

Minutes of the Meeting of the STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE held at the Council Chamber, Epsom Town Hall on 13 July 2023

PRESENT -

Councillor Neil Dallen (Chair); Councillor Hannah Dalton (Vice-Chair); Councillors Chris Ames, Shanice Goldman, Graham Jones, Alison Kelly, Robert Leach and Alan Williamson

Officers present: Andrew Bircher (Interim Director of Corporate Services), Victoria Potts (Interim Director of Environment, Housing and Regeneration), Brendan Bradley (Head of Finance), Piero Ionta (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), Mark Shephard (Head of Property and Regeneration) and Tim Richardson (Democratic Services Manager)

1 QUESTION AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

No questions or statements were received from members of the public.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made in relation to items of business to be discussed at the meeting.

3 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes and Restricted Minutes of the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee held on 28 March 2023 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

4 PLANNING DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT – RESOURCES

The Committee received a report seeking approval for additional resources to enable the Planning Development Management Service to procure consultancy support to clear the current backlog in tree and planning-related applications.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Clearance of backlog.** Following a question from a member, the Committee noted that the procurement of consultancy support would enable the existing backlog of applications to be cleared. The Committee also noted that the Government had proposed to undertake a review of

planning fees and that once this had been completed, the future resourcing of the service would be considered.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) Agree to procure consultancy support to clear the backlog of tree and planning-related applications.**
- (2) Approve the allocation of up to £60,000 from the Corporate Projects Reserve to the Development Management Service budget to enable the additional resource.**
- (3) Note that when the outcome of government's proposed planning fees increase is known, a further report will be produced to consider the impact on planning resourcing and budgets.**

5 2022-23 PROVISIONAL FINANCIAL OUTTURN

The Committee received a report summarising the Council's provisional financial performance for 2022/23 and providing details of the capital budgets to be carried forward for schemes where costs will be incurred in 2023/24.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Impact of interest rate changes.** A member of the Committee asked a question about the impact of interest rate changes on the likelihood of further property acquisitions by the Council. The Chair informed the Committee that the property strategy was being reviewed. The Head of Property and Regeneration clarified that the Property Acquisition Funds held by the Council were not a cash reserve, they were a borrowing facility which had been agreed by the Council.
- b) **Temporary accommodation.** A member of the Committee asked a question about risks associated with the acquisition of properties for homelessness. The Chair informed the Committee that there were around 70-80 families requiring temporary accommodation in the Borough at present. A further challenge was that there were not sufficient properties available for families in temporary accommodation to move on to. The Head of Finance informed the Committee that officers considered that there was a very small risk associated with acquisition of property for the purposes of temporary accommodation, due to the number of families currently seeking such provision being higher than the available supply.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) Receive the report on provisional financial outturn for 2022/23;**
- (2) Approve the carry forward £2.19m budget for capital schemes to be added to the 2023/24 capital programme.**

- (3) **Note that the provisional outturn position is subject to external audit. Should any material changes arise from the audit, these will be reported back to members.**

6 2024-25 STRATEGIC FINANCIAL PLANNING

The Committee received a report seeking guidance on the approach to producing the Council's budget for 2024/25 and Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2024-28.

The following matter was considered:

- a) **Service efficiencies and revenue generation.** A member of the committee asked a question about the identification of further service efficiencies and cost reductions. The Chair informed the Committee that further savings would be limited in nature, as the easy savings had already been achieved. The Chair expressed that he was confident that the Council would be able to meet the budget gap identified through a combination of revenue generation and cost savings.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to agree:

- (1) **The proposed approach to be taken to 2024/25 budget setting and the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2024-28, as set out in the report;**
- (2) **That officers should work with Policy Committee Chairs, as set out in section 7 of the report, to produce specific income generation and savings options, in addition to savings already targeted, to meet the initial projected deficit of £2.5m per annum by 2027/28;**
- (3) **That owing to the Council's projected budget deficit, any additional new revenue growth items (i.e. service enhancements resulting in increased net expenditure) supported by Policy Committees will need to be fully funded from existing budgets;**
- (4) **That the emerging annual / business plan and the budget process are aligned to ensure that any commitments are affordable;**
- (5) **The budget reporting timetable in Appendix 1 to the report.**

7 LAND AVAILABILITY FOR THE LOCAL PLAN

The Committee received a report considering the land availability of specific Council owned sites which were under further investigation by the Local Planning Authority (LPA).

