

Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive held on Tuesday 19th January 2016 at Pippbrook, Dorking, from 7.00pm to 7.48pm

Present:

Executive Members: Councillors James Friend (Leader/Chairman), Lynne Brooks, Howard Jones, Vivienne Michael, Corinna Osborne-Patterson, Sarah Seed, Michelle Watson and Charles Yarwood.

Non-Executive Members: Councillors Stephen Cooksey, David Draper, Paul Elderton, Simon Ling, Philippa Shimmin and Chris Townsend.

43. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 1st December 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Leader.

53. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Lucy Botting.

54. Disclosure of Interests

None.

55. Councillor Question Time

(1) Councillor Philippa Shimmin asked the following question:

'Last Summer the council purchased Clare and James House as part of their commitment to the Transform Leatherhead project. Please can you tell me what the plans are for these buildings in the SHORT term and how much it is costing the council to keep them maintained and secure?'

Councillor Howard Jones, Executive Member for Town Centres, responded as follows:

A tenant or tenants of the building are currently being sought for up to two years while development proposals are worked up which will be in accordance with the emerging masterplan.

In 2015/16 it is estimated that the costs will be around £80,000, most of that is rates but also some minor works on the building that are necessary and ongoing. These costs have been reflected in the budget monitoring.

In the short term, because of the timing of Transform Leatherhead, the officers have been actively seeking tenants for the buildings as they exist at the moment in order to address the issues of us paying rates and getting no return on the building. That is going on as we speak. Obviously the long term plan is to completely redevelop the site.

Councillor Shimmin asked a supplementary question regarding the possibility of allocating part of the building for an indoor market for crafts and Surrey Hills products on a similar model to that operated in Woking.

The Executive Member advised that officers were currently in discussion with various parties regarding the future use of the building, but he was not aware that this included the groups suggested by Councillor Shimmin.

(2) Councillor David Draper asked the following question:

'Bearing in mind the recent publicity in relation to the Meadowbank development, I would ask the Leader and / or Executive Member to inform us:

(i) If final quotes for the project have been received and, if so, do these match the proposed

budget plan or do they exceed this and by how much?

- (ii) As the work is several months behind schedule when will it begin and what are the revised dates for completion of the football stadium and associated buildings, plus the café and sports facilities?
- (iii) Has the lease with Surrey FA been agreed and signed and if not why?

Councillor Howard Jones, Executive Member for Town Centres, responded as follows:

There has been no change since the briefing given to the Leader of the Opposition last week.

Councillor Draper asked a supplementary question regarding the detail of the information given to the Leader of the Opposition at the briefing meeting.

The Leader advised that the information given at that meeting was exempt as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 and he would respond to Councillor Draper's supplementary question following the exclusion of the 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.

In response to Councillor Draper's supplementary question, the Leader confirmed the position regarding the Meadowbank development and noted the supportive press coverage from both of the Dorking football clubs. He advised that a press release regarding the delay in the project had been made and also published on the Members' Extranet.

- (3) Councillor Paul Elderton asked the following question:

'What is the administration's assessment of trends in the uptake of stalls for the Dorking Friday market and, if problems have been identified, what solutions are proposed?'

Councillor Michelle Watson, Executive Member for Environment, responded as follows:

The Dorking Friday Market, situated on St Martin's Walk car park is an important feature of the town economy and one that Mole Valley District Council has supported for many years, and continues to do so. The market continues to be popular with its regular shoppers and has a core group of market traders who have attended the market for decades and in some cases, generations. There are approximately eight regular stallholders who attend the market through all seasons, often through even the worst periods of weather. Over the years the number of casual stallholders who operate on a more ad hoc basis changes from one month to another, and this continues to occur. Their decision about whether to hire a pitch is affected by a number of factors, including weather conditions, footfall, season and stock.

Mole Valley District Council has continually shown its support for the market by ensuring it is advertised and promoted appropriately in market specific trade journals, to promote it to the market trade, as well as promoting it to customers through a banner which is regularly displayed in the High Street and signs around the town. MVDC also ensure the market area is safe and welcoming by coning off the car park in advance of the market, and sweeping the area and collecting traders' waste after the market has finished. In recent years, we have also shown our support for the traders by freezing the pitch fees when possible and as part of the budget setting exercise for 2016/17, I have proposed that the pitch fees remain frozen at this year's prices. I am sure this will be welcomed by the traders and demonstrates our appreciation for their loyal support for Dorking's market.

The Economic Development Team at the Council has promoted and supported the market in the

past, and they will continue to do so to ensure the vitality of this important aspect of the town. I hope local residents, and indeed Members, will continue to support the market by attending as regularly as they can on Fridays.

