

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held on 1st April 2014 at Pippbrook, Dorking from 7.00pm to 9.50pm

Present: Councillors Stephen Cooksey (Chairman), Lynne Brooks, Clare Curran, Paula Hancock, Raj Haque, Chris Hunt, Roger Hurst, Paul Newman and Paul Potter

Also present: Councillors John Chandler, Margaret Cooksey, Paul Elderton, Vivienne Michael, John Northcott, Caroline Salmon, Chris Townsend and Charles Yarwood

79. Minutes

The minutes of the Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 4th March 2014 were approved as a correct record.

80. Apologies for Absence

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Dave Howarth

81. Dorking Halls Service Update

The Committee received a presentation from the Dorking Halls Manager, Keith Garrow, who provided an overview of his Service.

During the course of Mr Garrow's presentation the following points were noted:-

- The three main income streams for the Halls came from professional live shows, cinema screenings (including the recently introduced live event streaming) and hire events. Professional shows generated the largest income, but were the most expensive to put on, while hire events were the most profitable as the Halls were paid by the hirer to use the facilities.
- Staffing at the Halls was divided into two areas, namely the operational side and the technical side. The catering facilities were run by an outside organisation, who had recently been awarded the contract following a tender process.
- In 2011 the Dorking Halls Working Group was set up to develop an Action Plan that would be used to develop business at the Halls. The work instigated by the Working Group included improved external branding outside the Halls, improved catering provision and improved advertising and marketing through the recruitment of a Business Development Manager.
- As part of the new catering contract, the bar and café had longer opening hours, tables and chairs were available for café customers outside the Halls, a new entrance for café users had been created and the external signage for the café had been improved.
- To improve utilisation of the facilities at the Halls, cinema equipment was installed in the Masonic Hall in October 2012. Since the additional cinema screen had been available it had generated an income of approximately £100,000. A digital projector had also been installed in the Main Hall, this was used as a cinema screen and to host live event screenings.
- Since the introduction of live event screenings, the attendance for screenings of National Theatre shows at the Halls had consistently been ranked in the top 8 best attended venues.
- The hire charges at Dorking Halls were bench marked annually against other similar venues and the most recent comparison had demonstrated that the current charges were set at a competitive level.
- There had been a steady increase in attendance at the Halls over the past three years; this could largely be attributed to the introduction of new cinema screens.
- In 2009/10 the Council subsidy to Dorking Halls was £341,000. It was forecasted that the subsidy for 2013/2014 would be £141,000, which was a significant reduction over that period

and now meant that the Halls had the lowest local authority subsidy of any of the venues in its benchmarking group.

- A key challenge facing Dorking Halls in the future was competition from other venues, particularly those that offered a slightly larger capacity as these were more attractive for professional live events. Other challenges included the on-going capital maintenance of the facility to ensure it remained an attractive venue for customers, the challenge of further reducing the subsidy from the Council and developing the catering provision.

Members questioned whether the new catering contractors were now settled at Dorking Halls and what impact there had been to service provision during the handover period. It was confirmed that the new contractors had changed the range of food being offered and were in the process of building business through offering meals before shows. It was the view of the contractors that in order to maximise its potential the environment of the café area needed to be changed, the viability of which was currently being investigated. It was commented that asking customers who wanted to eat before a show to order in advance may reduce the amount of people taking up this offer.

In response to a question about youth provision it was confirmed that a cinema card for young people had been developed in conjunction with Youth Voice, but it had proven to be difficult to attract other forms of youth entertainment such as bands due to the close proximity of Dorking to larger areas such as London and Brighton.

One Member reported that they had received complaints about the lottery scheme being operated by a third party on behalf of Dorking Halls. Mr Garrow confirmed that to date he was only aware of one complaint from a customer which concerned how their details were used. It was requested that if Members were aware of any further issues they should contact staff at the Halls to discuss further. It was advised that the lottery scheme had been introduced as a means of generating income for the Halls and it was anticipated that an income of £6,000 would be delivered in the first year of the scheme, followed by an annual income of £10,000.

It was the general opinion of the Members in attendance at the meeting that the staff at Dorking Halls were providing a good service and the Committee passed on it thanks to Mr Garrow. It was requested that when the new strategy for Dorking Halls had been developed that it would be brought before the Scrutiny Committee for discussion.

