

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE EXECUTIVE - 1 DECEMBER 2020

SUBMITTED TO THE COUNCIL MEETING – 15 DECEMBER 2020

(To be read in conjunction with the Agenda for the Meeting)

Present

Cllr John Ward (Chairman)	Cllr Nick Palmer
Cllr Paul Follows (Vice Chairman)	Cllr Anne-Marie Rosoman
Cllr Peter Clark	Cllr Liz Townsend
Cllr Andy MacLeod	Cllr Steve Williams
Cllr Mark Merryweather	

Apologies

Cllr Michaela Martin

Also Present

Councillor Julia Potts, Councillor Carole Cockburn, Councillor Kevin Deanus, Councillor Jenny Else, Councillor Mary Forszyski, Councillor Michael Goodridge MBE, Councillor John Gray, Councillor Chris Howard, Councillor Peter Isherwood, Councillor Robert Knowles, Councillor Stephen Mulliner, Councillor Richard Seaborne, Councillor David Beaman, Councillor Sally Dickson, Councillor Maxine Gale, Councillor George Hesse and Councillor Jerry Hyman

EXE 54/20 MINUTES (Agenda item 1)

The Minutes of the Meetings held on 3 November and 20 November 2020 were confirmed and would be signed in due course.

EXE 55/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS (Agenda item 3)

There were no declarations of interest raised under this heading.

EXE 56/20 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC (Agenda item 4)

There were no questions from members of the public.

EXE 57/20 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL (Agenda item 5)

There were no questions from Members.

EXE 58/20 LEADER'S AND PORTFOLIO HOLDERS' UPDATES (Agenda item 6)

58.1 The Leader and Portfolio Holders gave brief updates on current issues not reported elsewhere on the agenda:

- The report commissioned jointly by the Surrey Districts and Boroughs from KPMG would be published shortly. The report included recommendations on co-operation between councils, and there had been

some preliminary discussions with neighbouring authorities on saving costs and improving services to residents through working more closely.

- The property acquisition agreed by the Executive at the meeting on 20 November had been completed.
- Surrey County Council's Planning & Regulatory Committee had met on 27 November and refused to grant planning permission for UKOG to drill for hydrocarbons on land at Dunsfold. This vindicated the strong and consistent opposition to the proposals by Waverley Borough Council and local residents.
- Community Safety Officers were continuing to work with the community during the pandemic, and all councillors were asked to encourage residents and businesses to comply with the Tier 2 restrictions coming into effect from Wednesday.
- The procurement of the of the Housing Maintenance contract was progressing with preparation of the specification and the associated documents and data. Cllr Rosoman thanked the Housing O&S Committee for their contribution to the procurement project. The O&S Committee was also progressing its review of design standards for new affordable housing developed by the council.
- The Government had published its Social Housing White Paper, setting out a new Charter for social housing residents. It was disappointing to see the continued focus on home ownership rather than a commitment to providing more affordable homes for rent.
- The Local Plan Part 2 consultation went live last Friday and would continue to 29 January 2021. The Regulation 16 consultation on the Chiddingfold Neighbourhood Plan was also underway, and would remain open until 11 January 2021.
- The Brightwells Yard development was still on track to open in July 2021, but progress on signing up more commercial tenants was very slow. The roadworks had been put back until after Christmas, and it was possible that the highways works would be taken over by SCC and integrated with the Farnham Infrastructure Project. An Active Travel Scheme for Farnham was one of ten schemes being considered by SCC, with the possibility that it might provide a connection between the station and Brightwells Yard.
- Car park usage had increased to around 60% of normal rates before the national lockdown was imposed, but had fallen back to 35-40% in the last few weeks.
- Requests to use council-owned land for events were being considered on a cautious, risk-based approach but were not being ruled out as a matter of principle.
- Click it Local Waverley had been launched today, funded from Re-opening High Streets Safely Grant, providing a shared on-line shopfront for businesses in Waverley and for customers who wanted to shop local but were unable to get to the shops in person. The first orders had already been placed via the new website.
- Opportunities were being sought to provide space in the council offices at The Burys to commercial or community users, to capitalise on the lowered space requirements of the council. The new Horizon planning system had been launched in Building Control and was being tested

across Planning before going live in January; and Waverley's new website would be launching later in the month.

- The Communications Team had been focussed on communicating details to residents of the Tier 2 restrictions that would apply to the whole of Surrey at the conclusion of national lockdown.
- Congratulations to the Mayor of Haslemere, Haslemere Town Council and Haslemere Vision on the passing of the Haslemere Neighbourhood Plan on Monday evening.

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE COUNCIL

Background Papers

Unless specified under an individual item, there are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to the reports in Part I of these minutes.

