

Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive held on Tuesday 4th February 2014 at Pippbrook, Dorking, from 7.00pm to 8.20pm

Present:

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

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

55. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 17th December 2013 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman/Leader.

56. Disclosure of Interests

Councillor Simon Ling declared non-pecuniary interests in Item 10 – Appointment to Outside Organisation – Ashted Peace Memorial Hall Committee as he was the Council's representative on the Committee, and Item 12 – Recommendations of the Pippbrook Working Group, as he was the Chairman of the Working Group/ He was not required to leave the meeting during consideration thereof.

57. Report of the Scrutiny Committee

The Scrutiny Committee last met on 28th January and at the meeting considered a number of items, including an informative presentation from the Surrey Wildlife Trust about their work in the District and a report on the Outside Organisations. The report only provided information on these organisations, but a second report would be prepared to include Members and officers views as well. Any recommendations arising from this would be reported to the Executive later in the year.

58. Planning for 2014/15 – Corporate Plan and Budget Proposal [KEY DECISION]

The Executive were asked to (subject to any decisions it wished to make in the light of feedback from consultation) recommend to Council, for approval at its meeting on 18th February 2014, the eight recommendations as set out on page 7 of the agenda.

Councillors Charles Yarwood, Portfolio Holder for Communities and Assets, and Councillor Simon Ling, Portfolio Holder for Finance, introduced the item.

Councillor Yarwood explained that 2014/15 was the fourth and final year of the existing Corporate Plan produced in 2011/12. The report before Members proposed a light touch refresh of the corporate priorities and an update of key actions to deliver these. The Council's corporate priorities continued to be grouped under the three corporate themes of Environment, Value for Money and Access to Services, with an additional priority added to reflect the work relating to recent flooding in communities across Mole Valley. Key areas of work included the family support programme, welfare reforms, the preparation of draft housing and traveler site plans and procurement of a new waste contract.

Members noted that there had been a number of comments received from Scrutiny Committee, and as a result some clarification on the differences between the Equality Impact Assessments in relation to the impact on carers was tabled at the meeting.

Additionally, comments from the Standing Budget Panel on performance indicators had been taken into account, but as this was a light touch refresh of the Corporate Plan, these would be considered in more detail when the new plan was written for 2015 onwards.

Councillor Simon Ling informed Members that the budget process had been undertaken as in previous years, and reported to the Scrutiny Committee via the Standing Budget Panel. The Strategic Director would be available to speak to every group regarding the budget proposals should Members have queries.

The proposed budget for 2014/15 included an increase of 1.9% in Council Tax; the report set out the various strands of Council funding (grant, business rates, New Homes Bonus, fees and charges) and proposals for spending in 2014/15. It was recommended that the Council reject the government's Council Tax support grant; the Portfolio Holder explained that this was because the grant did nothing to improve the Council's Council Tax base, the amount was not in the control of the Council and was temporary in effect. The government had not yet announced the final referendum threshold for Council Tax increases in 2014/15, and this would be monitored closely by Officers. Council Tax increases in Mole Valley in recent years had been lower than the prevailing rate of inflation.

Councillor Ling explained that there were a number of known and unavoidable cost increases included in the budget which amounted to £490k, but that the retendering of the Dorking Sports Centre contract had produced an increased income of £442k.

Savings of £324k had already been identified and occurred within the budget with no reductions in service, as well as £78k having been found for new proposals. Overall, Councillor Ling was pleased to present a balanced budget for the second year running, but warned that 2015/16 would unfortunately not be so easy.

The Scrutiny Committee concentrated on examining the budget process, as it had been agreed that it was not the place of the Committee to make budget recommendations. During this item the Committee received the report of the Standing Budget Panel who had met with Portfolio Holders to discuss their budget and corporate plan proposals. The Panel had made a number of useful comments about the process and the Committee was pleased that the Leader of the Council had acknowledged that he felt the work of the Panel had been successful, and that the Executive were looking at how to incorporate some of the comments made by the Panel.

