

Minutes of the Meeting of the STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE held on 17 November 2015

PRESENT -

Councillor Neil Dallen (Chairman); Councillor Clive Woodbridge (Vice-Chairman); Councillors Tony Axelrod, Richard Baker, Kate Chinn, Eber Kington, Omer Kokou-Tchri, Keith Partridge and Mike Teasdale

In Attendance: Councillor Michael Arthur (For items 42 to 50)

Absent: Councillor Rekha Bansil

Officers present: Frances Rutter (Chief Executive), Kathryn Beldon (Director of Finance and Resources), Simon Young (Head of Legal and Democratic Services), Mark Berry (Head of Place Development), Judith Doney (Head of Revenues and Benefits), Lee Duffy (Head of Financial Services), Doug Earle (Head of Corporate Risk), Michael Smith (Chief Accountant), Peter Wells (Benefits Manager) and Fiona Cotter (Democratic Services Manager)

35 QUESTION TIME

A written question had been submitted by a member of the public in relation to Horton Chapel to which the Chairman responded verbally.

Note: Councillor Eber Kington indicated that he would be declaring a disclosable pecuniary interest in item 6 on the Agenda (Horton Chapel) and left the meeting during question time.

36 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Note: Councillor Eber Kington returned to the Chamber.

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee held on 29 September 2015 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

37 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Local Council Tax Support Scheme 2016/17

Councillor Omer KoKou-Tchri, Other Interest: Councillor Omer Kokou-Tchri declared that section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 currently applied to him and that he would not therefore be voting on any question in relation to this item.

Budget Targets 2016-17

Councillor Omer KoKou-Tchri, Other Interest: Councillor Omer Kokou-Tchri declared that section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 currently applied to him and that he would not therefore be voting on any question in relation to this item. No vote was taken.

Horton Chapel

Councillor Eber Kington, Disclosable Pecuniary Interest: Councillor Kington owned a property in the vicinity of Horton Chapel.

38 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME 2016/17

As a result of revised figures tabled at the meeting which affected the bottom line in relation to the Council's projected share of Council Tax Income, it was agreed to defer consideration of this item. The Committee was reminded that a local scheme had to be adopted by 31 January for the following financial year. It was agreed that a Special Meeting of the Committee would be held before the Council Meeting on 8 December 2016.

39 BUDGET TARGETS 2016-17

The Committee received and considered a report informing members of its revenue budget targets. The report sought support for changes to services and any further guidance on the preparation of the Committee's estimates for 2016/17 and for the next 3 financial years.

It was noted that as a result of the deferral of item 4 (Minute 38 refers), the Committee would not be able to confirm its support for the changes to services identified in paragraph 3.4 of the report in relation to the Council Tax Support Scheme and Hardship Fund. In order to meet the Council's statutory obligation to have a Local Council Tax Scheme adopted by the Council by the 31 January 2016, as already agreed, a special meeting of this Committee would be held to consider the revised figures prior to the Council meeting on 8 December. The Committee's estimates would be amended according to the decision taken at the special meeting.

The report highlighted that the following saving options had been put forward for 2017/18 to assist in addressing the funding shortfall over the three year period 2017/18 to 2019/20:

- Alternative payroll provision (£10,000)
- Cap on discretionary rate relief for business rates (£22,000)
- Shared ICT Service (£12,000)

In addition, it was noted (paragraph 3.6 of the report referred) that it was proposed to undertake work in the following areas:

- 5 -10 year Asset Management Plan
- Plant, Equipment and Vehicle Replacement Schedule
- Asset Disposal Programme
- Investigating the possibility of reducing the number of councillors
- Promoting digital interaction with customers e.g. online payments
- Tree Maintenance Service Review

Accordingly, the Committee:

- (1) Noted the implications of the budget targets approved by the Strategy and Resources Committee;
- (2) Noted that as a result of revised figures tabled at the meeting which affected the bottom line in relation to the Council's projected share of Council Tax Income, the savings option in relation to the Council Tax Support Scheme would need to be revisited;
- (3) Supported in principle the future savings options set out in paragraph 3.5 of the report for further work and inclusion in the Medium Term Financial Strategy;
- (4) Did not provide any further guidance on specific issues to be covered in the preparation of service estimates for 2016/17;
- (5) Endorsed the work plan as set out in paragraph 3.6 of the report.

