

**Minutes of the Meeting of the STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE held at the Council Chamber, Epsom Town Hall on 23 July 2024**

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**PRESENT -**

Councillor Neil Dallen (Chair); Councillor Hannah Dalton (Vice-Chair); Councillors Kate Chinn, Alex Coley, Alison Kelly, Robert Leach, Lucie McIntyre and Phil Neale

In Attendance: Councillor Steven McCormick

Officers present: Jackie King (Chief Executive), Andrew Bircher (Interim Director of Corporate Services), Brendan Bradley (Chief Finance Officer), Piero Ionta (Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer), Mark Shephard (Head of Property and Regeneration), Sue Emmons (Chief Accountant), Emma Hill (Principal Programme Manager) and Tim Richardson (Democratic Services Manager)

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**4 QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

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

**5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The following declaration was made by a member of the Committee in relation to an item on the agenda:

Stoneleigh Railway Station Community Licence

Councillor Hannah Dalton, Other Interest: Councillor Hannah Dalton declared an interest due to involvement in the funding for step free access work to Stoneleigh Station and in the Community Licence, and that she would not be voting on this item of the agenda.

**6 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Committee confirmed as a true record the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 26 March 2024 and Special Meeting held on 19 June 2024 and authorised the Chair to sign them.

A member informed the committee that the number of complaints received in relation to the Chalk Pit site had fallen. The member expressed the view that this reduction was not due to the problems from the site reducing but was instead due to residents becoming fatigued with the complaints process and not seeing

any improvement at the site. It was noted that these comments would be recorded in the Minutes.

## 7 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN

The Committee received a report presenting the proposed Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan. The Action Plan had been developed by a group of members and officers to consider the recommended areas of improvement identified by the peer review team.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Thanks to Principal Programme Manager.** The Chair expressed his thanks to the Principal Programme Manager for her work to produce this report and requested that this be recorded in the Minutes.
- b) **Reporting against actions.** In response to a question from a member, the Chair informed the Committee that reporting of progress against the actions detailed in the Action Plan would be presented to a future meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee.
- c) **Wording of recommendations.** In response to a question from a member, the Chair and Chief Executive informed the Committee that it was not able to amend the wording of the recommendations from the CPC, as these were made directly by the CPC group. The Chair informed the Committee that the Council did not have to accept or implement the recommendations from the CPC, but that it would need to provide good reasons for not doing so.

In response to a concern from a member regarding the wording of Action 11 of the CPC report, the Chair and Vice-Chair informed the Committee that all options would be considered whilst exploring a response to the Action, including the strengthening of the Scrutiny Committee.

- d) **Action 11.4 – correction to timescale.** The Committee noted the following correction to Appendix 1 to the report:

The timescale for Action 11.4 be corrected from “Feb 2025” to “Feb 2026”.

- e) **Partnerships.** In response to a question from a member, the Principal Programme Manager informed the Committee that Actions 9.1 and 9.2 of the Action Plan would be taken forward by reviewing the Council’s current partnerships and identifying new partnerships. This would include a focus on cost and achieving cost savings through partnership working.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved by 6 votes for and 2 abstentions to:

- (1) **Endorse the Action Plan as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, which responds to the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge Report.**

## 8 ORDER OF BUSINESS

The Committee agreed to amend the order of items on the agenda, to receive “Item 7 - Service reviews” prior to “Item 5 – 2023-24 Provisional Financial Outturn” and “Item 6 – 2025/26 Strategic Financial Planning”.

## 9 SERVICE REVIEWS

The Committee received a report proposing a programme of service reviews over the next three years, with the aim of delivering at least £720,000 of annualised savings for the Council.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **£35,000 for review of Community Services and facilities.** The Chair informed the Committee that the £35,000 proposed funding included in recommendation 3 of the report related to potential works at Bourne Hall, such as the relocation of the library or museum.
- b) **Correction to recommendation 2.** The Chair informed the Committee of a correction to recommendation 2 of the report, as follows:  
  
That the word “outcome” be corrected to “options”.
- c) **Scheduling of works.** In response to a member, the Chair informed the Committee that a number of factors were considered when producing the proposed schedule of works. These included the level of officer time required and the anticipated speed that savings would be achieved.
- d) **Amendment: Review of community services & facilities.** The Committee noted that the first service review item listed on Appendix 1 to the report would be split into two separate items. The wording “To review the community services offering and facilities at the Community & Wellbeing Centre” and “To review the services offering and facilities at Bourne Hall (including museum)” would be used.
- e) **Review of enforcement & borough cleansing.** In response to a question from a member, the Chair informed the Committee that this review would consider whether savings could be achieved through synergies in service delivery.
- f) **Consultancy for specialist works.** In response to a question from a member, the Chair and Chief Executive informed the Committee that the council only used consultants when it did not have the necessary skills, experience or resource in house. The Committee was informed that to provide an in-house team with sufficient skills and experience to undertake the duties provided by consultants would be extremely expensive and would provide issues with annual leave and sickness. The Chief Finance Officer informed the Committee that typically, requests to

procure consultant services would be presented to the appropriate committee for scrutiny if funding was required in accordance with the Financial Regulations.