The Chairman of the Committee requested that in future years information supplied to the Panel (particularly information concerning Fees and Charges proposals) be made available for all Members on the Members Extranet.

The Scrutiny Committee would soon be inviting the new operators of the Dorking Sports Centre to attend a meeting of the Committee to provide an update on their management of the centre. The Committee would also be looking to set up a Scrutiny Panel to looking into the Council's funding of the CAB.

The Leader stated that the work of the CAB would be examined by the Executive's new Wellbeing Working Group, the first meeting of which was to be held on 20th February.

The Leader of the Opposition asked for clarification regarding the arrangements for the government's setting of the threshold of Council Tax increases for a referendum; it was confirmed that the Council at its budget meeting on 18th February 2014 could not legally consider two options. Should the government decide that the threshold be lower than 2%, the Council would have to reconvene the meeting at a later date once a new proposal had been put together.

Councillor Vivienne Michael made reference to work in her portfolio of Customer Service and Wellbeing in response to some questions asked by the Standing Budget Panel; despite the loss of a significant number of government grants there had been a rise of 5% across her portfolio. Mole Valley was doing more through smarter partnership working; for example, working with Surrey County Council at the Fairfield Centre, using 'investing to save' measures and imaginative schemes such as purchasing emergency accommodation for homeless families to use, preventing them from being accommodated in bed and breakfasts. There had also been some concern expressed by the Standing Budget Panel with regards to performance indicators for day centres; customer satisfaction was measured but usage was not. Usage of the Fairfield Centre was on the increase, and income was reflecting the fact that ex-users of the Mayflower Centre were now using the Dorking Christian Centre. The Portfolio Holder was pleased to confirm that usage trends seemed to be in the right direction.

The Executive went on to consider the two options as set out in the report and supported Option

One. It was accordingly

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That

1. the 2014/15 Corporate Plan be approved;
2. the proposed budget for 2014/15 be set at £10,064,000;
3. the Council Tax Freeze Grant, offered by Government, be rejected for 2014/15;
4. on the basis of agreeing 1, 2 and 3 above, the Band D Council Tax for 2014/15 be set at £157.47 representing a 1.9 per cent increase in Council Tax for 2014/15;
5. a cost of living pay award of 1.4% be approved for staff, with a minimum addition of £505 pa to provide a higher award for lower paid staff;
6. a capital programme of £3,182,000 be approved for 2014/15;
7. the Section 151 Officer's statement regarding the 2014/15 budget and medium term financial outlook for the Council be noted; and
8. the level of Members' Allowances be considered in the light of the report by the Independent Remuneration Panel to be presented to the Council on 18 February 2014.

59. 2013/14 Month 9 Budget and Performance Monitoring Report

The Executive was asked to note the Council's year end financial outturn projections and performance for Month 9.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Councillor Simon Ling, explained that the latest financial forecast anticipated an underspend on businesses of £174k by the end of the year, rising to £284k with the addition of Investment Income. The forecast in the previous monitoring report to the Executive in October was for an overall underspend of £258k (£145k before investment income).

Executive Members noted that there was to be an £219k underspend in the Partnerships Team, £58k in the Planning Support Team and £57k in Community Support Service. There would however be a £66k overspend in the Development Control Team relating to the judicial review decision regarding Cherkley Court, as well as a potential cost claim against MVDC. The overspend had reduced by around £40k since the previous report following an improvement in the position on income from applications.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Assets, Councillor Charles Yarwood, informed Members that overall performance at the end of Month 9 was good with 95% (18 out of 19) of PIs on, or slightly below, target. New benefit claims were being processed in 21 days where the target was 24, and planning applications were also being processed in a timely manner. The number of missed bins per 100,000 collections had increased significantly, and the Telecare service was also above target. The website had seen a great deal of use over the past few weeks with regular updates regarding the flooding being disseminated through this medium.

