

# Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive held on Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> November 2014 at Pippbrook, Dorking, from 7.00pm to 8.20pm

Present:

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

Non-Executive Members: Councillors Stephen Cooksey and David Preedy.

## 37. Minutes

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2014 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman/Leader.

## 38. Apologies for Absence

None.

## 39. Disclosure of Interests

Councillor John Northcott declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 9 - Sites at West Street, Dorking, Surrey known as The Foundry and Church Street Workshops - by virtue of the Chairman of the Board of Dorking Museum being a personal friend.

## 40. Councillor Question Time

(1) Councillor James Friend asked the following question:

'Please can the Executive Member for Planning confirm that the Housing & Traveller Site Plan process has been terminated and that any new local plan making process will start with a clear explanation to the residents and communities of Mole Valley as to what the plan seeks to achieve and how it will achieve it in partnership with them from Day 1 such that local people and the council together can decide where development should and should not go?'

Councillor John Northcott, Executive Member for Planning, responded as follows:

Apart from tying up a few loose ends, work on the housing and travellers site plan has stopped. It is still my intention to recommend that the Executive on 9 December approves that a formal decision that work on that plan be terminated, and that intention has been supported by the Planning Policy Working Group.

Officers will shortly start preparing the groundwork for a new Local Plan and this will be subject to approval through the usual channels.

I am looking at ways in which I and the Officers can engage with all Members (before we commence the work on the new local Plan) to understand how best we can engage with local communities and residents to build their views into the plan making process.

(2) Councillor David Preedy asked the following question:

'The Portfolio Holder will no doubt be aware of the recent publicity regarding the use of Russ Hill Hotel near Charlwood for accommodation of asylum seekers. This has raised some concerns among local residents about possible security issues. Can the Portfolio Holder confirm whether this constitutes a change of use under planning law or whether it is consistent with the current planning permissions for this property?'

Councillor John Northcott, Executive Member for Planning responded as follows:

I can advise that a new planning permission is not necessary as, in terms of planning law, we are satisfied that a change of use has not taken place at the Russ Hill Hotel.

However, Mole Valley District Council officers have spoken with the Home Office contact on a number of matters. Officers have been advised that, as of yesterday, the number of asylum seekers at the Russ Hill Hotel has reduced substantially. The position changes daily and the Home Office continue to manage the reduction of numbers. There are two Home Office members of staff on site every day to liaise with the asylum seekers and they are in regular contact with local businesses.

The Neighbourhood Inspector for Mole Valley is fully aware of the situation.

The Leader of the Council has written to the Home Office expressing concern about the processes involved in the matter and a response is awaited.

#### **41. Report of the Scrutiny Committee**

The Scrutiny Committee met on 28<sup>th</sup> October and considered a number of reports which were included on the Executive agenda for 4<sup>th</sup> November 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 the terms of reference for two new Scrutiny Panels in respect of Affordable Housing and Planning Enforcement, and presentations from Ride London and Circle Housing: Mole Valley, and a service update from the Partnerships team. The Chairman stressed the importance of service updates as they allowed Members to understand the full roles and responsibilities of the Council's different service areas. Finally, the Chairman advised that consideration of the motion referred to the Committee from Council had been deferred to their next appropriate meeting.

#### **42. Month 6 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 September. The Executive Member for Finance and Corporate Services outlined the budgetary changes since the last reported position to the Executive. He advised that the £96,000 requirement for the current year for the Leatherhead Town Masterplan had been added to the reported projections, with projected underspends meaning that the costs could be absorbed within existing budget constraints.

With regard to performance, the Executive Member for Finance and Corporate Services reported that all performance indicators were on or above target. A number of key achievements were highlighted, including the refresh of the Council's website, an increase in partnership working in a number of areas, and the completion of 28 affordable homes by Circle Housing Mole Valley since April 2014 with a further 72 affordable units due to be completed by the end of 2014/15. The deadlines for applications for the Repair and Renew Grant and for the return of a full grant claim had been extended. The Chief Executive undertook to confirm the current deadline for applications.