- g) Vision Statement.** In response to a question from a member, the Vice Chair informed the Committee that the most recent Vision Statement produced by the Council was Future 40. The Council required a Vision Statement to enable it to successfully bid for external funding and secure buy-in from external parties to the council's aspirations.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved with 5 votes for and 3 abstentions to:

- (1) Approve the programme of service reviews, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report and as amended, to be progressed by relevant Heads of Service in consultation with the relevant Service Director and Policy Committee Chairs.**

The amendment was as follows:

- To list the wording "To review the community services offering and facilities at the Community & Wellbeing Centre" and "To review the services offering and facilities at Bourne Hall (including museum)" as two separate items in Appendix 1 to the report.
- (2) Agree that the options of individual service reviews should be reported back to the relevant Policy Committee;**
- (3) Agree that a report will be brought back at least annually to Strategy & Resources Committee to update members on progress against the overall programme of service reviews;**
- (4) Approve funding of £35,000 from the Corporate Projects Reserve to enable the review of Community Services and Facilities to be progressed.**

## **10 2023-24 PROVISIONAL FINANCIAL OUTTURN**

The Committee received a report summarising the Council's provisional financial performance for 2023/24 and detailing the capital budgets to be carried forward for schemes where costs will be incurred in 2024/25.

The following matters were considered:

- a) External Audit review of provisional outturn.** In response to a question from a member, the Chief Finance Officer informed the Committee that the External Auditor was due to undertake the audit of the provisional outturn in October – December 2024. This was later in the year than in previous years due to a backlog of local government audits elsewhere in the sector.

- b) **Capital project budgets carried forward to 2024/25.** In response to a question from a member, the Chief Finance Officer informed the Committee that the information contained in Table 6, paragraph 7.3 of the report did not include the budget for the deferred works to the Community and Wellbeing Centre as it related to projects from 2023/24. The Committee noted for clarity that the deferral of the works to the Community and Wellbeing Centre in 2024/25 had not removed the budget or changed the decision of the Council with regard to the works.
- c) **Employee Support Services.** In response to a question from a member the Chief Executive informed the Committee that the Council had a low staff turnover at present and that a vacancy rate was included in the budget, as was the case for other organisations. The Chief Finance Officer informed the Committee that the Council's staffing budget was £14m and that a variance of £100,000 represented a small proportion (less than 1%) of the overall budget.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) **Receive the report on provisional financial outturn for 2023/24;**
- (2) **Approve the carry forward £2.387m budget for capital schemes to be added to the 2024/25 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.**

## 11 2025/26 STRATEGIC FINANCIAL PLANNING

The Committee received a report recommending budget targets for 2025/26 and providing an update on financial planning for 2026/27 to 2028/29 as recommended by the Financial Strategy Advisory Group.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Homelessness.** In response to a question from a member, the Chair reminded the Committee that the Community and Wellbeing Committee was the lead committee with responsibility for addressing homelessness in the Borough. In response to a question from another member, the Chair informed the Committee that issues relating to homelessness were included as a standing item at his monthly meeting with Officers and that this was also the case for the Chair of the Community & Wellbeing Committee.
- b) **Asset Management.** In response to a question from a member, the Chief Executive and Vice Chair informed the Committee that the output from Asset Reviews undertaken over the coming year would be presented to a Member Working Group for consideration.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to agree:

- (1) to note the recommendations of Financial Strategy Advisory Group held on 12 July 2024;
- (2) the proposed approach to 2025/26 budget setting as set-out in the report to Financial Strategy Advisory Group at Appendix 2 to the report, in particular;
  - That officers work to progress the workstreams set out in section 7 of Appendix 2 to the report to produce specific income generation and savings options, in addition to savings already targeted, to meet the projected budget deficit of £720,000 per annum by 2028/29;
  - That the proposed Five Year Plan and the budget process are aligned to ensure that any commitments are affordable;
  - The budget reporting timetable as supported by Financial Strategy Advisory Group.

**12 APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS AND CHAIR OF THE SHAREHOLDER SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Committee received a report seeking the appointment of Members and a Chair to the Shareholder Sub Committee for the 2024-25 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 this report and detailed below:**
  - **Councillor Neil Dallen (Chair) (Residents' Association)**
  - **Councillor Alex Coley (Residents' Association)**
  - **Councillor Hannah Dalton (Residents' Association)**
  - **Councillor Alison Kelly (Liberal Democrat)**
  - **Councillor Robert Leach (Residents' Association)**

**13 PROCUREMENT OF HARRIER CENTRE ROOF REPLACEMENT**

The Committee received a report presenting the findings of a review into the procurement of the Harrier Centre Roof replacement, commissioned as requested by the Strategy and Resources committee meeting on 21 September 2023.