The Leader thanked staff for the hours of work that had been put in since Christmas Eve when the flooding issues began. There would be a review of the Council's response to flooding in due course. The cost of the efforts was unknown as of yet but Officers and Members would be keeping a watching brief on these. The Leader informed Members that he would say more about the recent flooding at the Council meeting on 18th February.

The Executive went on to consider the two options as set out in the report, and supported Option One. It was accordingly

RESOLVED: That the Council's year end financial outturn projection and performance for Month 9 be noted.

60. Housing Allocations Scheme

The Executive was asked to approve the draft Housing Allocations Scheme attached at Appendix 1 to the report.

Councillor Vivienne Michael, Portfolio Holder for Customer Service and Wellbeing, explained that the current Housing Allocation Scheme had been reviewed and approved by the Executive in September 2010, and was attached at Appendix 2 to the report. The Localism Act encouraged local authorities to make use of new freedoms to review their Housing Allocations Schemes and enable the better management of their housing registers. This included encouragement to implement qualification criteria on local connection and financial resources and to give preference to local needs and circumstances, as long as this is balanced against the statutory reasonable preference criteria.

The opportunity was therefore provided to review the Housing Allocation Scheme. Other drivers for change were a notice of motion to Council which sought that preference for affordable homes in rural villages and settlements be given to people with a local connection to a village and the need to make the best use of the affordable housing stock.

The review of the scheme commenced earlier in the year with a consultation questionnaire with key partners, residents and housing applicants, followed by a Member seminar on 1st October and a Member Working Group that met on 9th October and 4th November. Key partners had also been consulted on the proposed draft attached at Appendix 1.

The significant proposed changes were to:

- strengthen the qualification criteria for the register on local connection, owner occupiers, people with significant income and savings, people with no housing need and people who owe the Council money;
- provide additional preference to those with strong local connections to rural villages; and
- remove bands 4 and 5 that are currently made up of applicants with no local connection, no housing need, that do not meet the current income and savings criteria or owe the Council money.

Implementation, subject to the approval of the policy, would commence in June 2014.

Officers were asked to check the inclusion of Holmbury St Mary, The Abingers and Ranmore in the draft scheme.

Members expressed concern regarding the moving of families and children from rural areas, as this could be disruptive to their education in rural schools; it was felt that work should be undertaken with the County Council on this issue to ensure children were not disrupted unnecessarily. It was agreed by the Executive that the following additional recommendation be added to the resolution in order for the Portfolio Holder, in consultation with Officers, to look at this issue and make any other minor changes to the policy as appropriate:

‘(2) and delegate authority to the Portfolio Holder in consultation with Officers to agree minor changes to the Housing Allocations Scheme.’

The Chairman of Scrutiny Committee added that Members of the Committee had been broadly happy with the content of the report.

The Executive went on to consider the three options as set out in the report and supported Option 1. It was accordingly

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the draft Housing Allocations Scheme be approved; and
- 2) authority be delegated to the Portfolio Holder in consultation with Officers to agree minor changes to the Housing Allocations Scheme.

61. Open Spaces Events and Lettings Policy – REPORT WITHDRAWN

RESOLVED: That the report be withdrawn from the agenda and the item deferred to a subsequent meeting of the Executive.

62. Appointment to Outside Organisation – Ashtead Peace Memorial Hall Committee

The Executive were asked to agree that the current appointment of Councillor Simon Ling as the Council's representative on the Ashtead Peace Memorial Hall Committee be renewed for a further three year term of office until 2017.

At the annual meeting of the Executive on 25th Mat 2011m Councilor Simon Ling was appointed for a three-year term of office as a representative on the Ashtead Peace Memorial Hall Committee. The Executive had the power to make appointments to the various outside organisations throughout the municipal year. Democratic Services had been recently notified that the appointment in question automatically ended in March 2014; Councillor Ling had agreed to be nominated as the Council's representative for a further three years until 2017.

The Executive went on to consider the two options as set out in the report and supported Option 1. It was accordingly

RESOLVED: That the current appointment of Councillor Simon Ling as the Council's representative on the Ashtead Peace Memorial Hall Committee be renewed for a further three year term of office until 2017.

