

Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 18th March 2014 at Pippbrook, Dorking from 7.00pm to 7.52pm

Present: Councillors David Sharland (Chairman), Emile Aboud (Vice Chairman), Lynne Brooks, Stella Brooks, Derrick Burt, John Chandler, Margaret Cooksey, Stephen Cooksey, Mary Cooper, Clare Curran, Rosemary Dickson, Paul Elderton, James Friend, Phil Harris, Paula Hancock, Raj Haque, Valerie Homewood, Dave Howarth, Chris Hunt, Tessa Hurworth, Bridget Lewis-Carr, Simon Ling, Tim Loretto, Vivienne Michael, David Mir, Wayne Monkman, John Muggeridge, Iain Murdoch, John Northcott, Paul Potter, David Preedy, Caroline Salmon, Philippa Shimmin, Chris Townsend and Charles Yarwood.

55. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 18th February 2014 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

56. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Roger Hurst, Mick Longhurst, Paul Newman, Corinna Osborne-Patterson and Kathryn Westwood.

57. Disclosure of Interests

Councillor Raj Haque disclosed a non-pecuniary interest in Item 5 - Recommendations of Committees - Licensing Committee - Mole Valley District Council Statement of Licensing Policy made under section 5 of the Licensing Act 2003 (2014-2019), as the owner of a licensed premises.

58. Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman announced that the Commonwealth Flag had been raised outside Pippbrook on Commonwealth Day, 10th March 2014, in front of a small gathering of people. The Chairman had read a message from Her Majesty the Queen and an affirmation of the Commonwealth had been made by all those present.

The Chairman advised that tickets were still available for his charity lunch on Friday 28th March at Betchworth Park golf course. Finally, the Chairman notified Members of the Civic Reception to be held on Friday 11th April at St John's School, Leatherhead, and encouraged as many as possible to attend the event.

59. Recommendations of Committees

i) Licensing Committee - 10th March 2014 - Mole Valley District Council Statement of Licensing Policy made under section 5 of the Licensing Act 2003 - 2014-2019

Councillor John Chandler, Chairman of the Licensing Committee, introduced the item and proposed the recommendations of the Committee as set out on page 3 of the agenda and in the circulated addendum report. The Council noted that the Committee had asked officers to prepare a report explaining cumulative impact policies and the process for adopting one for consideration at a future meeting of the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the changes as shown in the revised Statement of Licensing Policy set out at pages 7 to 35 of the agenda be incorporated.
- (2) That the Policy as amended be adopted.

60. Business Rates and Council Tax Flooding Relief

The Council considered a report, which included an addendum, regarding relief which the Council was able to provide to both businesses and residents affected by recent flooding in the District. Businesses adversely affected by flooding would be eligible for rate relief for three months, and residential properties affected by flooding could apply for council tax relief for a period of three months.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That a local discretionary relief in respect of Business Rates Flooding be approved.
- (2) That a local discount in respect of properties subjected to internal flooding be approved.

61. Mole Valley District Council Annual Pay Policy Statement

The Council considered the report set out at pages 39 to 46 of the agenda. Councillor Charles Yarwood reported that the Annual Pay Policy Statement was a requirement of the Localism Act 2011 and ensured transparency in remuneration practices. Mole Valley District Council's Statement had been drafted in line with the best practice of the South East Employers (SEE). Councillor Yarwood advised that the ratio between the highest and lowest paid members of staff was 1:7, which was much lower than the Hutton Review maximum pay multiple of 1:20, and that the Council was committed to maintaining pay in line with the living wage for the lowest paid members of staff.

In response to a Member query regarding the presentation of the Chief Executive's salary in the 2013/14 Annual Accounts, the Council was assured that this would be reported within the accounts in a transparent and accessible format.

RESOLVED: That the Pay Policy Statement for the financial year 2014/15 be approved for publication.

62. Leader's Statement

The Leader referred to the discussion at the previous meeting of the Council regarding the unprecedented levels of flooding experienced in Mole Valley. Although the waters had now subsided and the sun was out, Members' thoughts were never far away from those residents and businesses affected by flooding. Mole Valley had welcomed the National Flood Forum's flood recovery trailer to Leatherhead, Charlwood and Brockham on 14th and 17th March. Working in partnership with Surrey County Council and the National Flood Forum, Mole Valley District Council had invited the Forum to the district, together with representatives from the Environment Agency and Thames Water, to give advice and information about flooding and flood recovery to affected residents. These events had been a great success, but it was acknowledged that this was just the beginning of the recovery process. The Council was committed to giving support to affected residents and businesses and had, in recent weeks, announced a package of financial support for those affected.