The following matter was considered:

- a) **Change in scope of works.** In response to a question from a member regarding the changes in scope of the works, the Head of Property and

Regeneration would look into the specific changes that had been required and provide information about these to the member following the meeting.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) note the findings of the report and endorse the learning points from it (as set out in para 4.1 of the report).**

#### **14 STONELEIGH RAILWAY STATION COMMUNITY LICENCE**

The Committee received a report seeking to facilitate the community of Stoneleigh to establish and maintain a community garden next to Stoneleigh Railway Station.

The following matter was considered:

- a) Future continuation of volunteer group.** In response to a question from a member, the Chair informed the Committee that it was hoped that there would be a turnover in the membership of the volunteer group in future years to enable it to sustainably continue its work, but that in the eventuality that it was not able to do so the maintenance of the area would return to Network Rail.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved with 7 votes for and 1 member not voting to:

- (1) Agree to enter into a Community Licence between Network Rail and EEBC once a group of volunteers has been established, to enable the volunteers in Stoneleigh to establish a community garden next to Stoneleigh Railway Station.**
- (2) Nominate and Authorise the Director of Environment, Housing and Regeneration and Head of Legal to progress the community licence to completion and take all actions and decisions as are necessary and appropriate to ensure that it is not the Council who is responsible for maintaining the community garden.**

#### **15 URGENT DECISIONS**

The Committee received a report detailing the decisions taken by the Chief Executive and Directors on the grounds of urgency, in compliance with the requirements of the Constitution.

Following consideration, the Committee unanimously resolved to:

- (1) Note the urgent decisions taken and the reasons for those decisions, since the last meeting of the committee.**

**16 HOOK ROAD CAR PARK - ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

The Committee received a report proposing the Council and the developer of the SGN Site work collaboratively to investigate the level of contamination and consequent environmental implications for development on any part of the wider gas works site.

The report was previously considered at Environment Committee on 16 July 2024.

The following matters were considered:

- a) **Consideration by Environment Committee.** The Chair provided the Committee with an update on the Environment Committee's consideration of the report, which had taken place following the publication of the agenda for the meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee. This was as follows:
- The Environment Committee had not agreed to request the Strategy and Resources Committee to undertake a Ground Investigation Survey.
  - A member of the Environment Committee meeting had raised a query regarding the contaminants at the site, and a list of contaminants had subsequently been provided to the councillor. A member of the Strategy and Resources Committee requested a copy of the document and it was noted that this would be provided to them following the meeting.
  - The Chair provided updates on other matters considered by the Environment Committee: the water table at the site, potential payback on initial investment and need for rapid consideration.
- b) **Payback on cost of Ground Investigation.** In response to a question from a member, the Chair informed the Committee that he was very confident that the Council would receive a significant payback on the initial investment required to undertake a Ground Investigation survey.
- c) **Ground Investigation Survey.** In response to a question from a member, the Head of Property and Regeneration informed the Committee that the Council would undertake a separate Ground Investigation Survey to the developer of the adjacent SGN site. This would enable the level of knowledge about the council's site to be brought up to the same level as the adjacent site. This would subsequently enable an environmental plan for the whole area to be produced if the two sites were combined at a later stage.
- d) **Correction to recommendation 3.** In response to a question from a member, the Chair informed the Committee that a correction to recommendation 3 of the report was as follows:

That recommendation be corrected to read as follows: "Note that the Director of Environment, Housing & Regeneration and Head of Property &



Regeneration, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee, Chief Finance Officer and Chief Legal Officer, have express authority to take all necessary actions further to the above decisions being made that commit resources, as is necessary and appropriate.”

Following consideration, the Committee resolved with 7 votes for and 1 abstention to:

- (1) Agree to undertake a Ground Investigation (GI) survey of the Council’s car park site at a cost of up to £30,000 (which includes £7,000 contingency as detailed in this report), to be funded from the Property Maintenance Reserve.**
- (2) To release (in principle) the Hook Road Car Park to facilitate the wider redevelopment of the gas holder site.**
- (3) Note that the Director of Environment, Housing & Regeneration and Head of Property & Regeneration, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Strategy & Resources Committee, Chief Finance Officer and Chief Legal Officer, have express authority to take all necessary actions further to the above decisions being made that commit resources, as is necessary and appropriate.**

**17 COMMERCIAL TENANT UPDATE - CLOCK TOWER UNIT 2**

The Committee received a report outlining the outcome of the marketing exercise to find a new tenant for the vacant Unit 2 at the Clock Tower.

Following consideration, the Committee resolved with 7 votes for and 1 abstention to:

- (1) Agree the grant of a new Full Repairing & Insuring (FRI) lease of Unit 2 The Clock Tower based upon the terms set out in paragraph 2.9 of the confidential Appendix 2 to the report.**
- (2) Note that the Head of Property & Regeneration, in consultation with the Chief Finance Officer and Chief Legal Officer, has express authority to take all necessary actions further to the above decisions being made that commit resources, as is necessary and appropriate, to progress the lease to completion.**

*The meeting began at 7.30 pm and ended at 9.06 pm*

COUNCILLOR NEIL DALLEN (CHAIR)