63. Adoption of Community Asset Transfer Policy [KEY DECISION]

The Executive were asked to approve the adoption of the policy, procedure and flowchart for the transfer of community assets and agree that the Council contact the voluntary, community and faith groups that were tenants of the Council making them aware of the policy.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Assets, Councillor Charles Yarwood, informed Members that the report set out the recommended approach for the Council in the transfer of community assets. It set out a consistent policy for the transfer of assets to the community that was currently in the ownership of Mole Valley District Council.

The policy balanced the specific requirements or needs of local communities with the expectations of the wider Mole Valley populous that the Council used its assets effectively to support voluntary, community and faith groups (VCFGs) as well as the Council's finances as part of its Mid Term Financial Strategy.

The Scrutiny Committee had been happy with the report, but Members noted that the safety and longevity of the transfer of freehold property was considered carefully; there needed to be sufficient safeguards in place for this process.

The Executive went on to consider two options as set out in the report and supported Option 1. It was accordingly

RESOLVED: That

1. the adoption of the policy, procedure and flowchart for the transfer of community assets be agreed; and
2. that the Council contact voluntary, community and faith groups that were tenants of the Council and make them aware of the policy.

64. Recommendations of Pippbrook Working Group [KEY DECISION]

The Executive were asked to agree the various recommendations as set out in the report on page 253 of the agenda.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Assets, Councillor Charles Yarwood, introduced the report and explained to Members that it set out the recommendations of the Pippbrook cross party Working Group to provide the main office site for Mole Valley District Council and, in doing so, drew upon the findings of the review carried out by specialist consultants Turner & Townsend.

In advance of a full report to Executive in August 2014, approval was sought to carry out 'soft market testing'. This was less formal than full market testing and involved a discrete approach in order to understand the market demands. Consideration would be given to the options which could be available for an enabling development of the site including the implications for Pippbrook House and to implement a process of consultation and engagement including the release of a public version of the Turner & Townsend report.

A further report would be presented to Executive in August 2014 (having previously been considered by Council) which would provide the results of the soft market testing and consultation initiatives. The report would recommend that after consideration of these, a decision be taken to move forward with either a new build or refurbishment option of the Pippbrook civic offices including an associated enabling development.

Councillor Yarwood thanked the Members of the Working Group for all their contributions, and went on to propose amendments to the recommendations as set out in the report, as follows (amendments/additions in **bold**, deletions denoted by a ~~strikethrough~~):

'The Executive is asked to agree the following:

1. To accept the recommendations from the Pippbrook Working Group; as follows:
 - a. The option to either refurbish the Pippbrook offices or provide a new build
 - b. Carry out soft market testing **in relation to Pippbrook House and associated enabling development**
 - c. To make public the non-confidential consultant's report
 - d. To carry out a consultation process
2. Approve ~~the~~ **a** consultation and engagement strategy ~~set out in the report~~ based on the recommendations of the working group; and
3. To extend the brief of the Pippbrook Working Group to review the results of the soft market testing and the consultation. The Working Group would report their findings and recommendations to the Executive in August 2014, to help enable a decision to be made on the appropriate way forward.'

Members noted that the proposed consultation needed to be meaningful and listen to the views of residents on the matter; it was essential that the public understood what the Council was doing and why.

Scrutiny Committee had had a lengthy discussion on the contents of the report. Some Members of the Committee had been happy with the report and felt that the proposals set out were a reasonable way forward. However, other Members had some significant concerns.

One of the main concerns related to the issue of enabling development and how it should be dealt with within the planned consultation; there was a suggestion that it would be useful for enabling development in both Pippbrook House and the grounds of Pippbrook to be treated as two separate considerations in the consultation, as there were different issues involved in these two options. There were also a number of questions about the need for soft market testing of the site to establish the potential options for enabling development and how this would relate to the consultation, but the need to undertake this exercise was accepted by most Members as it would inform the final

decision on the site to be taken later in the year.