40 HORTON CHAPEL

Note: Councillor Eber Kington withdrew from the meeting during consideration of this item and left the meeting following consideration of item 19 (Land at Fairview Road, Epsom).

The Committee received a report which summarised the position in relation to Horton Chapel. The report further sought agreement to a way forward leading to the disposal of the property by the Council either to an organisation for the provision of a community facility or on the open market.

It was noted that a final decision on the Chapel's future would not be possible until the issues which impacted on the property resulting from the Review of the Social Centres had been resolved. However, it was not considered that this should prevent the marketing exercise from proceeding.

Officers considered that four months was a sufficient period for bids to be put together – this period could be extended if it was thought appropriate to do so further along the line. It was recognised that community bids submitted might

well be dependent on external funding and that would be something for members to consider when evaluating and deciding which bid, if any, to accept.

In response to concerns that community groups were being expected to compete against commercial organisations, it was reiterated that the Council had tried on a number of occasions since 2004 to achieve a purely community use for the building without success. There had been a number of public consultations over the years and it was not disputed that the majority of people would like to see this building in community use. However, the issue had always been that no financially viable plan had been put forward. On balance, taking into account how the property market had changed since 2004, it was considered that the property should now be marketed so that all interested parties had the same opportunity to bid for the property. It was intended to engage a property agent to market the property on the Council's behalf, taking into consideration the most appropriate and cost effective means of doing so.

It was stressed that irrespective of whether the successful bid came from the community or commercial sector, it would be a disposal and the Council would be relinquishing all responsibility for the premises. Any commercial operator would be taking the property on subject to the restrictive covenants. If these were lifted the value of the building would rise but in that case the largest share of any increase in value would benefit the Secretary of State for Health and Charles Church Developments Ltd and not the Council.

The Committee:

- (1) noted the position to date;
- (2) Did not authorise Officers to engage an agent to market the property for freehold disposal;
- (3) Did not authorise Officers to agree allocation of funds for the purposes off the marketing exercise;
- (4) Did not agree that the period for submission of bids be 4 months;
- (5) Requested that a report be brought back to the Strategy and Resources Committee in January 2016.

41 MINUTES OF THE FINANCIAL POLICY PANEL: 13 OCTOBER 2015

Note: Councillor Eber Kington returned to the Chamber.

The Committee received the Minutes of the Financial Policy Panel meeting held on 13 October 2015.

It was noted that the Panel had received an interim report on Treasury Management and a mid-year progress report on backlog maintenance. The Panel had made the following recommendations to this committee in respect of backlog maintenance:

- that a regulatory property maintenance works budget of £35,000 be held separately from the backlog maintenance budgets; and
- that the additional emergency schemes listed below be approved:
 - a) hard surfaces – repairs to paving and walkways (£15,000)
 - b) relining Level 4 of Ashley Centre Car Park (£2,000)
 - c) Alterations at Bourne Hall to accommodate Conquest Art (£8,500)
 - d) Roof replacement and repairs at Bourne Hall Lodge (£20,000)

Accordingly, the Committee:

- (1) Approved the change in budget heads to hold regulatory property maintenance budgets separate from backlog works, but still can be subject to in-year officer budget virements;
- (2) Approved the inclusion of emergency schemes set out in paragraph 3 of the report totalling £45,500.

42 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT 2015/16: PROGRESS REPORT ONE

The Committee received and considered a report which set out performance against the Committee's actions for Progress Report One 2015/16.

During the discussion, the following points were noted:

- **EV1** *“to monitor the impact of the parking charging regime and set charges in consultation with local businesses”* It was acknowledged that this had not been conducted in the fashion originally intended and that this had been taken into account when setting the fees and charges
- **EV4** *“planning application submitted and determined for new retail store and housing on Depot Road and Upper High Street”*: The proposed development scheme for Upper High Street/Depot Road had fallen through. Speculative discussions with the new landowner had not been taken forward at this time. The overall objective was the delivery of Plan E of which this scheme had been just one element and other elements were currently being progressed.
- **EV4** *“implement the agreed plan and deliver the junction improvements at the Spread Eagle”*: In response to concern about delays in Plan E, Officers still considered that there was a realistic prospect of making progress on a detailed project plan by the end of November. Substantive works were not expected to start until early July next year.
- **MR4** *“implement changes to deliver venues subsidy targets”*: The Committee was disappointed to note that the current action status was “not met”. However, members were assured that Officers were continuing

to work hard to address this. Targets for venues had been stretching but, notwithstanding, subsidies were reducing.

