

Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive held on Tuesday 1st July 2014 at Pippbrook, Dorking, from 7.00pm to 8.05pm

Present:

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

Non-Executive Members: Councillors David Draper, Chris Hunt and David Preedy.

5. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 17th June 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman/Leader.

6. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor John Northcott.

7. Disclosure of Interests

Councillor James Friend declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 8, Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan 2014-2019 as a resident of the AONB.

8. Councillor Question Time

(1) Councillor David Preedy asked the following question:

'Please could the Portfolio Holder tell us how many new affordable houses were promised when the Council's Housing stock was transferred to Mole Valley Housing Association, and how many have been completed up to the end of last Financial year?'

Councillor Vivienne Michael, Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Resident Services, responded as follows:

Thank you Councillor Preedy for your question.

This is a question that has been posed several times and I am happy to recap.

The promise document sent to tenants before the stock transfer stated:

'Whilst a number of conditions would have to be satisfied for the target it has set itself to be achieved, Circle Anglia (in partnership with Mole Valley Housing Association) would look to develop 300 affordable homes in the first five years after transfer. Planning issues and securing developable land and grant funding would be the greatest challenges to meeting this target.'

As the wording itself suggests, given the practical challenges for any affordable housing development of land availability, securing planning permissions and funding, this was an ambitious target within the timescale. We also need to take into account the need for Mole Valley Housing Association (as they were then known) to establish itself.

Since the stock transfer in October 2007 to the end of the last financial year, 31st March 2014, Circle Housing Mole Valley has completed 78 homes. It will complete another 101 new homes during the 2014/15 year making a total of 179. These 101 units have planning permission, funding and have started on site.

Circle Housing have other developments in the pipeline and the redevelopment of the Middlemead Estate will, subject to planning permission being granted, be the next to go on site. This will replace the 46 sub-standard Orlit homes with 79 new homes of different tenures.

The progress made by Circle Housing Mole Valley is presented annually to Scrutiny Committee by

David Searle the Managing Director and he is scheduled to do so again in October. Mr Searle has confirmed several times to the Council that Circle is committed to achieving the 300 target and more, and has the finances in place to achieve this.

Of course, other housing associations have also played their part in delivering affordable homes across the District since stock transfer and during the period from October 2007 to March 2014 they have jointly delivered 187 new affordable homes in Mole Valley.

Councillor Preedy asked a supplementary question regarding whether the cumulative position rather than the annual position could be included in the Performance Reports submitted to the Executive in order to give a more accurate picture of how the Council was meeting its targets.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Resident Services agreed that the report should be as transparent as possible and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Services undertook to ensure that this figure were included in all future Performance Reports.

9. Report of the Scrutiny Committee

The Scrutiny Committee met on 24th June to consider a number of reports which were included on the Executive agenda for 1st July 2014. The Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, with the approval of the Leader, undertook to submit feedback to the Executive during their consideration of each report.

10. Petition – Housing and Traveller Site Plans Consultation

Mrs Josephine Bartlett presented a petition containing 628 signatures in response to the Council's Housing and Traveller Site Plans Consultation and addressed the Executive to explain the subject matter of the petition. The petition objected to the housing proposals for three sites along the Westcott Road, Dorking (DK14, DK18 and DK30) and asked Mole Valley District Council to keep them in the Green Belt.

The Leader, on behalf of the Portfolio Holder for Planning, thanked the petitioners for the petition and for explaining why they felt that the three sites should be safeguarded from development. He advised that the Council had received many objections to all the sites that had been the subject of the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan consultation and that these objections, including those that related to the three sites which were the subject of the petition, were currently being analysed. All the comments and petitions received as part of the consultation would be taken into account when deciding on which sites should be identified for development in the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan.

11. Statement of Community Involvement 2014 [KEY DECISION]

The Leader proposed that, following the comments of the Scrutiny Committee at their last meeting in respect of the method for consulting on planning applications, the item be withdrawn and reconsidered prior to submission to the September meeting of the Executive.

RESOLVED: That the item be withdrawn for reconsideration of the method for consulting on planning applications, and submitted to the meeting of the Executive in September 2014.

12. Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan 2014 - 2019 [KEY DECISION]

The Executive considered a report on the review of the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan which had been prepared by the Surrey Hills AONB Board. An addendum including revised recommendations was tabled at the meeting. The revised recommendations took account of the need to undertake a screening opinion in respect of the Plan.

The Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee reported that the Committee had supported the recommendations in the report, subject to the Executive's consideration of particular issues of concern. The main concern of the Committee had been the impact of cyclists on the local environment and in particular the effect on local residents. The Committee had also noted the

possible extension of the AONB boundary following the forthcoming boundary review and had suggested that the whole of the Woodland Trust Memorial Wood be included within the AONB. Finally the Committee had sought further information on the management and monitoring of the Surrey Hills Trust Fund.

The Leader advised that the AONB Management Plan supported the quiet enjoyment of the AONB through leisure activities, including cycling. The Plan specifically recognised the concerns about sports cycling, recognising that these activities needed to be controlled and managed. As such, the AONB Board would look to work with Mole Valley District Council on the Mole Valley Cycle Strategy to ensure that the impacts on the AONB were minimised. A multiagency approach, including the police, user groups, Surrey County Council and Mole Valley District Council, was likely to be necessary.

The possible inclusion of the whole of the Memorial Wood in the AONB would be suggested when the boundary review began in a year to 18 months time.