(4) Councillor Simon Ling asked the following question:

'Would the Executive Member please let us know how many MVDC employees left employment with the Council in the 12 months to 31 December 2015, and the percentage this bears to the total number employed; and also the corresponding figures for 2014; and if, there is a significant difference between these two years, say what if any action she is taking as a consequence?'

Councillor Lynne Brooks, Executive Member for Finance and Performance, responded as follows:

For the twelve month period to December 2015 MVDC's turnover was 15% which represented 43 leavers. The previous calendar year to December 2014 was 10% being 29 leavers.

We can see that the turnover in any organisation is healthy to ensure new ideas and influences are brought in, as well as the contribution our organisation makes in giving individuals skills for them to take elsewhere.

I actually think that the question is rather misleading and asked our officers to pull together information for the previous nine years which actually show that our employment figures ebb and wane depending on the economic situation our own country faces or our own county. So, for example, in 2008 there was a similar percentage leaving, 15.3%, whereas in 2010 we only saw 7% and in 2011 4.7%. So I am not unduly worried by the recent increase in our figures because there has been an improving economic situation and our employees are beginning to look for other opportunities that maybe we don't offer. This is going to be healthy no matter what.

We should also take into account the median age of our employees is 49 with some being very close to or able to retire if they choose to do so. As a result it is likely that we will experience higher levels of turnover than we have previously experienced and this will become a feature of our organisation as we go forward.

Our target turnover for any staff with reference to the Local Government Workforce Survey is around 11.4 to 11.9%, which, taking a mean over the last two years we actually come within. For a track record we do encourage our Human Resources team to conduct exit interviews and indicate the reasons for leaving. An analysis of the completed exit interviews for the first three quarters of 2015/16 shows three leavers stating promotion/higher pay as their reason for leaving; two for a career change; and the remainder are equally spread across a variety of reasons including, but not exclusively, relocation, health, work environment, work/life balance and further education.

Councillor Ling asked a supplementary question regarding whether the data showed that turnover was higher in any one particular department.

The Executive Member advised that she would look into this and provide Councillor Ling with a written response.

56. Report of the Scrutiny Committee

The Scrutiny Committee met on 5th January and considered two items which were included on the Executive agenda for 19th January 2016. The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee, with the approval of the Deputy Leader, undertook to submit feedback to the Executive during their consideration of each report.

The Committee had also received its annual presentation from Circle Housing Mole Valley. As well as providing an update on their performance over the past year, the presentation had also included information on Circle Housing's plans for the future which included streamlining its structure and merging with Affinity Sutton. Concern was raised about how these plans had been communicated to the Council to date and it was requested that Officers and Members were kept up to date with any progress in a timely manner. It was noted that, although a meeting had been planned between

the Chief Executive of Circle Housing and the Chief Executive of Mole Valley District Council, this had not yet taken place. The Committee had requested that the meeting took place before the end of January.

57. Thomas Flack Trust Fund Applications

The Executive considered a report detailing applications to the Thomas Flack Trust Fund and the recommendations of the Thomas Flack Working Group. The Executive also examined options for the future use of 95 Kingston Road, Leatherhead held within the Thomas Flack Trust Fund portfolio and proposals for a sinking fund to ensure the Trust Fund made the best use of its assets.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That, having taken account of the views of the Thomas Flack Working Group, the grants outlined in Section 2 Table 1 of the report submitted for the financial year 2016/17 be approved.
- (2) That, having taken account of the views of the Thomas Flack Working Group, 95 Kingston Road, Leatherhead be refurbished with the intention of letting the property on a commercial basis as detailed in Section 4 of the report submitted.
- (3) That, having taken account of the views of the Thomas Flack Working Group, £10,000 per annum be allocated to a sinking fund to cover any major works which may need to be carried out on the Thomas Flack Trust Fund properties going forward as referred to in Section 5 of the report submitted.

58. Housing Allocations Scheme Review

The Executive considered an amended Housing Allocations Scheme following a review of the Scheme by the Scrutiny Committee and Council. The Executive Member for Community Engagement and Resident Services outlined the two amendments being recommended to the scheme following the implementation of the new scheme in September 2014. She also drew attention to the issues in respect of the scheme which would be kept under review, and advised the Executive that work was ongoing in respect of increasing the delivery of affordable housing in the District and a report on this would be submitted to their March meeting. Finally the Executive Member thanked the Housing team for their work in reviewing and delivering the Housing Allocations Scheme.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee reported that the Committee had been supportive of the proposed amendments to the scheme.

The Leader made the following statement in respect of affordable housing:

‘Since the transfer of MVDC’s housing stock in 2007 we have seen 371 new affordable homes built in Mole Valley; that’s an average of nearly 50 a year. There are another 100 units with planning permission or in the planning pipeline. But we need to do more and think innovatively to increase the supply of affordable homes which is one of the key priorities in our Corporate Strategy.