Further to his announcement of the Discretionary Hardship Fund at the last meeting of the Council, the Leader was pleased to confirm that the offer had been extended to three months' Council Tax relief on the Mole Valley element of the Council Tax bill to those residential properties affected by internal flooding since 2nd December 2013. As detailed in the report at item 6 on the agenda, Surrey County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner had also taken a decision on 7th March to offer three months' relief for their respective element of the Council Tax bill. This meant that residents who experienced internal flooding could apply to Mole Valley District Council to pay no Council Tax for April, May and June 2014. In addition, those who had had to vacate

their property whilst repairs took place could still apply for help from the Discretionary Hardship Fund. The Council had also that evening considered the impact of flooding on the local business community and had agreed the business rate relief scheme for all flood affected businesses enabling the Council to support the local economy. In addition Mole Valley continued to work with its local communities and was looking to support local flood recovery groups and the local flood forums, which could be the way forward for residents, in partnership with other agencies.

Despite the unusual start to the year, 2014 was destined to be very special because it marked the centenary of World War I. The Leader was delighted to announce that the Woodland Trust planned to plant a centenary wood close to Headley Court. This was an exciting project and the Council was proud that Mole Valley had been identified as the ideal place for this commemorative venture. In addition, preparations were now under way for this year's Heritage Open Days which would examine life 100 years ago with a particular reference to the impact of the war on life in the District. Plans included exhibitions, talks and guided walks. The Council would also be working with the Surrey History Centre, Arts Alive and other community groups looking to celebrate this very special centenary.

The Leader referred to how Mole Valley continued to involve its residents in the decisions it took. Two significant consultations had taken place on the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan and the future of the Pippbrook site. Officers were now collating the feedback from hundreds of residents about the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan ready for a report later in the year. The Pippbrook consultation was ongoing and residents across the district were being actively encouraged to express their views on the Pippbrook site. These views would feed into a final report due to be submitted to the Executive later in 2014.

Looking forward to the new financial year, the Leader was confident that Mole Valley District Council would continue to deliver excellent services to its residents whilst constantly ensuring value for money. There was no denying that the financial challenges remained, but Mole Valley was determined to ensure the best possible outcomes for its residents and businesses.

The Leader then clarified the position regarding Councillor Richard Brooke and advised that he had now resigned as a councillor in Mole Valley. The Leader confirmed that Councillor Brooke had not been taking any expenses or his Members' Allowance for a number of months and any he had taken earlier had been given to one of his favourite charities 'Combat Stress'.

Finally, the Leader noted that 1st April 2014 saw Mole Valley District Council celebrating its 40th anniversary and thanked the Chairman for arranging for Members to mark the occasion.

63. Reports of Portfolio Holders

Councillor James Friend – Portfolio Holder for Environment

Councillor Friend advised Council that the new play facilities at Cradhurst Recreation Ground had been formally opened on 1st March and thanked the Chairman for attending the opening. He referred to the model consultation process drawn up by officers which would continue to be used for such projects. It had been good to see a large number of families enjoying the sunshine at the opening day and the local Brownie Group and other local volunteers were thanked for their participation in the opening.

Councillor Friend updated Members on car parking matters. In the run up to Christmas and over the Christmas period approximately 125% more free parking had been offered in the district. Residents had also taken full advantage of the launch of the penny a minute car parking scheme and were saving money by being able to reduce the number

of minutes bought. Mole Valley had sold 57,508 more tickets this year in addition to the sales via the new cashless payment system 'RingGo' which were not included in those figures. The recent parking initiatives had been a culmination of the work of the Car Parking Strategy Working Group and the Portfolio Holder thanked the Working Group Members for their innovative ideas.

The work of the Waste Management Working Group and the innovative ideas coming forward was also highlighted by Councillor Friend who expressed delight in announcing that from April residents would be able to benefit from making the right thing to do the easiest thing to do with the introduction of weekly recycling collections for textiles and small electrical equipment.

Finally Councillor Friend announced that an agreement, which was the first of its kind between a local authority and a private burial provider, had been made with Clandon Wood to allow families to make use of the Clandon Wood Woodland Burial site. The fees and charges for this would be exactly the same as those for woodland burials in Dorking cemetery.

