

Minutes of the Meeting of the STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE held at the Council Chamber, Epsom Town Hall on 26 March 2024

PRESENT -

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

In Attendance: Councillor Christine Howells, Councillor James Lawrence, Councillor Steven McCormick and Councillor Bernie Muir

Officers present: Jackie King (Chief Executive), Brendan Bradley (Head of Finance), Piero Ionta (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), Rod Brown (Head of Housing and Community), Mark Shephard (Head of Property and Regeneration) and Phoebe Batchelor (Democratic Services Officer)

42 QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

One written question from a Member of the Public was received by the Committee to which a written response had been published in advance of the meeting. A supplementary question was asked by the member of the public. The Chair informed the member of the public that a written response would be provided within three weeks, which was the week commencing 15 April 2024

One statement was received from a member of the public in relation to an item on the agenda (Chalk Pit).

43 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

44 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Committee confirmed as a true record the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 25 January 2024 and authorised the Chair to sign them.

45 PLANNED MAINTENANCE REPORT 2024-25

The Committee received a report providing an update on the current financial year's approved 2023-24 planned maintenance programme and requesting

approval for the planned maintenance programme for the next financial year 2024-25.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Value for money.** In response to a question from a member regarding the cost of works to the Council's venues, the Head of Property and Regeneration informed the Committee that the cost of the works detailed in the report included the provision of scaffolding and specialist equipment required due to the architecture of the Town Hall and Bourne Hall.
- b) **Playhouse automatic doors.** In response to a question from a member regarding works to the Playhouse automatic doors, the Head of Property and Regeneration informed the Committee that this project would not be taken forward as it had been identified that it would have an adverse impact on the space available within the foyer of the venue. The Committee was informed that this did not preclude a project for other works to improve the thermal efficiency of the doors from being made in the future via a separate capital funding bid.
- c) **Identification and prioritisation of works.** In response to a question from a member regarding the mechanism for identification and prioritisation of works, the Head of Property and Regeneration informed the Committee that identification of necessary works came from 3 primary sources: the Council's Facilities Maintenance contractor, the in-house building surveying team and the 10 year forecast for property maintenance. The identified works were prioritised on their urgency.
- d) **Maintenance of water courses.** In response to a question from a member, the Head of Property and Regeneration informed the Committee that the Council maintained watercourses such as drainage channels on council owned land. The council was not responsible for maintenance of streams and rivers, which fell to other national and regional bodies.

Following consideration the Committee unanimously resolved:

- (1) **To note the progress and anticipated spend at the end of the current year 2023-24 as shown in Appendix 1 to the report.**
- (2) **To note the additional emergency works raised and carried out in the 2023-24 planned maintenance programme.**
- (3) **To approve the 2024/25 planned maintenance programme at an estimated cost of £562,000 as set out in Appendix 2 to the report, to be funded from planned maintenance budgets and the Property Maintenance Reserve.**
- (4) **Subject to the Council's financial and contract requirements, to nominate and authorise the Head of Property and Regeneration to make changes within the 2024-25 planned maintenance programme to**

cover unforeseen matters (such as tender price variances) of up to, but not exceeding £20,000.

- (5) To agree to transfer the unspent budgets back to the Property Maintenance Reserve at the end of the financial year.**

46 ESTABLISH TOWN HALL SITE WORKING GROUP

The Committee received a report seeking the establishment a cross party Member Working Group to explore proposals around the development/disposal of the current Town Hall site.

The following matters were considered:

- a) Date of first meeting.** The Chair informed the Committee that the date of the first meeting of the Working Group was proposed as Wednesday 17 April 12.30-16.30.
- b) Minutes of meetings.** In response to a question from a member, the Chair informed the Committee that meetings of the Working Group would not be minuted, but that notes from each of the meetings would be produced. The notes of the meetings would not be restricted documents, but there would be some restricted information considered within meetings of the Working Group which would not be for publication. In response to a further question the Chair informed the Committee, that members of the Working Group engaging in general discussion would not be considered to be predetermination for consideration of a future planning application.

Following consideration the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) Establish a Strategy and Resources Member Working Group with terms of reference as set out in paragraph 2.3 and 2.4 of the report to take forward the work around the development/disposal of the current Town Hall site.**

47 STONELEIGH FLATS FOR TEMPORARY ACCOMMODATION

The Committee received a report proposing that the Council progress the grant of an underlease from Surrey County Council to use two Stoneleigh Community Library maisonettes as temporary accommodation for homeless households.

The following matters were considered:

- a) End of lease arrangements.** In response to a question from a member regarding arrangements for tenants in the event that the lease to the Council were to come to an end, the Head of Property and Regeneration informed the Committee that he was hopeful that an agreement would be found to enable the arrangements to continue. The risk that the arrangement comes to an end was similar to any other property which the Council leases.