The Affordable Housing Panel have identified potential initiatives for increasing delivery and a report on how they can be translated into action will be brought to the Executive in March. In the meantime, we can now clearly see from the information about the Housing Register in the report that the greatest need is for affordable one and two bedroom accommodation.

We need to be emphasising this in our negotiations with house builders looking to develop sites in Mole Valley and in our discussions with Housing Associations.

In doing so I’m sure we will be drawing on our Core Strategy policy that requires housing proposals to take into account and reflect housing needs in terms of tenure, size and type of dwellings.

While it is appreciated that we generally require new homes to reflect the character and appearance

of their setting, I do hope that house builders will respond positively to this message and work with us to help deliver the smaller type of new homes that are required by those in our communities who have the greatest housing need.'

RESOLVED: That the amended Housing Allocations Scheme attached at Appendix 1 to the report submitted be approved.

[Post-meeting note: Further to the Leader's statement set out above, it has been confirmed that the number of new affordable homes built in Mole Valley since the transfer of housing stock is 438.]

59. Suitability of Emergency Accommodation for Homeless Applicants

A report setting out a policy on the Suitability of Emergency Accommodation for Homeless Applicants was considered by the Executive. The Executive Member for Community Engagement and Resident Services advised that the policy had been developed in response to the Supreme Court judgement of April 2015, and brought together procedural best practice already implemented.

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee reported that Committee Members had been pleased to note that only six homeless households had needed to be housed in bed and breakfast accommodation over the Christmas period, which was the lowest number of households requiring housing at any one time in the past year. The Chairman confirmed that the Scrutiny Committee had no objections to the Executive adopting the policy set out in the report.

RESOLVED: That the policy on the Suitability of Emergency Accommodation for Homeless Applicants attached at Appendix 1 to the report submitted be approved.

60. Acquisition of Emergency Accommodation

The Executive considered a report which recommended the acquisition of a further two bedroom property for use as emergency accommodation. It was noted that the decision in respect of the Thomas Flack Trust Fund property at 95 Kingston Road, which had previously been used as emergency accommodation, had resulted in the removal of one unit from the emergency accommodation stock. A new two bedroom property would ensure that the stock was maintained and two bedroom properties were in particular demand.

Paragraph 3.1 of the report was corrected to read 'In keeping with the report regarding the suitability of emergency accommodation the Council will need to review from time to time whether to either increase or **decrease** the stock.....'

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee reported that the Committee had no objections to the Executive accepting the recommendations set out in the report.

RESOLVED: That capital expenditure of up to £300,000, made up of £61,500 remaining from the £1.4m approved budget from 2013 to acquire additional emergency accommodation, and £238,500 from the 2016/17 capital budget, be approved to acquire a two bedroom property to be used for emergency accommodation for statutory homeless households.

61. 2016/17 Council Meeting Schedule

The Executive considered the proposed meetings schedule for 2016/17.

In response to a question from Councillor Stephen Cooksey regarding the reduction in the number of scheduled meetings of the Executive and Scrutiny Committee, the Leader advised that the proposed schedule would assist in terms of workload and would allow a better flow of business between Executive and Council. The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee noted that a meeting of the Committee was scheduled prior to each Executive to enable pre-scrutiny to be carried out, and he confirmed that additional meetings could be convened for the purpose of external scrutiny.

RESOLVED: That the meeting schedule for 2016/17 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report submitted be approved.

62. Amendments to the Appointment of Members onto Outside Organisations

The Executive considered two nominations to fill vacancies which had arisen on outside organisations.

RESOLVED: That the appointments of Councillor Howard Jones to Leatherhead United Charities and Councillor Vivienne Michael as the Member Armed Forces Champion be approved.

63. 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 paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act; namely information relating to any individual, information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual and 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.

64. Forfeiture of Lease of Land at North Leatherhead Community Centre

The Executive considered an urgent report regarding the forfeiture of the lease at North Leatherhead Community Centre. The decision was urgent as, following the recent forfeiture, the delegated authority previously authorised as an urgent action applied only until the Executive meeting on 19th January 2016.

The Executive Member for Property and Parking reported that the decision to forfeit the lease had been taken by the Chief Executive under her urgency powers and that delegated authority to take further decisions was recommended. The team of officers who had undertaken the work was commended, and it was noted that the community was keen to get involved in the future running of the facility with appropriate training having already been offered.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Head of Service with responsibility for Property (CHoS) be authorised to take all decisions in relation to:

- (i) the operational running of the North Leatherhead Community Centre (NLCC);
- (ii) further investigation of the freehold title; and
- (iii) investigation into future possibilities for the NLCC, its viability of being put back into good repair or replaced and the recreational wishes of the community.