82. Local Enterprise Partnerships – Coast to Capital (C2C) Strategic Joint Committee and Appointment of Member

The Committee received an Executive report detailing the establishment of the Coast to Capital (C2C) Strategic Joint Committee including the proposed appointment of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Chris Townsend, as the Council's representative. Members were asked for their comments or recommendations which would be fed into the Executive's consideration of the report at its meeting on 8th April 2014.

During the discussion of the report it was noted that the Coast to Capital Local Enterprise Partnership geographically covered a large area from Croydon, down through East Surrey to Chichester and Newhaven on the south coast. Collectively the Partnership had bid for £560m of funding for a variety of projects across the area, including a bid of £25m from Mole Valley to fund the regeneration of Leatherhead and a number of transport projects in the District.

In response to concerns about the lack of democratic representation within the Partnership it was proposed that a Joint Committee would be established, comprised of an elected Member from each of the local authorities involved in the Partnership. It was proposed that the Leader of the Council, Councillor Chris Townsend would be the representative for Mole Valley. Information from the Joint Committee would be fed back to the Council by Councillor Townsend through Executive updates and the Sustainable Communities Working Group.

There was some concern that there had not been a consultation with Members before the bid had been submitted, but it was accepted that the submission deadline set by the Government for bids was very tight, which meant that there was not enough time to undertake a full consultation. The funds available were targeted towards schemes that could deliver growth, new homes or additional

floorspace in local areas and as a result it was felt that the regeneration of Leatherhead would be seen as a suitable scheme to be awarded funding.

Although the Coast to Capital LEP had bid for £560m of funding from central Government, the total fund available for schemes across the country was £2b. As the LEP were bidding against other LEP's from across the country there was no guarantee that the full amount of funding applied for would be awarded.

There was agreement amongst the Committee that the officers involved had worked extremely hard to put together the bid on behalf of Mole Valley and should funding be awarded it would represent a fantastic opportunity for Leatherhead and the District as a whole. It was noted that a Members Seminar would be held once the result of the bid had been announced.

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

83. Emergency Accommodation – 33 and 34 Edenside, Bookham, Surrey

The Committee received an Executive report setting out a proposal to convert a council owned property for residential use in order to provide two additional 2-bedroom flats to be used for emergency accommodation. Members were asked for their comments or recommendations which would be fed into the Executive's consideration of the report at its meeting on 8th April 2014.

It was noted that in June 2013 the Executive had approved the allocation of £1.4m to provide five properties for emergency accommodation. To date three 2-bedroom flats had been acquired. It was expected that it would cost the Council approximately £75,000 per unit to convert the proposed property to residential accommodation which was a cost effective alternative to acquiring property and made best use of existing accommodation. In doing this it would mean that the Council would still have funds remaining from the originally allocated £1.4m, which could be used to purchase additional emergency accommodation.

The recommendation to provide additional emergency accommodation was welcomed by the Committee as it was recognised that additional housing of this type was needed in Mole Valley. It was agreed that the Executive should be encouraged to accept the recommendations as set out in the report.

Recommendation to Executive: That the recommendations, set out in the report, are accepted.

84. Leader Appointment to the East Surrey Community Safety Partnership and Community Safety Board

The Committee received an Executive report which detailed the creation of the East Surrey Community Safety Partnership and recommended the appointment of the Leader of the Council as the representative for Mole Valley District Council on the East Surrey Community Safety Board.

The report was accepted by the Committee, but it was acknowledged that it would be important for the work of the East Surrey Community Safety Partnership to be fed back to all Members of the Council on a regular basis.

Resolved: That the contents of the report be noted and the comment made by the Committee be fed into the Executive discussion of the report.

85. New Taxi Tariff for 2014/2015

The Committee received an Executive report setting out the proposed taxi tariff for 2014/2015. Members were asked for their comments or recommendations which would be fed into the Executive's consideration of the report at its meeting on 8th April 2014.

It was noted that the taxi tariff in Mole Valley had not been increased since 2012 and following a discussion between Members and representatives from the trade at the Hackney Carriage Consultative Group meeting held on 25th February 2014 a fare rise equivalent to 3.9% over the past two years was being proposed.

This report divided opinion amongst the Committee with some Members concerned that a fare

increase would have a negative impact on those residents who were reliant on the taxi service due to poor transport links to the south of the district, particularly at evenings and weekends. It was also felt that as inflation continued to remain low and fuel prices had decreased the size of the proposed increase would not be appropriate. However other Members took the view that the drivers were in the best position to know their business and would not be putting forward a proposal that would negatively impact their income.

