

**Minutes of the Meeting of the STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE held on
24 September 2019**

PRESENT -

Councillor Eber Kington (Chairman); Councillor Clive Smitheram (Vice-Chair);
Councillors Arthur Abdulin, Steve Bridger, Kate Chinn, Nigel Collin, Hannah Dalton,
David Gulland, Colin Keane and Barry Nash

Officers present: Kathryn Beldon (Chief Executive), Damian Roberts (Chief Operating Officer), Rod Brown (Head of Housing and Community), Judith Doney (Head of Digital and Service Transformation), Amardip Healy (Chief Legal Officer), Brendan Bradley (Chief Accountant), Siobhan Gavigan (Revenues Manager), Annette Snell (Housing Operations Manager) and Sandra Dessent (Committee Administrator)

17 QUESTION TIME

No questions were asked or had been submitted by members of the public

18 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were made regarding items on this agenda

19 LOCAL PLAN CONSULTATION

The Committee received a report detailing a proposal to commission consultation experts and specialist software for the Local Plan public consultation. The aim of the consultation is to reach businesses, community groups and stakeholders and to maximise opportunities for engagement with the Local Plan process.

The success of the Future 40 consultation was noted and it was commented that whilst the Local Plan consultation was anticipated to be equally successful the methodology was different. It was agreed to circulate more information on the estimated number of responses for the Local Plan consultation.

It was anticipated the consultation would commence in November, however there was a possibility of the date would changing in the event of a General Election being called.

Accordingly, the Committee agreed to the proposed commissioning of consultation and engagement experts and specialist software to enable residents to comment for the Local Plan consultation with a budget of up to £75,000 as set out in paragraph 4.3 of the report.

20 LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME

This report provided an update to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme and proposed a simpler, less administratively burdensome process for providing support. It was anticipated that a new scheme would be presented to the Committee in autumn 2020. It was proposed to continue with the current minimum payment scheme for a further year to allow time to develop a new software system based on providing support through a discount scheme. This would replace the existing approach of means testing (as set out in paragraph 3 of the report).

The Committee noted that alongside the existing scheme the Council operated and funded a Discretionary Hardship Fund of £25,000 which had been a great help to those experiencing exceptional financial hardship. It also served to identify those being adversely affected by the Equality Impact Assessment.

The challenges faced as a result of the change to Universal Credit was discussed, and it was noted that despite the issues encountered the overall collection rate for all residents was 99.1.

Having considered the proposed actions and the 2020/21 scheme, the Committee:

- (1) Agreed to continue the current scheme for the 2020/21 financial year with the underlying means tested applicable amounts being uplifted by the same percentage as the Housing Benefit rates applicable from April 2020 and applying any further Regulation changes that might apply for that financial year;
- (2) Agreed the continuation of the Discretionary Hardship Fund for exceptional cases;
- (3) Agreed the actions proposed to change the scheme to a council tax discount to be implemented from 1 April 2021.

21 FLEXIBLE HOUSING SUPPORT GRANT

This report identified the growth in demand for homelessness assistance since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 and the resulting increase in expenditure for the provision of the homelessness service in 2019/20. The report recommended the use of the Flexible Housing Support Grant to increase homelessness prevention activity, reduce the use of expensive out of borough nightly paid accommodation through the increased use of Private Sector Leased properties and to purchase a new temporary accommodation rent accounting module and upgrade the existing Abritas Housing Services system.

Prior to the Committee meeting information had been circulated regarding a breakdown of the proposed spend of £106,950 as follows:

- a) Provide an additional member of staff (1 FTE) on a 2 year fixed term contract to supplement the existing team of 3 Housing Options Officers to

provide additional capacity to complete preventative work earlier so as to avoid the need to place households in temporary accommodation.

- b) To provide an additional 0.5 FTE member of staff, on a 2 year fixed term contract to support the expansion of the PSL scheme.

It was confirmed that should there be a wish to extend the scheme after two years a new proposal would come back to the Committee.

To assist with the implementation of the scheme Councillors were asked to forward any contact from residents regarding homelessness issues to the housing service for an update. It was noted that a revised Homelessness Strategy would come before the Committee at a future date.

Accordingly, the Committee:

- (1) Approved the use of £106,950 of Flexible Housing Support Grant to increase homelessness prevention activity and increase the supply of Private Sector Leased properties; and
- (2) Approved the use of £63,000 of Flexible Housing Support Grant to purchase a new temporary accommodation rent accounting module and upgrade the existing Abritas Housing Services system to assist homelessness prevention & relief administration.