EXE 59/20 UPDATE TO GENERAL FUND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL PLAN 2021/22-2024/25 (Agenda item 7)

- 59.1 Cllr Mark Merryweather, Portfolio Holder for Finance, Assets and Commercial Services, introduced the report updating the Medium Term Financial Plan(MTFP) to take account the review of the longer-term effect of the pandemic on the Council's future financial resilience, taking account of wider economic conditions. The outcome of the review was an increase to £7.9m in the projected net budget shortfall for the four year medium term. While Covid was one key direct driver for this, other consequential factors left an unresolved recurring annual deficit for 2024/25 and beyond projected at £1.2m pa. The principal aim of the revised MTFP was to protect core services so a one off repurpose of earmarked reserves in 2021/22 was likely to be necessary if government funding continued to fall short of meeting the full impact of COVID-19 on the Council's finances.
- 59.2 Cllr Stephen Mulliner spoke to provide some context to the statement that "Waverley has very limited General Fund reserves". Between 2007 and 2019, the Conservative administration had a strategy of ensuring reserves were equal to 12 weeks of council tax income, or £3.2m, which had been agreed with the auditors. So, the fact that the General Fund reserves were limited was only true in the context that no one was expecting the scale of financial strain imposed by a pandemic costing £7m so far.
- 59.3 Cllr Jerry Hyman expressed concern that in February 2021, councils would be blind to the economic hardship faced by residents and impose the highest possible rise in council tax on the basis that they have no option. That would only be true if councillors and officers were doing everything to minimise the council tax precept, and whilst a lot of hard work was being done to reduce costs and waste in many areas of the council's business, he continued to assert that the council could avoid unnecessary waste by preventing planning appeal cost awards if Waverley announced they would now apply environmental law correctly as required by the ECJ in the People over Wind ruling and the High Court Crondall judgement.

- 59.4 Cllr Follows reminded Cllr Hyman that Waverley had taken Counsel advice on a number of occasions regarding the ECJ ruling, and all had confirmed that Waverley was compliant in its approach. He went on to thank officers and Cllr Merryweather for their work in preparing the revised MTFP, despite the huge uncertainty about the government's future funding intentions, both in relation to Covid support and structural funding. It was clear from the Chancellor's statement that the expectation was for councils to raise local taxes to the maximum allowed in the absence of a fair funding settlement from the government.
- 59.5 **The Executive RESOLVED to RECOMMEND that Council:**
- 1. Approve the updated forecast and assumptions in the latest Medium Term Financial Plan and request that a full review of the Plan is brought to Council in February 2021 alongside the draft 2021/22 Budget report; and**
 - 2. Agree that capital receipts are applied to fund business transformation and efficiency projects as allowed under the statutory provisions.**

EXE 60/20 REVISED CORPORATE STRATEGY 2020 - 2025 (Agenda item 8)

- 60.1 The Leader introduced the Revised Corporate Strategy 2020-2025. During the process of revising the Corporate Strategy, the drafts had been shared with Members at workshops, and had been to all the Overview & Scrutiny Committees twice. The Executive had listened to the feedback and amended the structure of the Strategy.
- 60.2 In response to the feedback from the most recent Overview & Scrutiny Committee meetings, Cllr Follows proposed a further amendment, which had been circulated prior to the meeting, which clarified the vision statement of the council. The Leader seconded the amendment, and the Executive RESOLVED to adopt it into the draft Revised Corporate Strategy 220-2025.
- 60.3 Cllr Follows recommended the draft Revised Corporate Strategy to Council as a strong basis on which the Council could move forward. It clearly demonstrated the council's green credentials; support for those who are disadvantaged including the low paid; but also reflected the huge impact of the Covid pandemic on the council's finances and changed priorities.
- 60.4 Cllr Seaborne spoke and whilst welcoming the amendment that had been agreed, he was not able to see how the feedback from the Overview & Scrutiny Committees had substantively shaped the final draft of the Strategy. Cllr Hyman spoke in support of the draft Strategy, which he felt was much improved compared to the earlier iterations. However, it was important for the council's actions to live up to the words in the strategy, and he reiterated his previous comments about the need for the council to comply with environmental law.
- 60.5 Executive Members expressed their support for the Revised Corporate Strategy, which reflected the input of many Members and the shared

priorities of the different Groups on the Council. The council was already implementing many of the actions including the economic development team who were working hard to support local businesses, and the countryside team who were managing open spaces that had been so greatly appreciated by residents during the lockdown. Cllr MacLeod specifically refuted the assertion that Waverley was losing planning appeals due to its approach on the Habitats Directive, and following Cllr Hyman's approach would probably cost the council more appeals and costs.

60.6 The Executive RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to Council that the Revised Corporate Strategy 2020 - 2025, as amended, is adopted.

EXE 61/20 PROPERTY MATTER (Agenda item 12)

61.1 At 19:44h, the Executive **RESOLVED** that pursuant to Procedure Rule 20 and in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the further consideration of the following matter on the grounds that it was likely, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings, that if members of the public were present during these items, there would be disclosure to them of exempt information (as defined by Section 100I of the Act) as specified in Paragraph 5 of the revised Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972, namely: Information in respect of which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained in legal proceedings.