Councillor Vivienne Michael – Portfolio Holder for Customer Services and Wellbeing

Councillor Michael advised that Mole Valley District Council was committed to constantly improving its customer service and that the Council's officers were at the heart of this effort. As such, a new initiative – the Above and Beyond Awards - had been launched in December 2013 to recognise those members of staff who had not only demonstrated excellent customer service, but who had gone further, making an outstanding contribution and making an effort above and beyond what might otherwise have been expected of them. Fourteen nominations for the award had been received and the Portfolio Holder stressed that every one of the nominees was a real credit to Mole Valley and should rightly feel proud of their nomination. However, the judges felt that six members of staff stood out as worthy recipients of the first Above and Beyond Awards. Three could be mentioned now, with the names of the remaining three to be announced at a later date.

The first recipient of an award was Arabella Davies, the Democratic Services Manager. Arabella had received her award for her work with Headley Court arranging the Freedom March through Dorking and the signing of the Community Covenant. She had led a team of colleagues and senior officers from Headley Court, overseeing a wide range of tasks ensuring that the Freedom March went without a hitch and was a huge success. Other recipients of an Above and Beyond Award were Bob Thomas and Steve Thorpe who received an award for their dedication in helping Brockham during the Christmas floods, working extended hours responding instantly to the needs of the village. Councillor Michael stressed that the Council was very proud of all the winners and asked that Members join her in congratulating all of them.

64. Questions to Members of the Executive

(1) The following question was submitted by Councillor James Friend:

“Please can the Leader or Portfolio Holder confirm the implications for the Mole Valley District Council Housing and Traveller Site Consultation from the recent ministerial announcement that windfall sites can be included in supply forecasts for the whole planning period.”

Councillor John Northcott responded as follows:

In a written Ministerial Statement on the 6th March, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Planning, Nick Boles, announced the Government's launch of its online planning practice guidance. This guidance is to supplement the provisions of the

National Planning Policy Framework in the light of experience and of concerns raised by this Council and others.

One of the headlines in the Minister's statement was the announcement that windfalls can be counted over the whole Local Plan period.

The Council's Planning Policy Team is analysing the details of this very recent announcement to assess its consequences for the preparation of the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan. As always, the devil is in the detail. There are still questions to be resolved around the size of windfall sites to be included in any assessments, whether a different rate of windfalls should be applied towards the end of the Local Plan period and how the guidance will be interpreted by Planning Inspectors at Local Plan examinations.

At this stage it would be premature to be specific, but all the indications are that less Green Belt land will be required to be developed to meet the requirements for new homes in Mole Valley up to 2026 than previously indicated. However, we must not forget that the overall level of new housing required by 2026 has not changed, and also that there are other parts of the Minister's statement that could impact the figure.

In addition to the windfall issue the Minister has referred to a number of other contentious issues, such as the weight to be given to unmet housing need and whether that could outweigh harm to the greenbelt.

I will be working closely and urgently with the Local Plan Working Group and the Planning Policy Team to bottom out the consequences of this latest piece of Government guidance. It clearly has implications for the preparation and content of the draft Housing and Traveller Sites Plan, which eventually the Council will be asked to agree.

Councillor Friend asked the following supplementary question:

"Can you please confirm that the Local Plan does not now need to identify land for years 11 and beyond and, in line with local and national Conservative Party policy, that the demonstration of the very special circumstances by local communities will be the only reason why this Council would alter our precious green belt boundary?"

Councillor Northcott advised that he was unable to give such an assurance as the current preparation of the Housing and Traveller Sites Plan complemented the existing core strategy. The Ministerial announcement would certainly be relevant for the next Local Plan, but, there was currently significant uncertainty as to whether the last five years rule would apply to the work being done at the moment.

(2) Councillor Chris Hunt submitted the following question:

"Why was a recently installed 'clear up dog mess' sign in Ashted Village Ward removed and does the Portfolio holder agree with me that the incident has highlighted the need for 'dog mess' signs on both of the footpaths linking to Bramley Way which are used by local residents including children walking to school?"

Councillor James Friend responded as follows:

This is an issue which is challenging many local communities at the moment and the team doing enforcement are working hard. If there is anyone in the local community who knows of this very anti-social and anti-health behaviour going on they should let the team know.