Having noted performance to date, whilst assured that Officers were looking at more realistic targets and not speculating on increasing demand, the Committee identified the need, particularly in regard to venues, for clearly measurable and realistic targets as an area to be addressed in the 2016-17 Performance Management system.

43 ANNUAL INSURANCE REPORT

The Committee received and considered a report which provided an annual update on the Council's insurance cover arrangements provided by the London Borough of Sutton. The report also sought agreement to the progression of discussions regarding entering into a longer term arrangement.

The report indicated that direct costs to the Council were reducing and Officers considered that good progress had been made in relation to tree related claims. This had proved a difficult area in the past with a need to balance an increased risk of claims against the amenity value of a large number of trees in the Borough.

The Committee:

- (1) Noted the annual report prepared by the London Borough of Sutton in respect of the new insurance arrangements and continues action taken to improve the handling of claims;
- (2) Agreed that the Head of Corporate Risk progress discussions with the London Borough of Sutton for a longer term arrangement to achieve potential savings and economies of scale with a view to extending the current Collaboration Agreement.

44 WRITE OFFS

The Committee agreed the write off of debts totalling £35,671.77 in relation to business rates.

The report highlighted that resources were focussed on the recovery of debt whenever this was possible or economic to do so and, where appropriate, the Council was prepared to prosecute those in default of payment.

45 THE EPSOM-BANSTEAD SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT PACKAGE

A report, marked to follow and circulated following publication of the Agenda, was presented to the Committee. The report discussed a proposed capital transport scheme being sponsored by Surrey County Council. The scheme was known as the Epsom-Banstead Sustainable Transport Package and it was proposed that this Council should indicate that it was willing, in principle, to contribute towards the delivery of the scheme.

It was recognised that the information provided in the report was broad brush and provided at short notice. The status of the potential bid had been elevated by the Local Enterprise Partnership following a proposal by the County Council to prioritise it above other projects and to bring it forward in an earlier time frame than previously anticipated. However, the LEP would be looking for matched funding to progress the scheme. At this stage it was not possible to say how much that might be but any contribution would need to be funded from the Community Infrastructure Levy and could potentially tie up these funds exclusively on highways and transportation schemes for several years. The County Council was therefore looking for in principle support regarding a contribution towards this project.

Having noted that members of this Council were on a County Council task group relating to this project, the Committee:

- (1) Gave a commitment, in principle, to contribute towards the delivery of the Epsom-Banstead Sustainable Transport Package;
- (2) Noted that the precise amount of any contribution would be dependent upon the scheme being successful in obtaining external funding, the precise scope of the scheme, and the final balance of anticipated expenditure between the two constituent Boroughs; and
- (3) Noted that actual commitment would be dependent upon future approval.

Note: Report circulated to the Committee on Friday 13 November 2015.

46 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2016/17

The Committee received and considered a proposed Calendar of Meetings for 2016/17.

It was agreed that the Council be recommended to approve the Calendar of Meetings for 2016/17 as set out in the Annexe attached to the report. This was subject to the Democratic Services Manager investigating the possibility of moving the date of the Planning meeting in April 2017 and including the dates for the Licensing and Planning Policy Committee which were out to consultation at the time of publication of the Agenda.

47 OUTSTANDING REFERENCES

The Committee received and noted the outstanding references to officers as at 17 November 2015.

48 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

The Committee resolved to exclude the Press and Public from the meeting in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that the business involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act (as amended) and that pursuant to paragraph 10 of Part 2 of the said Schedule 12A the public

interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

49 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING - PROPOSED EAST SURREY BUILDING CONTROL PARTNERSHIP

The Committee agreed as a true record the Minutes of the Meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee held on 29 September 2015 considered officially sensitive and exempt from publication.

50 LAND AT FAIRVIEW ROAD, EPSOM

The Committee agreed that Land at Fairview Road, Epsom be sold at auction in accordance with the recommendations set out in the report.

Note: The details of the disposal are considered officially sensitive and the Minute of this item will be exempt from publication.

The meeting began at 7.35 pm and ended at 10.00 pm

COUNCILLOR NEIL DALLEN (CHAIRMAN)