With regard to the management and monitoring of the Surrey Hills Trust Fund, the Leader reported that the Trust Fund would be accountable in the same way as any trust fund with published accounts and trustees. In addition, the Surrey Hills Board, with its constituent local authority members, would receive and scrutinise reports from the Trust. In response to a question regarding whether applicants seeking planning permission for development in the AONB and paying a contribution to the Trust Fund could reduce their level of contribution to affordable housing and other Council priorities, the Leader advised that the Trust Fund would act independently from the affordable housing tariff and Community Infrastructure Levy when that were introduced and there would, therefore, be no impact on the contributions made under the tariff. Any other contributions to local projects and Trusts, such as the Surrey Hills Trust, would be entirely voluntary. The Leader also confirmed that the spending of any receipts generated by the Trust would be established on an individual basis between the Trust and the donor.

The Executive considered the Management Plan in detail. Concern was expressed that the establishment of the Trust Fund should be clearly separate from the AONB's role in land management to maintain the independence of any advice given on planning applications. Members were also of the view that the Plan should aim to maintain a balance, and that maximising the benefit to the local economy in terms of increased leisure and tourism in the AONB should not impact adversely on the quiet enjoyment and amenity of the area, and that disruption to communities should be minimised. The following amendments were suggested to achieve this aim:

2.3 The Vision – amend the final sentence to read ‘It provides opportunities for **appropriate** business enterprise.....’

F3 – amend to read ‘Farm diversification schemes will be supported where they help to maintain and enhance the special landscape character of the AONB **and have a demonstrably positive amenity impact** and contribute to the vitality of the Surrey Hills economy, particularly supporting sustainable tourism and leisure.’

RT6 – the wording should be strengthened to ensure that the disruption to communities from recreational activities in the AONB was minimised.

LU1 – amend to read ‘.....great weight will be attached to any adverse impact that a development proposal would have on the **amenity value**, landscape and scenic beauty of the AONB.’

Lu4 – amend to read ‘Proposals that would assist in the continuation of **direct** agricultural and forestry businesses.....’

Officers undertook to check the suggested amendments against the National Planning Policy Framework to ensure that the wording was consistent and the Executive agreed that minor editing of the Plan, taking account of the comments detailed above should be delegated to the Principal Conservation Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That authority to adopt and publish the Surrey Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan be delegated to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning following the satisfactory discharging of the requirements of the European Environmental Assessment Directive that neither a Strategic Environmental Assessment or Appropriate Assessment are required.
- (2) That any minor editing of the Plan be delegated to the Principal Conservation Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, taking account of the comments detailed above.

13. Countryside Management Partnerships - Management Review [KEY DECISION]

The Executive considered a report which proposed new governance arrangements for the three countryside management partnerships in Surrey, following an external review of the three projects. The new governance arrangements had already been agreed by two of the local authority partners, City of London and the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, and the proposals were due to be considered by Elmbridge and Epsom and Ewell Borough Councils before the Autumn.

The Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee advised that the Committee was supportive of the proposed governance arrangements.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the new governance arrangements for the countryside management partnerships (Lower Mole, Downlands and Heathland projects) in Surrey as detailed in the report submitted be agreed.
- (2) That a Service Level Agreement between the Lower Mole Project and Mole Valley District Council, attached at Appendix 1 to the report submitted, be agreed.

14. Hope Springs Eternal

The Executive considered a report on the progress of the Hope Springs Eternal project, which, subject to successfully achieving a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, would enable the restoration of important parts of the former Dorking Deepdene estate. The Portfolio Holder for Wellbeing thanked the officer team for their work on and commitment to the project and also noted the huge voluntary contribution made by the Friends of Deepdene.

The Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee reported that the Committee was supportive of the project. With regard to the walk around the Deepdene Estate, the Committee had asked if this could be extended to include the town centre. The Committee had also queried whether the Council would be left with financial liabilities at the end of the 35 year lease period.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Council would not be left with any financial liability at the end of the lease period. With regard to the walking map, the Portfolio Holder advised that he would like to develop an interconnected network of walking routes, providing a 'Walking in Mole Valley' map which drew all the shorter, individual routes together.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That if Mole Valley District Council is successful in its application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, agreements be put in place with Kuoni Travel to enter into an agreement to lease Deepdene Gardens at a peppercorn rent for a 35 year period taking on responsibility for the site and two historic structures (the Embattled Tower and Grotto).
- (2) That if the Council is successful in its application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, the ongoing revenue costs, estimated at £3,700 pa at current costs, and set out in the maintenance and management plan, be met from within the Parks and Planning Conservation Budgets.

15. 2013/14 April – March Budget and Performance Report

The Executive considered a report which detailed progress made over the 2013/14 year in respect of performance indicators and corporate projects and set out the financial outturn for the year. The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate Services highlighted the budgetary changes since the last reported position to the Executive and drew the Executive's attention to the particularly strong performance indicators in respect of benefits, missed bin collection, hygiene rating of food businesses and sickness absence amongst staff.

The Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee reported that the Committee had noted the underspend on the budget for Disability Adaptations Grants and, although it accepted that expenditure was demand led, questioned whether communication in respect of the fund could be improved to increase awareness of its availability. Secondly, the Committee had requested that in future reporting on projects should include whether the project was on schedule as well as on budget. Finally, the Committee had welcomed the news that a significant number of affordable housing developments would be completed in the forthcoming year and had recommended that reporting on this target should be amended from an annual target to one spread over a three year period.

It was confirmed that the statutory agencies were aware of the disability adaptations grants and would signpost applicants to the Council. The process to allocate grant funding had been speeded up and applications were now being turned around in just over one day.

The Executive agreed that any measures to improve transparency in reporting should be implemented so welcomed the suggestions of the Scrutiny Committee in this respect.

RESOLVED: That the Council's year end financial outturn and performance for 2013/14 be noted and the request to carry forward £475,000 of unspent minor capital works budget be approved.