The Executive Member for Community and Resident Services drew Members' attention to a number of performance indicators within her portfolio. The performance of the Benefits team continued to improve, with the time taken to assess new benefit claims being on target and the target for change of circumstances assessments being exceeded. The number of households in bed and breakfast accommodation continued to reduce, with three households at the end of October. The Executive Member reported on progress to reinstate the CCTV camera in South Street following the redevelopment of Waitrose. Access to the site was now possible and the contractor was timetabling the work with a view to the camera being operational as soon as possible. She undertook to keep Members updated on progress.

In response to a question regarding the collection of non-domestic rates, the Executive Member for Finance and Corporate Services confirmed that although collection was still slightly below target,

this had been affected by the introduction of a facility to pay in twelve rather than ten instalments, and it was expected that the year end collection rate would be on target.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee sought clarification of a number of items in Appendix B to the report. It was confirmed that the LINKS playing field related to St John's School and this was currently being worked on. The capital expenditure in relation to Pippbrook House corresponded to essential works to the roof and windows to keep the building weather tight. The entry entitled 'Property Project Advancement' included the North Leatherhead Project and Dorking Football Club.

**RESOLVED:** That the Council's financial and performance position for Month 6 2014/15 be noted.

#### **43. Surrey Local Strategic Statement [KEY DECISION]**

The Executive considered a report on the preparation of a Local Strategic Statement which would set out common priorities on strategic matters and actions that could be used to demonstrate at local plan examinations that the requirements of the Duty to Co-operate had been satisfied.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee reported that the Committee were supportive of the recommendations, but had highlighted the importance of extending the duty to cooperate to the West Sussex authorities in respect of the future of Gatwick Airport. The Leader advised that he was a member of a Surrey working group undertaking work on how to meet the duty to cooperate with London. It was confirmed that the Gatwick Diamond, which included local authorities from West Sussex, would undertake this role in respect of Gatwick issues.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the Leader be authorised to sign the Memorandum of Understanding, attached at Annex 2 to the report submitted, which explains how the Surrey Local Authorities will work together towards the preparation of the Local Strategic Statement for Surrey.
- (2) That the Terms of Reference of the Surrey Strategic Planning Infrastructure Board, attached at Annex 1 to the report submitted, be agreed.
- (3) That a Surrey Local Strategic Statement be prepared.
- (4) That authority be delegated to the Head of Planning Services to work with the Surrey Planning Officers Association on the preparation of the Local Strategic Statement.

#### **44. Children Safeguarding Policy and Procedure**

The Leader proposed that, following the request of the Scrutiny Committee at their last meeting that the document should be redrafted in a number of areas, the item be withdrawn and reconsidered prior to submission to the Scrutiny Committee and the December meeting of the Executive.

**RESOLVED:** That the item be withdrawn for reconsideration by officers, and submitted to the meeting of the Executive in December 2014.

#### **45. Sites at West Street, Dorking, Surrey known as The Foundry and Church Street Workshops [KEY DECISION]**

A report examining options for the future use of The Foundry and Church Street Workshops was considered by the Executive. The Executive Member for Assets advised that, as the Church Street Workshops were fully occupied, in reasonable condition and providing employment which linked to the antique traders and auctioneers in West Street, this site had been discounted and was not included in the options considered. The Executive Member outlined the four options considered and the recommended option which was to dispose of The Foundry for 100% affordable housing.

In order to fully debate and consider all information relating to the four options, including the exempt information in Appendices 3 and 4 to the report, the Executive

**RESOLVED:** That members of the Press and public be excluded from the meeting under Section

100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that consideration of the item 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.

## Part II

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee advised that the Committee had real concerns regarding the potential loss of industrial land in Dorking for affordable housing and could not support option 2 as set out in the report unless the Council could guarantee it would be able to supply alternative industrial land to replace the loss of land at The Foundry.

The Executive Member for Assets outlined the relevant planning policies in relation to the site which included policies on both industrial sites and housing provision. He advised that alternative industrial sites had been investigated and discussions with land owners were ongoing. It was confirmed that, should the Executive agree the recommended option, the site would be marketed subject to planning permission.

Executive Members noted the difficulties in letting the units at The Foundry and the need for affordable housing in the area.

The meeting resumed in public session, following which the Executive Member for Assets summed up and the Executive considered the recommendation set out in the report.

**RESOLVED:** To dispose of The Foundry (without Church Street Workshops) for affordable housing as set out at Option 2 in the report submitted, on terms to be agreed by the Corporate Head, in consultation with the Executive Member for Assets.