With reference to this particular sign, there has been some misunderstanding about the original locations needed for the signs. That has now been resolved and appropriate

signs are now in place. They are now installed securely with modified bases to ensure that the posts stay in the ground, to help prevent vandalism or removal.

I agree that there has been a problem with the pathway that links Bramley Way to Darcy Place and new signs inform dog walkers of the need to be responsible. However we have not had the same problem with the footpath that leads from Chaffers Mead. If that does become a problem then of course we would consider additional signage if that were needed. Dog fouling is a problem in several parts of Mole Valley and we do take littering and dog fouling very seriously. We will very shortly launch a new campaign, in partnership with the County Council, to raise awareness and to do more to tackle the problem. The campaign will aim to tackle littering and dog fouling through engagement, education and enforcement where necessary and appropriate.

I know that we do have some more of the stickers that go on lamp posts. If Members want some for their area contact the team, we will very happily furnish you with them. I urge you to pick key points outside nurseries, schools and shops, particularly where children are.

(3) The following question was submitted by Councillor Chris Hunt:

“How much does it cost to manufacture and install a 'clear up dog mess' sign and what is the cost on an hourly basis of sending out the 'hit squad' from the depot to clear up a footpath, for example to clean up 'dog mess'?”

Councillor James Friend responded as follows:

It costs approximately £21 each to buy the signs and approximately one hour to install, equivalent to around £30 of staffing costs including on costs. So about £50 in total to purchase and install each sign. If you offset that against the cost of not only the anti-social behaviour and the inconvenience, but also the potential health issues, that is a really good demonstration of value for money with our communities and I would encourage communities to come forward and tell us where they need them. Veolia are responsible for cleaning up dog fouling. We no longer pay Veolia for additional work of this nature as the cost is now incorporated in to the overall cost of the street cleansing contract. I am also aware that there are a large number of community notice boards around and we have a fantastic 'The dog poo fairy doesn't live here anymore' poster. If communities wish to use this as well they can do and they are a matter of pence rather than the sign costs.

(4) The following question was submitted by Councillor David Preedy:

“Prudential Ride-London MOU

I have recently had to resort to the Freedom of Information Act to receive answers to some straightforward questions I asked at Executive and Council in December regarding communications relating to the Prudential Ride-London cycling events. As a result I was informed of a Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Chief Executive in April 2013 relating to these events. Clause 13 of this MoU relates to terms of Confidentiality.

- (1) Why were Councillors not consulted (or even informed after the event) about an agreement signed by the Council which limits the Council's ability to communicate effectively and transparently with residents?
- (2) Why did the Council agree to clause 13.1 under which the terms of the MOU itself are to be treated as Confidential?”

Councillor Chris Townsend responded as follows:

Before I answer your questions, I am slightly amazed that we keep running down this road and I would like to express my disappointment that yet again Councillor Preedy

feels the need to raise these issues, rather than joining with me to ensure that we support our communities going forward.

The MOU was reviewed by Officers of the Council, and the Chief Executive discussed this with me at a one to one meeting in April prior to signing. It would be unrealistic to expect officers to inform all members every time something is signed.

Referring to the detail of the MOU I do not see that clause 13 has, as you say, 'restricted the Council's ability to communicate effectively and transparently with residents'. The MOU itself stipulates that the Council will support RideLondon in its communications with local residents and businesses. What Councillors must remember is that this is not an event run by Mole Valley District Council and that communications are, as they should be, led by RideLondon. This event is not restricted to Mole Valley, although most will acknowledge that we are heavily impacted, this means that communications need to be carefully managed to ensure that timely and consistent messages are shared with all affected districts and boroughs across the route. I can assure Councillor Preedy that we will continue to do all we can to ensure that RideLondon are communicating effectively with all our local communities.

In response to your second question, confidentiality clauses are standard in these types of documents. The MOU is in place to facilitate mutual cooperation, by setting out the roles and responsibilities of each party.

I very much hope that these are the last questions I will be asked regarding the background to RideLondon and that Councillor Preedy will now join me in looking ahead to how we can support our local communities with the forthcoming event.

Councillor Preedy asked the following supplementary question:

"Firstly if the agreement says specifically that confidentiality clauses include the release or publication of any press release, media or public statement, advertisement or announcement that this is very extensive and also how many other partnership agreements have similar clauses in and what is the cumulative effect of this on restricting the ability of the Council to communicate transparently with our residents?"