It was agreed that the different viewpoints would be reported to the Executive during its consideration of the item.

Resolved: That the contents of the report be noted and the comments made by the Committee be fed into the Executive discussion of the report.

86. Street Naming and Numbering – Introduction of Charges for Naming and Numbering New Properties

The Committee received an Executive report setting out the proposed introduction of charging for street naming and numbering on new developments. Members were asked for their comments or recommendations which would be fed into the Executive's consideration of the report at its meeting on 8th April 2014

It was advised that at present the Street Naming and Numbering service cost the Council £14,000 per annum, of which £7,200 was recouped from charging for renaming existing properties. If a charge was introduced for naming and numbering new developments it was expected that the remainder of the cost could be recouped. The charge for naming and numbering new properties would be made to the developer.

There was general agreement to this proposal amongst the Committee, although it was requested that local Members continue to be consulted on new street names in their local area.

Resolved: That the contents of the report be noted.

87. Report from the Car Parking Panel

The Committee received a verbal report from the Chairman of the Car Parking Scrutiny Panel, which summarised the work of the Panel over the past year.

During the report it was confirmed that over the past year the Panel had met twice to monitor the implementation of the Car Parking Strategy, which was agreed in February 2013. There had been 27 specific actions in the Strategy and to date 16 of these had been completed. These included the introduction of the 1p per minute parking charge across all Council car parks, the provision of a pay by phone (Ringo) option, an improved working relationship with Surrey County Council to coordinate on-street and off-street parking and a maintenance plan for the Council's car parks, which had led to improvements at St Martin's Walk.

Actions still to be finalised included the exploration of improved parking provision in the rural areas of the District, the possibility of introducing larger premium bays which could be used at an extra cost to the vehicle owner and virtual parking permits, which were being trialled as a means of reducing the cost of sending out paper permits each year. Options for residents parking at a reduced rate outside of 9.00am – 5.00pm were also being explored.

It was agreed that the Car Parking Scrutiny Panel would continue its monitoring role next year and it was suggested that this could include a review of charging at the Lower Shott car park, as since it had been introduced there had been mixed feedback from residents and traders.

Resolved: That the contents of the report be noted.

88. Final Report from the Waste Management Scrutiny Panel

The Committee received a report from the Waste Management Scrutiny Panel which set out its recommended waste and recycling targets for the next four years, along with an accompanying Communication Plan setting out actions to help achieve the target. It was noted that should the Committee approve the report it would be submitted to the Executive for final approval.

It was advised that the Panel were recommending a recycling target of 55% for 2013/2014, followed by a 1% increase in subsequent years. The new target was lower than the previous one as the Panel felt it needed to be adjusted to take into account the current unviability of nappy recycling and also the reclassification of leaf fall as non recyclable waste. As a waste target was being introduced for the first time it recommended that it remain an internal target for its first year of implementation.

The Communications Plan had been created as it was felt there was little scope for adding a new recycling stream, which meant that educating the public about what could and couldn't be recycled would be the most effective means of improving the Council's recycling rate and reducing the amount of waste being set to landfill.

The Committee were happy to endorse the report of the Panel and to recommend its adoption by the Executive.

Recommendation to the Executive: That the new waste and recycling targets be approved.

89. Scrutiny Work Programme 2013-2014

It was confirmed that as this was the final Scrutiny Committee meeting of the Council year a report would be brought to the first Committee meeting of the new year on the Work Programme for 2014/2015.

Resolved: That the Work Programme be noted.

90. 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 will involve 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.

91. Grounds Maintenance, Arboricultural Services and Highway Verge Maintenance Contract

The Committee received a report setting out the specifications for companies bidding for the Grounds Maintenance, Arboricultural Services and Highway Verge Maintenance Contracts. 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 8th April 2014.

Members raised a number of concerns relating to quality assurance, the allocation of cost against quality in the tender specification and how stringently the contracts would be monitored by Council officers, particularly in light of the Council taking on responsibility for highway verge maintenance from Surrey County Council. Reassurance was given that officers would continue to work closely with contractors to ensure that the service delivered met the level specified with their contracts. It was anticipated that the first year of undertaking highways verge maintenance would be used to learn best practice and identify service improvements.

Recommendation to the Executive: That the recommendations set out in the report are accepted.