There was also disappointment that a draft of the consultation document was not available, as it was difficult to comment on what should or shouldn't be included. However it was suggested that the consultation should be separated into three sections, namely – what to do with Pippbrook House, what is the best option for office space and how any project should be funded? It was felt that Members should have the opportunity to comment on the consultation document before it was publicised.

The Executive went on to consider the two options as set out in the report and supported Option 1. It was accordingly

RESOLVED: The Executive

1. accepted the recommendations from the Pippbrook Working Group; as follows:
 - a. The option to either refurbish the Pippbrook offices or provide a new build
 - b. Carry out soft market testing in relation to Pippbrook House and associated enabling development
 - c. To make public the non-confidential consultant's report
 - d. To carry out a consultation process
2. approved a consultation and engagement strategy based on the recommendations of the working group; and
3. extended the brief of the Pippbrook Working Group to review the results of the soft market testing and the consultation. The Working Group would report their findings and recommendations to the Executive in August 2014, to help enable a decision to be made on the appropriate way forward.

65. Leatherhead Pools Allotments

The Executive were asked to agree that vacant plots be offered to new tenants until a decision was reached on whether the site was developed.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Assets, Councillor Charles Yarwood, explained that on 30th July 2013 when approval was given to entering into a Development Agreement with Barratt's, a decision was also taken to freeze the availability of vacant plots on the site. In part this was to allow for consultation with the then newly formed allotments association and to manage expectations of tenants who might only get two growing seasons from their plot.

From the views that had been received it was clear that the Leatherhead Pools Allotment Society's committee and other correspondents that the vacant plots on site should be made available and future tenants made aware of the potential development.

Members noted that there appeared to be no downside to this decision as it allowed residents to enjoy use of vacant plots, protected income, reduced the Council's costs in maintaining vacant plots and helped create a clear picture of demand.

Scrutiny Committee were broadly happy with the content of this report and are happy for the Executive to accept the recommendations as set out in the report.

The Executive went on to consider the two options as set out in the report and supported Option 1. It was accordingly

RESOLVED: That vacant plots to be offered to new tenants until a decision is reached on whether the site is to be developed.

66. 2015/15 Council Meeting Schedule

The Executive were asked to approve the meeting schedule for 2014/15 as set out in Appendix 1 to the report.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Assets, Councillor Charles Yarwood, informed Members that the Council's meeting schedule usually ran from May to May each year. However, due to the local elections being delayed until 22nd May 2014 the Annual Meeting for 2014 would be held on 27th June.

The Executive went on to consider the two options as set out in the report and supported Option One. It was accordingly

RESOLVED: That the meeting schedule for 2014/15 be approved.

(Note: The meeting schedule as agreed is attached to the minutes at Annex 1.)

MEETING SCHEDULE 2014/2015
(Meetings are held at 7.00pm on unless stated otherwise)

Development Control (Wednesday)	4 June 2 July	6 August 3 September	1 October 5 November	3 December 7 January	4 February 4 March	1 April 6 May
Scrutiny Committee	24 June 29 July	2 September 30 September	28 October	2 December 6 January 27 January	24 February 24 March	
Executive	1 July	5 August 9 September	7 October 4 November	9 December 13 January	3 February 3 March 31 March	
Audit	26 June (draft accounts)	25 September (final accounts)	27 November		12 March	
Council	22 July		14 October	20 January *	17 February	17 March 19 May (Annual)
Licensing			8 October		11 February	
Standards	10 July		16 October		22 January	
Local Plan Working Group	9 July	10 September	22 October	10 December	25 February	
Wellbeing		16 September	18 November	28 January		25 March
Sustainable Economy	25 June	17 September	26 November		10 February	

* Approval of Draft Local Plan

Bank Holidays

26 May 2014
25 August 2014
25/26 December 2014
1 January 2015
3 and 6 April 2015
4 May 2015

Elections

7 May 2015 (District and Parish Council and Parliamentary)

Member and Staff Consultative Forum:

16 July, 15 October and 11 March