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Nature of report.** The Committee noted that the report had been presented for consideration in response to a request from the Local Planning Authority enquiring about the availability of certain sites.

- b) **Scotts Farm Road former scout hut.** In response to a question from a member, the Chair informed the committee that the former scout's hut on Scotts Farm Road was in fact situated on Wesley Close. It was noted that this would be incorporated into the response to the LPA.
- c) **Scotts Farm Road, recommendation for submission.** A member of the Committee identified that the Scotts Farm Road site had previously not been submitted to the LPA for consideration but was now recommended for submission. The member asked for clarification as to the reason for this change. The interim Director of Environment, Housing and Regeneration informed the Committee that following a review of the Council's brownfield sites, officers considered that the site could achieve 5 or more dwellings, which was the threshold required for sites.
- d) **Richard's Field car park.** A member of the Committee asked why the Richard's Field car park site had previously not been submitted to the LPA for consideration but was now recommended for submission. The Chair informed the Committee that following a review of the Council's brownfield sites, it was considered that the site could potentially be utilised for both residential and car parking use.
- e) **Longmead Depot.** In response to a question from a member, the Chair informed the Committee that the Longmead Depot was used as the storage location for the Council's waste and recycling collection vehicles.
- f) **Cox Lane Community Centre.** The Chair informed that Committee that the leases for Cox Lane GP Surgery and children's nursery expired just before the completion of the Local Plan period, in 2038. It was considered that for the operational certainty of the surgery and nursery that the site should not be submitted for inclusion at the present time. It was noted that the Local Plan was reviewed every 5 years, and the inclusion of the site could be reviewed in the future.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously was resolved to:

- (1) **Authorise the Head of Property & Regeneration to submit the following Council owned sites to the LPA for consideration as part of the Local Plan process:**
 - a) **Scotts Farm Road**
 - b) **Richard's Field Car Park**

8 TOWN HALL SITE

The Committee received a report considering the appointment of specialist consultancy support required for the Council to consider all its options in relation to the future of the Town Hall site.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Options for Town Hall site.** The Committee noted the potential development and development delivery options available for the Town Hall site.
- b) **Use of consultants.** In response to a question from a member, the Head of Property and Regeneration informed the Committee that it was proposed to procure consultancy support as set out in the report to provide capacity, resilience and expertise for the works which the Council did not currently possess.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) **Agree the procurement of specialist regeneration and development consultancy support as detailed in the report.**
- (2) **Agree a budget of up to £150,000 to be funded from the Corporate Projects Reserve.**
- (3) **Delegate to the Acting Director of Environment, Housing & Regeneration and the Head of Property & Regeneration in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer, to commission the work.**
- (4) **Note a report would be brought back to Committee at the earliest opportunity following completion of the work.**

9 APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS AND CHAIR OF THE SHAREHOLDER SUB-COMMITTEE

The Committee received a report seeking its agreement to the appointment of Members and a Chair to the Shareholder Sub Committee for the 2023-24 Municipal Year.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) **Appoint Members and a Chair for the Shareholder Sub Committee as required by its Terms of Reference, and set out in paragraph 3.3 of the report. These were: Councillors Neil Dallen (Chair), Hannah Dalton, Graham Jones, Alison Kelly and Alan Williamson.**

The meeting began at 7.50 pm and ended at 8.20 pm

COUNCILLOR NEIL DALLEN (CHAIR)