The Leader advised that he could not respond at the meeting as he did not have the relevant data to hand. He undertook to look at the matter with the Chief Executive and respond to Councillor Preedy in writing.

(5) Councillor Margaret Cooksey submitted the following question:

"When the issue of the Pippbrook site was last discussed at Scrutiny Committee I raised the question of information regarding a previous public consultation on the matter. Could the Portfolio Holder for Community and Assets on behalf of the Leader please tell us of the results of his promised investigation?"

Councillor Charles Yarwood responded as follows:

The previous consultation was around the budget in November 2012. One question on there was on Pippbrook, namely:

'MVDC currently spends 10% of the Council Tax it receives on the running costs of its civic and administrative headquarters at Pippbrook in Dorking. It is believed that this cost could be halved by a very major refurbishment or rebuild of the Council's headquarters within the Pippbrook site, funding the works by allowing some form of sympathetic development, such as some housing, on the site. Any such development of the site would preserve the current civic nature of Pippbrook House, maintain the current amount of open space and leisure activities, and protect the significant trees on the site.'

24% of responses to that consultation indicated a preference to retain exactly the existing layout of the Pippbrook site, including the Council's administrative and civic headquarters, and accept the running costs that this entails (Equivalent to 10% of Council Tax received by MVDC).

76% of respondents were minded to allow some form of sympathetic development, such as housing, on the Pippbrook site, providing funding for the major refurbishment or rebuilding of the Council's offices, and reducing the running costs of those offices by half (Equivalent to 5% of Council Tax received by MVDC).

In the new survey out there at the moment, to date 816 people have responded, for which we are very grateful and I would like to encourage any resident who has yet to complete the online survey to do so before it closes on 10th April.

Councillor Margaret Cooksey asked the following supplementary question:

“Would it be possible to have the response in writing as the reason I am asking it is because I have been asked repeatedly by a particular organisation for that information. And could you tell me how many responses there were to that particular question and what was the distribution of those respondents?”

Councillor Yarwood advised that a total of 144 responses had been received, of which 35 were in favour of retaining the Pippbrook site in its existing layout and the remaining 109 were in favour of some form of enabling development. With regard to the geographical distribution of those responses, he undertook to check if the information were held by the Council and if so to provide it to Councillor Cooksey. A written copy of the response to the original question would be provided to Councillor Cooksey.

(6) Councillor Stephen Cooksey submitted the following question:

“At the meeting of the Council on 18th February 2014, in answer to my question, the Leader of the Council reported on action that had been taken by the Council to implement motion 3/2013 relating to central government and the green belt which had been approved by Council at its meeting on 3rd December 2013. Would the Portfolio Holder for Planning now give an updated report on action taken since 18th February and any proposed future action?”

Councillor John Northcott responded as follows:

My answer may include some things that were started before 18th February. The motion has been discussed by the Surrey Planning Officers' Association and the Planning Policy Managers of Surrey. Senior Mole Valley officers and I briefed Sir Paul Beresford prior to his recent meeting with Ministers and discussed how to take this forward.

It has also been referenced in a report to the Surrey Chief Executives and Surrey Leaders about Surrey's strategic challenges. In addition I have raised the windfall issue with officers at the LGA in my capacity as a member of the Environment and Housing Board.

An important outcome of this dissemination of the motion is that there is to be a half day workshop on 26th March in the Dorking Halls to consider Surrey's strategic challenges. This is being attended by the Leaders of the Surrey Districts and Boroughs, their Planning Portfolio Holders, Chief Executives and Heads of Planning. I believe this is the first time that such a group has ever met together. The workshop will provide an opportunity for members and senior officers to review the strategic challenges facing Surrey; review governance arrangements and explore the opportunities for joint working to address key issues such as the provision of new housing, and the regional and sub regional distribution of resources and growth.

The Surrey Planning Officers are also working individually and jointly to respond to the Mayor's proposed Further Alterations to the London Plan and I believe I am right in saying that Mr Straw has a major role in this. This provides an opportunity to work together to express concern that London is not making provision within its boundaries to meet its own housing requirements.

As I have referred to earlier in the other question to me this evening, there has been a recent Ministerial statement, indicating that the Government recognises at least some of the issues raised by the motion.

Councillor Stephen Cooksey asked for a written copy of the answer.