61.2 At 20:25h, the meeting resumed in Open session.

61.3 **The Executive RESOLVED to RECOMMEND to Council the recommendation as set out in the Exempt report.**

PART II - MATTERS OF REPORT

The background papers relating to the following items are as specified in the reports included in the original agenda papers.

EXE 62/20 CARBON NEUTRALITY ACTION PLAN 2020-2030 (Agenda item 9)

62.1 Cllr Steve Williams introduced the Carbon Neutrality Action Plan 2020-2030 and Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy and recommended them to the Executive. He thanked the Sustainability officers for the work they had put into the documents, and the significant amount of work already accomplished to move forward on many of the important actions to get our carbon footprint down as rapidly as possible. Cllr Williams also thanked all councillors who had engaged in developing the plan including the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and all council officers for what they had done so far to ensure that our work to tackle climate change and reduce our carbon footprint had permeated everything that the council did.

62.2 The same determination was needed to deal with the climate emergency as had been demonstrated in the response to the Covid pandemic. The Climate

Change and Sustainability Strategy set out the strategic goals to reduce the borough council's emissions, and the carbon emissions across the borough; and set out a strategy to mitigate the impact of impending climate change that was inevitable. Actions to cut carbon emissions would have financial consequences, but so would the costs of mitigating unchecked climate change; the investment in carbon reduction would reap financial, social and environmental dividends in the future.

- 62.3 The public consultation had demonstrated that 93% of residents felt climate change was important, and the council was committed to establishing a climate assembly, so that citizens of Waverley would be able to examine the issues and evidence, and help unlock the actions needed to become a net zero carbon borough by the end of the decade.
- 62.4 Cllr Mulliner recognised the changes made to the Action Plan, but felt that it was still aspirational and he remained cautious about what could be achieved. None of the long or medium term actions were costed, and only six of the 45 short-term actions were costed. There was no cost attached to the reducing the carbon emissions of the council's housing stock, and there needed to be some realism about needing government support for that. There did not seem to be any clear idea of what the potential carbon savings of actions were, and he felt that a better use of budget would be to increase the number of officers working on the Action Plan, to turn it from an aspirational plan to one that meant business.
- 62.5 Cllr Seaborne acknowledged the significant improvement over the earlier versions of the Action Plan, but was concerned about the weight given to the public consultation responses as positive endorsement of the council's approach. With under 1,000 responses, and no demographic data on respondents, it was incorrect to draw conclusions from the survey and use them as support for the Action Plan. Cllr Seaborne was also concerned that the Action Plan failed to include an item to specifically address the single largest source of emissions associated with the council's activities; and it failed to show the real trajectory of emission reduction based on the Plan's actions.
- 62.6 Cllr Follows and Executive Members praised the cross-party approach to addressing the climate emergency challenge and welcomed the contributions of Members from all Groups. The Action Plan was aspirational, and not perfect, but doing nothing was not an option. The Action Plan was a living document and would be refined and improved in parallel with the work to reduce carbon emissions.
- 62.7 The Executive RESOLVED to:**
- a. Approve final Strategic Carbon Neutrality Action Plan 2020-2030 attached in Annexe 1, including the high-level targets within it, and acknowledges that it will be an evolving document.**
 - b. Approve the final Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy in Annexe 2.**

- c. Endorse the governance structure proposed, including the membership of the Climate Emergency Board.**
- d. Note the responses within the consultation summary which is attached in Annexe 3.**

EXE 63/20 BOUNDARY COMMISSION ELECTORAL REVIEW 2020-2022 (Agenda item 10)

- 63.1 The Leader introduced the report proposing the establishment of a cross-party Member working group to lead the development of the council's Size Submission document relating to the size of the council from 2023, as part of the Boundary Commission's Electoral Review of Waverley. Whilst the Boundary Commission did not have to follow the council's recommendation on council size, and there was an opportunity for independent submissions to be sent to the Commission, the Leader hoped that the cross-party approach would lead to agreement on a single Size Submission from the council.
- 63.2 Cllr Robert Knowles spoke to express his concern at the timing of the review, and the cost, given the government's clear strategic intention to abolish district and borough councils. Whilst the Leader had some sympathy with this view, the Commissioner had been asked about this and it was understood that given the uncertain timing of any potential local government reorganisation in Surrey, the Electoral Review would continue as scheduled until such time that there was a definite reason to stop.
- 63.3 The Executive RESOLVED to:**
- i. Approve the setting up of an Informal Working Group of councillors, comprising two representatives from the three larger political Groups and one each from the two smaller political Groups, nominated by Group Leaders, together with one Independent Councillor.**
 - ii. Ask the Informal Working Group to bring forward recommendations (on the LGBCE 'Size Submission' document relating to the size of the Council from 2023) for consideration at the Executive's February 2021 meeting at the latest so that the Executive can, in turn, make recommendations for the Full Council to debate at its February 2021 meeting.**

The meeting commenced at 6.00 pm and concluded at 8.27 pm

Chairman