerns, the majority of the feedback from Members was largely positive and the session concluded with the Chairman thanking Mr Garrow for his attendance. A request was also made for the Business Plan to be presented to the Committee for discussion once it was available.

98. The process for procuring a contractor for the redevelopment of the Dorking Football Ground, Meadowbank

The Committee received an Executive report setting out the process for procuring a contractor for the redevelopment of the Dorking Football Club. Members were asked for their comments which would be submitted to the Executive during its consideration of the item at its meeting on 31st March 2015.

From the Committee's discussion of this item, there were two main concerns highlighted. The first related to the tight timescales for the completion of the project and whether the Council would be able to make the necessary timely decisions required for the project to be completed on time. The second concern also related to decision making on the project, with it questioned whether given the magnitude of the project, an ad-hoc meeting of the Executive should be arranged to take the final decision on the procurement process rather than using delegated authority. It was agreed that these concerns would be relayed to the Executive during its consideration of the report.

Despite these concerns, it was clear that there was a general level of support for the recommendations set out in the report and in particular it was felt that there would be benefits from using a collaborative approach in the procurement process.

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

99. Report of the Car Parking Panel

The Committee received a verbal report from Cllr Margaret Cooksey, a member of the Car Parking Panel, on their meeting which was held on 11th March to review the progress made against the Car Parking Strategy and to discuss any current car parking issues.

The Panel's update presented a positive picture of the Council's car parking service and included information on the Council's new Dorking based parking scheme for low paid workers, new parking proposals designed to improve traffic flow on Dorking and Leatherhead High Streets and also confirmation that all actions in the Car Parking Strategy were underway, with many being actually completed.

It was agreed that the Panel would continue to meet annually and would report back to the Scrutiny Committee at the same time next year.

Resolved: That the report of the Car Parking Panel be noted.

100. Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

The Committee received a copy of its work programme and the Executive Forward Plan for it information. The Chairman also confirmed that the work programme for 2015/2016 would be included for discussion at the next meeting of the Committee on 2nd June 2015.

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

101. Urgent Item

The Chairman advised the Committee that he had been made aware that a report requiring a time critical decision was being prepared for the Executive meeting on 31st March 2015. The report concerned the potential allocation of capital funds to assist Leatherhead Youth Football Club with the replacement of their pitch.

As the report was not available at the time of the Scrutiny Committee meeting it was agreed that it would be circulated to Members outside of the meeting. If Members wished to make comments on the report these would need to be fed back to the Scrutiny Committee Chairman before the Executive meeting on 31st March, so they could be reported at that meeting.