22 REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS, POLLING PLACES AND POLLING STATIONS

The Committee received a report regarding the review of polling places and in accordance with the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 it was compulsory and had to be completed by 31 January 2020.

A consultation was underway and it was proposed that a working group be established to consider representations for the proposals.

In response to a question regarding a motion moved at Council (Item 7, Motion 2, Annex 2 – Minute no.18). it was confirmed that one of the aims in establishing a working party was to manage and collate the feedback from the two schools that were effected by closure during term time. Furthermore the two schools had been sent the consultation document in order that the parents/guardians could be made aware of the review and have the opportunity to make comments.

It was confirmed that Councillor Christine Howells from Nonsuch Ward had been nominated to sit on the working group.

Suggestions were made to combine polling places however the Committee was informed that the Council were constrained by electoral registration rules.

Members involved in the working group were reminded that three meetings had been arranged to consider the representations on 16, 17 and 18 October

Accordingly, the Committee agreed:

- (1) That a Working Group be established to consider all representations received in respect of the public consultation in respect of Polling Districts, polling Places and Polling Stations;
- (2) That the Working Group comprise of 5 members with the Chairman of the Residents' Association, the Leader of the Liberal Democrat group and the Leader of the Labour group having nominated 3 members, 1 member and 1 member respectively as detailed in paragraph 4.2 of the report, and Councillor Christine Howells as the nominated representative from Nonsuch Ward agreed at the meeting.
- (3) That this Committee considers the proposals of the Working Group at its meeting on 26 November 2019.

23 BUDGET TARGETS 2020/21

This report detailed proposed budget targets for 2020/21 and provided an update on financial planning for 2021/22 to 2023/24 as recommended by the Financial Policy Panel on 10 September 2019.

It was recognised that in order to achieve the forecasted savings there would a reduction in operational costs and Officers were encouraged to exercise caution and carefully monitor the head count to ensure that resources were sufficient to achieve the Council's aspirations.

Having considered the budget targets, the Committee:

- (1) Noted the recommendations of Financial Policy Panel held on 10 September 2019.
- (2) Agreed the following overall budget targets for 2020/21:-
 - a) estimates are prepared including options to reduce organisational costs by £544,000 in 2020/21 subject to government grant announcement, to minimise the use of working balances and maintain a minimum working balance of £2.5 million in accordance with the medium term financial strategy;
 - b) that at least £290,000 additional revenue is generated from an increase in discretionary fees and charges, based on a minimum overall increase in yield of 3.0%, with the exception of car parking which is set at 6.0% as these charges are adjusted every two years;
 - c) that a provision for pay award is made of £400,000 that allows for a 2% cost of living increase;
- (3) Agreed that further savings are identified for inclusion within the new Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2020-2024 to reduce the Council's

net operating costs by a minimum of £1,825,000 over the period 2020/21 to 2023/24;

- (4) That Capital Member Group seeks to maintain a minimum capital expenditure programme to control the use of capital reserves between 2020 and 2024, subject to an appropriate prioritisation of spend to save and externally funded schemes.

24 STRATEGIC STATEMENT ON ECONOMY AND PLACE

The Strategic Statement sets out the Council's strategic priorities for economy and place in the context of the Council's new long-term vision for the borough, and in advance of the new Corporate Plan and the forthcoming detailed strategies that will emerge over the autumn through the Council's Local Plan process.

It was highlighted that the focus of the Statement was maximising the social, economic and environmental outcomes that could be achieved, alongside core considerations of financial viability, future decisions relating to the Council's own asset management (purchase, disposal, use and development) and will need to demonstrate a clear contribution to one or more of the following strategic priorities:

- a) Contribution to the delivery of the Council's Long-term vision and the delivery of the strategic priorities set out in its Corporate Plan
- b) Providing an opportunity to facilitate "Good Growth" as set out in the Surrey-wide Place Ambition
- c) Within the Town Centre - contribution to priorities set out in the Council's Plan E – Area Action Plan, including the defined opportunity areas.
- d) The scope for the protection of key employment sites, further strengthening the protection provided by the Council's Article 4 Directions
- e) Contributes to the priorities set out in the Council's Housing Delivery Action Plan.

Having considered the strategy set out in the report, the Committee agreed the Strategic Statement on Economy and Place

25 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee held on 30 July 2019 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

The meeting began at 7.30 pm and ended at 8.15 pm

COUNCILLOR EBER KINGTON (CHAIRMAN)