- b) **Initial outlay and lease length.** In response to a question from a member, the Head of Property and Regeneration informed the Committee that the one-off outlay of £15,000 was for legal and conveyancing costs and included a contingency of £10,000 which may not be required. The lease was expected to run for just under 3 years.

Following consideration the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) **Agree to the Council being granted a commercial underlease by Surrey County Council (as described in Exempt Appendix 1 to the report) to use Stoneleigh Community Library maisonettes for temporary homeless accommodation.**
- (2) **Agree to fund the required budget up to £15,000 from S106 developer funds.**
- (3) **Note that the Head of Property & Regeneration, Head of Housing & Community in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer will progress the matter to completion.**

48 CHALK PIT

The Committee received a report setting out the matters considered by the council's Environment Committee on 23 January 2024 in respect to the options available to respond to complaints of noise from Epsom Chalk Pit.

Following consideration, as funding could not be found from existing budgets and internal resource could not support the work, the Environment Committee resolved that Strategy and Resources Committee be requested to identify funds of £140,000 to instruct external noise consultants to conduct a fresh investigation into activities at Epsom Chalk Pit.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Financial position.** The Chair informed the Committee of the cost breakdown of a noise investigation as follows: £40,000 expenditure was required in order to undertake an independent noise investigation, but that this would not include any enforcement action. To take enforcement action would require an additional budget of £50,000 and it was recommended that a further £50,000 be budgeted for use in the event of an appeal. This was a total of £140,000. The Chair reminded the Committee that the Council faced a budget gap in 2024-25 which would be funded through the use of reserves. The Chair informed the Committee that the Council had a plan to address the continuing future budget gap, but that it held a small amount of financial reserves. These were: a General Fund of £3 million (of which £2.5 million was the minimum level by which the Council should operate) and the Corporate Project Reserve of £1.5 million (of which £1 million was the minimum level). The Chair informed the Committee that the £500,000 available in the Corporate Project Reserve would be reduced by nearly one third if a decision to support expenditure of £140,000 on a noise investigation was made.

The Chair informed the Committee that the Council did not have assets which could be easily sold to fund the budget gap. The Chair also informed the Committee that other Councils had issued a Section 114 notice due to having insufficient funds to operate.

The Chair reminded the Committee that it was responsible for the financial wellbeing of the Council, for the benefit of all residents.

- b) Complaints received.** The Head of Housing and Community provided the Committee with an update on the number of complaints received by the Council in relation to the Chalk Pit site following the publication of the agenda. The complaint profile included in the report detailed complaints up to week 10. In week 11 there had been 3 complaints, in week 12 there had been 4 complaints and in week 13 there had been 6 complaints.

The Committee was informed that Surrey County Council had taken some planning enforcement action in relation to development on the site by Skip-it and Reston Waste. The Committee was also informed that the Environment Agency intended to assess the noise and dust management plans for both Skip-it and Reston Waste's use of the site.

- c) Residents' concerns.** Members of the Committee expressed support for the need to address the concerns of residents with regard to the use of the site.
- d) Amendment to recommendations:** The Councillor Robert Leach proposed and Councillor Shanice Goldman seconded the following amendment to the recommendations of the report:

"2.1 Agree to reserve £40,000 for independent noise investigation and £100,000 for subsequent potential enforcement and litigation work, both funded from the corporate project reserves. To replenish the reserves, Environment committee must identify new and not previously identified savings or income for an equivalent amount by the end of the 25/26 financial year."

"(II) If recommendation 2.I. is adopted, authorise, and nominate the Head of Housing and Community, in consultation with the Chair of Environment Committee, to commence this work only when in their professional opinion the level of noise and complaints warrant such action following completion and commissioning of the required buildings with current or amended planning permission."

The Committee unanimously voted to approve this amendment, which became the substantive motion.

Following consideration the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) Consider the request from Environment Committee for additional funding, as set-out in the report, and:**

- (2) Agree to reserve £40,000 for independent noise investigation and £100,000 for subsequent potential enforcement and litigation work, both funded from the corporate project reserves. To replenish the reserves, Environment committee must identify new and not previously identified savings or income for an equivalent amount by the end of the 25/26 financial year.**
- (3) Authorise, and nominate the Head of Housing and Community, in consultation with the Chair of Environment Committee, to commence this work only when in their professional opinion the level of noise and complaints warrant such action following completion and commissioning of the required buildings with current or amended planning permission.**

The meeting began at 7.30 pm and ended at 9.03 pm

COUNCILLOR NEIL DALLEN (CHAIR)